

# **Total War on Corruption**

Remark by President Olusegun Obasanjo  
**At the Inauguration of the Independent Corrupt Practices and  
Other Related Offences Commission**  
*Abuja, 29 September 2000*

I have for many years held the view that corruption, in all its manifestations, is the greatest single impediment to our national aspiration to enter the new millennium with confidence. Corruption checkmates all vision for a morally strong and economically prosperous society. Indeed, corruption is the anti-thesis of development and progress.

It is an indication of the seriousness with which I regarded - and still regard - the matter of corruption in our governance, that the Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Bill was the first Bill that was submitted to the National Assembly, almost immediately after the inauguration of our Administration. Indeed, you could say that this Bill was brewing in my pocket even during the election campaigns, as I prayed that God would grant me the opportunity to work with the Legislature to transform it into law. Total commitment to anti-corruption crusade was one of the major promises I gave to the electorate. And I intend to keep my word.

In this regard, I wish to express my appreciation to the National Assembly for not only sharing my own concern about the dangers of corruption, but also for taking steps to pass the Bill into law within a reasonable length of time. I note with deep appreciation that the National Assembly enriched the provisions of the draft Bill, which augurs well for our struggle against corruption.

Soon after assuming office, in my Independence Day Address to the nation last year, I observed as follows:

- **“For those who are tempted to believe that our struggle against Corruption is utopian, let me remind them that we have no choice in the matter. Corruption is not only illegal; it is bad because it corrupts the very soul of our community. It makes nonsense of all planning and budgeting, and it wastefully depletes our inadequate resources. It breeds cynicism, and promotes inequality. It almost renders it impossible for this Administration to address the objectives of equity and justice in our society with any seriousness. And finally, it destroys the social fabric of our society, leaving each individual on his own, to do only whatever is best for himself.”**

Twelve months after these remarks, the signs are that we have only just begun to scratch the surface of this terrible blight on our efforts to transform this country. The task before you, Chairman and Members of the Commission, is consequently, a very grave one indeed. With your coming into being, our Administration hopes to serve the final notice on the evil of corruption. Many ordinary Nigerians will join me in praying to God to guide you so that the beginning of your office will also be the countdown to the beginning of a sanitised moral environment, with honesty as the guiding value in our daily lives, privately or publicly.

In discharging your duty, you will be at the vanguard of the reformation of Nigeria, politically, economically, and socially. It is in recognition of this fact that the process by which you were

selected has been a very careful and thorough one. The responsibility you bear from now on is a heavy one, and you have been selected because you are men and women of integrity, who can be relied upon to discharge your duties in the knowledge that you are now our standard bearers in the crucial battle against corruption. You will be expected to carry out your duties in strict compliance with the provisions of the law that has brought your commission into being. You will be required to fear nothing and no one but God. And you will so conduct yourselves as to leave no room for doubt, as to your integrity, honesty, or decisiveness.

The law you are called upon to uphold and execute is a stringent one. It punishes both those who receive, and those who offer gratification. It imposes a duty, the breach of which is punishable by law, on everyone, from those who directly participate in the crime of corruption, to those who, though not participating in it, yet have knowledge that such a crime has been committed, or is being committed, and failed to report it to the Commission. It is a unique law whose merit has already been acclaimed by expert observers at home and abroad. It is a very bold step, and a very necessary one in the right direction.

By all considerations, this is a very powerful law that is going to touch the life of most Nigerians. In order to ensure that ignorance does not become an excuse, the Nigerian public should be made fully aware of the full scope of this law. Thus, the Commission is expected to carry out full scale enlightenment programme that will drive home the moral as well the legal message to the Nigerian public, so that the citizens will know their rights and obligations under this new law.

Also, it is a well-known fact that many aspects of procedures in Government and general conduct of public affairs have been so thoroughly corrupted that the procedures themselves have become excuses for those who may not be inclined to fraudulent behaviour. The Commission should critically look into this 'corrupt environment', so to speak. The questions are: Are there elements in procedures that compel corruption or make corruption easy? How can we sanitise the procedures so as to remove the corruption that has become embedded in it? We look up to the Commission for answers.

You are most likely to come under pressure to bend the law to accommodate family, friends and colleagues. No doubt some of those who have cases before you will attempt to bribe you. And some will even threaten you. But you have all been selected with considerable care, and I am confident that you possess the qualities of honesty and diligence, which are indispensable, if you must discharge your duties satisfactorily. You have an obligation to yourselves, to the country, and to God. You must not fail us.