

ADVERTORIAL

Re – FIRS ignores Buhari’s Directive, sacks Nine Directors

The attention of the FIRS Management has been drawn to malicious publications in some no less reputable media outfits such as Premium Times and PUNCH Newspaper dated 18th May, 2020, entitled "**FIRS Chair ignores Buhari's directive, retires nine directors**", which blatantly twisted facts to create the impression that nepotism and tribalism are being entrenched in FIRS. Management also notes with satisfaction subsequent spirited and well intentioned rejoinders by friends and well-wishers of the FIRS in a bid to state the true perspective of the matters arising from the said invidious publication.

2. Following wide consultations, the FIRS Management wishes to bring to the attention of the general public that the present Management of FIRS led by Mr. Muhammad Nami has no intention of (and is not) entrenching nepotism and tribalism in FIRS. The Management therefore wishes to state categorically that those making such insinuations are doing so from the figment of their imagination.

3. The main issues mischievously alleged in the publication are summarized as follows:

1. That Muhammad Nami unlawfully retired nine Directors to pave way for his allies by relying on old Civil Service Rule which was suspended by President Muhammadu Buhari via a circular No SH/COS/100/A/1462 dated 17th June, 2016 issued by the then Head of Service, and that the immediate past Chairman of FIRS upheld the order as no Director was retired during his administration on the basis of the old rule.

2. That Muhammad Nami assumed office in November 2019

3. That the Service relied on Section 10.1a (iii) of the FIRS Human Resources Policies and Processes (HRPP) to retire the Directors while ignoring Section 1.8.2 of the same HRPP which deals with the effects of circulars and other amendments to HRPP.

4. That after the retirement of the Directors, the Executive Chairman appointed Four (4) new Directors, which has caused disquiet among Senior Staff who were sidelined for the Contract staff.

5. The publication asked “where is transparency, accountability, integrity and Federal Character in these appointments?”

4. For the purpose of clarity and avoidance of any doubt, Management wishes to put the record straight as follows:

4.1 Muhammed Nami did not unlawfully retire nine Directors to pave way for his allies. In the first place, the retirement of the Directors was done in accordance with the rules and followed due process as it was approved by the Board.

Secondly, on the issue of using old Civil Service Rule at the expense of the new rule, it must be noted that FIRS (the Service), was established pursuant to FIRS (Establishment) Act 2007, as a **Public Service** and not a **Civil Service**. There is a lot of difference between Civil Service and Public Service. Civil Service covers Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government without autonomous Status, while Public Service includes among others FIRS, Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), with autonomous status and functional Board of Directors. As such the circular couldn't have been binding on the Service.

4.2 The Service did not disobey the new regulation suspending the eight (8) year tenure rule. Of course, it is easy to see that the previous management did not retire Directors because there was no Board in place, and so it operated solely thereby determined the rules to implement and those to disobey with a huge media support from the likes of the media organisations under reference.

4.3 The FIRS Human Resources Policies and Processes (HRPP) in its Chapter 10 adequately captures all retirement matters that are peculiar to the Service, and which all staff signed and promised to abide by at the point of entering into the Service. By virtue of the provision of S.1.8.3 of the FIRS HRPP, it is only where any matter is not provided for or covered by the HRPP that recourse is made to the provisions of the Public Service Rules (PSR). And since there is no lacuna therein, there is no need to rely on the Head of Service Circular on 8 year Tenure Suspension.

4.4 It should also be noted that the provision of S.1.8.2 referred to in the publication relates only to the circulars, directives, notices, orders and other

documents issued by the Board and Management of the Service and not from the Head of Service. This Section also gives powers to the Board to periodically amend the HRPP.

4.5 It is also not correct that after the retirement of the Directors, the Executive Chairman employed the Four (4) contract Directors without advertisement. The correct and verifiable position is that Nine (9) Directors were retired out of which six (6) were retained as Acting Coordinating Directors and Special Assistants. The Four (4) contract Directors mentioned in the mischievous publications are not all Nupes as alleged. Only two of them are from Niger State while one of the other two is from Kaduna and the other is from Bauchi. As contract staff, these Directors were engaged on the basis of the provisions of S.2.22 of HRPP for a period of 2 years which did not violate any rule. To further prove wrong the allegation of tribalism, the current Management team is made up of the Executive Chairman, two members from the North East and North West respectively, another two from the South West and the last two from the South East against the highly biased one operated previously.

4.6 Therefore the present Management team with members from different Regions approved by the Board as well as the efforts made to return the core functions of the Service to the staff instead of allowing the consultants to continue to perform such functions are all signs of Transparency, Accountability, Integrity and adherence to Federal Character principle.

The new Management also retained 14 out of the 24 Directorate Contract Officers inherited from the immediate past administration which was obviously lopsided in favour of the geopolitical region of the former Chairman. Please note that out of the 24 Contract Directorate Staff engaged by the immediate past administration, 17 of them were from the same geopolitical zone with the former chairman, while out of the 13 Permanent Directorate Staff engaged recklessly and illegally by the same management, 8 of them were from former Chairman's geopolitical Zone. Also, out of the 14 Contract Directorate Staff retained, 7 of them are from the same geopolitical zone with the former chairman.

5. Following from the above, the important questions the Management wishes to ask those who have allowed themselves to be used for the wrong reasons are as follows; where were they:

- When the above stated lopsided appointments took place in FIRS (2015 – 2019)
- When majority of the staff of FIRS were rendered redundant because their core tax functions were outsourced to mostly inexperienced consultants?
- When the immediate past administration of the Service operated without a Board or properly constituted Management Team, and even elevated a contract staff to exalted positions of Special Adviser, Coordinating Director, and later as Acting Chairman?
- When the immediate past administration failed to properly constitute a management team, and operated with only two Coordinating Directors (Biodun Aina and Cyriacus Ekechi) against the (6) allowed by the HRPP of the Service?
- When very experienced staff of the Service's operations, tax audit, and investigation departments were posted out to non – existing Training Schools?

6. The general public, the diligent tax compliant companies and other organisations are therefore advised to ignore and treat such publications as a mark of the entrenched yellow journalism in the country's media practice. The Management therefore frowns at the reprehensible, ignominious, and unprofessional antics of a few misguided people who are being used to drag the noble journalism profession into disrepute by the unprincipled resort to sensationalism at the expense of hard facts.

7. Finally, the Management wishes to caution the media killjoys not to drag this reputable and professional Institution into uncharitable tribal politics. To be sure, the core mandate of the Service is to assess, collect and account for Tax Revenue in the country for the common good of its citizenry and the Nation at large.

**Signed
Management**

