

0209

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA**

Thursday, 12th March, 2009

The House met at 10.55 a.m.

PRAYERS

(The Speaker in the Chair)

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Hon. Members, I have examined and approved the Votes and Proceedings of Wednesday, 11th March 2009.

OATHS

**Oath of Allegiance
And
Oath of Membership**

The Speaker: Before I make the announcement we have here this morning a Member-elect to be sworn-in. He is Hon. Okechukwu Ude.

Hon. Ude, could you please come forward to receive the administration of Oath.

Thereupon the following Member took and subscribed the Oaths as required by law:

Hon. Okechukwu Ude (Orumba North/South) – Anambra State.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Meeting of PDP North/West Zonal Executive Committee

The Speaker: This announcement is from the Deputy Chief Whip of the House of Representatives.

The North/West Zonal Executive Committee of the PDP will be meeting on 14th March, 2009 at 10.00 a.m. in Kaduna State. Hon. Waziri Tambunwal would let you know where the venue is.

*Signed
Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambunwal.*

Meeting of Committee on Climate Change

0210

The Speaker: *There will be a meeting of the Committee on Climate Change today 12th of March, 2009, in House Committee Room 3.*

*Signed
Hon. C. Ubani.
Chairman*

**Rescheduling of Consideration of Report –
Investigation by the Committee on Power**

The Speaker: This announcement is from Hon. Ita-Enang, Chairman, Rules and Business.

Honourable Members are please informed that the said Report earlier listed for today on the Power Investigation will be rescheduled for definite consideration on Wednesday the 18th and Thursday the 19 of March, 2009.

This information is in advance of the Notice Paper now in print. I am sure that by next week, members wishing to contribute during the consideration would have taken time to prepare for it and come up with possible legislation that would change the efforts of the government towards a positive manner in providing power.

Consecration Ceremony Hon. Alex Ukam

The Speaker: This announcement is from Alex Ukam. He is now a Bishop. He is inviting all of us to a consecration ceremony which will take place on the 12th of April, 2009 at the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, World Headquarter, 34, Ambu Street, Calabar at 10.00 a.m.

Wedding Invitation

The Speaker: Hon. Peter Linus Umoh is inviting all of us to the wedding ceremony of his first daughter, Miss Lucy Peter Umoh, which will take place on Saturday the 28th of March, 2009, at No 9, Inyang Street, Calabar, Cross River State.

The Church Service will take place at the Mount Zion Light House, Full Gospel Church International Headquarters.

**Visit by the Council Members of
Musawa Local Government**

The Speaker: Hon. Matazu wants the whole House to know that we have in the Gallery the Chairman and the entire Council Members of Musawa Local Government, Katsina State.

0211

They should kindly stand up for recognition, please.

(The Chairman and Council Members rose for recognition)

Meeting with the Hon. Speaker

The Speaker: I would like the following Members to meet with me immediately after today's sitting:

Hon. Christopher Berewari
Hon. Nelson Alapa
Hon. Ado Adogo Audu
Hon. Akinlade Isiaka
Hon. Abba Lawan
Hon. Ojomo Alaba
Hon. Igochukwu Aguma
Hon. Peace Nnaji
Hon. S. Shetima; and
Chairman Committee on Army

PRESENTATION OF PUBLIC PETITIONS

The Speaker: Any Member who has a Petition to present to the House may rise to do so.

Petition against the Minister of the FCT

Hon. Chukwudi Leonard Eze (Orlu/Orsu/Our East): Mr. Speaker, I have a Petition from Mr. Nnadam Okeke on behalf of Parks and Garden owners in Abuja.

The Petition is with regard to the activities of the Hon. Minister of the Federal Capital Territory against the owners of Parks and Gardens in Abuja.

The Minister of FCT has ordered the closure of those Gardens because they sell alcohol and the owners are wondering why such action should be taken when there is no law in Nigeria banning the sell of alcohol in Abuja.

Without boring this House, I wish to submit the Petition.

The Speaker: Hon. Eze, I would want you to please discourse this issue with the Chairman of the Committee on FCT and the Minister to find a solution to it before laying the petition on the Floor of the House.

(Petition by the leave of the House withheld)

0212

Non-payment of Retirement Benefits

Hon. Agoro Lanre Adeniran (Irepo/Orelope/Olorunsogo): Mr. Speaker, this Petition is from one of my constituents and it is brought pursuant to Order VIII Rule 3 of the House. The Petition has to do with the retirement benefits of some retirees of INEC. The Petitioner is aware of the working relationship between INEC and NICON. Up till now, the retirement benefits of INEC retirees have not been paid to them by NICON.

The Petitioner believes that the House will do justice by prevailing on NICON and INEC to avail them of their gratuity benefits.

I would want to crave the indulgence of the House through you to lay the Petition before the House.

The Speaker: Please, you can proceed.

(Petition laid)

Dismissal from the Police Force

Hon. Ihiabe Samson Positive (Dekina/Bassa): Mr. Speaker, this Petition is in respect of one of my constituents, Mr. Andrew Asia, who served in the Police Force for 25 years. The gentleman was dismissed for no just cause and three of them who were on duty followed suit but after petitions, two were recalled into the Police Force. Up till this moment that I am speaking, the gentleman is staying in the village without job and he has nothing to eat with the members of his family.

He petitioned again to the Police Service Commission. They wrote him a letter in 2004 that his case was being treated but up till today, there is no communication between him and the Police. I would not want to bore the House with the rudiments of this petition.

With the express permission of the Speaker, I would like to lay the petition on the Table for the consideration of this House.

The Speaker: Please, you can proceed.

(Petition laid)

The Speaker: Is there any other petition? *(No response)*

All petitions are referred to the Committee on Public Petitions

0213

(Petitions accordingly referred to the Committee on Public Petitions)

Audience with Mr. Speaker

The Speaker: The Chairman of the Committee on Land Transport, Hon. Bernard Udoh should meet with me immediately after today's sitting.

Reception Party

The Speaker: The newest Member of the House of Representatives is inviting Members to a reception in his honour immediately after sitting today at Julius Berger Shooting Range between Kado Estate and Jabi.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS

Mid-Sessional Report of the Committee on Petroleum Resources (Downstream)

The Speaker: The first Business of the Day is presentation of the Mid-Sessional Report of the Committee on Petroleum Resources (Downstream) standing in the name of Hon. Clever Ikisikpo.

Hon. Clever Ikisikpo, you are invited to move for the presentation of the Report.

Hon. Clever M. Ikisikpo: Mr. Speaker, I hereby move that this House do receive the Mid-Sessional Report of the House Committee on Petroleum Resources (Downstream).

Hon. Bala Almu Banye (Batararawa/Charanchi/Rimi): I rise to second the Motion as moved by Hon. Ikisikpo.

Question put and agreed to.

(Report laid on the Table)

Mid-Sessional Report of the Committee on Air Force

The Speaker: The second Business of the Day is presentation of Mid-Sessional Report of the Committee on Air Force standing in the name of Hon. Halims Ochuko Agoda.

Hon. Halims is invited to present the Report.

Hon. John Halims O. Agoda (Ethiope East/Ethiope West): Mr. Speaker, I move with deepest

0214

respect to present the Bi-Annual Report of the Committee on Air Force.

I beg to move.

Hon. Patrick Obahiagbon (Oredo): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure this morning to second the Motion ably moved by Hon. Halims Agoda.

Question put and agreed to.

(Report laid on the Table)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MOTION

The Need to Halt the Proliferation of Illegal Universities

The Speaker: Hon. Members, the first Order of the Day is a Motion for the Need to Halt the Proliferation of Illegal Universities standing in the name of Hon. Albert Abiodun Adeogun.

Hon. Adeogun is invited to move his Motion.

Hon. Adeogun Albert Abiodun (Ife Central/Ife North/Ife South): Mr. Speaker, I move that:

The House:

Notes that Education is the bedrock for development in all nations and Nigeria cannot be an exception;

Further notes the right of all Nigerians to have unlimited access to education at all levels;

Aware that the National Universities Commission (NUC) has the primary duty of regulating and granting licence to investors in the Education Sector for the purpose of establishing private Universities;

Further aware that over fifty Universities located all over the country are illegal with a population of about 100,000 students running various courses without accreditation from the National Universities Commission (NUC);

Worried that some of these illegal Universities had been in existence for over 5 years and had graduated students with degrees in various disciplines not recognized by law and deprived from participation in

0215

the mandatory National Youth Service Corps Scheme;

Disturbed that the continued admission of students into these illegal Universities will not only expose the beneficiaries to frustration and widen the coast of

unemployed Youth but will weaken and trivialize University education.

Resolves to:

Mandate the House Committee on Education to Investigate the existence of illegal Universities, identify the promoters of such illegal institutions, proffer solution to salvage the future of the students who are already admitted into these illegal Universities, prescribe sanctions for promoters of these illegal Universities and report to the House within two weeks.

I so move.

