PUBLIC STATEMENT TO GOVERNOR AKINWUNMI AMBODE CONDEMNIGN THE LAGOS STATE GOVERNMENT’S CRACKDOWN ON INFORMAL TRADERS AND DENIAL OF THE RIGHT TO LIVELIHOOD OF OUR MEMBERS

Today, the Nigeria Slum / Informal Settlement Federation stands in solidarity with informal traders, market women and men, and street hawkers in Lagos State to demand an end to the Lagos State Government’s crackdown on their primary means of livelihood. The sudden efforts by the Lagos State Government to drive informal traders off the streets of Lagos is unmistakably little more than an attempt to push the poor further to the margins.

The majority of Lagos’s 22 million inhabitants lives in informal settlements, buys food from informal markets, and moves around the city in informal transportation. Street traders and hawkers are at the bottom rung of Lagos’ socio-economic ladder – they are the poorest of the poor. However, despite their poverty, they still pay receipted dues to Local Government Councils in the areas where they operate.

We do not deny that hawking goods between cars on busy streets and intersections is dangerous for hawkers and can have other negative consequences. However, to overcome these challenges, the Government must first develop alternative means for street traders and hawkers to generate their livelihood. Instead of investing public resources in arresting the poor and chasing them from the streets, why not offer vocational skills trainings, or develop affordable markets and social housing?

The Lagos State Street Trading and Illegal Market Prohibitions Law is a remnant of the outdated military era and is not attuned to the socio-economic realities of most Lagosians. We are deeply concerned about the real consequences if the Government acts on its threats.

Your Excellency Governor Ambode, we are aware of the good intention of your administration as well as the significant challenges that you face governing the Lagos megacity. However, we urge you to review many of the policies programs and programs presently in place to evaluate their impacts on the majority of Lagosians. For example, note that the Lagos Homes
Ownership Mortgage Scheme (HOMS), touted as a “social housing” program that would house the poor, requires mortgages that poor Lagosians can not qualify for. Note also that despite federal and Lagos State laws that require basic education to be free, nearly all schools charge admission fees. Note further that government-built model markets remain empty because poor traders do not earn enough money to rent their expensive stalls. These are but a few examples of current Lagos State Government policies and practices that are out of step with the socio-economic realities of most Lagosians.

The Nigerian Slum / Informal Settlement Federation is a movement of the urban poor for our dignity and development, made up of community savings groups in over 50 slums and informal settlements here in Lagos – and growing in other Nigerian cities. In addition to community-led economic empowerment through our savings groups, we work with our member communities to undertake citywide slum profiling, mapping, and enumeration to identify and understand our development challenges and opportunities. We are affiliated with Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), a global network of slum dwellers’ federations in 36 countries around the world who stand in solidarity with us on issues such as this.

We are inspired by the fact that democracy opens room for debate on the best government policies and practices. To this end, we call on the Executive Governor of Lagos State, Mr. Akinwunmi Ambode and the Lagos State House of Assembly to listen to the voices of the people and suspend the enforcement of the Lagos State Street Trading and Illegal Market Prohibitions Law, and instead turn attention to overcoming the root causes of street trading and hawking. We need government policies aimed at helping the poor climb out of poverty, not condemning them to further impoverishment.

NIGERIAN SLUM/INFORMAL SETTLEMENT FEDERATION, LAGOS CHAPTER

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