

CORRUPTION: THE WAR CONTINUES

*President Olusegun Obasanjo's remark on the Supreme Court Ruling on the Constitutionality of the
Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act*

Abuja, 7 June 2002

I am indeed glad to receive the news that the Supreme Court has finally rendered judgment on a matter, which our Government considers to be of utmost importance for the sustenance both of democracy and of good governance in Nigeria.

In ruling that the National Assembly acted within its legislative competence in passing the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, which applied generally to all States and all levels of Government in the Federation, the Supreme Court has vindicated my Government's conviction that, to vigorously fight corruption, it was necessary to put in place a uniform legal framework for the crusade, that was applicable everywhere in Nigeria.

This judgment is welcome, because it has made a significant statement concerning the general competence of the National Assembly to make laws for the Federation. And it has now released the Corrupt Practices Commission, in particular, from constitutional constraints, which hitherto have made it difficult for it to investigate, and where justifiable, prosecute allegations of corruption both within the Federal Government and its agencies, and also in the States and Local Governments.

It would be a grave mistake, however, to see this judgment as validating the position of one set of litigants against the other. The states, which queried the Law, acted properly, and within the provisions of our Constitution. They have enriched our understanding of the Constitution, and enhanced our commitment to the rule of law.

Approaching the Supreme Court to seek clarification on an important constitutional issue was not, in our view, an act of hostility or unnecessary confrontation. Rather, it was a necessary process through which we can translate ambiguous constitutional principles into action, a process from which we all stand to gain.

I consider it my duty to congratulate the National Assembly for its courage in passing this law, especially at a time when many thought it was exceeding its constitutional powers in doing so. And I also congratulate the aggrieved states for taking the issue to the Court, instead of choosing the unhelpful option of political confrontation.

Ultimately, however, we must all accept that the crusade against corruption goes far beyond mere adherence to constitutional precepts, beyond mere obedience to the letter of the law. It is the spirit of the law, the obligation that it imposes on all of us to transform it into a way of life that matters most.

For I am convinced that corruption is at the core of most of our difficulties in the area of governance, and the crusade against it is a struggle for the soul of our country. It is a crusade that each and every one of us must join, for it is the best way to ensure a future that is safe for us, and for many generations of Nigerians yet unborn.