Hon. Halima Hassan Tukur (Yauri/Shanga/Nagaski): Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the Motion.

Question proposed.

Hon. Albert Abiodun Adeogun: Mr. Speaker, let me first of all thank you for the support you gave to me when I moved a Motion here on the issue of out sourcing of currency, printing distribution and circulation by the Central Bank of Nigeria. As a Yoruba, man I want to thank you for that support. *(Laughter)*

I also want to thank you for the support you would give to me on this Motion.

The Speaker: I sincerely hope that you are not insinuating that other tribes do not express thanks.

Hon. Adeogun: The do not thank for the favour done yesterday, today and for the future. I have thanked them for what they did yesterday; I am thanking them for what they are going to do today and I am also thanking them for what they will do for me tomorrow. *(Laughter)*

This issue of illegal Universities is brought to this Floor because we have Constitutional responsibilities. If you look at section 89 of the Constitution, you will see the schedule on Concurrent List. Item L, paragraphs 27 to 28, and with the permission of the Speaker, I will read:

0216

(i) the National Assembly shall have power to make laws for the Federation or any part thereof with respect to University Education, Technological Education or such Professional Education as may from time to time be designated by the National Assembly.

With due respect, if you look at Section 89, from page 88: *Power to conduct investigation*, it is the combined effect of this provision of the constitution that I bring this issue of illegal universities to this hallowed Chamber. I was motivated to look into this matter because of some publications that came up in Daily Trust and the Nigerian Tribune.

In the Daily Trust of Friday, 28th of February, 2008 there was an interview in which it was said that the NUC boss granted the Editor, captioned: *Illegal Universities on the Increase*. And if you look at page 27 and 37, it is very clear there and I want to mention here with your permission that the NUC Executive Secretary, Prof. Julius Ogodien in response to his question did say:

We have taken it upon ourselves to publish the list of illegal Universities in our bulletin every Monday and also on our Web Site. I do repeat the list all the time, even when they have closed down or no longer operating, I do not remove their names from the list.

I retained those names because if you remove the names people will think that they have been approved. So we leave their names on the list and the list keeps growing.

The second Publication is in the Nigerian Tribune. It was published in Nigerian Tribune of Wednesday, 25th February 2009 caption: *National Universities Commission Appointment of Receivers for Illegal Universities*.

There is an agreement that the NUC which came as an advisory body in 1962 and became statutory in 1974 is aware that there are institutions in Nigeria that are operating illegally.

In fact, the Executive Secretary acknowledged in his response to one of the questions that some of these Universities, once they apply for application forms and they issued receipts to them, they will use the receipts issued to them to go and open an account and start operating Universities.

I took the pain to go to the website of these universities; and to refresh your memories, if you go to www.naira-land.com/Nig, you will find the websites

0217

and the contents, some of which I am going to move here.

If you go to this website, you will see the list of all the Universities that NUC acknowledged are operating illegally. Without embarrassing any body, I want to mention some of these Universities.

The Universities are:

- (i) National University of Nigeria, Nasarawa State.
- (ii) North Central University, Benue State.
- (iii) Christians Authority of American University of Science and Technology, Anambra State
- (iv) Lead-Way University, Delta State
- (v) St. Clements University, Ekiti State
- (vi) Christ Alive Christian Seminary and University, Enugu
- (vii) Atlantic Inter-continental University, Anambra State
- (viii) Metro University, Dutse, Abuja
- (ix) Siding University, Rivers State
- (x) University of Industry, Yaba.
- (xi) University of Applied Sciences and Management, Republic of Benin
- (xii) Christus University, Anambra State.
- (xiii) Delta University College, Ghana

The list is endless.

The Speaker: Hon. Adeogun could you please, give us the names of those Universities again.

Hon. Albert Abiodun Adeogun: Hon. Speaker, There was a public announcement which was in the website of the National Universities Commission (NUC). The announcement states thus: The National Universities Commission (NUC) wishes to announce to the general public, especially parents and prospective undergraduates that the under listed universities have not been licensed by the Federal Government and are, therefore, operating illegally in violation of Education

0218

(National Minimum Standard etc.) Act Cap E3 Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004. The universities are:-

- 1. *National University of Nigeria, Keffi, Nasarawa State*
- 2. *North Central University, Otukpo, Benue State*
- 3. *Christians of Charity American University of Science and Technology, Nkpor, Anambra State.*
- 4. *Leadway University, Ugheli, Delta State*
- 5. *Saint Clements University, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State*
- 6. *Christ Alive Christian Seminary and University, Enugu*
- 7. *Atlantic Intercontinental University, Okija, Anambra State*
- 8. *Metro University, Dutse/Bwari, Abuja*
- 9. *Southend University, Ndoki, Rivers State*
- 10. *University of Industry, Yaba, Lagos*
- 11. *University of Applied Sciences & Management, Port Novo, Republic of Benin or any of its other campuses*
- 12. *Blacksmith University, Awka, Anambra State or any of its other campuses*
- 13. *Volta University College, Ho, Volta Region, Ghana or any of its other campuses in Nigeria*
- 14. *Royal University Izhia, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State*
- 15. *Houdegbe North American University*
- 16. *Atlanta University, Anyigba, Kogi State*
- 17. *Sunday Adokpela Univeristy, Otada Adoka, Otukpo, Benue State*
- 18. *United Christian University, Macotis Campus, Imo State or any of its other campuses*
- 19. *United Nigeria University College, Okija, Anambra State*

0219

20. *Richmond Open University, Arochukwu, Anambra State*
21. *Samuel Ahmadu University, Makurdi, Benue State*
22. *UNESCO University, Ndoni, River State*
23. *Saint Augustine's University of Technology, Jos, Plateau State*
24. *Open International University, Akure*
25. *The International University, Missouri, USA, operating anywhere in Nigeria*
26. *Columbus University, UK, operating anywhere in Nigeria*
27. *Tiu International University, UK, operating anywhere in Nigeria*
28. *Pebbles University, UK; operating anywhere in Nigeria*
29. *Aston University, UK; operating anywhere in Nigeria*
30. *London External Studies UK operating anywhere in Nigeria*
31. *Pilgrims University; operating anywhere in Nigeria*
32. *Lobi Business School Makurdi, Benue State*
33. *West African Christian University, operating anywhere in Nigeria*
34. *APA University, Utonkom, Benue State or any of its campuses in Nigeria*
35. *Bolta University College, Aba, or any of its campuses in Nigeria*
36. *United Nigerian University College, Okija, Anambra State or any of its campuses in Nigeria*

Hon. Speaker, the public announcement was signed by Prof. Julius Okojie.

In conclusion he said:

0220

For the avoidance of doubt, anybody who patronizes or obtains any certificate from any of these illegal institutions does so at his or her own risk. Certificates obtained from these sources will not be recognized for the purposes of NYSC, employment and further studies. The relevant law enforcement agencies have also been informed for their further necessary action.

My concern over this issue is that all over the world, universities are meant for development, a citadel of research and excellence. Today, we have universities that issue certificates and their graduates cannot go for NYSC and they cannot also get jobs. NUC is talking of appointing Receivers. NUC is not talking about the students. You must not blame them. The future of Nigeria depends on our youths. If the youths are being trained illegally, being offered certificates that are irrelevant, unrecognized, what is their future? It is expanding the coast of criminality in Nigeria.

I do not want to belabour the House but I want to urge this House to take a firm position to look at ways we can salvage the students who are involved. Some of them have spent about five years in such universities. I know of some universities that are even recognized by NUC that run programmes for about five years and graduate students; but the NUC did not recognize their certificates and presently, they do not go for NYSC and they cannot get jobs.

The reason is that, assuming you are licensed in

2001 the university takes off and enrolls students and the students go through Parts 1, 2, and 3. In their final year, the NUC will come up with their conditions and recognize only Part 2 students. As a result, those who have gone through Parts 3 and 4 would not be recognized when they are graduated and nobody cares. This is the future of this country. I am worried and sad and I know the House is also worried. We must do something that will assist the educational system in Nigeria.

Like I did say before, I expect your support today and tomorrow.

The Speaker: Hon. Colleagues, we will start from the right hand side.

Hon. Abubakar Garba Matazu (Matazu/Musawa): Mr. Speaker, what we are dealing with today in this hallowed Chamber is a very serious issue; an issue which has to do with the future of Nigeria and Nigerians. As the mover of this Motion rightly pointed out, education is a very serious matter. Without education no nation, no matter how small or

0221

big it may be, can progress. Let us remind ourselves; we are trying to implement the Seven Point Agenda of Mr. President which would lead this country into one of the twentieth most developed economies in the world, and if we are playing with our educational sector and the future of our Nigerian leaders, how can we achieve this very laudable programmes that are contained in the Seven Point Agenda?

Let me say it clearly that the people who are promotion the establishment of these universities are committing economic and financial crimes. They are people who are dealing with this country in a negative way, do not want the progress of this country. Their only selfish personal interest is to make money, not to promote development of this country.

