



HAJJ MABRUR

TOWARDS A SPIRITUALLY REWARDING HAJJ

A Publication of National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON)

2017 Vol 8 No.9

NAHCON Celebrates 10 Fruitful Years

NAHCON Achievements ■

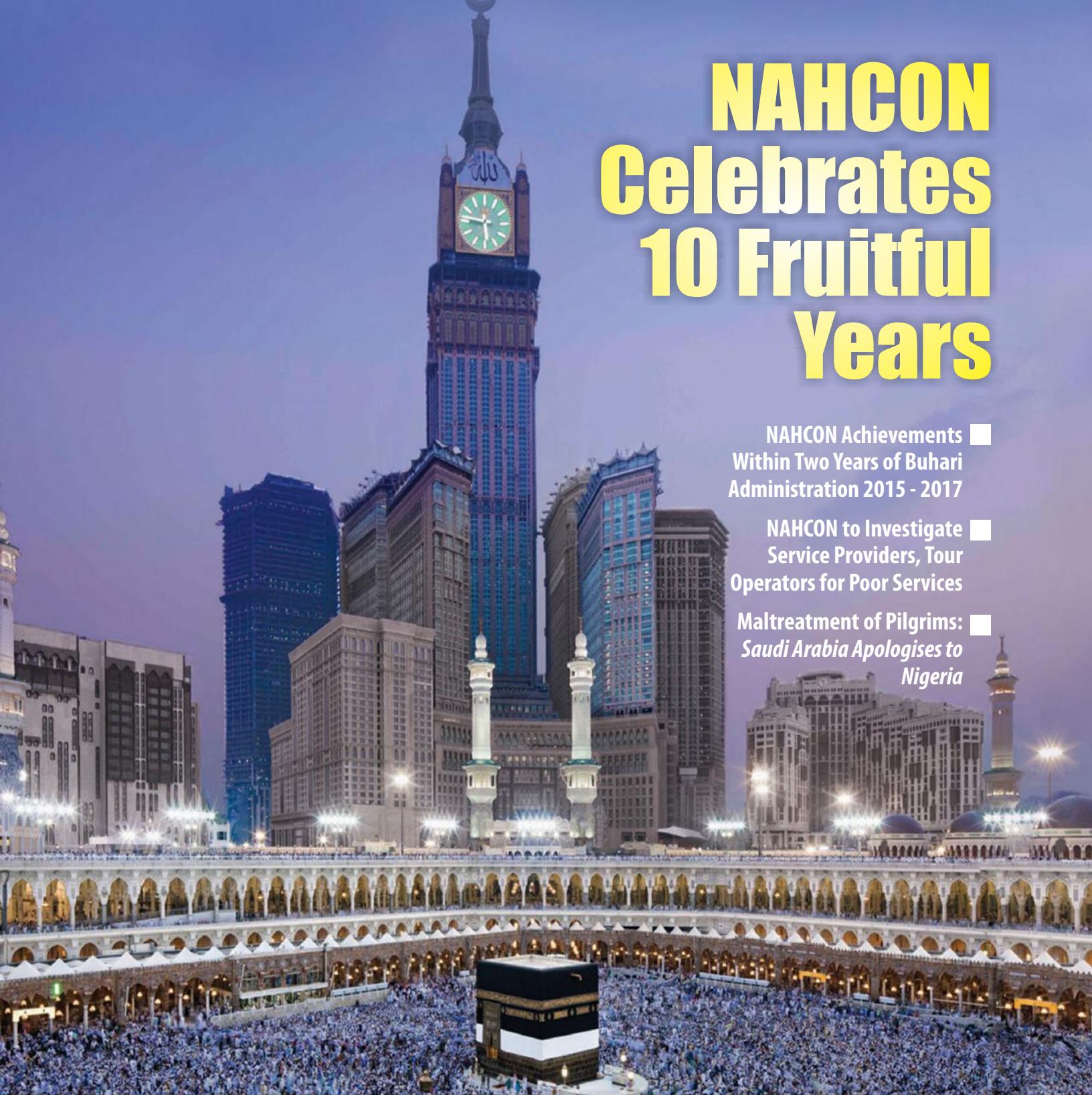
Within Two Years of Buhari
Administration 2015 - 2017

NAHCON to Investigate ■

Service Providers, Tour
Operators for Poor Services

Maltreatment of Pilgrims: ■

Saudi Arabia Apologises to
Nigeria





MISSION:

To diligently implement the
National Hajj Commission of
Nigeria (NAHCON) Act 2006

VISION:

To provide efficient and
effective service to
Nigerian Pilgrims

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FOREWORD

Hajj exercise is the yearly Muslim worship which undoubtedly many love to embark upon, though not all who wish to do so have been blessed with the wherewithal. Some are incapacitated due to health matters and others due to financial constraints. For those blessed to make it through, the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has already embarked on meaningful reforms that will change the face of Hajj operations in Nigeria to their delightful venture. One of such policies concerns the quality and quantity of foods served to the pilgrims at various locations of the pilgrimage in order to discourage them from patronizing illegal food vendors. Other reforms include consolidation of the national Hajj team which took off from 2016, the Markaziyya accommodation in Madinah and so on.

And for those still praying to make it to Hajj one day, NAHCON has a plan for them as well. It is the Hajj savings scheme and the establishment of a training institute to cater for pilgrims' educational needs. All these stories and more are contained in the 2017 edition of NAHCON Hajj Mabrur.

Indeed, NAHCON Hajj Mabrur 2017 is loaded with incisive reviews, reports and interviews designed to redress any missteps and for records sake.

From the Chairman's word of caution on information dissemination, charging the media not to rely on third party sources to the Commissioner of Operations' exclusive interview on a successful airlift exercise, the edition answers most of the question Nigerian pilgrims and Nigerians at-large would have asked NAHCON minders if they had the chance to.

In particular, there abound details that remain any researcher's delight essentially backed by facts, figures, pictures and tables for the reader's perusal.

In one of the stories, Hajj Mabrur reports how Saudi Arabia apologised to the Federal Government of Nigeria over maltreatment of two Nigerian pilgrims from Nasarawa State. Interestingly too, the edition records how, for the first time, the national medical team deployed the use of Electronic Health Medical System (EHMS). What exactly is EHMS? Find out the details in this edition.

These and other stories constitute a document that promises to be as educative as it is entertaining.

Happy reading from NAHCON Hajj Mabrur Team. ■

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NAHCON Chairman/CEO,
Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad

Don't Work on Third Party Information –Chairman Charges Media

By ...

The Chairman of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, MON, FCIA, has called on members of the 2017 Hajj Media Committee to exhibit professionalism in covering 2017 Hajj operations by shunning any third party information, so as to ensure working within the norms and ethics of journalism.

Barr. Muhammad, who stated this during the inauguration ceremony of the Committee held at NAHCON Head office Abuja, June 9, 2017, told the media committee members that the task ahead of them was demanding.

"You have a herculean task ahead of you, the task of managing us and managing the public as well, the task of managing the information at the right time to the public, the task of getting

accurate information and making the best use of it," he said.

He further reminded the journalists saying, "No matter how credible you think that a person is, as far as the organization is concerned, wait for the official channel of information to be given to you; because he may not know some facts behind the scene."

"So, don't work on third party information. In the course of this exercise, therefore, we will interface; we will communicate; we will grant interviews; and we will allow you to have access to some information that we believe the public should know," he assured.

The chairman further assured that he will "personally" try as much as he can, with his other colleagues, to make sure that they review things periodically.

He, however, pointed out that Hajj operations and exercise are always challenging, "because you are dealing not only with the pilgrims who registered for the Hajj but also with the officials who officiate the Hajj, both Nigerians and Saudi officials - and other officials who are involved indirectly in the management of Hajj, such as security agencies, aviation officials, the medical officials, the banking sector and so many others. Everybody has a role to play.

"Hajj is a complex exercise that every member of our society believes that he or she is a stakeholder; and, of course, he or she is a stakeholder; because it is a matter of national interest and a matter of religious obligation. So, your task is very important to the Commission and to the pilgrims," the chairman stated.

Barr Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad equally outlined what NAHCON wanted to achieve by having a media team as follows: (a) Dissemination of the right information to the public, particularly the pilgrims who may be the direct beneficiaries of that information. (b) Protecting the integrity and image of our religion and our nation; because there is something that the media Committee members, as information managers, cannot use as a yardstick of measuring the conduct of the entire pilgrims because of the bad conduct of an individual.

"So, if one takes such a story and an editor somewhere turns it into a big story with a banner headline, the image of the country as well as that of the religion will be battered. So, there are some things that we have to assess and review to determine whether they are news-worthy or not," he urged.

The Chairman also reiterated that NAHCON's only desire in all its operations was excellent service delivery, to ensure that all pilgrims get value for their money at all times. He, therefore, advised the Committee members to always share whatever information they got with NAHCON officials, so as to take immediate measure to rectify it, adding that "We don't need to wait for postmortem Hajj. Wherever we have issues, let us solve it on the spot, not after the Hajj. We don't want to come back to Nigeria telling stories on what had happened. If you hear or see anything that you believe is not in the best interest of the pilgrims or the Commission or the nation, alert us immediately; so that we do the needful, because by keeping it until when we returned, you are not helping and with helping the pilgrims."

The Commission Chairman added that he and his Commissioners were not scared



Across section of the 2017 media committee members and NAHCON officials at the inauguration ceremony



NAHCON Chairman, Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad in a handshake with Media committee chairman, Malam Ubale Musa of Radio Deutsche Weller



Across section of the 2017 Media Committee Members

of criticism; because it is only through criticism that one can rectify short comings, consolidate efforts, become stronger and move on. "If you are conscious and willing to be criticized, you will always have the desire to do the needful," he stated.

While urging the media committee members to be fair and just in their reportage, he pointed out that "Whatever we do we are accountable first to Almighty Allah, and then to human beings. So, we should fear Him because we will account for everything in the day that there will be no lawyer, no appeal. We must fear that day more than the accountability before man."

Referring to some negative reports in the social media about the Commission, the Chairman said: "Of

course, we cannot stop people from perceiving us the way they feel they want to perceive us; because my understanding of life now is that human beings believe what they want to believe not what you want them to believe. Not matter how hard you try to bring out the facts, those determined to engage on mischief will still be mischievous. But the beauty of life is beyond this life; there is the Day of Judgment."

Responding, the 2017 Media Committee chairman, Malam Ubale Musa of Deutsche Welle Radio, thanked Almighty Allah for the opportunity and NAHCON for selecting the team members out of a thousand practicing journalists to serve in the Committee.

Malam Ubale stated that media management not only in Hajj Commission but in any undertaking is like a prison. "We see it in different perspectives; but the key critical factors in media management are two: access and transparency," he said.

He assured the NAHCON Chairman that if journalists can get access and transparency from the management, the Commission will find 2017 Hajj media committee members worthy partners in 2017 Hajj exercise.

