



National Human Rights Commission

SPEECH BY DR. TONY OJUKWU OFR, SAN, THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION AT THE PRESENTATION OF FEBRUARY 2025 HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION DASHBOARD

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Distinguished colleagues, partners, human rights defenders and members of the press,

It is an honour to present the February edition of the National Human Rights Commission's Human Rights Monthly Dashboard. This dashboard, now in its second edition for the year, is a reflection of our unwavering commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights in Nigeria.

As always, our offices in Abuja and throughout the 36 states have been working diligently to collate and analyze the complaints received by the Commission, as well as to monitor and report on human rights violations throughout the country.

This month, we have received a total of 205,364 complaints, underscoring the ongoing challenges we face in securing human rights for all Nigerians. Notably, violations involving state actors continue to top the list, which remains a grave concern. Despite our collective efforts, there are still instances where those entrusted with enforcing the law end up being perpetrators of violations themselves. This reality calls for a renewed emphasis on accountability, particularly within law enforcement agencies. The use of power must always align with human rights standards, and any abuses must be swiftly addressed.

In addition to this, we have observed troubling trends in the violations of economic, social, and cultural rights. These rights, which are fundamental to human dignity, continue to be overlooked in several parts of our country. Access to basic necessities such as food, housing, healthcare, and education remains a challenge for far too many. We must take urgent steps to address these disparities and work toward policies that ensure equitable access for all Nigerians.

February also witnessed the enactment of several laws with significant human rights implications. Among them, we saw the Edo State Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law 2025, the Anambra Homeland Security Law 2025, and the Edo State Kidnapping Prohibition Law 2025. These laws promote severe penalties, including the death penalty, for individuals involved in cultism, kidnapping, particularly those linked to ritualistic activities. While we understand the sentiments and the need for strong measures against such heinous acts, it is crucial to ensure that the rights of the accused are upheld, and that justice is administered in a manner consistent with international human rights standards. Additionally, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC) proposed death penalty on counterfeit drugs continues to raise concerns regarding the balance between punishment and human rights.

This month, we also report on a number of tragic events that have deeply affected communities across Nigeria. In Delta State, two boats conveying burial guests collided and capsized, resulting in the loss of lives. The herder-related violence in Benue and Niger States continues to wreak havoc, with numerous communities being attacked and displaced. The situation in these states calls for a swift and coordinated response from both state and federal authorities to bring an end to the cycle of violence.

Furthermore, the discovery of three young children who tragically lost their lives in a freezer in Anambra State has shocked the nation. This incident underscores the importance of child protection, and we urge relevant authorities to intensify efforts to prevent such atrocities from recurring.

Gentlemen of the press, we continue to witness an alarming rise in cult-related violence in the South-South region. The frequency of cult clashes is escalating, creating an environment of fear and insecurity for ordinary citizens. It is imperative that state and federal law enforcement agencies respond decisively to dismantle these criminal organizations and restore peace to affected communities.

Finally the disturbing trend of child abandonment remains largely unaddressed with an upsurge in reported cases to our offices. In a bid to support our work as frontline human rights defenders in dealing with issues of women and children, the NHRC has approved a Child Safeguarding Policy. As there have been noticeable increase in the number of children who come in contact with the Commission's staff, the Policy is aimed at protection of children and young persons who use the services of the NHRC from harm and ensure they are treated with dignity and their human rights protected. I must give a huge thanks to Mrs. Grace Pam, the Director of Women and Children and her staff for diligently pushing for the approval of this policy. In particular, I note that Mrs. Pam, the outgoing Director is leaving this as a legacy to her decades of career in the Commission. We owe you, Grace, a quantum of appreciation and wish you success as you begin a new life. Always remember - once a human rights defender, always a human rights defender. I hereby urge the distribution of this policy to all staff and process of enlightenment and awareness to be rolled out immediately.

Despite the daunting human rights challenge we face, I must reiterate that our work at the National Human Rights Commission does not end with the publication of this dashboard. Rather, it is a call to action. We have noticed recently the use of our dashboard information and statistics at state level by political actors. We understand the emotions that may arise when states are faced with the realities of the information relating to their states. We welcome every debate and continue to call on states government to study the dashboard carefully and take actions aimed at addressing the challenges highlighted by the Commission.

The dashboard is merely a starting point, a tool to provoke dialogue, and inspire concrete steps toward solutions. We must continue working with government agencies, civil society, international partners, and communities to address these violations and find lasting solutions.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for their continued support. Additionally, I extend my appreciation to our tireless staff members across the country, the media, and all our stakeholders whose contributions continue to make a tangible difference in the lives of Nigerians.

In conclusion, let us not lose sight of the fundamental principle that human rights are not a luxury or a privilege, but a basic entitlement for all people. It is our collective duty to ensure that every individual in Nigeria can live with dignity, freedom, and equality.

Thank you once more for attending the dashboard presentation for February 2025.

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