These illegal universities as the mover of this Motion rightly pointed out are more than 50 and they are still in existence in this country. I remember vividly, just about two weeks ago, the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission visited the Inspector General of Police to discuss this very serious illegal issue being perpetrated in our educational sector in this country. This issue is very serious.

The Education Committee requires at least one month and not two weeks to carry out thorough and very serious investigation and proffer solution for this problem because we cannot play with the future of Nigeria and we cannot allow anybody, be he Nigerian or non-Nigerian, to play with the future of Nigeria. Without education we cannot make any progress.

I therefore urge my hon. Colleagues to give total support to this Motion so that we can help Nigerians, the people who went out under the rain and the sun to vote us to come here and represent them. It was not because they cannot come here but because they have trust in us. Therefore, let us confirm to them that we would not toy with the trust they have on us.

I so submit.

Hon. Samson Osagie (Orhionmwon/Uhunmwode): Mr. Speaker, under the Constitution, the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, Section 18 enjoins government to direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels. My position on this Motion is that it has exposed the disconnect between the policy of government towards providing education and the need of the people towards achieving their educational goals.

0222

Of course, what has happened is that the existing educational facilities appeared not to be enough and that is why we can now see people establishing universities that are not recognise by law and students are falling victims. They are taking advantage of the situation but at the end of the day they become the worst for it.

I believe that it is very important that aside the Prayers of this Motion, as a government and as a legislature, we must look at the processes for licensing educational institutions. For instance, in foreign countries where you have so many institutions of learning in a particular city, you can find as many as five universities in one cosmopolitan city in other to cater for the educational needs of the people.

We must also examine why those institutions remain illegal? Is it that they have not been able to meet with the requirements or that they have refused to comply with the requirements in which case they have become illegal institutions?

What I am saying is, while we must clamp down on educational institutions that have been established illegally, we must also be mindful of the fact that our system needs to generate an environment by which those who wish and have the capability to establish educational institution are able to do so within the confines of the law.

We cannot joke with the future of our students. If they go to school, we cannot afford to tell them that the certificates that they have acquired are rubbish; not even to talk of those who go to recognized schools whose certificate are sometimes said to be worthless.

In order words, I want to add by way of amendment that we must also try to investigate and proffer more suitable solution for the acquisition of licenses for the establishment of private universities and other institutions of learning in Nigeria.

Hon. Ihiabe Samson Positive (Dekina/Bassa): Mr. Speaker, the presentation of my Colleague, the mover of this Motion, to me cannot be questioned here. He has done a good job, he has brought out all the hidden factors in respect of these illegal universities and even the Nigeria University Commission (NUC) has attested to it by warning people not to patronise those schools.

In the interest of Nigerians and in the interest of our younger generation, there is a need for us to take a very solid decision in respect of this. I would not like to bother our Colleagues in respect of this but I know that

0223

there would be need to add in the Prayer - *illegal Universities and Polytechnics* because as much as we have illegal Universities so much also we have illegal Polytechnics and other higher institutions.

In the form of amendment, I would like to add that we should include *Illegal Universities, Polytechnics and other Higher Institutions in the interest of Nigerians*.

Hon. Emmanuel Yisa O. Jev (Buruku): Mr. Speaker, may God bless the good soul of the sponsor of this Motion. Although, I am a few years in becoming an elder but this is one Motion that cuts across age. I am really touched by the Motion.

This is a very important Motion. While we focus on illegal Universities we should also focus on the quality of education in legitimate universities that we have; they should go side-by-side.

The National Universities Commission should not play *holier than thou* on this matter by not issuing out the names of those universities that are illegal but also focusing on the need for quality education in the universities that we have.

I know that at a time in my State Capital, Makurdi, there was a street where I identified about seven campuses of universities; and OND and HND graduates told me they go for lectures in such campuses. Normally, it is just a room and a parlour apartment posing as a campus of a University. At a time they were closed down and I no longer see them. Now it seems they are springing up again.

We also have people who get themselves employed by writing undergraduate Thesis for university students. Therefore, there are many issues that the National Universities Commission should look at and not just focusing on illegal Universities.

Of course, I agree entirely with the mover of this Motion that we need to eliminate those who want to use education for commercial purposes. However, while we do that we should also focus on the ills that attend the regular universities that we have in this country.

Hon. Olufemi Gbajabiamila (Surulere I): Mr. Speaker, my contribution is going to be very limited to two areas. Firstly, as stated by Hon. Osagie, there are only six fundamental objectives that are listed in the Constitution and out of the six that could have been listed, Education happens to be one of them. In Section 18 of the Constitution as he rightly said says that *government policy shall be directed towards equal and adequate education opportunities at all levels*. We

0224

should take note of these two words: *equal and adequate*.

If you have mushroom and illegal universities that are springing up left, right and centre the products of those universities can hardly be said to be able to enjoy equal and adequate education at all levels for our citizens.

The language in the Motion, which talks about illegal universities, brings me to my second point. Illegal, means that it is against the law. One of the essential elements in any law is the provision for recommendation. Consequently, it is not enough to say *empower NUC to licence the universities*. It is not enough for us to sit here, argue about mushroom universities springing up left, right and centre. It is important for us to look at the law that sets up the NUC and if there are no provisions, penalties, or consequences of setting up willingly *as-you-please universities*, then we need to make adequate provisions because when you do something illegal it becomes a criminal act.

You cannot have a crime without a penalty and that is my contribution.

Hon. Ubale Jakada Kiru (Bebeji/Kiru): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that this issue is a very important one and the concern shown by this House is a very legitimate indeed.

I want the Speaker to address one of the issues raised by my honourable Colleague, and that is the aspect of the law establishing the NUC itself. We need to look at the law again and see if it stops at simply asking the NUC to advertise the names of illegal Universities. If it does not move forward from there, then certainly the law is defective.

The Committee needs to study the law and recommend appropriately to the House on this issue and I think by way of amendment, this should be included in the Motion. One other thing that I wish to point out is the fact that even our security agencies have proved to be ineffective in this regard because if NUC goes to the extent of advertising on its website, showing names and locations and yet none of our security agencies in the country responded, it is unfortunate.

I believe that this House has a duty to point it out clearly to our security agencies in this country that they need to be on their toes, as far as the future of this country is concerned.

Hon. Rabe Nasir (Bindawa/Mani): Mr. Speaker, I

0225

am very happy about this Motion. Let me commend the sponsor and co-sponsors of this Motion because this is one of the well researched Motions that I have ever come across in this Chamber. I really appreciate it. It is research based and I like it.

Secondly, the deplorable situation that was indicated by this Motion in this country is yet another example of the despicable role corruption plays in our body politics and in all ramifications of our existence in this country. I think that is the more reason we should specifically focus attention on fighting corruption in this country.

Now, the mere mention of illegal establishment of universities in this country connotes corruption, which should have been checked right from the on set. The fact that they even exist, have students, and are issuing certificates is another very unfortunate incident of perpetrating corruption in this country; while hardly anything is being done to checkmate that.

I think it is the role of everybody, the law enforcement agencies, regulatory agencies, and ordinary citizens in this country to fight this menace in our body politics and national life.

I want to seize this opportunity to indicate one basic fact that we have to take into consideration, giving the opportunity offered by this Motion. We must re-examine the motive or the intention of establishing universities and or any other establishment in this country. Hardly do you conclude that the establishment of such institutions is simply meant for national development.

People are driven by selfish interest other than national interest to establish businesses, including educational institutions. It is not because they have interest in the development of Education in this country that they establish universities or even primary schools; it is only money driven and no wonder therefore, that they indulge in all illegal activities to establish those schools which they run as they like while the law enforcement agencies sit by and watch.

I would like to correct an impression here which has been created by one of the speakers who spoke in favour of this Motion. This is to the effect that it is the responsibility of the security agencies to forestall the existence of these universities. It is also the responsibility of not only the security agencies, but all the enforcement and regulatory agencies to checkmate this menace.

Hon. Bala Ibn Na'Allah
(Zuru/Fakai/Sakaba/D/Wasagu): Mr. Speaker, talking

0226

from a very serious position, I am a bit worried about the impression being given during the debate as it relates to this Motion.

I must admit that the Motion is timely, it is well intended but there is certain information that we must carefully look at.

I am happy that my Colleague, Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila has categorically stated what can be called illegal. The use of illegal in this Motion appears to be a bit misplaced in the sense that there is no dispute as to the fact that the alleged Universities mentioned here are licensed Universities. What is in dispute, when you carefully look at it is *further aware that over fifty universities located all over the country are illegal, with a population of about 100,000 students, running various courses without accreditation from the (NUC)*. What it means is that *ipso facto* the universities are legal but that they run courses that have not been accredited by the NUC. That is what the Motion is saying based on the language used.

So, for us to say that all of them are illegal, I do not think that that will be speaking well of this country. We must be extremely careful. I am not speaking for the Motion but I am bound by the contents of the Motion itself as presented in this House.