Malam Ubale, concluded his remarks by saying "We are bound to differ and see things from different perspectives. So, wherever we go wrong we implore you to call us to order. We will appreciate you, Mr. Chairman. Even though we came from different media organizations, we are respected and credible media partners though with different background. I am assuring you that the Commission will get the best out of the Committee members." ■



NAHCON Chairman/CEO, Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad

The 2017 Hajj fare of N1.5 million as announced by the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) had indeed generated heated controversy. While some pilgrims wondered why the fare was higher than that of 2016 and, thus, called for a reduction, others called on the Federal Government to subsidize the Hajj fare by approving concession in the Dollar exchange rate.

However, NAHCON insisted that "the component that determines the hajj fare is the dollar" explaining that "the official exchange rate in 2016 was N197 to a dollar, while in the year 2017, it was N305."

According to the Chairman of the Commission, Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, the Commission made wide consultation before deciding on the 2017 Hajj fares, adding that NAHCON did not just fix the figures.

He explained that the cost of each component that made up the fare was arrived at after reviewing the entire negotiations and discussions between service providers and NAHCON team

"The U.S. dollar constituted about 98 per cent component of the fare; and the Commission used the dollar to pay for all

Don't Blame NAHCON on Hajj Fare Hike

U.S. Dollar constitutes 98 percent component of the fare ...as NAHCON even saves US\$18.8m on Pilgrims' accommodation

By Kabiru Yusuf Kano

services that would be rendered to pilgrims in Saudi Arabia."

So, in actual terms, the component that determines the hajj fare is the dollar; the official exchange rate last year was N197 to a dollar; but this year, it is N305 - and when you multiply it by 4,805, which is the total fare per pilgrim, it will give you about N1.5 million.

"The bottom line is the exchange rate, over which NAHCON has no control. Government considered the sensitivity and the importance of hajj and allowed us to enjoy the official exchange rate. If we were to use the prevailing bank rate of N368 to the dollar, the cost would be between N1.8 million and N1.9 million. We tried to explain these facts several times, using all available means; and we granted series of press interviews and issued several press releases on this issue.

We also published breakdown of the fare on the official website of the

Commission and released to the public, explaining that we arrived at each component through consensus with stakeholders like the State Pilgrims Welfare Boards and Commissions and with relevant government agencies involved in regulating Hajj matters.

The cost of air ticket was reached after negotiations between airlines and the Commission's technical team, which comprised representatives from aviation agencies and State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards and agencies; and that NAHCON formally communicated to the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority and requested for advice on the appropriate fare the Commission should agree upon for ticket," Mukhtar said.

On Basic Travelling Allowance (BTA), the Chairman made it clear that every pilgrim would receive a flat rate of 800 dollars, instead of the 750 dollars given last year.

How NAHCON Crashes the Cost of Pilgrims' Accommodation

In its effort to reduce the cost of Hajj for 2017, NAHCON negotiated downward the cost of accommodations to be used by pilgrims in both Makkah and Madinah. This was achieved after rigorous negotiations between the Commission and the landlords/reputable agents in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

To achieve this, the NAHCON's team of inspectors and negotiators ensured that there was no augmentation for pilgrims' accommodation in Makkah, a success that was also recorded for Madinah accommodation. By that success too, pilgrims paid between 500 to 900 Riyals less for 2017 Hajj in Makkah, while in Madinah they paid 614 Riyals less for even better accommodation.

The reduction in the cost of Makkah and Madinah accommodation had really affected positively the 2017 Hajj fare. The effort scraped the previous regime of pegging the benchmark of the accommodation at SR4,000 flat rate, and introduced new initiative that each house would be paid for based on its merit and the criteria laid down by the Commission, namely: proximity to the Haram, facilities and age of each accommodation.

Also, to ensure transparency and to save pilgrims from the activities of fraudsters, the Executive Chairman of the

Commission, Alhaji Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, announced at a public hearing organized by the House of Representatives Committee on Public Petitions in Abuja that the Commission introduced electronic payment system to prevent agents from taking undue advantage of State Pilgrims' Boards in accommodation charges during Hajj.

Through this laudable initiative, NAHCON was able to save the country and the pilgrims some funds under the economic recession witnessed recently. Subsequently, results from the Madinah accommodation negotiations showed that the Commission had saved N6.5 billion in Makkah and 12.3 US dollars in Madinah, as compared to previous years.

He said since the introduction of electronic

payment directly to property owners, price of accommodation had crashed. He used the opportunity to deny accusations in a petition by aggrieved agents that the Commission manipulated the 2016 Hajj operations to the detriment of service providers.

Barr. Mukhtar said the petition brought against the Commission's 2016 Hajj activities and the preparation for 2017 Hajj had exposed the petitioners' lack of sufficient knowledge of the Commission's mandate. The petitioners said there were plans by the Commission to increase transport fares of pilgrims for the 2017 Hajj. The petitioners therefore, sought the intervention of the House Committee to avert what they called "further overbearing attitude" of the head of the Commission.

Shedding more light on the air carrier involvement in the issue, before the members of the Senate

Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Chief Executive Officer of Med-View airline, Alhaji Muneer Bankole explained that their company's involvement in the Hajj exercise was limited to airlifting the pilgrims and the processes of getting the carrier involved was through an advertisement and bidding processes.

He said, "Many airlines were called and many parties representing different agencies of government as well as security agencies and tax office were all involved where airlines were selected and prices were quoted."

He pointed out that charges for Hajj ticket is different from that of conventional ticket. Airlift of Hajj passengers is done on a charter basis, while the conventional ticket is cheaper. Why?

According to Bankole, "Passengers' airlines that are operating to Nigeria can charge you \$600 because they are not losing any-



One of the pilgrims' accommodations in Madinah situated in Markaziya area

thing when they come to Nigeria and there's no passenger to go back with.

"But for the operator to get passengers to meet its operational cost, he has to cut price; or in the sense of doing this the airliner must take you to his own base, because there is no airline that has a direct access to fly direct, except the designated airline of Nigeria and other Western countries."

Bankole further explained that airlines operate four legs while the scheduled (conventional) flight operates only two legs. How? In the first sequence, when we have to commence airlift of pilgrims we have to carry pilgrims right from any zone from Nigeria all the way to Saudi Arabia, and we come back empty because we are in a chartered operation. We are not allowed to carry commercial passengers on that flight. So, when you are coming back to your base to carry other pilgrims, you are coming back zero.

In the second sequence, when you finish airlifting pilgrims to Saudi, you are not allowed to park your aircraft in that Kingdom. You must return it back empty to your base. Also, when you are to bring your pilgrims back home after Hajj, you will go empty and bring them back. You will continue like this. So, cost of operation is as big as this.

"When we are quoting our fare, we look at the following: We look at the cost of the flight, cost of the fuel to be used not only fuel in terms of contingency. In the event that you will fly to enter another country there



Alhaji Muneer Bankole CEO Med View Airline middle with some of his operational Staff

is another issue," said Bankole.

For example, he continued, "When you fly over Sudan, you have to pay \$6,000 no matter the number of the frequencies, that's not their own. So, all these things go inside. Thirdly, you must put the charges of handling."

For Med View, Alhaji Bankole explained, they initiated 100% delivery of pilgrims to Madinah, and it will cost between two to three millions Saudi Riyals because the airport in Madinah is privatized. If you look at what happened to Nigerian pilgrims in the past, they used to go to Madinah from Jeddah airport through buses which used to take six to eight hours. Some died on the road; and we thought the only way to save the situation is to initiate 100% landing in Madinah, which is an extra 400 million Riyals. We paid; and we thank Allah (SWT)," Bankole revealed.

Alhaji Muneer Bankole further gave an insight on how airlines gave the breakdown of quotations, as various airlines submitted,

as an evidence, saying, "Med-View airline quoted for the Southern part of Nigeria \$1,750 and for the North \$1,700." According to Bankole, last year air fare was at the exchange rate of N197 to US\$1. So, the National Hajj Commission summoned carriers to come and discuss, and find a window where these prices quoted could be reduced. The airlines came down to \$1,650 and \$1,700, while another airline in the cost of this reduction quoted \$1,600 and \$1,550.

Various independent investigations also revealed that the Hajj fare was primarily jerked up by prevailing exchange rate because about 98 percent of the Hajj components was paid in dollar; and following this development, all intending pilgrims were to access the dollar at the Central Bank exchange rate of N305.

If not for the exchange rate, the 2017 hajj fare would have been much lower than what was paid in 2016, according to nine-year official data on hajj fares analyses by this magazine.

Analysis of official documents from both the Central Bank of Nigeria and National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) given by many hajj service operators showed that there were no significant changes of the dollar components of the hajj fare in the last nine years.

The hajj fare ranged between \$3,404 in 2009 and \$4,752 in 2017; and the highest being \$5,026 in 2016. Stakeholders said the prevailing exchange rates over these years determined the fare paid by Nigerian pilgrims.

In 2009, for instance, the total hajj fare package with \$750 Basic Travelling Allowance (BTA) was \$3,404.95, which translated into N470,736 at that year's official exchange rate of N135 to a dollar.

In 2010, the hajj fare package was \$3,484.54, which became N482,679 at the exchange rate of N135 to a dollar. By 2011, the package was \$3,766.44 and the exchange rate was N154 to a dollar, which made it N591,798.

In 2012, the total package was \$4,112.86, with an exchange rate of N145 to a dollar, making it N613,644. By 2013, the total package was \$4,234.12 which translated into N636,496 at the exchange rate of N146 to a dollar.

The package slightly rose to \$4,451.65 in 2014, translating into N686,061 at N150 to dollar exchange rate. At the exchange rate of N160 to dollar in 2015, the total hajj package of \$4,671.43 was N758,476.



Mr. Godwin Emefiele, CBN Governor

In 2016, the hajj package rose to \$5,026.40 which translated into N999,248 at the exchange rate of N197 per dollar. But for the first time in nine years, the total hajj package in 2017 dropped by \$300 from last year's \$5,026.40 to \$4,725.41.

Despite the drop of the hajj package to \$4,725.41 from last year's, pilgrims still paid N1,526,590, about N500,000 higher than what they paid in 2016, because of the prevailing exchange rate of N305 to a dollar.

This means that at the exchange rate of N305 to a dollar, Nigerian pilgrims would have paid N1,533,052 in 2016; N1,424,786 in 2015 and N1,357,753 in 2014.

The cost of major components of the hajj package, which includes air fare, Makkah and Madinah accommodations, which have been the source of the controversy have not changed significantly during the nine-year period as reviewed above.

Although 2016 official exchange rate was N197, recession and the attendant fall of the Naira forced 2017 official exchange rate to N305. Whereas a pilgrim needed just \$4,003 in 2016, his need in 2017 had risen to \$4,805.

"Now, if we multiply \$4,805 by N305, what we will get is N1,465,525 (approximately N1.5m). This is why NAHCON has pegged the 2017 Hajj fare at N1.5 million. Further investigation has also revealed that air ticket from Northern Nigeria was \$1,600, while that of the Southern part was \$1,700. Furthermore, the cost of accommodation in Makah was \$933 while that of Madinah was \$430. These were easily verifiable.

