

## **National Dialogue Declaration**

Issued by Civil Society Organisations participating in the national dialogue in Lagos 12 September 2017

1. We, the 123 Civil Society Organisations from different parts of the country, have gathered in Lagos at a defining moment for the protection of civic space and to discuss the NGO Regulatory Bill (HB585) now at the Committee stage in the House of Representatives, sponsored by Hon. Umar Buba Jubril.

2. Our collective mission as nonprofits is to make the society a better place for everyone. We offer a deep debt of gratitude to nonprofits across the country for supporting government in bringing development to the door steps of the common man and in the implementation of the SDG.

3. We are committed to a legitimate, transparent and accountable sector. We recognise the need for a comprehensive self-regulation within the sector. Understanding that this requires the collective involvement of all stakeholders, we urge nonprofits in the country to continue to put systems in place within their various organisations to ensure standards and improve governance.

4. We are extremely concerned that there is a NGO Regulatory Agency Bill (HB58) seeking to regulate the nonprofit sector. Nigeria as a signatory to many international standards, norms and principles around freedom of association and assembly cannot be seen to be backsliding on its commitments to the rights of citizens and citizen organisations.

5. We fully support the call by various civil society actors to stop the passage of Bill 585. We condemn the Bill in its entirety and call on the House Committee on Civil Society to uphold decisions of civil society organisations at the July 25, 2017 roundtable to “kill the bill”. We stand in solidarity with the 54 civil society actors and experts issuing a statement on Bill HB585 as reported by Premium Times on its website on September 7, 2017<sup>1</sup>

6. At the same time, we will continue to be vigilant and to draw on our cooperative network to enhance dialogue on nonprofit transparency and accountability, to foster constructive relationships for the growth of our sector and to increase our support for a self-regulatory framework.

7. Through our discussions we have committed to:

- Sustain our voices against the Bill using our different spaces including social and traditional media to continue to call for its death
- Explore processes for a self-regulatory framework by developing a range of options capable of enabling the operations of small, medium and large nonprofits in the country
- Take necessary steps to educate the public, regulators, policy makers, media and the civil society community on the importance of nonprofits

8. In the light of the concerns around the sector being used as conduits for terrorism financing we have decided to further strengthen our internal control systems drawing upon all relevant internationally accepted standards and tools at our disposal.

9. A stronger civil society across the country, which includes small- and medium-sized nonprofits remain essential for our democracy and development. For Nigeria to attain the SDGs, it is of importance to support an enabling environment for the formation and operation of nonprofits.

10. We express our appreciation for the generous support of InnerCity Mission for Children in hosting the dialogue. With key decisions to strengthen our sector, promote our values of transparency and accountability, our dialogue in Lagos has demonstrated our unity and strength to stand against the NGO Regulatory Agency Bill (HB585). We look forward to meeting again in November 2017 at the Nigeria Network of NGO's Annual Conference.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/242640-ngo-regulation-bill-threatens-nigerias-hard-won-democracy-academics-experts-others-warn.html>