Firstly, I am saying that if this is the situation, maybe, the most appropriate prayer would be that the Committee on Education should at least in its Report that would be submitted to this House, state among the listed universities which of them exist in accordance with the law and those that are illegal.

Secondly, if the National Universities Commission, for example had a duty to ensure that certain processes after licensing ought to have been followed in order to regularize the existence of these universities but they have failed or neglected to do so, then something should have been done. You cannot punish the universities for nothing. This is the position from which my Colleagues ought to look at this Motion.

The Motion is good and timely. Every Member of this House should support it, except that we should exercise caution in knowing the necessary intendment of the Motion.

The Speaker: Before I call on the Chairman of Committee on Education, I am going to allow the honourable Chairman of the Committee on Industry to make his contribution.

Hon. Solomon U. Agidani (Apa/Agatu): Mr. Speaker, my worry in support of this Motion arises from

0227

the fact that when you ordinarily look at the long list of illegal Universities from the spirit of this Motion, it would appear that there is no government agency in this country that should take care of this situation.

These Universities did not grow from one to fifty overnight. They certainly have come in one after the other. Certainly, the authorities that are supposed to raise eyebrows just looked at the other way. If the National Universities Commission (NUC) had been alive to its responsibilities, this situation would not have arisen.

In looking at the promoters and the NUC side by side, I would want a situation where the House also frowns at the nonchalant attitude of the NUC to bring a stop to this kind of illegal activity that has happened over the years in the educational sector. Certainly, if you project backwards, we would be thinking of about twenty years that some of those illegal Universities have been operating in this country. Rather than waste the time of the House, I would want to make one or two amendments.

The first amendment is that *the House frowns at the attitude of NUC in allowing illegal Universities to exist in the country. Secondly, the House should direct the House Committee on Education to recommend to the NUC to, as a matter of urgency, close down those illegal Universities forthwith and prosecute the promoters.*

Hon. Farouk Lawan (Shanono/Bagwai): Mr. Speaker, I lend my voice in support of this Motion

because of its critical importance to the stability of education in this country. I do so recognizing the need for us as a House to protect the sanctity, integrity and credibility of our educational system. Unfortunately, it is true that there are so many Universities or illegal institutions in this country. There is no doubt that there is a lot that can and has to be done to check the proliferation of illegal institutions in Nigeria.

Let me acknowledge that this problem is not something that concerns only those of us who are the duly elected representatives of Nigerian people. Even the Minister of Education, Federal Ministry of Education and NUC are deeply concerned with this issue.

I recall that when we went out a few months ago on oversight visit to the NUC, one of the most important issues that agitated our minds was the prevalence and existence of many of these so-called Universities that are not licensed. These are institutions that have no permission to operate as Universities from

0228

the National Universities Commission but they continue to advertise their programmes and unwittingly deceived innocent parents and children who in the end pass through educational institutions that are not legal. They come out with certificates that would not be recognized and accepted by employers of labour in this country.

The National Universities Commission (NUC) publishes the list of recognized and approved Universities monthly. They have a Newsletter which they release every month. They make it a point of duty to list out the Federal, States and Private Universities that are legally approved by the NUC but there are so many other existing institutions.

I recall when we went on oversight function, our position as a Committee was that the proprietors of those institutions must be treated as educational saboteurs. They should be treated as criminals that should go to jail, just like the way we treat economic and financial saboteurs in this country. This is because the damage that an illegal institution can wreck to the psyche and lives of those who become victims and also on the society, is so serious that we must fashion a way to decisively deal with this matter.

What we need to do in the course of this is to criminalise the setting up of such an institution, such that anybody who does so should be treated as a criminal and be dealt with accordingly. On this call, I believe part of the responsibility also lies with us. We have to look at the National Universities Commission Act and see whether it has powers to prosecute those who operate those institutions.

The Speaker: Thank you. I have a few amendments here in front of me. However, Hon. Tsegba, do you have a contribution to make?

Hon. Terngu Tsegba (Gboko/Tarka): I have no contribution, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: All right, let us have the Chairman, Committee on Niger Delta.

Hon. Olaka J. Nwogu (Eleme/Oyigbo/Tai): Mr. Speaker Sir, I have always believed and still believe that education is a right and not a privilege. I want to add that while I agree to all that have been said especially by the Chairman, Committee on Education, when this is referred to the Committee, the focus must be to protect the students.

People are eager to pay to those private institutions, whether they are legal or otherwise because they want to be educated. There is a drive and hunger

0229

0230

for it and we all know that it is a good hunger that we want to encourage.

I therefore urge that whatever decision we take, it must be such that protect and advance the students that are victims.

The Speaker: Hon. Halims Agoda, do you have constitutional contributions to make?

Hon. John Halims O. Agoda (Ethiopia East/Ethiopia West): It is not constitutional.

I just want to lend credence to Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila's contribution regarding the efficacy of NUC as an established institution that perhaps may have been given power to sanction any person that violates the Act.

I have the law before me here and of course, it is a law that was put in place on the 15th of January, 1974. I have gone through the provisions; it is such a scanty law and there is no provision for sanction whatsoever given to this body.

So, what Hon. Femi said gives us the opportunity to reflect deeply on most of these Acts and institutions that there is the need for this distinguished Assembly to look at the various legislations that set up our institutions; such Acts like this one which came into being since 1974. The reality of our modern societies requires that this law should have been looked into.

So it provides us food for thought, as a responsible House to look into the Act and see how we can amend it to have meaning to the relevant situations that we have here.

The Speaker: That is all right. The first amendment will come from Hon. Sada Soli. Could you please, move your amendment?

Hon. Sada Soli Jibia (Jibia/Kaita): Mr. Speaker, I move that:

The House mandates the House Committee on Education to investigate the existence of the Unauthorized Universities and other Institutions of Higher learning; identify the promoters of these illegal Institutions or these unauthorized Institutions and report to the House within two weeks.

Hon. Khadijat Bukar A. Ibrahim (Damaturu/Gujba/Gulani/Tarmuwa): Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the Motion.

Amendment put and negated:

The Speaker: Honourable Members the next amendment is from Hon. George Daika

Hon. George E. Daika (Shendam/Mikang/Qua'an/Pan): Mr. Speaker, I had wanted to contribute.

The Speaker: Please give us your amendment only.

Hon. George E. Daika: I want to analyse my reason of putting forward this amendment, but if I am not given the opportunity, I will put forth the amendment.

My amendment is an additional prayer to the last prayer and it reads:

Mandate the House Committee on Education to probe the activities of the National Universities Commission in the prosecution of illegal Universities/ Institutions of Higher learning and to proffer solutions and report to the House within four weeks.

The Speaker: I am sorry honourable, that same amendment had failed earlier. Hon. Samson Positive can you move your amendment.

Hon. Ihiabe Samson Positive (Dekina/Bassa): Mr. Speaker, what I simply said was that:

They should investigate the issue of illegal Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Educations and other Institutions of Higher Learning in Nigeria.

Otherwise, we should leave it as it is.

Hon. Rufus Omeire (Ideato North/Ideato South): Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the amendment.

Amendment put and agreed to:

Hon. Samson Osagie (Orhionmwon Uhumwode): Mr. Speaker, my amendment is:

That the Committee on Education should examine the conditions for granting licenses for the establishment of Tertiary Institutions with a view to making them attainable by would-be proprietors.

0231

Hon. Hassan A. Shekarau (Birnin Gwari/Giwa):
Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the amendment.

Amendment put and agreed to

Hon. Austin Nwachukwu (Ehime Mbano/Ihite Uboma/Obowo): Mr. Speaker, my amendment is:

Mandate the House Committee on Education to investigate the existence of illegal Universities, proffer solutions to salvage the future of students who are already admitted into these illegal institutions by effectively transferring them to other legal institutions, identify the promoters of such illegal Universities, and recommend necessary sanction to serve as deterrent.

Hon. Herman C. Hembe (Konshisha/Vandekiya):
Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the amendment.

Amendment put and negatived.

Hon Garba Shehu Matazu (Matazu/Musawa):
Mr. Speaker, considering the nature and seriousness of this issue, I want to amend that *instead of two weeks the Education Committee should be given four weeks to carry out a very thorough Investigation on this issue.*

Hon. Warman W. Ogoriba (Yenagoa/K/Opokuma): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the amendment.

Amendment put and agreed to:

Hon. Rabe Nasir (Bindawa/Mani): Mr. Speaker, the amendment is:

Urge the Minister of Education and all enforcement and regulatory agencies to specifically do whatever they can, lawfully, to forestall the existence of illegal Institutions in this country.

Hon Mustapha Ahmed (Bauchi): Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the amendment.

Amendment put and negatived.

Hon. Makanjuola Gbenga (Ekiti/Isin/Irepodun/Oke-Ero): Mr. Speaker, my amendment is:

0232

That the House mandates its Committee on Education to look into the NUC Act with a view to reviewing the necessary provisions to empower this establishment in order to be able to carry out their jobs properly.