It is clear from the above details that it is highly naïve to blame NAHCON for the increase in Hajj fare. Neither can Federal Government nor the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) be blamed, because the major correlate which determines Hajj fare is the exchange rate," said MURIC finding. ■

Comparative Analysis of 2016 and 2017 Hajj fares

S/N	Item	2016	2017	Difference
		National Charges	Dollars	
1.	Air fare	1,700.00	1650.00	50.00
2.	Makkah Accommodation	1067.24	1000.53	66.70
3.	Madinah Accommodation	617.00	429.56	187.44
4.	Feed at Masha'ir	85.38	85.38	0.00
5.	Air condition at Arafat	74.71	74.71	0.00
6.	United Agent Fees	274.55	322.57	-48.02
7.	Tent Security Deposit	1.33	1.33	0.00
8.	Tent C	73.37	73.37	0.00
9.	Ministry of Hajj Deposit	13.34	13.34	0.00
10.	Feeding at Airport	4.00	4.00	0.00
11.	Feeding in Madinah and Makkah Accommodation 35 days	280.15	280.15	0.00
12.	Muassasah Arafat PVC Tent	0.00	80.04	80.04
13.	Wrist band	43.00	0.00	43.00
14.	Sub-Total	4,234.07	2,014.99	219.08
15.	1% CBN commission Charge	42.34	40.15	2.19
16.	Total US\$ without BTA	4,276.41	4,055.14	222.17
17.	Total US\$ with BTA of 750	5,026.41	4805.14	222.17
18.	Total US\$ with BTA of 800	5,076.41	4855.14	222.17
19.	Announced Hajj fare with BTA of 750 @197 per \$	999,248.92	984,477.71	
20.	Announced Hajj fare with BTA of 800 @305 per \$	1,557,351.36	1518683.33	

The Muslim Rights Concern Findings

Also in its investigation, the Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) revealed that 98% of the services rendered by NAHCON in Saudi Arabia are determined in US dollars.

NAHCON Gives State Pilgrims' Boards Listening Ears

By Alhaji Lukman Ojubanire



Amb. Muhamma Sani Yunusa, Nigerian Consul-General in Riyad, inspecting pilgrims' food

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), has again been commended for ensuring quick service delivery to pilgrims in Madina. The Madinah Coordinator, Lagos State Pilgrims in Madina, Alhaji Lukman Ojubanire made the commendation in an interview with journalists in Madinah.

Asked to compare NAHCON's services and arrangements this year with previous years, the Coordinator said there was a remarkable improvement, particularly in the areas of accommodation, feeding and release of pilgrims to either Makkah or Madinah, saying it

took days in the past to get the releases, but this year it took only few hours.

On accommodation, Alhaji Ojubanire, said this was one of the areas the Commission deserves commendation the most, in view of their proximity to the Prophet's Mosque, their standard and neatness.

He thanked NAHCON for giving State Welfare Boards listening ears, by implementing virtually all suggestions made after the last exercise, with regards to accommodation and feeding in Madinah, saying the dishes are bye and large commendable.

In an interview, some pilgrims from Ekiti, Kwara, Lagos, Oyo and Zamfara States corroborated the Lagos State Madinah Coordinator on the twin issues of accommodation and feeding. However, some of those interviewed hoped that their traditional local dishes were provided.

Speaking on the issue of Nigerian menu to the pilgrims, the deputy Coordinator of NAHCON in Madina, Alhaji Ahmad Maigari said they had problem with some of the Caterers engaged in preparing Nigerian cousins, but the Commission

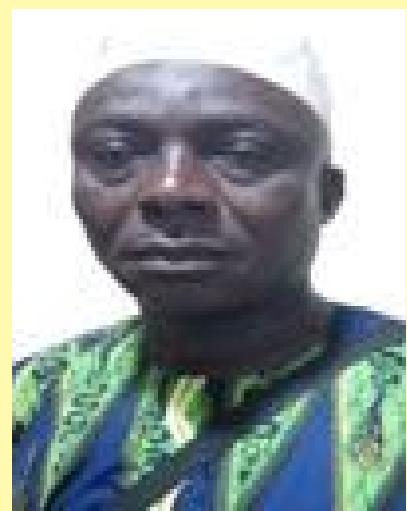
was quick to work round the problem to mitigate the pilgrims' plight of not having the cousins they were used to in Nigeria.

He expressed concerns that some State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards sent their pilgrims to the holy land without officials to attend to them, which became more tasking for the few NAHCON officials on ground.

Meanwhile, investigations at the various Clinics show that there were efforts being made to ensure proper handling of patients, through prompt attendance. In the main Clinic, some patients from other continents who happened to pump into it were attended to.

In a phone interaction with the NAHCON Commissioner in charge of Health matters, Dr. Ibrahim Kana had assured that the medical team in all the Clinics would do their best in meeting the aspirations and yearnings of any pilgrim that had a compelling reason to consult with them.

There was no report of any unpleasant incident or misconduct by any Nigerian pilgrim, as they made their visits to required areas.



Alhaji Lukman Ojubanire,
The Madinah Coordinator,
Lagos State Pilgrims Welfare Board

Osinbajo to 2017 Pilgrims: Pray For Unity, Peace & Progress

By Kabiru Yusuf Kano

The acting President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, has charged Nigerian pilgrims to pray for the country, its leaders and the quick recovery and safe return of President Muhammadu Buhari. He made the plea while inaugurating the first flight of the Nigerian pilgrims to Saudi Arabia for 2017 Hajj.

Professor Yemi Osinbajo who was represented by the minister of the FCT, Muhammad Musa Bello said to the pilgrims, "You are now the representatives of millions of Nigerians. Each and every one of you is an ambassador. I'm appealing to you to conduct yourselves as ambassadors of our great country. Do not engage in any act that will tarnish the image of Nigeria."

The acting President described the flag off the airlift as "a culmination of intense planning, hard work, dedication and commitment by Hajj officers all over the nation." He congratulated NAHCON for a job well done, reminding the officials, however, that the inaugural airlift was also "the beginning of another hard work, because you cannot really say it's done until all pilgrims go to Saudi Arabia, perform an accepted Hajj and come back home safely."



Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, Acting President



First batch of the 2017 Pilgrims from Federal Capital Territory in a queue to join the flight at Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport Abuja

He urged officials at all levels of Hajj administration to officiate with the fear of God in their minds. He said: "I beseech you to officiate with the fear of Allah, if you do that well,

God Almighty has a way to reward you." Turning to the pilgrims he said: "As the largest single group of Nigerians to a foreign land, you must conduct yourselves in good manner."

Also speaking at the occasion, the Chairman of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad revealed that over 80,000 Nigerians are expected to perform this year's hajj, despite the economic recession that hit the nation.

Recalling the challenges faced by the Commission this year, Barr. Mukhtar said, "This hajj has come with special and peculiar challenges – the challenge of the increase of 2017 hajj fare. But, Alhamdulillah, with Allah's support and guidance, a lot of Nigerians are able to make it."

According to him, "Over 60,000 Nigerian pilgrims are expected to perform this year's hajj under the state governments' quarter, while about 19,000 are expected to perform the hajj under private Tour Operators. This number is unprecedented in view of the global economic recession which is not only affecting Nigeria but many other countries."

He also revealed that the Advance Team sent by the Commission had already arrived and were fully equipped to attend to the needs of the pilgrims including their administrative needs, medical services and other consular supports

with the assistance of Nigerian Consulate in Jeddah and Embassy in Riyadh.

While assuring the pilgrims of a comfortable stay in the holy land, the chairman said that, "25% of the total workforce of Nigerian officials will sacrifice their hajj this year to attend to the needs of the pilgrims, because the Commission is "in tune with the change agenda of this administration that service delivery and service to humanity to any public officer is something that cannot be negotiated and cannot be compromised."

On his part, the Sultan of Sokoto, and President General of the Nigerian supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III, called on the pilgrims to respect the laws of Saudi Arabia and advised them to desist from engaging in any act that will tarnish the image of Nigeria.

Sultan Abubakar who was represented by the emir of Bauchi, Rilwanu Sulaiman Adamu, further urged the pilgrims to pray



NAHCON chairman Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad chatting with Commissioner of operation, Alhaji Abdullaahi Moddibo Sale shortly after the first batch departed



Secretary of te Commission, Dr. Bello Muhammad Tambuwal addressing the first batch on their arrival to Madinah

for Nigeria, its leaders and the recovery of President Muhammadu Buhari. "While praying for yourselves, your families, you should equally remember

your nation and the President as well," he added.

On his part, Senator Hadi Sirika, Minister of Aviation, called on the pilgrims to adhere strictly

not only to the religious regulations of the hajj obligations but also the rules of the host country, Saudi Arabia, and to be good ambassadors of Nigeria. He particularly warned against taking contrabands to the holy land, especially cola nut which is considered as hard drug by the Saudi government and attracts death sentence.

The first batch of the 2017 pilgrims from Abuja, boarded Flynas airline with registration number XY5702 which departed direct to Prince Muhammad ibn Abdul'aziz, in Madinah at 3:16pm with 460 Federal Capital Territory pilgrims and 20 officials, consisting of 299 males and 161 females.

They were received on arrival by the NAHCON Medina reception team led by Dr. Bello Muhammad Tambuwal and after all mandatory checks at the Airport, they were taken to their reserved accommodation at the Aziziyyah district, near the Prophet's holy Mosque. ■

NAHCON'S Reforms: No Retreat No Surrender!

By Kabiru Yusuf Kano

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria NAHCON has said that its reforms aimed at ensuring that pilgrims get value for their money have come to stay, vowing that no

amount of threat, arm twisting, ill motivated criticism and imaginary hurdles would deter it from its goals.

The Chairman of the Commission, Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad who stated this at

stakeholders pre-Hajj meeting held at Al-Raqiyyah Hall, in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, however, said it does not mean that the Commission would not listen to genuine criticisms or advice that would add value to the Commission's goals, but it would certainly not bat eye on any misguided distraction.

"NAHCON won't be deterred from her goals by threats; arm twisting, ill motivated criticism or imaginary hurdles. Rather the Commission has resolved to improve on whatever successes recorded and look for ways to correct mistakes



NAHCON Chairman, Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad while addressing the gathering during post Arafat stakeholders meeting held at Al-Raqiyyah Hallin Makkah

observed so far," he revealed. "We will nevertheless welcome constructive criticisms and genuine advice that would add value to the Commission goals," he added.

He further said "NAHCON would not relent in its efforts to ensure that the pilgrims get the best possible services during the entire exercise, hence, all hands must be on deck to ensure a hitch free exercise. No one should rest on his oars until every pilgrim has successfully carried out the hajj rites and safely returned to his loved ones."

The chairman stated that despite all the challenges right from the beginning of the implementation of the reforms in accommodation which some people believe was their birth right that should not be challenged, NAHCON succeeded in that direction.

In his words "these are the same elements we found in feeding and in tour operators. Of course, we know they have their God fathers both in Nigeria and in Saudi Arabia, but we remain committed in the reform we are implementing."

"But today, there are so many other formulae that can be used to attack whoever wants to bring reforms, may be, through media, social media or even possible physical attack"

"They make frantic effort to undermine the operations, but Almighty Allah shows them that He is in control, that's why we are here today. I am not surprised with the kind of challenges we faced because of this reform we are implementing and I believe many are yet to come."

