

The Meeting Held in Berlin between African People Convention, The Voice Forum and Caravan Group with His Excellency the Ambassador to Nigerians and the Embassy Staff on the 12th of September 2008

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the meeting held with His Excellency the Ambassador Abdul Bin Rimdap of Nigerian Embassy in Berlin. The report offers a source of information on the efforts, particularly on refugee and asylum seekers' issues and the roles played by the international philanthropic African communities registered in Germany.

The war on refugees and Asylum seekers is a new kind against the people in need of protection. The Nigerian Embassy in Berlin held a meeting with a group of African organizations whose roles are to advocate the interest and the liberation of refugees and asylum seekers.

African People Convention and some other organizations felt that African Embassies are hitching into the right of the Refugees and Asylum seekers and therefore considered it paramount to use instrument of diplomacy to have a tete-a-tete with the diplomatic missions in Germany.

It also registered the dissatisfaction of the Nigerian Community that supposed to advocate the interest of her citizens. The APC advised that hearing must be stopped in order for peace to reign between the embassy and the advocate groups in Germany.

Introduction

The essence of the meeting was to discuss the issue of the ongoing consular hearing and to register the dissatisfaction of the citizens to the Ambassador and his staff in a diplomatic manner. The meeting was scheduled for 14:30 but commenced at about 15:15 due to delay on the side of the embassy's staff.

The meeting started with an introduction by Minister Patrick Okoye. He introduced the African People Convention and the Nigerian Community to His Excellency - Ambassador Abdul Bin Rimdap. He also introduced the topic of discussion to His Excellency. The Ambassador welcomed the representative and asked for a formal introduction of the representatives.

The President of APC (Mr. Edebiri N. Osayi) started with the introduction of representatives from the Voice Forum, Caravan Group in Munich, IRAD e.V and members of APC. He further put forward the reasons why the group accepted the invitation. Mr. Ehiwario Lewis further elaborated the purpose and the consequences of Consular Hearing to the Ambassador and the Ministers. Mr. Akinyemi informed His Excellency of the anger of the Nigerians in Germany as a result of the Consular Hearing. Mr. Humphrey Omo-ojumah explained his point of view on the issue.

Role of Embassy

His Excellency defined the role of Embassy as a Diplomatic Mission. He pointed out that embassy has four major elements of activities in any host country. He sighted example of political development, economics and bilateral - trade. He further explained that the Embassy has been protecting the interest of her citizens through advice and refusing to issue ECOWAS Travelling Certificate (ETC) for some individuals. His point of defense was that they embarked on the issuance of ETC in order to avoid deporting non-Nigerians to Nigeria. He buttress on languages where he claims that a lot of people do speak Hausa and that they may not be Nigerians but may be Cameroonians or people from Niger Republic. He also said that some people speaking Yoruba may not be Nigerians but may be from Togo or Benin Republic. He claimed that some of the people given ETC are given in order to help prevent them from facing further punishment and to help the person (s) go back home to start a new life haven passed through some difficult situations in Germany.

He pointed out that many a time German Authorities reported the embassy to the Ministry of External affairs in Nigeria for defying the request to issue ETC to Nigerians whom were not granted asylum, he supported his claim with the Nigerian Government planning to send immigration officers from Nigeria to administer the activities. He stressed that if the representatives are in doubt, and that they may stop the hearing for a month for the representatives to see the consequences. He further claimed that stopping it may aggravate the deportation of Nigerians; he claimed that the German Authorities will deport a lot of Nigerians without the embassies concept. The President (Mr. Edebiri N. Osayi) of APC disagreed with the point raised by the Ambassador regarding deportation. The representatives supported Mr. President's idea and found the Ambassador's claims to be false. The Secretary General (Mr. Akinyemi) presented the laws governing refugees and asylum seekers as stipulated by UNHCR. This was supported by Mr. Omo-ojumah (Public Relation Officer) where he further elaborated the needs for refugee protection.

In response to representatives' disagreement, the Ambassador asserted that only few Nigerians have been deported in comparison to other countries. He quoted his experience in Austria and that of the time he has spent in Europe; representatives reminded him that he is a visitor and that the Nigerians residing in German understand the German law better than all the embassy staff. The Ambassador disagreed with the representatives and he requested them to provide the statistics of the people deported from Germany during the past years. He however praised the groups, but scolded them somehow by requesting them to put their homes in place before discussing issues as statistics of the deported people could not be presented. This was termed political brouhaha or razzmatazz by the representatives.

The Nigerian community was another problem encountered by the representative from the voice, Caravan, IRAD and APC. The group was shocked by the contributions of Nigeria

community, the efforts and contribution of the community was astonished and the Voice, Caravan, IRAD and APC feel suspicious of the community.