Hon Ali Wudil Muhammed (Wudil/Garko): Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the amendment.

Amendment put and agreed to:

Hon. Hussein Namadi Abdulkadir (Hadejia/Kafin Hausa): Mr. Speaker, my amendment is to the heading of the Motion, and it reads:

The Need to halt the proliferation of illegal University and other Tertiary Institutions

The Speaker: I believe that has been done actually. I will now proceed to put the Question on the Main Motion as amended.

Main Question as Amended put and agreed to.

The House:

Noted that Education is the bedrock for development in all nations and Nigeria cannot be an exception;

Further noted the right of all Nigerians to have unlimited access to education at all levels;

Aware that the National Universities Commission (NUC) has the primary duty of regulating and granting licence to investors in the Education Sector for the purpose of establishing private Universities;

Further aware that over fifty Universities located all over the country are illegal with a population of about 100,000 students running various courses without accreditation from the National Universities Commission (NUC);

Worried that some of these illegal Universities had been in existence for over 5 years and had graduated students with degrees in various disciplines not recognized by law and deprived from participation in the mandatory National Youth Service Corps Scheme;

Disturbed that the continued admission of students into these illegal Universities will not only expose the

0233

beneficiaries to frustration and widen the coast of unemployed Youth but will weaken and trivialize University education.

Resolved:

- (i) To mandate the House Committee on Education to investigate the existence of illegal Universities, identify the promoters of such illegal institutions; proffer solution to salvage the future of the students who are already admitted into these illegal Universities; prescribe sanctions for promoters of these illegal Universities and report to the House within four weeks.
- (ii) To mandate the House Committee on Education to investigate the issue of illegal Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Educations and other Institutions of Higher Learning in Nigeria.
- (iii) That the Committee on Education should examine the conditions for granting licenses for the establishment of Tertiary Institutions with a view to making them attainable by would-be proprietors.
- (iv) To mandate its Committee on Education to look into the NUC Act with a view to reviewing the necessary provisions to empower this establishment in order to be able to carry out their jobs properly.

BILL

National Honours Act, Cap. N43 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 (Amendment) Bill, 2009

A Bill for an Act to Amend the National Honours Act, Cap. N43 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 to provide that the Award of National Honours shall be subject to the confirmation of the National Assembly, 2009.

Order for Second Reading.

The Speaker: Hon. Colleagues the second Order of the Day is commencement of debate on the General Principles of a Bill for an Act to Amend the National Honours Act, Cap. N43 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 to provide that the Award of National Honours shall be subject to the confirmation of the National Assembly, 2009. Members would recall that on Wednesday, 11th March, 2009 the House rescinded its earlier decision on the Bill.

0234

I now invite Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila to move that the Bill be read the Second Time.

Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila (Surulere 1): Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill for an Act to Amend the National Honours Act, Cap. N43 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 to provide that the Award of National Honours shall be subject to the confirmation of the National Assembly, 2009, be read the Second Time.

I so move.

Hon. Goni Bukar Lawan (Busari/Geidam/Yunusari): Mr. Speaker, I second the Motion as ably moved.

Question proposed.

Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila: Mr. Speaker, before I proceed let me very sincerely and with deep sense of humility, thank my Colleagues for a very rare privilege and indulgence that was given in allowing the reconsideration of this Bill.

Let me also say for avoidance of doubt that the Bill seeks just two amendments and not the one that was reflected on the Order Paper. First, it seeks the confirmation of all nominees of National Honours by the National Assembly.

Secondly, it seeks that even after you have been awarded or possibly been decorated with an honour that the National Assembly be empowered to strip any awardee of his award in the case of any misconduct.

Those were the two amendments that were sought by the Bill. In taking the second bite at this Bill, I do not intend to stay on my feet for more than four minutes. The debate was thrown open last week and I would want to allow my Colleagues to contribute to the merits and demerits.

Having said that, let me also say that it is this very institution - the National Assembly, some time in 1963 and 1964 that passed the National Honours Act. I tried to lay my hands on the Hansard of that period but it was unfortunate I could not because therein, I believe we would have found the intendment and the mindset of the Legislators and the National Assembly at the time when the Act was passed.

Though we do not have the Hansard but we do have one thing; we have precedents; our laws and rules allow us to borrow a leaf from this practice in other parts of the world.

0235

However, a national honour as I said earlier and I have always said, is not just any award. There are many awards all over the place. I, and many of my Colleagues have different awards adorn to us in our offices; but the National Honour is different. It is given for and on behalf of the Nigerian people.

It is the Nigerian people that are saying to the rest of the world *this is our son and our daughter in whom we are well pleased*. It is an embodiment of all that we stand for individually and collectively as a nation. It mirrors our morals and our culture. It saying to the rest of the world this is the best of the bests.

A recipient must at all times stand head and shoulders above his peers and colleagues. It is the greatest honour a nation can collectively endow or decorate a citizen in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the common goal. Such an honour should not be treated trivially but with the greatest sense of responsibility and sacredness.

The value of the national honour or any award for that matter is the respect accorded to him by his larger citizenry. But, in this case there are many questions and very few answers. Question is, how are these awards categorized? What are the criteria for OFR and MFR? Even where OFR, MFR is being elevated, what has he done or has he done anything subsequent to the first award? Was there anything of greatness to warrant an elevation? There are many questions but few answers.

It will interest this House to know that the confirmation process of an award is made by the Council of State. It is also interesting to know that those who nominate the awardees also sit in the Council of States. They are members of the Council of States; consequently, they are sitting over the nomination they have made.

We in this House have since established the principle of law that you cannot be a judge in your own course. As the one who is nominating, you cannot also sit to confirm. Many may argue that the process will be rigorous. Let me submit with all sense of reasonability and humility that the essence of the national honour. It is meant to be rigorous. The process is meant to be rigorous because it is not just any award.

As a matter of fact, it should be so rigorous that one can easily say that it would be easier for a camel to enter the eye of a proverbial niddler than for you to get an award. There is no doubt that when an award is rare and it is not given to all comers it retains a lot more value.

0236

Let me do a little comparative analysis. The National Honour Award has passed through a cumulative period of thirty-five years in Nigeria. Nigeria boasts in those thirty-five years about 4,000 awardees. By comparison the United States that instituted their own award over hundreds of years ago, proudly boasts about 105 awardees as opposed to our 4,000 in thirty-five years.

The point being made is that a national honour is necessarily a yearly ritual. A national honour in a given year can be given to one person or five or ten persons; and indeed, it can be zero. If we do not find somebody who has attained the high level of achievement that is intended for an award, you do not give it out.

I want to make reference to the newest project of the Federal Government, which is the project of re-branding Nigeria. Suffice it to say for the purpose of this debate that if you want to re-brand Nigeria there is no better way to start than by looking inward and to re-brand your National Honours Award system. You can start that way and then we would be taken serious about re-branding Nigeria.

As I said, the second leg of the amendment is to do with the powers of the National Assembly to strip a recipient of an award for misconduct. I do not think it is debatable that there are many awardees that parade themselves as national honour holders yet they have been tried and truly convicted by courts of competent jurisdiction in Nigeria.

National honours and conviction do not go hand-in-hand. It is almost oxymoronic. It is contradicting in terms. I cannot parade myself as the best of Nigerian and at the same time on the other hand I have been convicted by a court of competent jurisdiction.

So, I will not belabour the point so that my Colleagues can contribute to this debate but I will say honourable Colleagues that as we deliberate on this important Bill, I implore and appeal to you that we be guided by only one thing and that is our national pride and our national ethos.

Hon. Ihedioha Emeka Nkem (Aboh Mbaise/Ngor Okpala): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the amendment of this Bill brought forward by Hon. Gbajabiamila. It goes without saying that this is a very laudable amendment that he has brought forth. It is very important that we as Members of the House of Representatives of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should appreciate ourselves with the Bill.

0237

The intendments of the amendment are very laudable. There is need to put sanity in our system. There is need for us to define exactly what National Honour should be. I believe that the moment this Bill is passed, the Executive, the proposers and those who have been conferring thus far will then appreciate the need for them to be circumspect in making recommendations.

The statistics proffered by Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila goes without saying that a few things have been done wrongly in the past. I therefore believe that we cannot say that we have given over 4, 000 people National Honours till date without the input of the legislature which indeed is the fulcrum of our democracy.

If in the past we had no legislature, the Executive and the Military could parade themselves and act in ways and manners that they considered necessary. I would lend my full support to this Bill and urge my Colleagues to support it so that we can bring transparency, instill discipline and also ensure that the true representation of Nigerians is well appreciated by the time this House gives full weight via confirmation to National Honours Awardees. Those of you who were recipients would indeed probably walk very tall that you are distinguished Nigerians.

I support this Bill and urge my Colleagues to consider it.

Hon. Ningi Abdul Ahmed (Ningi/Warji): Mr. Speaker, let me say how delightful and proud I am today to have listened to a complete *exposé* of what a National Honour is and what it ought to be.

