



**AFRICA NETWORK FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE
*CITIZENS' DIALOGUE ON POST-GFAR ROADMAP AND ASSET RECOVERY
REGIME IN NIGERIA***

**WELCOME REMARKS BY REV. DAVID UGOLOR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ANEEJ**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to this Dialogue on the roadmap for Nigeria Post-GFAR and the asset recovery and management regime in the country.

From the perspective of CSOs, the drive to strengthen and enhance transparency and accountability in asset recovery and utilisation is decades-long. There has been reasonable progress in certain areas such as the continuing repatriation of Abacha loot from Switzerland and other jurisdictions. There have also been less praiseworthy experiences like the unaccountable utilisation of some of such repatriated funds, such as witnessed in the events leading up to the last general elections in the country.

Overall, there was an obvious need for the establishment of institutions and mechanisms both at the international and national levels that would enhance transparency and accountability in efforts to recover looted funds and ensuring that such funds are utilised in a judicious manner that benefits the ultimate victims of corruption.

At the global level, the last couple of years witnessed two key events and initiatives in this respect, with obvious implications for Nigeria. The first was the London Anti-Corruption Summit in May 2016 where Forty-three countries from all over the world made over 600 country-specific commitments, in addition to a Global Declaration against Corruption. These commitments encompassed issues of beneficial ownership, tax evasion, tracking of stolen assets, the use of new technologies to address corruption and international cooperation, amongst others. These are all issues with direct implications for asset recovery efforts.

As you can find in your welcome pack, Nigeria made a number of commendable commitments in this regard at the summit, including on beneficial ownership, tax transparency, asset recovery and transparency management of returned assets, and payments to victims of corruption. The implementation of these commitments would have a huge impact in enhancing the asset recovery and utilisation regime in Nigeria.

In similar vein, the inaugural Global Forum on Asset Recovery (GFAR) was held in Washington, DC in December 2017. Hosted by the United Kingdom and United States of America, the Forum focused on four priority countries: Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Ukraine and Nigeria. In terms of its significance, the Forum achieved the following, amongst others:

- It built on the framework and commitments of the London Anti-Corruption Summit in the area of asset recovery
- It recognised the central role of civil society in asset recovery and utilisation processes
- With particular reference to Nigeria, it witnessed the signing of the MOU for the return of 322.5 million dollars of Abacha loot, and
- It established the framework for further civil society engagement in asset recovery and utilisation processes, through the ten principles for disposition and transfer of confiscated assets in corruption cases.

These GFAR principles provide a framework through which we, as civil society and citizens, can meaningful engage with relevant stakeholders and advocate for the improvement of the asset recovery regime in Nigeria.

At a broad level, these principles speak to:

1. Partnership between transferring and receiving countries
2. Mutual interests of transferring and receiving countries motivating action
3. Early dialogue by both parties and continuing dialogue in the whole process
4. Transparency and accountability in the return and disposition of assets
5. Beneficiaries of returned assets to be the victims harmed by corrupt conduct
6. Strengthening anti-corruption efforts to achieve development goals
7. Case-specific treatment for disposition of confiscated assets
8. Agreements for disposition of assets to be context-specific in accordance with Article 57(5) of UNCAC
9. Preclusion of benefit to offenders involved in the commission of corrupt offences
10. Inclusion of non-government stakeholders, such as CSOs, in the asset return and disposition process.

It is particularly in accordance with Principle 10 that ANEEJ has, through its Monitoring of Recovered Assets through Transparency and Accountability (MANTRA) project, convened this dialogue. At this strategic moment, it is important that we seize on the momentum provided by these global initiatives to chart a course for legal, institutional and broader reforms in asset recovery and utilisation in Nigeria.

Our expectation is that at the end of the day, we are able to have a realistic assessment of where we are as a country in operationalising these principles and commitments from the London Summit, and make recommendations on the roadmap going forward.

In concluding, I would like to thank the Federal Government of Nigeria for providing the opportunity for civic engagement through the Open Government Partnership (OGP), and the inclusion of Civil Society in the implementation of the MOU between the Switzerland and Nigeria Government in the repatriation of the \$322.5 millions. We also want to also thank the Development For International Development (DFID) for its support for the work we continue to do in this area through the MANTRA project and also the MANTRA Partners, Nigerian Network on Stolen Asset (NNSA) members, the media and to the resource persons who have made time to share information and experiences with us that will ensure that we have a fruitful dialogue. We also want to acknowledge the work of the Federal Ministry of Justice through the office of the newly created Asset Recovery and Management Unit (ARMU) and also the Office of the Vice President for providing leadership in the implementation of Asset Recovery regime in Nigeria.

The Recommendations and resolutions of our dialogue will feed into our interaction with the Post-GFAR event tomorrow.

We are no less grateful to everyone here for making time to honour our invitation. We look forward to a fruitful dialogue.

THANK YOU.