**THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRIMES COMMISSION (EFCC) MUST RESIST EFFORTS TO POLITICIZE THE USE OF ITS POWERS AND AVOID FURTHER EROSION OF ITS INTEGRITY**

ACCESS TO JUSTICE MEDIA STATEMENT

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In the early hours of Tuesday, 24th July 2018, the residence of Senator Ike Ekweremadu, Nigeria’s Deputy Senate President was barricaded reportedly by officers of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (“EFCC”). Simultaneously, the residence of the Senator Bukola Saraki, the Senate President was blockaded as well by officers from the Department of State Security (DSS) and the Nigerian Police Force.

Media reports narrate that at about 8:00am the same day, Senator Ekweremadu was served a letter by the Commission requesting his presence for an interview with the EFCC Chairman at 10:00 am on the same day, Tuesday the 24th of July with regard to an investigation into a case.

As it turned out, there was a politically-orchestrated effort to forestall the sitting of the Senate on that very day because of anticipated changes in the political party balance of the Senate: some Senators had planned to change their party affiliations from the ruling party. With the eventual defections of several Senators during the legislative session of the Senate on the same day, it becomes obvious that invitations given to the Senate President and Deputy, as well as the heavy presence of security and law enforcement agents at the residences of these Senators to barricade their movement was a ploy to ensure the Senate could not conduct its proceedings on that day due to the absence of its principal officers. The Deputy Senate President – who was invited by the EFCC to appear at its office – was effectively restrained from moving out of his residence.

It is unfortunate that, as it turned out, the EFCC and the Police were involved in this high-stakes episode of political drama. Many will find it particularly disappointing that the EFCC, a leading torchbearer of the fight against corruption, was coopted into a scheme that was intended, from the beginning, wholly to serve partisan political objectives. The history of the Nigeria Police Force’ biases towards, and attachments to incumbent political office holders sticks out a mile, so that its involvement in the ploy, though regrettable, will hardly come as a surprise to many.

The need for the EFCC to remain politically neutral and focused exclusively on fighting corruption is one that cannot be over-emphasized. Using the Commission’s powers to serve politically partisan ends will represent an invidiously corrupt use of, and departure from that mandate, and will harm the perception of the Commission as an unbiased criminal justice agency. It will also play into the hands of those who are detractors of the Commission’s work, and provide them cannons with which to attack the Commission’s objectivity and judgments.

We fear that the EFCC may have already lost a significant measure of public goodwill, standing and trust following this incident, and it will be harder to rebuild its credibility after this stunt.

The EFCC has made a grave mistake in its involvement in this incident and it must soberly reflect on how it will atone for, learn from, and put this incident behind it. The EFCC must, going forward, make a decision to follow the “straight and narrow” path, stay above the fray and fickle of partisan politics, and stand its ground not to become puppets of any party or government; otherwise, just like the Police Force, it will grind slowly – in a way of speaking - into its own *death*. The precedent it has set with the Senator Ekweremadu incident must be overwritten with a clear and abiding commitment never to take that route again.

A2Justice now urges the EFCC to immediately investigate its involvement in the Senate saga, and bring to account, any persons who may have authorized and executed the misuse of the Commission’s powers in that regard. It must also apologize to Nigerians over its role in the Senate affair, and make a public commitment that it will never again go down that lane again.

Signed,

**Joseph Otteh Daniel Igiekhumhe**

Director, Access to Justice Programme Officer

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