The representative from Caravan told the Ambassador and the gathering that the different organizations that have travelled far away to Berlin did not make the journey in order to see skyscrapers in Berlin but to discuss the issues that concern the welfare of Nigerians. Mr. Lewis Ehiwario informed the Ambassador to put an end to the act. He presented the right governing refugees and asylum seekers as an example. This was supported by Mr. Akinyemi. Mr. Akinyemi told His Excellency and the embassy staff that no group can stop consular hearing and that the methods at which it is conducted is the topic of attention. He supported his claim that Nigerians or Africans can no longer be too loyal to the colonial masters and that it is time for African nations to stand on their feet and do away with the colonial master eras. He supported his point that it will be impossible for Nigeria government to move German Embassy staff to a different state or regions to perform activities for Nigerian Government with Nigeria instruction.

Due to lack of time from His Excellency - Ambassador Abdul Bin Rimdap, he had to excuse the meeting and requested his ministers to continue. The continuation of the meeting was chaired by Mr. Okoye who requested Mr. A.L. Sidi, the Minister Education and Welfare to present the true picture of the issue.

Consular Hearing

Mr. Sidi explained the condition of the interviewed refugees as a despicable or precarious situation. He further stressed that the people need help. He expatiated that most of the people they give ETC are those wasting their lives in Germany. He pointed out that the useful ones are usually not granted ETC. He noted that the hearing is transparent and that any of the representatives who wish to witness the hearing is invited to the hearing station. Mr. Ehiwario and Akinyemi reminded the consular that verbal altercations alone are not enough to decide one's nationality. They cited examples of German Authorities who go to Africa to investigate and verify documents of those who intend to marry in Germany without request or permission from the Embassy or ask the embassy to verify the document (s).

The argument put forward by the representatives was that because the deportation of these people is for the benefit of German Authorities, they found it more convenient to use the embassy as an instrument of the deportation. The representatives stood on the fact that the hearing should be stopped except for the Nigerian Community who sees progress in the hearing.

However, APC and other delegates considered the Minister Consular's statements as a defend mechanism. The whole stories were like balderdash as tagged by the representatives. All that is expected from the embassy community was how to stop the mobile consular hearing but not to give stories of those identified. APC and the rest deem the hearing as illegal and it will not be accepted as long as APC's interest is to see that Africans are seized from being humiliated and disrespected in the world community.

In order for peace to reign, APC is calling on the embassy to put an end to mobile hearing. It is undisputable that hearing cannot be stopped, but the corrupt manner at which the Nigerian Embassy in Berlin is conducting it will not be accepted.

Summary

The African People Convention advised Nigerian Embassy staff to stop the Mobile Consular Hearing (MCH). The hearing must take place at the embassy premises if at all it continues. And that the hearing must not be based on verbal and individual outlook but must base on documentation (s). This can also be extended to obtaining any Nigeria document (s). Whether the embassy found it feasible or not, the building is the home of Nigerians and must not be mobile. The embassy must not use size as a defend mechanism, if thirty people can visit the embassy on daily basis for visas and passport issuance and extension, therefore there will also be a provision for the hearing.

APC is totally disappointed at the manner at which refugees and asylum seekers are handled during the hearing process, though, Mr. Sidi counteracted this that the refugees are not humiliated but put forward that majority of them do put up some unpleasant attitudes during deportation. He also noted that during Mobile Consular Hearing (MCH) the refugees and asylum seekers are violent.

APC was disappointed at the Nigerian Community members as they claimed that refugees and asylum seekers are criminals due to the manner at which they get themselves involved in crimes.

Huddles

The African People Convention, The Voice Forum and Caravan were not happy with the manner at which the Nigerian Community reacted in the meeting. The African People Convention, the Voice and Caravan were disappointed at the manner at which the Nigerian Embassy Staff organized the meeting. Their disappointment was that they were not informed of the meeting with the Nigerian Community. They claim that the Embassy disrespected them for not informing them of the groups invited for the meeting. The representatives (APC and others) called the invitation of Nigerian Community as a political jingle. It was said to be a deliberate act by the embassy as the people invited from the Nigerian community were not told the true story (information gathered from the community members after the meeting with the Ambassador).

Resolution

Delegate view of the act within the context of the consular hearing strategy and found it not wanted and see the need to put an end to it. They found the Strategy to combat this act when continued as a demonstration and protest in Nigeria using University students and news paper publication, radio and TV broadcasts.

Conclusion:

The President (Mr. Edebiri N. Osayi) thanked the embassy staff for welcoming APC, The Voice Forum, IRAD and Caravan and encouraged them to do the right thing for the interest of the Nigerians residing in Germany and for the host country – Germany. The meeting ended at about 6:30 pm.

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