"Alhamdu lillahi! Today we are proud to say that Nigerian pilgrims are accommodated in decent and comfortable houses in Makkah and Madinah and our pilgrims can compete with any pilgrim from any part of the world in terms of public transport system."

"Also today Nigerian pilgrims have the best of medical services, officials at State levels and the private tour operators are more committed to serving their pilgrims than ever before. I believe we have many more things to do. We should collectively



L-R: Emir of Bauchi, Alhaji Rilwan Sulaiman Adamu; Consul-General, Ambassador Muhammad Sani Yunusa and Chairman, House of Representatives Committee on Saudi-Nigeria Inter-Parliamentary Friendship and Hajj matters, Dr. Abdullah Balarabe Selame



NAHCON PPMF Commissioner, Alhaji Yusuf Adebayo Ibrahim with Charge d'Affairs, Ambassador Umar Salisu, at post Arafat stakeholders meeting

pursue and ensure the success at all levels", he stated.

To refresh the memory of the public about the activities of these bad elements, the Chairman continued: "In 1975 when late Sheikh Mahmoud Gumi of blessed memory led the pilgrims' welfare board, he wanted to introduce some of these reforms we are implementing now.

He wrote in his book '**Where I Stand**', in the process of implementing the reform, some elements within the accommodation providers decided to cripple the initiative. "I believe the same elements are the ones trying to sabotage our efforts today."

"Who wanted to assassinate, or kill late Mahmoud Gumi of blessed memory at that time? Their children and grand-grandchildren are still alive; they can do anything for money. So, the only formula to attack Sheikh Gumi was to use poison."

But today, there are so many other formulas that can be used to attack whoever wants to bring reforms, may be, through media, social media or even possible physical attack.

"So, I want to assure that even if it warrants us to pay with our blood, I and my colleagues are ready to take it," he said.

"But today, there are so many other formulas that can be used to attack whoever wants to bring reforms, may be, through media, social media or even possible physical attack"

The Hajj airlift also witnessed a lot of challenges because of the continuous registration process. "But I am pleased to inform you that today we have 65,000 pilgrims under the States who performed the Hajj this year, 4,000 above those who performed Hajj last year. Also from the tour operators, we have over 16,200 performing Hajj this year 8,000 above those who performed Hajj last year under tour operators. ■

NAHCON Procures Zamzam For 2017 Pilgrims Weeks Before Arafat –*Comm. Operations*

By Kabiru Yusuf Kano



Zamzam water for all 2017 Hajj Nigerian pilgrims has been air freighted to Nigeria two weeks before Arafat and would be distributed to the pilgrims as they come back home after Hajj, the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has revealed.

NAHCON Commissioner of Operations, Alhaji Abdullahi Modibbo Saleh who made the revelation in an interview noted that every pilgrim is entitled to a 5-litre keg of zamzam water procured for them by the Commission.

The pilgrims are, therefore, enjoined not to carry the holy water in their luggage as its leakage is believed to interfere with the operational mechanism of the aircraft.

He said that each pilgrim would collect his or her keg at the departure center through which they were airlifted to the Kingdom and warned against exploitation of unsuspecting pilgrims over the holy water.

Pilgrims in the past used to employ all possible means to procure and transport the zamzam water to Nigeria. This is now history. Airliners used to be mandated to provide it to their pilgrims. It was not totally executed as there continued to be pockets of complaints by pilgrims for not getting their shares. In 2016 Hajj, NAHCON procured the water and used the instrumentality of its zonal coordinators to ensure that the new policy was fully executed. It was successful as no single pilgrim complained of not getting his or her share. This year will surely not be different.

In a related development, the Amirul Hajj and Commissioner for Home Affairs, Lagos State, Dr. AbdulHakeem AbdulLateef has confirmed receiving 2,332 packages of Zamzam water for Lagos State pilgrims and all were airlifted to Nigeria for distribution to the pilgrims as they return home.

"Every pilgrim would get a 5-litre kg of Zamzam water on arrival at the Murtala Muhammad International Airport, Lagos".

The pilgrims are, therefore, enjoined not to carry the holy water in their luggages.

He said every pilgrim would get a 5-litre kg of Zamzam water on arrival at the Murtala Muhammad International Airport, Lagos. ■



Amirul Hajj and Commissioner for Home Affairs, Lagos State, Dr. AbdulHakeem AbdulLateef

2.3m Pilgrims Performed 2017 Hajj

...as Nigeria occupied 7th position and 2nd in Africa

By Kabiru Yusuf and Abubakar Jeddah Usman

According to Saudi Arabian General Authority for Statistics (GaStat), a total of 2,352,122 pilgrims performed the 2017 Hajj. Of this number, 1.752 million pilgrims came from outside the Kingdom while 600,108 were domestic pilgrims.

GaStat said that male pilgrims were 1.334 million and female pilgrims 1.018 million. It further stated that the number of pilgrims from non-Arab Asian countries reached 1.042 million forming 59.49 percent, and 383,044 pilgrims came from non-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries forming 21.86 percent.

Pilgrims from non-Arab African countries occupied third position with 186,873 forming 10.67 percent, those from the European countries were 84,894 pilgrims forming 4.85 percent. As for pilgrims from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries the number reached 32,600 making 1.86 percent and the total number of pilgrims from north and South American countries and Australia reached 22,268 which stand at 1.27 percent.

As early as 00:18minutes of Wednesday September 30, 2017, chanting of *Labaik Allahuma Labiak* (to Thee we come) was everywhere, pilgrims donning traditional white garments heading to the



tent city of Mina outside Makkah in an itinerary retracing the route Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) took 14 centuries ago. Speaking to Hajj Mabrur at the plain of Arafat, the Chairman CEO of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, (NAHCON), Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad charged pilgrims to double their efforts in reaping the bounties of Allah, this important day of Arafat.

The Chairman who gave the advice after going round Nigerian pilgrims' tents, also called on them to take good care of their health in view of the scorching sun,

heat, the high temperature and the low functioning of the mounted desert coolers in the tents.

"The desert coolers are performing but not optimally because of the harsh nature of the weather. The toilet facilities are okay even though in some places you will see a lot of queues. But, there is nothing one can do about it particularly during prayer times", he lamented. The Chairman said the beauty of the 2017 Hajj was since the movement from Makkah to Mina, Mina to Arafat, there has been no single accident. All the pilgrims were evacuated in good time, no

record of rancor or fighting among the pilgrims which is a good thing hoping that the movement to Muzdalifa back to the tents and the observance of the timing for Jamarat would also be well coordinated and peaceful and that the pilgrims will finish their hajj rites safely.

Importantly, he added, the Commission has established an emergency hall Centre with officers to man the affairs 24/7 hours, encouraging pilgrims under distress situation to always call this number 90008251 or 920008251 for medical attention.

"We have a robust, well-coordinated medical team

that is up and doing, with ambulances stationed in various strategic camps to attend to the emergency needs of the pilgrims. We are coordinating well with state officials to attend to any emergency or distress situation. So, I can proudly say so far, so good because even the mortality recorded this year as at now is lowest in the last ten to fifteen years", he added.

He expressed displeasure over the alleged poor condition and low standard of some State accommodation in Makkah, assuring that even though Makkah accommodation is purely state affairs, NAHCON will investigate the matter and ensure appropriate measures or sanctions taken.

Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar MON enjoined the pilgrims to pray for Nigeria and beseech the Almighty to Allah to guide and guard our leaders and give them wisdom to move the country forward, and a resounding good health for the President, Muhammadu Buhari.

As an annual event, NAHCON organized a National prayer session for peace, progress and development of Nigeria. During the prayer session, clerics offered prayers in Arabic, English, Hausa, Yoruba Igbo and Ijaw languages.

In their prayers, the Islamic scholars thanked Allah for the return of peace in the country and prayed the Almighty to grant President Muhammadu Buhari, state Governors and leaders at all levels the wisdom to govern well as well as for the economic



Deputy Chief Imam National Mosque, Abuja, Dr. Ibrahim Makari leading Nigerian pilgrims in a National prayer on Arafat Day
Nigerian pilgrims joined other Nationals walking to their tents on Arafat Day



Nigerian pilgrims joined other Nationals walking to their tents on Arafat Day



Nigerian pilgrims devoted in prayers for themselves and Nigeria

development of the country and the continued well-being of all citizens.

After sunset, Nigerian pilgrims and their counter-

parts across the globe left Arafat and headed to **Muzdalifah** where they spent the night following the footsteps of Prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him). Most pilgrims especially women and the elderly started leaving **Muzdalifah** few minutes before sunrise on Friday morning heading straight to the symbolic stoning at Mina to throw pebbles at **Jamaratul Aqbah**.

Inside the cooled and spacious **Jamarat** building, Nigerian pilgrims took part in the ritual of 'stoning of Satan', where they threw pebbles at the largest of the three pillars called Aqaba, symbolizing the devil. They spread across the length of the elliptical-shaped pillar and hurled stones in an orderly manner saying **Allahu Akbar** before throwing each pebble.

After stoning, some slaughtered their sacrificial animals while those who made arrangement for their Hadaya with Ja'iz bank since from Nigeria, the single act helped greatly in focusing on other Hajj rites; whereby they went straight to the Grand Mosque in Makkah to perform **Tawaf al-Ifadah**.

But others decided to stay back for the day due to the high temperature or after their completion of the recommended days in Mina which resulted in recording fewer crowds at the **Jamarat** and other pilgrims decided to stay probably due to the phased or segmented stoning schedules.

It could be recalled that last year the Saudi authorities introduced grouping system or a phased and segmented schedule for the **Jamarat** to avoid reoccurrence of the unfortunate episode of 2015. The same

this year, Nigerian pilgrims were scheduled for eleven o'clock for the stoning on the first day, while subsequent days they were scheduled for 6am.

Indeed, this new procedure of grouping eased the difficulties faced by pilgrims in the past, with the help of volunteers and security officials who provided directions to the pilgrims in their way and cooling them with water to make their journey more comfortable to the vast multi-storied complex north of the tented city;

Nigerian pilgrims completed their stoning in record time.

"It's different every year," said Abubakar Saddiq from Bauchi State, adding that "Some years back there were less pilgrims because of fears and warnings of disease. But this year, I feel there are a lot more people here."

By Sunday noon, over two million pilgrims who participated in the Hajj activities in Mina and Arafat began returning to Makkah for final prayers as the world's largest annual

gathering of Muslims winds down.

In stifling heat, a Saudi security guard sprayed pilgrims with water as they advanced through Mina for the final rite of the Hajj, the "Stoning of the Devil"

Nigerian pilgrims started trooping out of the plains of Mina to Makkah, after the ritual of throwing the pebbles at the Jamarat and only a small number of them stayed the maximum three days at Mina.

According to the Saudi Press Agency, Indonesia is the world's most populous

Muslim nation, and it also provides the largest number of pilgrims for the Hajj, giving her the opportunity to occupy the first position with 221,000 pilgrims, followed by Pakistan with 179,210.