It depends on what Dictionary you are looking at. There are various meanings attached to the word *honour*. Some dictionaries qualify it as excellence, others say it is an achievement and also some refer to it as a fit achieved uniquely.

Honour, as the name connotes, goes back to the 12th century Greek history where the bests among the Military, Entrepreneurs, *et cetera* were given the honour to lead; that was the beginning of the National Honour that spreads all through the Roman Empire. This particular exemplary setting is now being acclaimed within the British Empire where an honorary of a British Empire must be seen to have achieved some certain national fundamental excellence; be it in sports, Arts, Science or whatever discipline.

Therefore, if we reflect back on our minds, why are we called honourables? We are called honourables because we have attained a certain excellence by going

0238

through an election. As far as the definition of election is concerned, you cannot just elect any person; you must elect a person based on certain criteria.

Mr. Speaker, you as a National Awardee, we give you respect firstly because you are the Speaker. Secondly, you are an honorable Member, but nobody remembers that honour that was given to you last year. Nobody remembers the honour that was given to others. Why? This is because the award has been so bastardized. It does not make any meaning.

I cannot comprehend why a local contactor in Bauchi whose spheres of influence does not go beyond Bauchi would be given an honorary award that is equal to that of the Speaker. Why it is so prevalent is because the Committee that is assigned with that responsibility picks people not on merit or historical antecedent but because they are close to them and they are their friends. Looking back at the number of awardees, especially last year, there are more contractors than even civil servants. In fact, the one arm of government that suffers from negligence and denial of this honour is the legislative arm.

From 1966 to date, we do not have more than 20 legislators who are honoured because they were parliamentarians. There are other people too in the academics and business communities who have contributed immensely to the development of the society but the Committee looked at the other way.

I believe that this particular subject matter is within the terrain, purview and jurisdiction of the National Assembly to have a look at it. Like I said before, if this nation refused to work, blame the legislature because we are the only reason a nation under democracy must work.

Therefore, for us as a nation, we are to set standard that we may possibly not attain because this honour connotes respect. If we say an honourable is an Honouree, we must give him that respect, whether we like him or not. The honour connotes a collective endeavour. A saying goes thus: *Show me a Notional Honouree and I will tell you the kind of person he is or the kind of country he comes from*. It means that it is a very serious matter.

As representatives of the people, we are the only body empowered to make laws and we must make laws correctly so that there should be guidance. Let us forget what happened in the past, it has happened but the future is well ahead of us.

Hon. Ehiogie West Idahosa (Ovia North East/South West): Mr. Speaker, in one of my rare

0239

contributions I want to acknowledge the making of history. What appears to be just a Bill seems to me to be perhaps one of the most important single pieces of legislation ever considered on this Floor since 1999 that I have been a Member.

From the history of our country, our problem has not been with resources. It is not with opportunities but with behavior modification. We have never really thought about collectively appreciating what are the parameters for attaining the characteristic mannerism for nation building. So everything goes and all comers are awarded and no one aspires to distinguish himself.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is so important that it is an extraordinary Bill. I must credit you with history for the manner that this Bill found its way back to Parliament. It shows that you are on the right track to reinvent the new Nigeria.

We cannot talk about re-branding our country without re-branding the ideals for which Nigerians stand for. We say today that leadership cannot stand upon nothing. There must be a moral high ground for you to profess yourself a leader in any industry and sector. The parameters cannot be best defined than that defined by the Parliament of the people.

It is very clear to me that this simple Bill if passed ultimately by Parliament will set a very huge landmark in the appraisal history of our country so that at the end of the day when you meet a man that the people of Nigeria have conferred an honour on, you will know that the Honour was truly deserved; and that this honour has been proofread, filtered, certified and rationalized by the people's Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be part of this House as this history is being redefined. You are very well done and thank you so much.

Hon. Uche Ekwunife (Anaocha/Njikoka/Dunukofia): Mr. Speaker, National Honour is an obligation of value system in a nation. The essence of National Honour is to give credence to excellence, achievements and contributions of people to the nation irrespective of the sector. The reality on ground betrays the meaning attached to it. It also betrays the norms in the society.

This Bill seeks to put up a standard and parameters that will guide the National Honours. In a situation where people who have contributed immensely to the development of the nation are left out and people with questionable characters are being honoured is not just regrettable; it is also condemnable. We are the representatives of the people. We know who is credible

0240

in our society. I think we are in a better position to screen, recommend and send to the Executive, the people that are credible to receive the National Honour in order to encourage people to put in their best knowing that at the end of the day, the nation they had worked so much for, will commend and honour them.

I therefore urge all my Colleagues to please support this Motion.

Hon. Terngu Tsegba (Gboko/Tarka): Mr. Speaker, let me first of all correct the impression by the former Leader. We are doing this amendment not because as Members of the House, we want to get National Honours.

The first amendment to the Bill in my opinion is to distinguish National Honours from Chieftaincy Titles. The National Honour is just becoming like a Chieftaincy title where Traditional Rulers nominate people and confer them with Chieftaincy titles. Particularly in the last administration, all you need to get National Honour was to be close to the government of the day or to a State Governor and you are nominated for National Honours.

What has happened now is that so many people who were given National Honours cannot stay back in this country to defend their actions. Some Ministers who were given National Honours are no longer living in Nigeria. They are still putting the National Honours against their names. A Minister who got 3,000 plots in the last administration is presently on the run. The National Assembly has indicted him and he is still carrying that National Honour. I think this is what this Bill sought to do. Such people cannot stand the test in this Chamber to be confirmed as awardees of National Honours.

The second amendment, which seeks to strip those people of such honour, is also very important. If that was contained in this Bill, I am sure by now we would have taken appropriate action. The former Inspector-General of Police who was conferred with National Honour was convicted on a fraud case of over ₦14 billion. He is still carrying the National Honours of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This is what this Bill seeks to do.

I have spoken to the mover of the Bill. When we get to the detailed consideration of the Bill, we will look at areas of confirmation. We can mandate Committees of the House to screen the recipients and forward the Report to the House for consideration, because it will be unwieldy to bring the whole of the nominated members before the House for confirmation. Like I said earlier,

0241

when we get into the details of the Bill such other details would be worked out.

Hon. Nnenna Ijeoma E. Ukeje (Bende): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila for this amendment. The time has come for us to put in place laws that protect and preserve the values of today, in the hope that we will have a tomorrow to be proud of.

I was watching Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister of England as he was addressing Congress in the United States; and the highlight of it was when the Knighted Senator Kennedy stood up and everybody stood up in applause for upwards of five minutes; and I had goose bumps.

It is tragic that Nigeria has become a country where it makes the news when people reject National Honours rather than when people accept honours. The simple reason is that people we reverence too much, too little of what they know too much of and proliferation reduces value.

To this end, I would like to lend my voice to this Bill and to commend the mover of the Bill Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila. It is actually a hundred and fifty-six (156) awards that have been given in the United States till date, and not one hundred and five (105). A total of six hundred (600) awards were given to the Olympic Team. The comparism is scary and time has come for us to collectively preserve the things that are truly ours in the hope that the reasons that those awards were given in the first place to reward people who have excelled themselves in national development can actually, totally and honestly walk and stand tall amongst the other recipients around the world and say we are the best of the bests.

Hon. Leonard Okuweh Ogor (Isoko North/Isoko South): Mr. Speaker, let me commend the mover of this Bill for coming up with such a wonderful solution. I strongly believe that honour, mostly when it is national, must be given to only those that deserve it.

It has come to the extent where it is now something that we have to make a critical analysis of. But my little concern is that there is an element of this Bill that talks about stripping, which I think is the most important element that we must focus seriously on. The concept of confirmation definitely is something we should try as much as we can to avoid. We must be able to allow the Executive to carry out a major responsibility, as it borders on probably giving honours to those that honours are due.

Our responsibility as Parliament is to make laws

0242

for good governance as it is clearly enshrined in Section 4(2) of the Constitution. But where we happen to find out that there is something wrong as it borders probably on honour that has been given to somebody and that the person does not really deserve that honour, it is then probably that we can intervene in respect of this particular Bill and make sure that that person is properly stripped of that particular honour.

I therefore want to commend my friend, brother and Colleague for finding time within his busy hours to come out with such a wonderful concept, to save us from some of these kinds of embarrassment that we have found ourselves in.

Hon. Bala Ibn Na'Allah (Zuru/Fakai/Sakaba/D/Wasagu): Mr. Speaker, there are two information that are very vital to this House in order to understand the platform from which the Bill must be appreciated by the House.

The leader gave example of the reason Members of Parliament in the United States of America can metamorphose into being called honourable. But let me say, Mr. Speaker, that the sanctity of the honour given to a citizen is a stimulant to his patriotism. The United States of America restricted even Members of the Parliament from bearing Honourable this or that. You are either a Member of the House of Representatives or a Congressman. That is how they are addressed. If you are a Senator, you are called a Senator. No Member of the House of Representatives of the United States of America today answers or bears the name Honourable. That is how serious the question of honour is.

