

PRESS STATEMENT

RE: MINISTER INDICTS CUSTOMS OVER RICE SMUGGLING

The attention of the Nigeria Customs Service has been drawn to media reports credited to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Akinwunmi Adeshina, to the effect that the Service has not done much to curb the smuggling of rice into Nigeria.

While this is not an attempt to join issues with the respected Honourable Minister, we owe it a duty to let Nigerians know our commitment to implementation of government policy particularly as it relates to rice smuggling. In the last decade for instance, poultry products and fruit juice sectors faced similar problem of domestic protection. Customs' diligent implementation of government's prohibition policy contributed significantly to the current steady growth being enjoyed by both sectors. Contrary to media reports, we believe that our anti-smuggling efforts will contribute in the long run to sustainable domestic rice production in Nigeria.

As Nigerians and equal stakeholders in the economy, we believe that it may not be difficult for any person who has a fair knowledge of international trade to appreciate the peculiar situation Nigeria finds itself. Government in its wisdom has adopted a regime of tariff restriction on rice importation while being surrounded by neighbouring countries that open their doors to importation of rice from all parts of the globe.

Despite the challenge of our porous borders, the reinvigorated anti-smuggling operations in the last one year (**March 2013-February 2014**) resulted in the seizure of **220,177** (two hundred and twenty thousand, one hundred and seventy seven) bags of rice across the country. It is instructive to note that this huge seizure of rice is an aggregation of all smuggled rice. Some of these are ferried in ones and twos on motorcycles, donkeys, some concealed among bags of millets and other forms. This is in view of the fact that the extant law on rice importation prohibits its entry through the land borders. To therefore suggest that rice is being smuggled in trucks and trailers across the border in broad daylight is misleading.

Worthy of note is the fact that these huge seizures of rice did not come without a price. Over the same period it is regrettable to recall that we lost 19 of our colleagues at different locations in the fight against rice smuggling.

As a Service, we do appreciate, why the immediate beneficiaries of this policy will feel less appreciative of our efforts. This is more so, when the same seized rice is auctioned into the Nigerian markets. By implication, any of these **220,177** bags seen in our markets will still be misconstrued as smuggled.

The Service therefore wishes to assure the public of its unwavering determination to enforce government's extant policy and tariff regime on rice.

Signed

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For: Comptroller-General of Customs