

**Report of happenings in the Nigerian National Assembly Week ending February 11, 2012**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WATCH**

**House to probe Amnesty Programme:**

The House of Representatives on Wednesday (February 8) mandated its Joint Committee on Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Ministry of Niger Delta, Public Safety and National Security to investigate the implementation of the amnesty programme and ascertain the performance of all bodies connected with the programme.

This was part of the resolution following the debate on a motion sponsored by Rep. Arowosoge Abiose (ACN, Ekiti) on the new spate of violence and attacks on oil facilities in the Niger Delta area.

Rep. Abiose said the attacks linked to the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) is coming after one year of suspension of violence by the group, even as the group threatened to attack South African companies and other multinationals operating in Nigeria. This threat is in apparent protest to the trial in South Africa of one of the leaders of MEND for crimes.

Stressing the need to address the situation, Rep. Abiose said the country was already faced with the problem of violent attacks by the Boko Haram group.

The committee has two weeks to report to the House.

**Reps want Ibadan Airport upgraded:**

The House of Representatives has asked its committees on Appropriation and Aviation to ensure the inclusion in the 2012 budget of needed funds to upgrade the airport in Ibadan while urging the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) to step up security at the airport.

The resolution followed a motion moved by Rep. Abiodun Awoleye (ACN, Oyo) who lamented the non-inclusion of the 29-year-old airport in the list of five airports recently approved for upgrading by the Federal Ministry of Aviation.

**Senate clears former Foreign minister as ambassador:**

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ojo Maduekwe and his counterpart in the aviation ministry, Fidelia Njeze were among the more than 80 nominees cleared by the Senate to become Nigeria’s ambassadors.

This follows the adoption of the recommendation of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs by the Senate at its plenary on Wednesday February 8. Also confirmed was returnee ambassador and former chair of Abuja Municipal Area Council, Esther Audu.

The list of 88 persons sent by President Goodluck Jonathan to the Senate for confirmation as ambassadors was made up of 56 career diplomats and 32 non-career or ‘political nominations’.

Interestingly, two of the nominees were marked as unsuitable for the position as they failed the committee screening. One of the two was described as “not expressive when she appeared for the screening. She was nervous in her response to issues raised before her. She is not good in foreign relations, diplomacy or general questions”.

Yet another was described as not able to give “good responses to questions raised before him during the screening. The committee was not impressed with his performance which was below average.”

A third nominee earlier rejected by the committee but later cleared, was described as demonstrating “a fair knowledge of Nigerian issues, but his knowledge of foreign relations, diplomacy and global affairs was not impressive. The committee did not find him suitable.”

Another nominee, Bianca Ojukwu, widow of Odimegwu Ojukwu is expected to be screened after her late husband’s funeral while the rejected nominees are to be given a second chance to prove themselves before the Senate committee within one week.

Meanwhile, Senate President David Mark has urged the Senate committee on Foreign Affairs to critically consider the number of Nigeria’s foreign missions with a view to recommending the closure of those that are not ‘viable’.

**Senate to scrutinise DPR staffing:**

Worried by the proposal by the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) to spend N30.39billion of the total budget proposal of N35billion on recurrent expenditure, the Senate Committee on Petroleum (Downstream) has requested the department to furnish it with details of its staffing.

This is as the committee found out that the DPR had 1108 workers and plans to recruit 250 additional workers during the year.

**House probe of ‘fuel subsidy’ ends:**

After three weeks of public sitting, the House of Representatives ad-hoc committee investigating the management of petroleum subsidy funds held its final sitting on Thursday February 9 with a pledge to make recommendations that would require action by the three arms of government. This is being interpreted to mean that the committee may recommend prosecution of those implicated.

Chair of the committee, Rep. Farouk Lawan (PDP, Kano) said the members would write the report to reflect the overall interest of Nigerians, and not those of any particular group. He stated that they would work to ensure ‘greater transparency, accountability, and prudence in the management of public resources’ in the sector now and in the future.

**Senate moves to sanitise university and other tertiary institutions admission:**

The Senate has resolved that the controversial pre-admission test conducted by universities for successful candidates of the Universities and other Tertiary Institutions Matriculation Examination is both legal and legitimate because the Act establishing the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) recognises it.

Submitting the report of the Committee on Education, which was mandated to carry out a public hearing on the issue, committee chair, Senator Uche Chukwumerije (PDP, Abia) said “no stakeholder during the public hearing challenged its legality” but that some, especially JAMB queried the propriety and legality of the written part of Post-UTME’s screening exercise.

Senator Chukwumerije also blamed JAMB for what he considered its failure to conduct a fair examination, which he said led to the introduction of the post-UTME by universities.

The Senate also resolved that JAMB should discontinue the operation of the so-called ‘Special Centres’ which have degenerated to centres for examination cheating which are being commonly referred to as ‘miracle centres’.

Furthermore, it wants JAMB to shift examination dates from Saturday or any weekend to a week day – Monday or Tuesday, “because it is found that Saturday offers free rein to impersonators who are mainly recruited from the ranks of public and private sector workers who should be busy in their offices on week-days”.

The Senate then approved the recommendations of the committee to include:

• the National Board for Technical Examinations (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should carry out similar post-examination test for Polytechnics and Colleges of Education;

• the exercise of this function by any other organ outside the tertiary institutions violates the essence of representation; and

• the examinations-for-admission fee to tertiary institutions should be unified and a one-stop (but composite) charge made.

The Senate panel recommended total charge of N6,000 per candidate – N4,000 to JAMB and N2, 000 to a university. It proposed that universities owned by state governments and private individuals/agencies should be persuaded to accept the proposal for N6,000 admission ceiling and that disregard of the ceiling on a composite examination charge should attract reprimand, suspension or termination of appointment of the head of tertiary institution.

In its resolution, the Senate held that JAMB was doing well in the equitable placement of candidates from all parts of Nigeria and evenly in all the Universities of the Federation but cautioned against making placements in excess of the capacity of the schools.