

**BUREAU OF PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS (BPSR) LUNCH SEMINAR ON
“THE WHISTLEBLOWER POLICY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR PUBLIC
SERVANTS” – BY MRS. KEMI ADEOSUN, HONOURABLE MINISTER OF
FINANCE, ON 15TH AUGUST 2017.**

Protocols

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this seminar on “The whistleblower policy and its implication for public servants”. This is a very timely and appropriate subject for any reform minded public servant to wish to understand and embrace and to that extent I congratulate Dr Joe Abah and his team for this initiative.

The Whistleblower Policy which was launched in December 2016, has been one of our more successful new initiatives. We have worked hard in ensuring that we have the right systems, processes and protection in place for public servants to raise their concerns about possible violations or misconduct. This is something we are keen on achieving. Regaining the trust and integrity of the public service is a significant focus for this administration.

Much of the success of this policy has relied on the decision of the whistleblower to do the right thing. I can tell you that out of the 365 actionable tips we have received, over half of them have come from public servants touching on issues such as contract inflation, ghost workers, illegal recruitments, misappropriation of funds, illegal sale of Government assets, diversion of revenues, and violation of TSA regulations, amongst others.

In reviewing the information we receive, we have noticed that certain type of tips are recurring, for example; 39% (144) of the actionable tips relate to misappropriation and diversion of funds/revenue, 16% (60) relate to ghost workers, illegal recruitments and embezzlement of funds meant for personnel

emolument, 15% (56) relate to violation of TSA regulation, 13% (49) relate to contract inflation/violation of the procurement act and failure to carry out projects for which funds have been released and 9% (34) relate to non-remittance of pension & NHIS deductions. Others include concealed bail-out funds and embezzlement of funds from donor agencies.

Overall, the volume of tips received has been greater and of higher quality than expected when the programme was first adopted. We continue to receive information everyday with total communication reaching above 5,000 in July through our various reporting channels.

There is however, a long way to go and we must do more.

Part of our work is to analyse trends and take corrective actions. For example many of the salary, tax and pension under remittance cases shared a common thread. Several cases where Institutions were found to have insufficient funds to meet their obligations often had illegal recruitments which bloated the wage bill and agencies responded by part paying or short paying salaries, whilst applying to FG for salary shortfall payments. We are revising our procedures for approval of recruitment, which will improve our budgeting and control.

Equally in many cases where revenue has been diverted to accounts outside TSA, we have reviewed our reconciliation and receipting processes. So the information being provided is useful in driving process improvements.

If as a civil servant, you have information about a possible misconduct or violation that has occurred, is on-going, or is about to occur, we implore you to come forward and report it. You can submit your information anonymously and confidentially through the online portal, by email or by phone (**details will be provided at the end of my speech**) and if you choose to disclose your identity, I assure you that it will be fully protected. All information you provide will be

reviewed, analysed and referred to be treated either administratively or criminally, through the investigative agencies.

If for any reason after you have made a disclosure, you feel that you are being treated badly because of your report, you can file a formal complaint through the same confidential channels and the matter will be dealt with immediately with the seriousness it deserves. Also, where you have suffered harassment, intimidation or victimisation for sharing your concerns, the whistleblower policy makes provision for restitution of any loss suffered.

The risk of corruption is significantly heightened where the reporting of wrongdoing is not supported or where those who report wrongdoing may be subject to retaliation, such as intimidation, harassment, transfer, dismissal or violence by their fellow colleagues or superiors.

The protection of public sector whistleblowers from retaliation for reporting in good faith is therefore, integral to our effort to combat corruption, safeguard integrity, and enhance accountability. These are not just words, as you must have heard, the Senate recently passed the Whistleblower Protection Bill which gives a whistleblower, protection under the laws of Nigeria. This is a great step in the right direction in our fight against corruption and I must thank the legislature for supporting the executive.

Our whistle blower policy is consistent with many other countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States who have passed comprehensive and dedicated legislation to protect whistleblowers and particularly, public sector whistleblowers.

In line with ensuring that we continue to build the right capacity and follow best practice, the Whistleblower Unit consisting of representatives from the various investigative agencies, is expected to go on a study tour to Australia to

understand how they have been able to successfully implement the policy. We will continue to evolve and improve on the programme based on our experiences and learnings from other jurisdictions.

The reward scheme has also acted as an incentive for disclosures – a whistleblower is entitled to between 2.5% and 5% of the amount recovered if the information provided is original and directly leads to the recovery of stolen or concealed funds or assets. Even in the payment process we have built in protection to ensure that whistleblowers identity remains confidential and that bank and other details can not be used to trace information providers.

Of course, balance is necessary in every policy and you will note, that as keen as we are for officers to provide information, there are serious consequences for providing false or malicious information including the possibility of prosecution. We must ensure that people are not victims of personal grudges or private misunderstandings.

While we recognise that whistleblowing alone is not a solution to corruption, it is one of the tools that can improve governance in the public service.

Now you might be thinking to yourself, “So how does this affect me?”. If I don’t have a tip, what role can I play? I say to you today, that each and every one of us has a key role to play in rebuilding the integrity of the public service. The human resource department must handle complaints of retaliation with speed and confidentiality, ensuring that all complaints go through the right channel. All issues must be adequately investigated and referred to the appropriate disciplinary body or panel of inquiry; Finance and Accounts must ensure that they are constantly improving their processes in response to tips; Internal audit procedures must be strengthened and the Bureau of Public Service

Reforms must coordinate and ensure full acceptance, knowledge and implementation of the programme.

Finally , I want to again appreciate the Bureau of Public Service Reforms for putting this seminar together. We want to assure you of our continued support. The Whistle blower policy is here to stay and we are formalizing the procedures for it the Whistleblower Unit to be a fully fledged operation within the Ministry of Finance. We are intentionally integrated the team into the ministry to provide comfort to those with information by ensuring that the environment is not intimidating.

We encourage you to continue to continue to support the whistleblower programme and participate in building a civil service that we can all be proud of. Most information providers are not motivated by financial gain and that is very encouraging. I want to assure you that by blowing the whistle you are not a snitch or a traitor, you are a patriotic Nigerian who wants to contribute to the building of a better nation for future generations.

Call 09098067946 or send an email to whistle@finance.gov.ng or visit our web portal at www.whistle.finance.gov.ng

Thank you for listening.

God bless you and God bless Nigeria.