Bangladesh became fourth with 127,198, Egypt 108,000, Iran with 86,500, Nigeria in the seventh position with 81,000, Turkey is following with 79,000, Algeria 36,000 and Morocco in the tenth position with 31,000 respectively. ■

Stop Patronising Illegal Food Vendors, Pilgrims Advised

By Sa'adatu Albashir

Eating unhealthy food from unauthorized street vendors is one of the causes of avoidable illnesses by pilgrims in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

Pilgrims insist on eating food similar to what obtains in their respective countries, thus, they patronize rogue traders, at unkempt environments.

A pilgrim from Ghana, AbdulRahman Abdulaziz, who has performed hajj five times said he has never tried eating Arabian food, adding that he was not adventurous and only settles for the familiar.

Aisha Bashir from Nigeria, who has been sick with diarrhea since arriving in Makkah on Tuesday, 22nd August 2017 said despite the obvious cause of her ailment, she still prefers to eat Nigerian dishes, even if it's made in an unhealthy environment.

"I cannot eat the food here. They don't put pepper and it tastes bland to

me. At least the Nigeria food has Maggi, onga and original attarugu", she said. However, Malam Adams Muhammad, a Nigerian resident in Makkah berated the pilgrims for 'deliberately' putting their lives in

danger just because of pepper. Many pilgrims were delayed at the Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport Abuja, for their refusal to hand over pepper in their possession, which is a banned commodity on board air planes.

He advised pilgrims that hajj is a spiritual exercise, saying they should be able to inconvenience the self for the sake of Allah and not insist on having their way.

He added that this action of the pilgrims makes the work of the



One of the Dr. at Shar Sitting Clinic counseling pilgrims on what to eat and not eat

Maltreatment of Pilgrims: Saudi Arabia Apologises to Nigeria

Saudi Arabia has apologised to the Federal Government of Nigeria over the maltreatment of two Nigerian pilgrims from Nassarawa State by its security agents in Madinah. Audu Muhammad and Ibrahim Godi were said to have been brutalized and beaten by custom officers shortly after their arrival from Abuja.

Deputy Governor of Madinah region, Sheikh Muhammad Albijawi,

who tendered the apology during a visit to the victims in their hotel, assured that the security officials would be dealt with for the maltreatment. He expressed regret over the unfortunate incident and assured that it would not happen again.

He further urged Nigerian pilgrims to be of good conduct and perform the annual spiritual pilgrimage based on religious guidelines and instructions. He further disclosed that the Saudi

authorities had put facilities in place to ensure a hitch-free Hajj.

The Nigerian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Umaru Salisu Zainabu, commended the Saudi Arabian authorities for a swift response over the incident.

The Deputy Minister of Hajj and Umrah, Mohammad Albijawi, gave the apology on behalf of the Royal leaders of the Kingdom when he visited the victims at Wefada al-Zahra Hotel on Al Salam Street Markazziya, in Madinah.

"Saudi authorities would never tolerate such kind of embarrassment of pilgrims and would take measures to ensure all those who participated in maltreatment of pilgrims were brought to book", he said.

He added that Saudi Arabian would continue to ensure better handling of pilgrims, particularly while in the Kingdom, assuring that the Kingdom was committed to delivering the needed service to Nigerian pilgrims and others around the world.

In his words: "we shall continue to provide effective service to pilgrims. What brought us here is the issue of the two pilgrims that were maltreated by our security agents. We are here to say sorry. We regret the issue and assure you that such things will never happen again."

Responding, the tortured pilgrims, Audu Damina Muhammad and Ibrahim Nani Godi, expressed gratitude to the Saudi authorities and the National Hajj Commission, NAHCON, for responding to their plight promptly.

"On behalf of the King, the Governor of Madinah and all the royal leaders in this Kingdom, we are here to once again tender our apology to you for what has happened and to assure

National Hajj Commission of Nigeria and hajj organizations of other countries more cumbersome and wasting resources that can be channeled to other uses.

"I don't understand our people. They don't want to leave their comfort zone, and life is not like that. They divert the attention of the Commission to avoidable mundane issues, instead of using the time and resources to better their stay in the holy land", he insisted.

Malam Adams advised them to learn to endure as hajj is not a pleasure seeking activity but a spiritual one.

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria NAHCON, had initiated reform in the organization of food services for pilgrims, aimed at preventing food related diseases and illegal food vending.

The Chairman of the food committee, Malam Shehu Makarfi had gone round caterers to ensure the level of compliance to the contract between them and NAHCON was strictly adhered to.

Investigation carried by Hajj Mabrur revealed that there were more than 210 companies in the food and catering sector in Makkah which try to meet all food requests from pilgrims, the head of the catering committee at the Makkah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Shaker Al-Harthi, told Arab News.

There are many cuisines offered, such as Indian, Indonesian, European, Turkish, Egyptian and Shami. This gives pilgrims an opportunity to experience different civilizations through food.

Catering companies provide meals according to their contracts with the Hajj delegations, including breakfast, lunch and dinner. Menus differ according to demand.

Al-Harthi said the food sector in Makkah is facing challenges, especially with population growth, expansion of the holy city and the resulting increase in the number of visitors and pilgrims. ■



A Nigerian pilgrim admitted in Makkah clinic

you that the Kingdom will never allow such a thing happen again".

The Deputy Minister restated the determination of the Saudi government to provide the needed services to the pilgrims, adding that the responsibilities of the Kingdom would continue to be upheld. He said the authority cherished all pilgrims and would continue to serve them by ensuring they stayed in peace throughout the period of Hajj.

The Deputy Governor lamented that it was unfortunate that the guests of Allah could be badly treated by those who are supposed to show kindness to them and this he vowed will not be tolerated, hence the decision to punish the overzealous agents to serve as deterrent to others.

On his part, Ambassador Umar Salisu, Charge d'Affair's, Embassy of Nigeria in Saudi Arabia, said: "We really appreciate the action taken by the Saudi Authority to bring those people to book and continue to allow Nigerian pilgrims to perform their hajj rites without any fear of harassment, molestation and maltreatment."

The Charge d'Affairs added that the Governor of Madinah informed him about the type of punishment that would be given to the perpetrators of the incident and assuring him that this is happening for the first time and will be the last.

The Ambassador explained that two pilgrims from Nasarawa State were allegedly detained and manhandled on arrival at the King Abdulaziz International Airport in Madinah on Aug. 19, 2017. It took the intervention of the Secretary to the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Dr. Bello Tambuwal, before they were released.

Hajj Mabrur learnt that Dr. Bello Tambuwal, petitioned the Saudi authorities and drew the attention of the Nigerian Embassy in Riyadh to the unfortunate incident. As a result, the Nigerian Charge d'Affairs in Riyadh, Ambassador Umar Z. Salisu, went to Madinah to sympathize with the victims and to get an explanation from the Saudis on the issue.

However, after NAHCON's petition and the prompt arrival of the Charge d'Affaires, the Saudi government, through the Governor of Madinah, expressed shock



King Salman of Saudi Arabia

over the incident and promised to decisively deal with the security personnel involved. To show remorse over the incident, the Madinah Governor, represented by his Deputy, Ambassador Dr. Wahid Alsihli, along with the Deputy Minister in charge of Hajj and Umrah Affairs in the Kingdom, Muhammad Abdurrahman Al-Bijawy, were at the Nigerian pilgrim's hotel at Markaziyyah area, to tender an apology to the victims, NAHCON, Nigerian government and pilgrims over the incident.

Responding, Ambassador Salisu expressed delight over the Saudi Arabian government's humility, as to accept the mistakes of its overzealous agents, tender an apology and above all to send high ranking government officials to apologise to the two victims from Nasarawa State, Alhaji A u d u D a m i n a Muhammad and Alhaji Ibrahim Nani Godi.



Alhaji Audu Damina Muhammad and Alhaji Ibrahim Nani Godi, the victims of Saudi Arabian Security maltreatment listening to the Madinah Deputy Governor, Sheikh Mohammad Albijawi's speech when he visited them in their Hotel at Madinah



The victims receive honorarium of 10,000SR each from the Deputy Minister of Hajj and Umrah, Muhammad Albijawi.

Meanwhile, the Chairman/CEO, Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, praised the action of the Kingdom, which he described as exemplary and a demonstra-

tion of the importance the Kingdom attaches to the welfare of pilgrims, worldwide.

According to him, "The gesture deserves commendation as it doused whatever misgivings that could have arisen from the overzealous action of the security officers. We indeed appreciate their quick action especially the apology tendered by none less than the Deputy Governor of Madinah and the Deputy Minister of Hajj, Madinah

branch. It shows the high pedestal in which Nigerians are held and more particularly, it is a testament of the Kingdom's resolve to make all pilgrims feel at home in the Holy Land."

In a related development, Independent Hajj Reporters commended

the federal government for taking "immediate and proactive steps" in seeking redress for the two Nigerian pilgrims reportedly manhandled by the Saudi Arabian security agents in Madinah airport, saying that "this is commendable and unprecedented," a statement by the civil society's national coordinator, Ibrahim Muhammed and Publicity Secretary, Abubakar Mahmoud, said. ■

Wishing Nigerian Pilgrims Spiritually Rewarding 2017 Hajj

By Muhammad Ajah

It is something of great joy to congratulate the Nigerian pilgrims who, despite the economic recession witnessed in the country and the controversies over the hike in price, were able to complete their 2017 Hajj fares and make it to the Holy Land of Makkah to fulfill their religious obligation, the fifth and seemingly most difficult pillar of Islam. It is a manifestation that whoever Allah calls to that all-important spiritual journey, He (Allah) will provide the means. My elation overflows and I wish them Allah's complete reward: happiness, safety, security and everlasting bliss in this world and the hereafter.

The other thing that pricks my veins is to mention the national Hajj regulator, all the state boards and stakeholders for standing firm on the path of resilience, patience and focus in facilitating all the tedious processes required by the pilgrims for the journey notwithstanding all the challenges that cropped up all through the time the 2017 Hajj fares were announced. Amidst the turbulent waves that greeted the tail end of the preparatory stage of the first phase of the operations, these Nigerian patriots were able to impress the citizenry in general and the Muslim Ummah in particular with the assurance of



Pilgrims boarding aircraft just before take-off for Hajj operation

service delivery to the pilgrims. How smoothly the airlift of the pilgrims has been going on!

The long awaited journeys to Saudi Arabia which commenced on Sunday July 30, was a great relief to many Nigerians some of who invariably developed pessimism on the successful take off. The airlift operations were kick-started with a Boeing 747 flight number XY5702 belonging to the Saudi-designated

airline, Flynas, with registration number ERB-AC and with 460 pilgrims made up of 291 males and 161 females under the FCT Muslim Pilgrims' Welfare Board and 20 officials who comprised mostly of medical personnel for the pilgrims. They departed the Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport, Abuja to the Prince Muhammad Bn Abdulaziz International Airport Madinah, around 15:17 local time.

Attended by the highest political and traditional institutions in Nigeria, the event witnessed good wishes and tough warnings for the pilgrims and Hajj managers. The pilgrims were warned on the dangers of disobeying the rules and regulations guiding Hajj as laid down by the Saudi Arabian government as well as the severe implication in carrying contraband things, like kola nuts, into the Kingdom.

