



STATEMENT

BY

**DR DALHATU SARKI TAFIDA, OFR, NIGERIA HIGH
COMMISSIONER TO THE UNITED KINGDOM**

**ON THE REFORMS OF CONSULAR AND
IMMIGRATION SERVICES AT THE MISSION, THURSDAY,
2ND APRIL 2009**

Heads of Section of the High Commission,

Ministers and staff of the High Commission,

President of CANUK,

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press,

Fellow Nigerians,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this Press Conference. Today's is the second occasion since my assumption of duties in April 2008. It is, as I mentioned during our first interactive meeting, part of the process of consultation and engagement with my fellow country men and women in the United Kingdom, under my watch. Our focus today is the reform of the Immigration and Consular Units of the High Commission with the objectives of enhanced service delivery in line with the dictates of Citizen Diplomacy of the present Administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, GCFR.

As you are all fully aware, the Immigration Section of the High Commission is one of the mission's windows to the world. It is an essential area of service delivery that constitutes the interface between the mission and the public, specifically, Nigerians in the UK. No matter what the mission does on the political and economic fronts, the image of the mission is largely formed, in the eyes of the public, by how well the mission discharges its consular and immigration functions. This is why it is extremely essential that the Mission gets it right in terms of expeditious issuance of visas, passports and other travel documents, not to mention assistance to Nigerians in distress. And this is why I have, since assumption of duties, taken this brief most seriously.

You are all living witnesses to the changes that we have introduced so far in those sections with your kind advice, guidance and cooperation. I thank you for this support. However, we still have complaints from Nigerians and members of the public on some of notable problems at our Immigration and Consular Sections. These include:

- a. Poor but often times, wrong perception by members of the public, exacerbated by the Mission's unflattering, and some times, unearned reputation for bad image arising from poor services.
- b. High and sometimes, wrong expectations of what the mission can and cannot do for Nigerians, especially those in need and in distress.
- c. Allegations of bribery, corruption and extortion against staff.
- d. Unusually large number of applicants, especially Nigerians that throng the mission on a daily basis, giving the impression of chaos in the Visa Hall.
- e. Poor access control with large number of Nigerians coming for services without prior appointments.
- f. Poor public relations on the part of frontline staff.
- g. Problems associated with the procedure of obtaining services, especially, payments for new e-passports.

You will most likely agree with me that the introduction of the e-passports, which was launched at the Mission in June 2008 and the deployment of two highly competent Immigration Officers from the Nigerian Immigration Service, have greatly enhanced service delivery in this vital area. You will recall that even before that initiative, the first step I took to address the main problems facing the Section was to post a very senior and dynamic officer as Head of the Section. This has been complemented by an equally reinvigorated Consular Section that administers to the welfare of Nigerians, including those in detentions or in distress. The visibility and contact supervision of the Immigration and Consular Sections have evidently improved service delivery to all Nigerians and other members of the UK public.

I am pleased to announce that, in addition to the above, I constituted a four-man Committee of senior officers of the Mission under my chairmanship, to study the situation further and make appropriate recommendations. The Committee has done an extensive work and made far-reaching recommendations and suggestions which I have since duly approved for implementation. These include:

- i. Token increase the cost of service delivery, mostly on issues like passports, visas, to cover administrative and related charges. The details of which will be released shortly.
- ii. Making the Visa Hall more congenial and user-friendly.
- iii. a rigorous programme of staff training and re-training in service delivery and public/customer relations for frontline staff in the passport and visa units.
- iv. Staff reorganisation and redeployments of staff to be carried out with a view to ensuring that no staff in the Section stays longer than necessary or is allowed to entrench the culture of corruption and impunity in the Section.
- v. Zero tolerance of corruption and other sharp practices.
- vi. The erection of Complaints/Suggestion Boxes; one in the Reception/Banking Hall and another in the Visa Hall. These would be regularly downloaded and suggestions/complaints therein brought to the attention of the High Commissioner directly by the Special Assistant to the High Commissioner. This will be reinforced by the introduction of a system of Appeals against the decisions made on visas, passports and other services which applicants may find unsatisfactory.

- vii. Provision of Information Desk in the Banking Hall to sort out categories of applicants before being sent to the Visa Hall. In addition to serving as the Mission's Reception Hall, the Banking Hall will thus serve as a "Holding Room", thereby reducing the crowd in the Visa Hall.
- viii. Provision of privately-run Facilities/Services Desk, equipped with photocopying machine, computer, printer and internet facility, at a fee for the benefit of visitors to the Mission for various services.
- xi. Redesigning the Mission's website, to make it more user-friendly – the specific details are being considered.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me explain to all Nigerians through your good selves that the nominal fee increases are intended to make it possible for the Mission to render better, quality services. It is not intended to add unnecessary financial burden on fellow Nigerians, who are already facing enormous challenges imposed by the current global economic melt down. There is also the element of reciprocity embedded in the new fees, in line with diplomatic and consular practice.

The fee structure is open and transparent. Let me seize this opportunity to appeal to all applicants for visas and passports not to pay any fee over and above the approved fees. You should not hesitate to report to me any member of staff who demands payment of unauthorised fees before services are rendered. I assure you that any staff of the Mission caught engaging in corrupt practices will be visited, upon conclusive investigation, with summary dismissal. In the same vein, we shall uphold the principle of fairness, while introducing other necessary incentives intended to promote hard work and conscientious services.

I will like to end this brief remark by appealing for the cooperation of all, to ensure a better image for our country and the Mission in the UK. I am committed to continuous review and improvement of the internal systems and processes of the Mission and shall, as usual, welcome suggestions and ideas from you, to achieve these objectives.

I thank you for your attention.