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ITUC-Africa Strongly Condemns the Violent Repression of Peaceful Protests in Nigeria: Calls for Urgent Dialogue and Reform

The African Regional Organization of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa www.ituc-africa.org) unequivocally condemns the violent suppression of unarmed, and peaceful protesters in Nigeria. The tragic loss of lives in Kaduna, Suleja, and other parts of the country is a devastating reminder of the dire socio-economic conditions that have driven millions of Nigerians to the streets, demanding their fundamental rights and dignity.

Nigeria, now the capital of global poverty, surpassing India, is at a critical crossroads. The country's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) figures show that 133 million people live in multidimensional poverty. The crises of food and fuel inflation (a 28-year high of 34.19%) and grinding unemployment have been pushing millions into extreme hardship and misery. The country is experiencing a mass exodus of skilled and educated nationals seeking greener pastures abroad chiefly because the government fails to provide a conducive and secure environment for its citizens.

The heavy-handed response by the government to legitimate and peaceful assembly and protests only exacerbates the situation, deepening the frustration and despair of its citizens. Instead of deploying force, the government must address the root causes of these protests: the worsening socio-economic conditions that have plagued Nigerian working people for a couple of years now.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which Nigeria is a signatory, guarantees the right to peaceful assembly and protest. The use of excessive force against peaceful protesters is a gross violation of these fundamental rights. Additionally, as a member of ECOWAS, Nigeria is bound by the regional bloc's commitment to upholding democratic principles and the rule of law, which includes respecting the voices of its people.

It is time for the Nigerian government to heed the calls of its people and take immediate, decisive action to alleviate their suffering. ITUC-Africa stands in solidarity with the Nigerian people and will continue to advocate for their rights and dignity.

ITUC-Africa calls on the Nigerian government to immediately cease all acts of violence against protesters and instead engage in meaningful dialogue that leads to genuine action. The government must prioritise the following measures:

1. **Cut the Size of Government:** Streamline governmental structures to reduce inefficiency and corruption, redirecting resources to critical sectors.
2. **Deploy Resources Where They Are Needed Most:** Focus on areas that directly impact the lives of ordinary Nigerians, such as healthcare, education, and social services.
3. **Provide Safety Nets:** Establish robust social safety nets devoid of tokenism and corruption to protect the most vulnerable from the harsh impacts of economic reforms.
4. **Institutional Reforms:** Implement comprehensive institutional reforms that ensure the government is efficient, transparent, and truly serves the interests of its citizens.

The Nigerian government must act now to restore hope and trust or risk further unrest and instability. The path to sustainable development lies in genuine engagement with the people, addressing their grievances, and implementing reforms that uplift rather than oppress the masses. The world and Africa's organised labour community are watching, and history will judge this government by its actions in this critical moment.

Signed, Akhator Joel ODIGIE, General Secretary, ITUC-Africa. Issued from Lome, Togo