They were urged to be good ambassadors of Nigeria while in the Holy Land, to pray for themselves, their families and the nation. On the other hand, the Hajj managers were warned against shortchanging the pilgrims in anyway. Particularly, the national Hajj regulator, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) was commended for its coordinated efforts in making the year's holy trip a reality.

Acting President of Nigeria, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo extolled the hard work and dedication of NAHCON's leadership and other stakeholders and congratulated them for good preparations and successful beginning of the Saudi-bound airlift operations. Represented by the Minister, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Malam Muhammad Musa Bello, who was the pioneer chairman/CEO of NAHCON, he urged officials at all levels of Hajj administration to officiate with the fear of God, charging the pilgrims to be of good conduct and law-abiding, saying: "As the largest single group of Nigerians to a foreign land, you are ambassadors of Nigeria." He enlisted the holy travelers to pray for President Muhammadu Buhari to return home in good health to continue his good work for the country.

On his part, the chairman/CEO of NAHCON, Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, appreciated all the stakeholders for their support even as he recalled the controversies that resulted from the increase in Hajj fare. He thanked God that over 79,000 Nigerians, made up of 60,000 under state boards/agencies/commissions



Mal. Muhammad Musa Bello,
FCT Minister



Barr. Abdullahi Muhammad,
NAHCON Chairman

and 19,000 under private tour operators were expected to perform this year's Hajj.

It would be recalled that Nigeria has 95,000 Hajj slots, because the 20% global reduction of Hajj allocations due to the expansion projects of the Holy Mosque of Makkah was restored to all participating countries of the world this year, thus returning Nigeria's quota from 76,000 it utilized since 2011. He disclosed that 25 percent of the officials at all levels have agreed to sacrifice their Hajj for effective monitoring and rendering of services to the pilgrims and in the spirit of the change mantra of the current administration.

He appealed to the pilgrims to see their officials as human beings who are bound to make mistakes so that when such happens, the pilgrims should pardon and offer maximum cooperation for proper representation of Nigeria at the global gathering.

The President General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), the Jama'atu Nasril-Islam (JNI) and the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar III, said that upon all the quarrels over the Hajj fares, only those enabled by God will perform the year's Hajj. Represented by the Emir of Bauchi, Alhaji Rilwanu Suleiman Adamu who would lead the delegation of NSCIA to 2017 Hajj, he described Hajj as an act of worship and not tourism, observing that pilgrims

must ensure strict compliance to Hajj rites to avoid vitiating their Hajj.

Other well-wishers included the chairman House committee on Saudi Nigeria Interparliamentary Relations and Hajj Affairs, Dr. Abdullahi Balarabe Salame, representatives of the Chairman Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Acting Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), the local government chairman of Abaji, Emir of Abaji and a host of others.

With the successful start, three things amongst others come to fore: the need for some officials to serve the pilgrims without performing Hajj, the late intervention of the National Assembly in matters relating to forex exchange and the mandate of NAHCON to eliminate corruption in Hajj management which is primarily one of the major factors that resulted to the gang-up against it. Besides, it is noteworthy and laudable the Commission's resolve to tackle the frauds committed by some self-acclaimed Hajj managers in the past in some components of Hajj such as accommodation, Hadaya and Basic Travel Allowances (BTA).

The efficacy of voluntarism in Hajj is another initiative worthy to note. It is no more an issue of public debate or criticism because in reality it is difficult to effectively combine performance of Hajj and officiating as one of the duties would

be subjected to low attention and ultimately yield poor results. In 2016 Hajj, like the pioneer chairman often did in the past, the chairman/CEO forfeited his Hajj to serve the pilgrims.

Few other officials joined suit. The Commission, therefore, after wide consultations with relevant stakeholders from across Nigeria, found it very necessary to make it a policy from and also encouraged State Pilgrims' Boards to key into it. The NAHCON boss was optimistic that the policy will be very useful because, as he put it, if Nigeria does not do it, there will come a time when Saudi Arabian government will impose it.

The result of fully monitoring the pilgrims was quite great because low casualty rate among Nigerians in 2016 Hajj was recorded; cases of pilgrims roaming about under the sun were minimized; they were made to stay inside their tents for praying and supplicating to Allah despite the hot weather during the Hajj period and medical cases were very low. For the year, 25 percent of NAHCON's and states' officials will serve the pilgrims without donning their white garments.

The effect of the late intervention of the National Assembly to reduce the Hajj fares was obvious. Many pilgrims who had deposited over one million naira awaiting the final announcement of the 2017 Hajj fare by NAHCON became reluctant in completing their deposits as they waited in vain.

The Senate, however, recommended that the federal government should grant a concessionary exchange rate of N200 to US\$1 for pilgrims embarking on 2017 Hajj, a recommendation that was widely criticized by many and opposed by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on the grounds of the economic recession faced by the country.

The official rate granted by government for 2017 Hajj is N305 to US\$1 and there have been controversies on whether religious pilgrimages fall under economic activities and institutions classified by



Members of the National Assembly during public hearing on 2017 Hajj fare



A section of women at the 2017 Hajj stakeholders meeting

government under the critical sectors that should access the dollar at N305.

The Commission also intensified effort to block the leakages linked to Hajj management. State governments in the past used to be lured into paying huge sums of money in the name of subsidy or augmentation for the costs of their pilgrims' accommodation. Katsina, for instance, according to the chief executive officer of the state, Governor Aminu Masari, has been spending N1b yearly on Hajj. States like Kano, Kogi and others just last year spent millions of naira to augment the accommodation costs of their

pilgrims, which was discovered by NAHCON to be fraud hence the new initiative to eliminate agencies in accommodation contracts in Madinah and Makkah.

Moreover, there used to be cases of fraud committed by some state officials and Nigerian business men in the Kingdom who swindled pilgrims and state governments in many ways including Hadaya. They would collect little amounts for the sacrificial animals, sometime half of the official prices announced by the sole administrator of the Hajj rite in Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Development Bank

(IDB). But they either do not perform the rite at all or they use deformed animals that are against the Islamic prescription.

The pilgrims used to be shortchanged and the fraudsters capitalized on the official exchange rate to make millions of naira for themselves in the name of Hajj. During last year's Hajj, the Commission discovered several states that were entangled in such financial mess; that

is why a flat BTA of US\$800 was settled for any pilgrim travelling for 2017 Hajj under state boards and under the official rate of N305 to US\$1. To God be the glory that these initiatives are yielding good results.

By all measures, the 2017 Hajj will record significant successes regardless of the challenges that greeted its preparatory stages. Nigerian pilgrims will go and come back safely to their motherland and will enjoy the special

privilege to worship, glorify and seek Allah's blessings in the purest parcel of land on the mother earth. Their airlifts to the Kingdom have been steadily hitch-free; so will be their return trips. I wish them all very memorable spiritual trip of their lives. Hajj is really a full life event, prescribed once in a life time, for those who have the means to perform it. It should not be a 'do or die' affair. Hajj mabrur in advance! ■

NAHCON to Investigate Service Providers, Tour Operators for Poor Services

Visiting pilgrims in their tents while in Mina is an annual event designed by the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON,) with a view to enabling the management of the Commission to meet pilgrims in their respective tents, in order to know their feelings about 2017 Hajj operations.

The visit also serves as an opportunity for the pilgrims to face the high-powered delegations from both NAHCON and the Federal Government with their complaints or suggestions on how to improve the subsequent Hajj operations, especially about their accommodations, feeding, transportation and health. To ensure total coverage, NAHCON came up with three groups: group A under the leadership of the Chairman, Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, group B and C led by Commissioner of Operations Alhaji Abdullahi Modibbo Saleh and Commissioner in charge of Planning, Policy Management and Finance, Alhaji Yusuf Adebayo Ibrahim respectively. The groups have all gone round the State pilgrims' tents and given the pilgrims listening ears.

Group A, headed by the Chairman, Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, paid visits to Lagos, Kaduna, Kano Gombe, Nassarawa, Sokoto, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, independent Tour Operators and FCT among others. During the visits, complaints mostly centered on inadequate facilities and the poor output of the cooling systems.

Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar told pilgrims that President Muhammad Buhari has congratulated Nigerian contingents to the year's Hajj for successfully completing the Hajj rites and enjoined them to continue being patient as Hajj generally is a tasking and challenging religious activity.

The President spoke through the Chairman, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, (NAHCON), Barrister Abdullah Muhammad Mukhtar represented by a representative of Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Professor

Abubakar Mustafa on a special visit to pilgrims in their tents in Mina.

The Chairman expressed happiness about pilgrims conduct during their stay in Mina and Arafat, hoping they continued until the end of the entire exercise. He pointed out that they were visiting the pilgrims at their various tents to assess their situation, listen to their complaints if any and advise.

At the Kaduna State tents, the State Pilgrims Welfare Board overseer, Imam Husayn Sulayman Tsoho Ikara, who commended and appreciated the NAHCON's visit outlined certain problems which include but not limited to shortage of facilities and poor cooling systems in tents in Mina and Arafat, a complaint at all tents visited.

The NAHCON team also visited Kano and Gombe tents where he sought pilgrim's opinion on curtailing the number of Nigerian pilgrims so as not to overstretch Nigeria's allocated facilities at Mashaa'ir areas as is now obtained in the areas.

At Gombe pilgrims' tents Barr. Mukhtar explained that the first flight of Nigerian pilgrims back to Nigeria is expected to be on the seventh of September with Gombe State pilgrims advising the officials of the State Pilgrims Board to ensure that they moved the first batch of the pilgrims on the sixth to ensure smooth start of the operations.

He informed them that they should be ready for speedy dispatch of pilgrims when the operation starts as until all Gombe pilgrims are airlifted before other States would follow, saying any hitch from them will eventually affect the entire homeward journey.

He commended Gombe State officials and pilgrims over their conduct and patience when a delay of two days occurred at the Gombe zone during the first lap of the airlift

to the holy land. Responding, officials of the Gombe State pilgrims promised to ensure compliance with flights schedule.

Visiting the tent of International pilgrims brought by Tour Operators and Service Providers gave the Chairman opportunity to hear alleged cases of poor services rendered to Nigerian pilgrims by some Tour Operator Companies and their Service Providers, as well as States Pilgrims' Welfare Boards and Agencies.

At this point, pilgrims wasted no time in complaining to the chairman of poor services such as inadequate Tent space, poor toilet facilities and delay in the provision of food by some caterers.

After listening to the pilgrims on these lapses, the Chairman vowed that the Commission will investigate and take appropriate action against any Hajj Service Providers or Tour Operators that render poor services to Nigerian pilgrims.

Barr. Mukhtar who visited the Kitchen and tasted the meal supplied to pilgrims in order to ascertain the kind of food being served to Nigerian pilgrims, vowed to oblige the erring services providers companies or Tour Operators to make refunds back to the affected pilgrims; saying that the commission has reported the matter to Saudi Ministry of Hajj.

Leading team B to Lagos State tent, the Commissioner of Operations, Alhaji Abdullahi Moddibo Saleh, expressed NAHCON satisfaction on the facilities provided by the Lagos State Government to its 2,332 pilgrims in Mina, Saudi Arabia.