Let me say that the foundation for honouring a citizen has to do more with his commitment to the growth and development of the Nation to which he is a citizen. Today, an American passing by the flag of the United States of American holds it and kisses it with tears as a sign of patriotism.

What it means is that there are certain misplaced positions that this Bill seeks to cure, which we have a responsibility and a very onerous one to strengthen for the purpose of re-inventing and rebranding Nigeria.

Just two days ago, while we were sitting here, I had occasion to whisper to you that there is no nation that benefited by way of growth and development based on the foundation of beautiful speeches made by its leaders; it is based on the commitment of the leaders to turn that country around; and there is no country, that has attained the highest for its citizens without following the Rule of Law.

0243

What is Rule of Law? Fundamental as it is, it is that every elected Member and every citizen who is paid with the tax payers' money has a responsibility to exhibit the highest standard of etiquette, highest standard of patriotism and the highest standard of commitment. It is in the pursuit of that, that he distinguishes himself to be awarded an honour in that country where he served. All these are missing.

In the sayings of Richard Nixon: *if you dodge away from your responsibilities, you certainly cannot escape from the consequences*. It was because the Parliament dodged away from its responsibility to set standard for this country that we are wallowing in what we are today. This is the time that the Parliament should stand up to contribute meaningfully, based on the responsibilities bestowed on it by the Constitution.

Hon. Abass O Braimah (Etsako East/West/Central): Mr. Speaker, with your usual Parliamentary appropriation and blessing, may I submit by immediately applauding the sponsor of this Bill, Hon. Olufemi Gbajabiamila; an elucidate Parliamentarian for having the audacity and the courage of conviction to bring to bear to this Parliament a Bill that desires to be driven to a state of *neplus ultra*.

National Awards are established to encourage and celebrate excellence in any given sphere of life. The prospect and purpose could be occupationally related, it could be for Statesmanship, it could be for excellence in humanitarian field, even in academic prowess.

Presently, the law that has been enacted does not require the Executive to seek the input of the Legislature before nomination and awarding any one this award. What this Bill is saying is that Parliament should be the final Clearing House; they should be the bus stop in terms of value addition and value enhancement for awarding National Awards.

Because time is of the essence, on the rock of Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila's Bill, I stand.

Hon. Sani Sale Minjibir (Minjibir/Ungogo): Mr. Speaker, I believe we all understand the value of good role models in any society and the award of such National honours is a way of creating role models that will be able to act as inspiration to people within the country and beyond the shores of this country.

This Bill seeks to reinvent and reposition the award of such National Honours in this country in the proper direction. I might add that what has been happening recently concerning such National Awards is a situation that we can best describe as going on a

0244

tangential course when it comes to the main thinking of the initiators of such National Awards.

In addition, I would like to strongly identify myself with the intendment of this Bill and I urge my hon. Colleagues to, please, give it the needed support.

Hon. Yakubu Umaru Barde (Kajuru/Chikun): Mr. Speaker, I want to align myself with the mover of this Motion, Hon. Femi, for the intendment of what is contained in the Motion.

Each time I rise up to speak in this Chamber; I always think about what is happening now and what will happen in the near future. Most times when you see our President and Commander-in-Chief giving award or honours to many people the question that comes to mind is what have they really achieved that they were being honoured by our President, elected by all of us?

There are many awards today in this country that are not national in outlook; there is nothing bad in that but anybody that has been so honoured, to bear the toga - National Honour - is an image of Nigeria wherever he goes to. He is therefore, supposed to be respected much as he is also supposed to behave as a Nationalist.

The question here is I have found out that there are many people today that have national honours and as has been said by some of my Colleagues who have spoken for this Motion, some of them are even contractors. What we are telling our children then is that they should try to be contractors and they would merit the award of National Honours.

Just as my Colleague, the Chairman of House Committee on Ethics and Privileges, role models are supposed to be emulated in our society. So, if our children will sit down and see people who have questionable characters being honoured by our President, what we are telling them is that they should emulate such people and what would the society in future be like if our children are made to emulate people of unquestionable characters.

As Parliamentarians, it is very important that such list should be brought to the National Assembly for inputs and for clearance. This is because if a Minister would be appointed by Mr. President but screened by the Senate or the National Assembly, then there is need for somebody who would be nationally honoured by our President to be screened by the National Assembly.

Therefore, I want to urge my Colleagues that if we are re-branding Nigeria, we should rebrand the individuals and for anybody to be honoured nationally

0245

he or she needs to be rebranded and he or she must have the honour to be called a National Award recipient.

Hon. Gbenga A. Oduwaiye (Ijebu Ode/Ijebu North/East Odogbolu): Mr. Speaker, a lot has been said about this Bill but I want to look at it from yet another perspective and to draw a parallel line between National Awardees and Ambassadors of this country. This is because in a way people who were given national awards are supposedly human benchmarks for Nigerian standard. Everywhere they go with the appendage of the award, they are seen as ambassadors of this country. It is still in the same spirit of the Constitution that says that ambassadors should be cleared by the National Assembly. It is extremely important that the process of giving awards should be more robust and transparent.

It is a known fact in this country that friends or supposed friends of the government are the ones that are usually nominated; whereas people who have clearly demonstrated sufficient commitment to the Nigerian project; because they have been found in one way or the other not very friendly to some of the policies and initiatives of the government, are being unduly denied.

Ideally, because these awardees represent the people and the Federal Republic of Nigeria; every Nigerian should have a say in who gets this award. It is the responsibility of the Parliament, being the House of the people, to at least, be the clearing house.

Let me re-instate a suggestion made by one of our leaders that it does not necessarily mean that every awardee will pass through the open House. The National Assembly has an institutional way of working through the Committees and gives suggestions on those who may not merit it and those who have actually merited it but have not been so considered.

For these reasons, I want to firmly support this Bill and recommend that it should move forward.

Hon. Sada Soli Jibia (Jibia/Kaita): Mr. Speaker, this country is great with great men and women who, through the dint of hard work, have contributed to the national development and progress of this country. This amendment is trying to restore credibility in the process of the Honours Award.

In every Honour or Award given to someone, there is the expectation of some *dos* and *don'ts*. These are some aspects that are absent in this honours award exercise. I think that is one of the initiatives and targets of this amendment. It is trying to create a window whereby someone who has been awarded these honours would know what is expected of him; this is absent at present.

0246

The National Honours Act has been in existence since 1964 and at this moment, those honours have become like a patronage. This is one area this amendment is trying to rectify issues. In essence, it is a welcome development and it is an opportunity whereby the Representatives of the people would have a say on who and why someone should be honoured in this country.

Hon. Davies Sokonte (Degema/Bonny): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the timeliness of this amendment cannot be over-emphasised. If we look at the date when this Act was first passed, you will find out that the crafters were part of the Executive Arm of Government. So it was easy for them to look at it or get the nominations from the Executive angle and also want the process to pass through parliamentary checks.

Unfortunately, we know that since the original Act was passed, the system of government in this country has so changed. Therefore, the dynamics that were at play when the Act was initially passed and the political and economic dynamics that are at play today are no longer the same. So, ordinarily it calls for amendment.

Secondly, presently in this country, the award of national honours has become some sort of patronage not because of excellence but because of convenience or proximity to power and to those who are in the position to give those awards. I believe that this Act needs to be amended.

I also want to say that we should not concern ourselves only with whether Parliament should vet the list of awardees or just amend and vet the list of those to be recalled but to look into the Act in its entirety. A law that is 45 years old is an old law and needs total overhaul and review.

I want to say that this amendment should be allowed to go through a Second Reading so that the appropriate Committee would look into it and make the necessary corrections.

Hon. Abdullahi Shuaibu Hashimu (Awe/Doma/Keana): Mr. Speaker, I wish to support in principle the amendment proposed by Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila on the National Honours Act. All previous contributors have agreed that what has been happening so far has shown that the Act has been bastardised, politicised, abused, non-transparent and so on. There is need to bring back sanity to the award of National Honours in this country.

So many examples buttress this fact. I just want to cite one. For instance, in other countries, it is not even highly placed or very important personalities that are

0247

given the national honours award. I was standing by a train somewhere in England and I saw a black man who was wearing the national honours of Britain that was awarded by the Queen. He was just a cleaner along the railway extension but somehow the Queen identified that this is somebody that deserved to be honoured for the work he has done or is doing for Britain.

That brings me to the issue of who really should have the power to make the award. I am sure that when we get to the Bill after the Second Reading, it will be looked into. Whether we like it or not, in most countries of the world, this power is vested in the sovereign. It is vested in the King, the Queen or the Head of State. It is not something that is vested in the Parliament. Unless facts can be brought to the contrary, it is realised that the King, if really he acts as the Head of State, is the embodiment of national values of patriotism and that he will not do the kind of things our present leaders are doing.

