

EFCC Reports on the State Governors and the Vindication of Dr. Bukola Saraki of Kwara State.

Contributed by Bolaji Abdullahi
Monday, 16 October 2006
Last Updated Monday, 16 October 2006

Wednesday, the Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, appeared before the Nigerian Senate to report on the activities of his Commission, especially concerning corruption. He informed the Senate that 31 out of 36 Nigerian State Governors are being investigated or have sundry allegations of corruption hanging around their necks. One of the five governors that got a clean bill of health by the irrepressible chairman of the EFCC is Dr. Abubakar Bukola Saraki, the Governor of Kwara State.

You will recall that last year when the issue of Dr. Saraki's London House came up and we were inundated with a great deal of ill-informed and ill-motivated comments, I had a cause to respond to your website affirming Dr. Saraki's integrity, both in his capacity as a public official and as a private citizen before now.

However, even as worried as I was then with some of the remarks that were instigated by your publication, I was quick to express my confidence in your professional commitment to fighting the monster called corruption in our country. And I believe this alone was your motivation.

Now that the jury has risen with the EFCC's pronouncement before the highest legislative chamber in Nigeria, I think it is important to go back to the issue concerning Dr. Saraki. In journalism, what makes the news most of the time is the bad news. However, sometimes, it is also important to emphasise the positive sides in the overall interest of our country.

Because you did a story last year, which elicited so much reactions and questions, some of them bordering on Dr. Saraki's integrity, I think it is only fair that you also let the world know, now that the EFCC has given him a clean bill of health.

Personally, I, like millions of people of Kwara State, who believe in their Governor feel quite triumphal with the EFCC verdict. However, beyond triumphalism, this vindication is providing us with another opportunity to restate what we have always believed. Like majority of the people of Kwara State who have benefited from quality governance in the last 3 years, I believe Dr. Saraki is one of the sterling exemptions to the general perception of public officials in Nigeria. We are indeed delighted that the EFCC has now joined us to say so.

The point I seek to make is this: while we must remain uncompromising in our fight against corruption and abuse of office; we must also be wary of those who would want to tar everyone in public office with the same brush.

What the EFCC report has done is to affirm that even in our country, there are exemptions, no matter how few they may be. The challenge for us is to find a way to recognize these exemptions and give due respect to them and the obvious sacrifices they are making. If we do not do this, and if we continue with the mindset that everyone who occupies a public office is corrupt, we may end up scaring away from the public service people who are genuinely motivated by the desire to serve and make the difference in the lives of their people. Certainly, failure to make this distinction is as bad for the system as the corruption that we seek to fight. I hope you will be kind to take my point and find a space for it on your website.

I congratulate you for the good work you are doing. Thank you and God bless.

Bolaji Abdullahi is a Special Adviser to Gov. Bukola Saraki of Kwara State.