He stated that the quality of accommodation, indigenous food and welfare provided to Lagos State pilgrims were commendable. He congratulated the Akinwunmi Ambode led government and the Lagos State Muslim Pilgrims' Welfare Board for the achievements, urging pilgrims to pray for the leadership of the Board and the State.

In the same vein, Hajiya Aisha Muhammad said: "We have always been proud of Lagos State in the way they have assisted their pilgrims in terms of food, accommodation and their welfare and of course their regular standard enlightenment programs."

Then, she advised the pilgrims, saying: "I want to appeal to all pilgrims not to spend their money on gift to take back home, so that they don't get stranded."

"Again, be mindful of the weight of the luggage you can carry on the flight, bearing in mind that the big bag is 32kg while the small bag is 8kg. Anything above that will not be tolerated. This directive is neither from the Commission nor the Board. It is from the Saudi Authority. Don't allow anybody to deceive you that they can waive it. We on our part are happy with Lagos State and on behalf of the Commission, we commend your efforts."

Alhaji Yusuf Adebayo Ibrahim, NAHCON Commissioner in charge of Policy, Personnel Management and Finance (PPMF), who stood in for the Chairman, Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar, led team C to Abia, Anambra,

Benue, Edo, Ekiti, Kebbi, Kwara, Ogun, Osun and Oyo where he explained to the pilgrims that NAHCON will not entertain any bag that exceeded the approved 32 kg and 8kg.

The Commissioner who described the 2017 hajj exercise as successful, cautioned pilgrims against purchasing unnecessary items that they could easily afford in Nigeria as the various airlines have given each pilgrim thirty two kilograms as main luggage and eight kilograms as hand luggage.

At the Kwara camp, the spokesman of the State Pilgrims' Welfare Board, Alhaji Ibrahim Oniye, (the Makama of Ilorin) appealed to the Federal Government to increase the Basic Travelling Allowance (BTA) given to each pilgrim as against the eight hundred dollars which he

claimed is insufficient.

The Makama of Ilorin praised the State Amir Hajj, Prof. Jamiu Sulaimon and the State Executive Secretary of the Board, Alhaji Tunde Jimoh, for organising a successful timely departure from Nigeria to the holy land: He also commended NAHCON particularly for what he described as a successful 2017 Hajj operations, especially in the areas of accommodation, feeding and transportation.

In his remarks at the Oyo State camp, a prominent Nigerian Islamic scholar, Sheik Muyideen Ajani Bello, observed special prayers for the unity of the country foresight for its leaders and improved health for President Muhammad Buhari.

In a related development, the Independent Hajj Reporters has urged the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) to sanction service providers and tour



Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, NAHCON Chairman



Consul-General in Riyad, Amb. Muhammad Sani Yunusa

operators who delivered poor services to Nigerian pilgrims in Mina and Arafat.

"There are complaints of non-provision of some essential services like meals, transportation of pilgrims, non-allocation of tents for pilgrims by some Nigerian tour operators and their Saudi based service providers," the civil society's national coordinator, Ibrahim Muhammad, said in a statement released in Mina, Saudi Arabia.

"This situation has made it difficult for the affected pilgrims to perform their act of Ibadah under conducive, environment," he said. "In view of the above, Independent Hajj Reporters, therefore, called on NAHCON to immediately begin investigation to unearth the reasons for the poor services experienced by some pilgrims in Mina, especially those served by Service No 18," the statement said.

The civil society said a committee comprising of leadership of AHUON – the umbrella body of Independent Tour Operators, NAHCON's inspectorate, evaluation and

compliance unit, Mutawwif for African Non-Arab Pilgrims and Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, be constituted to look into the issue.

"NAHCON should replicate what it did in 2015 by immediately commencing the process of compelling the service provider(s) to make refunds back to pilgrims for service not rendered or rendered un-satisfactorily. Such moves will help the commission to apply sanctions to appropriate quarters," according to the statement.

Independent Hajj Reporters team in Mina and Arafat frowned at some state pilgrims' welfare boards officials who were found evading the genuine requests for information from their pilgrims and abandoning their duty posts when it mattered most.

The civil society said it will officially report such State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards leadership to their respective state governors as their action have caused some pilgrims untold hardship during the hajj. ■

HAJJ/UMRAH OPERATIONS: NAHCON Vows to Enforce Regulations – *Shamaki*

Alhaji Usman Aliyu Shamaki is the head of Inspectorate and Compliance unit of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON). In this interview, he spoke on the efforts being put in place by NAHCON to ensure smooth Hajj operations, regulation of services of Tour Providers among other salient issues.

Recently you had a trip around the country and in the performance of your job as regulator of Hajj and Umrah in the country, can you let us know the decision that informed the trip and what are the objectives that this trip is supposed to achieve?

Shamaki: Let me begin by telling you that before the advent of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), the issue of travel agencies that conduct Umrah and Hajj were totally unorganized. Travel agencies that parade themselves across the country as Umrah and Hajj operators did it without regulations that guide their activities. So by the enactment of the NAHCON Act, the Commission came out to regulate these travel agencies so that the end users would have value for their money.

As a result of that, several guidelines were lined out in order to



Alhaji Usman Aliyu Shamaki
Head of Inspectorate and Compliance unit, NAHCON

control these travel agencies. One is to ensure that our pilgrims did not lose their money. Two is to ensure that these agencies are identified in certain

places of doing their business so that whenever any aspect of Hajj rites is compromised by them, the Commission will be able to reach them immediately.

Thirdly, all those quack travel agencies will be phased out from the system so that our pilgrims will not be duped of their money and they will have and enjoy quality services. So these are the reasons we go out periodically as a routine to ensure these travel agencies whom we have given licences are complying with the rules and regulations of NAHCON.

With what you just said now, one can rightly conclude that your department or unit is the watchdog of NAHCON, so what are those things you always put on the table for Tour Operators to comply with?

Shamaki: First and foremost before we register you as a travel

agency to conduct the activities of Hajj and Umrah, you must have registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and secondly your office must exist where we can easily locate it. In addition to this, your account must be audited and also you must have an International Air Transport Association (IATA) and your share capital must not be less than N30 million with the CAC. After submitting these documents to the Commission through the Chairman of NAHCON, then the inspectors will go out to verify the claim made by the travel agency and report back to the Commission that actually the claims made by the agencies in the forms they submitted are true and correct.

Now what is the difference between the travel agencies and the state governments since state governments carry the bulk of the pilgrims. Are they (state governments) also regulated by your body? And if they are, what is the difference in the regulations you give tour operators and state pilgrims' welfare boards?

Shamaki: The only difference is that the states are regulated by their governments at that level because you know that if a government is involved in the matter, the problem is a little bit less than the private travel agencies who are totally not regulated. Sometimes we rely on the State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards because of the regulation of the state governments. We ensure that government policy in the states is to ensure that the travel agencies perform their duties creditably well coupled with the regulations of NAHCON to ensure that the State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards perform their duties. This is the difference between private travel agencies and the states.

As the enforcement unit of NAHCON, your mandate is to make sure that these operators comply with the rules and regulations set by NAHCON,



Members of the inspectorate unit inspection some of the pilgrims' accommodations



How the inner side of one of the pilgrims' accommodations looks



One of the Toilet facilities in the pilgrims' accommodations

what parameters do you use to measure compliance level by these agencies?

Shamaki: We carry out routine inspection to monitor the states and private travel agencies to make sure they comply with the set rules. At the end of every Hajj exercise, we publish in no less than three national dailies invitations for complaints affecting every pilgrim, an opportunity for any services rendered to him within or outside Nigeria after which the Commission will take appropriate actions.

In any case where you find noncompliance, what are the sanctions?

Shamaki: There are many sanctions most especially for the travel agencies. Let's assume that a travel

agency has refused to comply depending on what is on ground in terms of services like airlifting, accommodation or transportation, appropriate actions are taken against such agency depending on the level of gravity or non-compliance. Let say the issue of accommodation is involved; we will make sure that refunds are made available to the pilgrims concerned. And if the offence is so grievous, we blacklist the agency and withdraw its licence so that it will no longer be given Hajj allocation.

In this case do you think we have had enough of these private Tour Operators or are you still going to licence more?

Shamaki: The licensing is a continuous process just like blacklisting too if you don't live up to expectations or you let people down. So there will always be blacklisting to allow or give room for others to come in and give best of services to the pilgrims.

Can we have the numbers of Tour Operators that have defaulted during your recent tour across the country?

Shamaki: For example in Kano, we have about 77 defaulters, 17 from Lagos and 13 from Abuja during the recent inspection tour that we embarked upon. However, I'm pleased to add that majority of these defaulters are correcting their anomalies. They have written to the Commission that they are correcting their mistakes. In the same vein, some have refused to renew their licenses while others are acting under ignorance not knowing that NAHCON must renew their licenses before they can operate Umrah or Hajj and they have not approached us on the procedure for obtaining license for Hajj and Umrah. So, I think the travel agencies are complying.

We learnt that what you allocated to these private Tour Operators is 10,000 seats. Are you looking forward to increasing the seats or reducing them?

Shamaki: Depending on the demand by the members of the public, we try to assess this through how people pay or respond to performing the Hajj. If the number of people that want to travel with private Tour Operators increases, the number may increase but if the number is not increasing what is the essence of allocating more seats?

Does the recession we are going through now have anything to do with this?

Shamaki: Because this is not the beginning of registration so we cannot say whether the number will increase or not until such a time when Hajj fare is announced and payments have started coming into NAHCON that you will know whether certain people will perform the Hajj or not.

What is your relationship with the State Governments and the FCT Boards and how do you beam your searchlight on them, compel them to perform very well and comply with NAHCON's rules and regulations?

Shamaki: Annually before the beginning of Hajj, we call for a meeting between the Commission and the States during which we discuss issues that will serve the pilgrims State by State and how to address the problems during the meeting. Also at the end of every Hajj exercise, there is a form we call performance status report where all types of services are listed. We send then to the States to fill and

return to NAHCON asking them about the performance, accommodation provided, performance of the airlines, performance of cargo carriers, transportation. If a State has stated to the contrary, we go to where our attention has been drawn to see what the State is talking about, it is something that can be addressed by the Commission through the feedback that we get.

You said that you have a feedback mechanism where you ask pilgrims if they have any issue and performance with the Hajj operators that they engage. Now from the feedback that you have been getting from the pilgrims, where do you identify as the biggest challenge for the pilgrims in their relationship with Tour Operators?

Shamaki: The majority of complaints received are in the area of accommodation. You know immediately a pilgrim pays for services, the most important aspect of Hajj in Saudi Arabia is accommodation where the pilgrims stay. He stays there for a minimum of 14 days and you know people like comfort. We have been having complaints from pilgrims who sometimes pay for five-star hotel accommodation only for them to be accommodated in an apartment that is not commensurate with what they paid. In such cases we always ask the agency to provide the balance of the money to the pilgrims. So we have challenges in pilgrims' accommodation because other services such as local transportation are carried out by government agencies in Saudi Arabia.