Basically, the amendment to the Act should be holistic. It should aim at ensuring that we bring out the qualification, the criteria and the parameters but not for the National Assembly to confirm the nominees.

Hon. Mohammed Ali Wudil (Wudil/Garko): Mr. Speaker, I will start by eulogising the mover of this amendment Bill. This is informed by what the former Speaker said that this House is trying to make history by confirming or recognising who should get national honours award in order to make it more honourable.

We do not want to make our national honours look like bad washing machines that have zero output. We want a situation whereby if you are given a national honour, it would look more honourable. The history is that it should look like a national honour from now on.

Hon. Igwe Paulinus Nwagu (Ezza-North/Ishielu): Mr. Speaker, I thank the presenter of this amendment Bill and those who have contributed. I believe that people have been abusing the privilege of being given a national honours award because it has not been passing through screening.

All we have been saying is that the screening of those who will be given the award should pass through the National Assembly. People think because they are not in the same political party or that they do not like the leader of the country at that particular time, so they can reject the award. It is a very serious embarrassment to the government of the day.

I believe that if the screening of those who will get the award passes through the National Assembly, it would add credence to the exercise.

0248

I thank my hon. Colleagues and I urge them to pass this Bill to the Second Reading.

Hon. Nkiruka Onyejeocha (Isuikwuato/Umunneochi): Mr. Speaker, when this Bill is passed, it will bring us back to the basics. What is our value system in this country? Are we going to honour people just because you like their faces? Do we honour people because of what they have contributed to this nation or because they have money? Is it because they come from particular zones or areas?

I am supporting Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila for bringing this Bill at this point and to say that: *a stitch in time saves nine*. If we start now, nobody will be talking about re-branding Nigeria because the re-branding will re-brand itself. The country will look better because everybody will know that one has to do certain things to be called certain person.

Hon. Wilfred Onyema (Ogbaru): Mr. Speaker, my Colleagues have said it all. Basically, it is a straightforward Bill and our value system is wrong just as Hon. Onyejeocha said. You do not give someone a national honours award just because you like his face. Anybody who should be given an award should have a track record. There must be things that he has done for the country. I just asked my Colleague whether anybody did mention the case of the former Inspector-General of Police.

The Speaker: Yes, they did.

Hon. Onyema Wilfred: If that has been said then I rest my case. It is very wrong to give somebody an award and the person is indicted for a crime and we did not even strip him of that award even as he goes about saying he is CFR or MFR.

Hon. C.I.D. Maduabum (Nnewi North-South/Ekwusigo): Mr. Speaker, this Bill is good and timely. No doubt, we have powers to legislate on awards of national titles, honour, decorations and other dignities as provided in Item 4 of the Exclusive Legislative List. The National Assembly has complete powers to legislate on this subject.

Most importantly, if there will be no abuse of the award of national titles of honour, maybe this Bill may not have been necessary. It is because of the abuse that we are talking about this Bill today. In checking this abuse, we must not substitute one abuse with another one.

I support that this Bill goes to Second Reading. The Committee will still have a lot of work to do in giving us a Bill that will stand the test of time. For

0249

0250

instance, the most critical issue is setting of standards. The Bill should be able to set standards by stating what somebody must have done to merit that. Certain standards should be set in the Bill. Of course, we must give those operating the system some discretion.

I strongly believe that this type of award is something that is best suited in the Executive. Executive is best suited to handle this type of matter and that is why the Bill has not done away with this particular issue. The Bill has given the power to propose the awards in the President. It is still there. It is only asking for concurrence. In the Bill, the Proposer of who should take it is still within the Executive arm.

I want us to go a step further when we are considering it in the Committee to set up parameters. The critical decision to make is that the awards that we are allowed to legislate on are National Titles of Honour. I repeat, *National Titles of Honour, Decorations and other Dignities*. It is different from professional honours. It is different from local titles of honour because if you are a very good lawyer and you have attained some distinction, your local professional organisation awards you the title of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN). If you have distinguished yourself in engineering and other professions, you are given the title of Fellows of your various associations.

Hon. Nelson G.O Alapa (Ohimini/Otukpo): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to lend my voice on this important Bill. According to the mover, what this Bill seeks to achieve is to re-brand the integrity of Nigerians especially in the eyes of the international community.

It is a fact that we are facing enormity of challenges in respect and integrity of Nigeria. I thank the mover in the sense that if this Bill sails through the Second Reading, we will be in a position to stand and attest the integrity of Nigerians.

You will agree with me that some couple of months back, an Ambassador of this country was nominated to represent this country in another country and he was rejected. The reason was because he does not possess the integrity required to represent this country in that country. If we go by the way the national honours are given in other countries, we will see that national honours are given to people who live above board, integrity, wise.

Hon. Abubakar Garba Matazu (Matazu/Musawa): Mr. Speaker, in a very straightforward manner, let me touch an area where previous speakers and contributors to this very

important amendment have not touched. It is only in Nigeria that a coup plotter who succeeds in plotting a coup is given a national honour but a coup plotter who fails is condemned and killed through a firing squad. This is one reason why this amendment is very necessary and it is a must.

Hon. Farouk Lawan: Mr. Speaker, I want to support the mover of this Bill, who I believe has done the best out of his life. I think this Bill is the best thing honourable Femi Gbajabiamila has ever done in his life and I want to support it.

This Bill provides us with an opportunity to review the way we accord honours, respect and titles in this country. I want to take off from the contribution made by Hon. Bala Ibn Na'Allah, that unfortunately we have a passion for honours and titles even when we do not deserve them and this has contributed in eroding the moral and ethical values of our society. This is why people go out of their way to take all kinds of titles because the standard used in awarding honours and titles is not credible but dubious, questionable and in most cases, we end up giving honours and awards to people who do not deserve them. Going by the contributions made by my Colleagues, a good number of Members have noted those who were awarded National Honours in this country but who did not deserve them and who should not by any dint of imagination be awarded such honour.

Unfortunately, in the last ten years, one of the criteria that were used was for people who were in particular offices to be getting the honours because they are there. I recall that when I was the Chairman of House Committee on Finance, almost every Chief Executive of every Parastatal in the Finance sector was given a National Honour. If you were a Comptroller of Customs, you will get one; and so on and so forth. Whether you did well or did not, you will simply get an award because you are occupying a particular position. This Bill should be the basis for us to reappraise and review the manner we accord honours in this country.

I also want us to start it from here. We should even review the titles that people who are in public offices hold. Why do we necessarily have *Distinguished* for every Senators and *Honourable* for the Members of the House of Representatives, State Assembly, Local Government Chairmen and Chancellors? Why should people bear honourable? Why is it that we cannot have a title that would describe what we do and even in the course of that work we distinguish ourselves? The country should design a process of giving honours and respects to those who have made themselves honourable and distinguishable.

0251

Hon. Ita Enang (Itu/Ibiono Ibom): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the Hon. Chairman of Education Committee that in my Local Government, even the domestic aid to a Chancellor is called honourable; the PA to the Chairman is also called honourable.

The Speaker: Hon. Ita Enang, which Local Government are you from?

Hon. Ita Enang: Mr. Speaker, I am from Ibiono Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa-Ibom State. I want to urge that we pass this Bill and to say also that I have counted the words sought to be introduced in this Bill, it is only 34 words in four lines.

This is a 1964 Act; it was only touched in 1979 and after that it was only the supplementary provisions and the subsidiary legislations that were given. They categorized those who are to be given honours and made provision for giving honour to the Military, Air force and Fire Service. Now that democracy has set in, it is time to bring the legislature into the picture because this honour must definitely be a national honour.

I think the least treasured honour, I am sorry I want to be a lot more careful; one of the honours that appeared most suspect, is the honours that were given to all the Aides, Aides of the President and other officers, who are not President, but PAs to Ministers in certain Government Quarters in 2007. I will use the word Aides advisably.

The Speaker: PA to Ministers had honours?

Hon. Ita Enang: Yes, Sir. It discredited and brought low the honours. The process of choosing should also be looked into because in some States, if you belong to ANPP, all the people who would be given the honours, not minding the quality of the people in

0252

that area, must be from ANPP. You must look for your men to give honour to them. That has brought low and into disrepute the honour; and I support this purifying process.

The Speaker: All right, I will now put the Question that the Bill be read a Second Time.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Second Time and committed directly to the Committee of the Whole.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Paramount Ruler of Obudu

The Speaker: Hon. Members, I have an announcement from Hon. Paul Adah saying that the Paramount Ruler of Obudu is going to be 50 years on the Throne on Saturday. All Members are cordially invited.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Tunde Akogun (Akoko Edo): Mr. Speaker, I move that this House do adjourn till Tuesday, 17th of March, 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

Hon. Shehu Agaie (Agaie/Lapai): Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the Motion as moved.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved: That the House do adjourn till Tuesday, 17th March, 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

The House adjourned accordingly at 1.55 p.m.