

ICPC to probe party funding, arrests council chairman, FRSC officials

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POLITICIANS who divert public funds to finance party activities may now have nowhere to hide. Reason: The Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) yesterday declared its readiness to go after such offenders.

This disclosure came as a council chairman in Kano State and other officials were arrested over alleged corrupt practices.

The ICPC Chairman, Justice Emmanuel Ayoola, who spoke yesterday during a courtesy call by officials of the International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES) Democracy at large, recalled that in 1966, several politicians were sent to prison for diverting government funds into financing political parties.

"The possibility of that to continue is still there and the way ICPC intends to approach this problem is found in the System Review, review of practices of parastatals and public bodies to ensure that funds are utilised according to the budget," he said.

Ayoola stressed that mobilisation was vital because regulatory efforts could only be effective if there was a transformation of attitudes of the people.

His words: "We should adopt integrity education to have a national culture of integrity. We believe that if there is a national culture of integrity, we don't need to police people as we do now to ensure that they do what is right."

Although nowhere in the statutes of the ICPC Act 2000 were political parties mentioned, Ayoola said Section 9 of the law could be used to look into the activities of political parties.

The ICPC chief said though the commission was not directly involved in issue of financing of political parties, "it is interested in the diversion of public funds and ICPC wants to ensure that funds are utilised according to budget to bring about a change in the transformation of integrity."

He asserted that only an independent body like the ICPC, with almost the same power with the judiciary, could make a difference in tackling corruption, adding that it would extend its mandate and interpret it extensively.

Mrs. Amy Loprest, a consultant to IFES Democracy at Large, who led the delegation, said she came to Nigeria from New York, United States (U.S.) to establish a project that would review, identify, find answers, and enforce laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria related to financing of political parties.

She said the project would recommend some procedures that would situate transparency in the electoral process. ICPC, Loprest said, has a big mandate and an important role to play in the enforcement of financing law.

The programme officer of the group in Nigeria, Mr. Jide Ojo, "political corruption is one of the biggest headaches presently in Nigeria, with problems of godfatherism, godson, close relationships among others," adding that these had given birth to litigation in some states.

Presenting two publications on "Political Party Manual" and "Political Party Handbook" to the commission, Ojo said they would aid political parties in preparing their financial reports.

He noted that last year, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) presented an audit report on political parties for 2003 in which all the parties were indicated as being substandard in their funding.

Also, the ICPC has arrested, the chairman of Wudi Local Council of Kano State, Alhaji Abubakar Abdullahi and three other top management staff over alleged corrupt practices.

Others arrested were the secretary of the council, Alhaji Ali Abdullahi; the council's Treasurer, Alhaji Isa Abdullahi and the Director of Personnel Management in the council, Alhaji Mukhtar Yahaya.

The suspects were arrested following a petition and are being detained while the commission continues with investigations over the alleged fraudulent acquisition of some property worth N2.5 million, including a private school in Wudi town of Kano state.

Preliminary investigations by ICPC have revealed that the suspects by their act, were attempting to defraud not only the Wudi Council and Kano State government but the Federal Government as well.

And for allegedly demanding and receiving a N7,000 bribe, two senior officials of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) have been arrested in Abuja by the ICPC.

A statement by Mike Sowe of the ICPC Public Enlightenment Department said the duo at the Federal Secretariat, Abuja apprehended the driver of a private car for alleged traffic offences.

Officially, the penalty for the said offence was N7,500 but the two officials demanded an unofficial N7,000.

The owner of the private car then contacted the ICPC.

Investigators from the commission provided the N7,000 in marked notes to the FRSC officials, who accepted the money and were subsequently arrested.

The suspects are being held in Abuja while investigation continue.