Along this line, what is your relationship with the Ministry of Hajj Affairs in Saudi Arabia to see to the comfort of the pilgrims in the Holy Land?

Shamaki: We collaborate with them for the interest and comfort of the pilgrims. They have been trying very hard in making sure that pilgrims all over the world are comfortable during the stay in Saudi for the Hajj. They also assist in ensuring that the service providers in Saudi Arabia perform their duties according to the rules and regulations of the Kingdom.

You said where problems are identified, the Commission tries to resolve it within and outside Nigeria. What other measures do you have for Tour Operators that default?

Shamaki: Depending on where the offence is committed, if the offence is committed in Nigeria, it will be treated here. Let me give you an example of Lalle Travel and Tours from Minna in Niger State that defaulted and took away more than N100 million that belongs to Niger State pilgrims. We dragged this matter to the court and now the managing director of Lalle is languishing in jail for seven years. We took the matter to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and with the assistance of the EFCC we were able to prosecute the travel agency. And if the offence is committed in Saudi Arabia, we would collaborate with the Ministry of Hajj to report the defaulter or the service provider and appropriate actions are taken in line with Saudi rules and that is how we will resolve the matter.

"There are many sanctions most especially for the travel agencies. Let assume that a travel agency has refused to comply depending on what is on ground in terms of services like airlifting, accommodation or transportation, appropriate actions are taken against such agency depending on the level of non-compliance." ■

NAHCON in Search of Financial Autonomy

By Muhammad Ajah

At the auditorium of the National Mosque complex, Abuja enters the man on the mantle of Hajj administration in Nigeria, Barr.

Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, who with his normal timeliness and humility went round to shake hands with stakeholders and exchange pleasantries as they awaited the arrival of the chairman of the occasion, the Sultan of

Sokoto and President-General, Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and Jama'atu Nasril-Islam (JNI), Alhaji Muhammad Sada Abubakar III, and the Honourable Minister of the

Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and pioneer chairman and chief executive officer of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Mallam Muhammad Musa Bello.

Then enters one of the key architects of the NAHCON Establishment Act 2006 whose actions together brought about the standardization of Hajj

management in Nigeria, Dr. Usman Bugaje, then the chairman of House Committee on Nigeria/Saudi Inter-parliamentary Friendship, Hon. Dr. Abdullahi Salame, then representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and Acting Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), then past chairmen, executive secretaries and board members of National Hajj Boards/Committees/Commissions, then a host of first class Islamic scholars and chief Imams across the country and later the Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Alhaji Muhammad Babandede. Before then, already seated were majority of the stakeholders including chairmen and secretaries of State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards/Agencies/Commissions, the chief executive officers of the private Tour Operators, all relevant Ministries, NCAA, FAAN, NAMA, NIMET, AIB, the press as well as all the paper presenters and discussants.

Then the Sultan of Sokoto enters and immediately Ustaz Abubakar Lamin opens the great event with a recitation from the Holy Qur'an and a prayer. That was how the two-day event began and throughout witnessed very well-researched presentations. But to note were extensive discussions on the papers which instilled in the participants the fear of Allah, love for humanity as well as rededication and reinvigoration to the service of Nigerian pilgrims with passion and patriotism.

The conference with the lead paper entitled: Hajj



NAHCON Chairman; His Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto and the FCT Minister

"Some of the key resolutions reached at the end of the conference were that NAHCON should explore all possible means to formulate economic, agricultural, industrial and other policies for the benefit of the Muslim Ummah since the country has no national policy on Hajj".



A cross section of stakeholders at a conference including MD Med View, Alhaji Muneer Bankole



Management in Nigeria: "Honouring the Past, Treasuring the Present and Shaping the Future", assessed Hajj Management in the country before the establishment of NAHCON and lauded the roles and contributions of the present Boards of the Commission towards the perfection of the Hajj exercise in the country. Specifically, it recognized the giant steps and policy reforms of the Commission in the areas of accommodation, feeding, medical services, airlift of pilgrims, luggage management, Hajj carriers by way of granting waivers on aeronautical charges so as to increase their operational funds for more efficient and safer operations.

Generally, NAHCON was commended for eliminating chains of agents in Saudi Arabia for 2017 Hajj, saving Nigeria US\$12.3 million in Madinah, US\$6.3 million in Makkah and between US\$50 to US\$100 from air fare negotiation. NAHCON was, on the other hand, urged to intensify efforts to overcome the major recurring challenges in Hajj affairs such as shortchanging or overcharging the pilgrims and demanding for augmentation to settle accommoda-



NAHCON Chairman/CEO, Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad

tion costs, drug trafficking and other security related offences, abscondment, birth and miscarriages in Hajj and indiscipline, among others.

Some of the key resolutions reached at the end of the conference were that NAHCON should explore all possible means to formulate

economic, agricultural, industrial and other policies for the benefit of the Muslim Ummah since the country has no national policy on Hajj, intensify effort for financial autonomy, remain under the Presidency, invest in profitable Shariah-compliant ventures that will accrue profits, stimulate reading culture and promote literacy among the Muslims, as contained in the NAHCON Act which demands adequate information and library service system as well as enlightenment and orientation for the pilgrims, develop software management system for Hajj by absorbing all technologi-

cal indices in Hajj management and restructure zonal offices for effectiveness and efficiency.

Government was advised not to hands-off from the operations and management of Hajj and Umrah, lauded for granting the approval to NAHCON to acquire Metro Plaza as its National Headquarters. The conference recommended that the Hajj Saving Scheme should commence without further delay with Jaiz Bank providing the platform to manage the scheme in a collaborative manner. ■

NAHCON Celebrates 10 Fruitful Years

By Kabiru Yusuf Kano

The history of Hajj in Nigeria may go along with history of Northern and Southern amalgamation. During the colonial period, the British imperial administration, having recognized the great potential of Hajj did everything to discourage it, but failed.

The first attempt to organize Hajj in a modern way in Nigeria started with a motion by Alhaji Abubakar Imam in 1953 in the budget session of the House of Representatives in Lagos. The motion was tabled for the establishment of a Nigerian Office in Jeddah to cater for the welfare of Nigerian pilgrims going to Saudi Arabia for Hajj every year.

The motion was approved and Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, on becoming Premier in 1954, became the pilgrims' leader every year until his death in 1966. Therefore, since then the organisation of Hajj went through various stages, chaos and confusions, which led to the Federal Government abolishing private agents who turned it into some kind of shylock milking the poor and established Pilgrims' Board in 1975.



New NAHCON headquarters, Abuja

Since then the organisation of Hajj went through various stages, starting from the decree of 1986 to that of 1989 among others. But all these decrees never solved any

problem because every year came with a new arrangement.

Confusion and untold suffering of pilgrims continued for a whole decade before some relief came in 1999 when a

democratic civilian government came on stream.

In 2006, President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration approved the establishment of National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) through an Act with the first board inaugurated in 2007. From its inception, it was vividly clear that a good foundation has been laid for the Commission and mandates clearly defined for future growth and development.

It was prior to this that NAHCON through its Chairman/CEO, Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad organized a stakeholders' conference on the occasion of ten years anniversary for the establishment of the Commission with intention to assess its journey so far within the last ten years of its existence with a view of reviewing the general challenges and focusing to propel improvements in Hajj Management and efficiency in service delivery to pilgrims.

In his address at the conference, the chairman Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad said "Today we no longer hear about challenges of airlift of pilgrims before the closure of Jeddah airport, missing luggage, abscondment of pilgrims, poor accommodation, stranded pilgrims in the Holy Land. Our operator services have been standardized, problems of handbag, Tour Operators and Service

Providers have been eliminated and the Hajj industry has greatly been sanitized. This glory of the decade really deserves celebration", he stated.

It was in view of the above, he said that the founding fathers of the Commission, experts in Hajj management, past leaders of the Commission, former Board Members, veteran Hajj administrators, aviation agencies, diplomats, relevant government agencies, service providers and all other stakeholders in Hajj business were invited to partake in the conference to review the performance of the Commission within the last decade of its existence and develop greater vision for another decade.

According to the Chairman, the Commission has achieved a lot in the areas of accommodation, feeding, medical services, airlift of pilgrims, luggage management and negotiation of Hajj fare as well as policy guidelines. He also pointed out that the Commission recorded



Sultan Sa'ad Abubakar explaining a point of interest to former commissioner PPMF, Alhaji Liad Tella



Cross section of Stakeholders on Hajj during the Hajj and Umrah conference, held at Auditorium of the National Mosque, Abuja

successes in other operational activities such as licensing of State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards / Agencies and Commissions, accreditation of Tour Operator Services and above all ensuring efficient service delivery to pilgrims.

He asserted that the Commission, through these reforms, has been able to eliminate agents in accommodation, feeding services in Saudi Arabia, thereby saving US\$12.3 million in Madinah, over US\$6.3 million in Makkah, US\$50 in airfare for both north and southern departure centres and US\$100 for Maiduguri and Yola Zones respectively.

Moreover, he added the reform also blocked the unnecessary windows for payment of augmentation of millions of Naira on accommodation from the State Governments annually. "This singular action provoked the hitherto disgruntled beneficiaries that lost out due to the reforms, as such the campaign of calumny, false accusations, illicit social media propaganda and attempt to drag the good image of the Commission in to the mud because it is no longer business as usual", he said.

Barr. Abdullahi explained that it is obvious that the Commission has not erred or derailed from its focus; neither has it defaulted, short-changed or failed to meet up the expectations of the Muslim Ummah, the confidence of Government and the trust of Almighty Allah. "I am indeed confident that we are on the right track. We

shall not relent in delivering the mandate entrusted on us".

The Chairman who reminded Nigerians that even though a lot of progress were recorded from inception of the Commission, it wasn't without challenges. "Within the last ten years, Hajj operations had suffered some sad events. Issues like the Mahram challenges, crane crash in Makkah during the expansion work, stampede accident in Mina in 2015 as well as other major disasters are still fresh in the memory of Nigerians". As for its plan for the years ahead, the Chairman said the Commission is planning to kick-start the process of Hajj Saving Scheme and appointment of Board of Trustees and to enhance its revenue profile with a view to gradual financial autonomy for the Commission in future as well as to implement Hajj Development Levy Projects at the various departure centres.

The projects listed by the Chairman are reforms on the zonal offices across the country, establishment of Hajj Training Institute for Hajj Managers, Development of Software Management System for Hajj already deployed and purchase of Metro Plaza to serve as Corporate Headquarters for the Commission already approved by the Federal Executive Council.

On his part, his Eminence the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III, appealed to the Federal Government to reinstate the position of Amirul Hajj in line with Islamic tradition. He said wherever Muslims found themselves; they must have a leadership that would guide their conduct and behaviour as clearly spelt out in the Holy Qur'an.

"Whenever Muslims are embarking on a journey within and outside their country, they must select a leader among themselves who will guide their dealings. We cannot allow close to 100,000 Muslims to embark on pilgrimage to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia annually without leadership because it is against the teachings of Islam. I therefore, urge stakeholders in this conference to brainstorm and come up with workable solutions on how we can enhance Hajj management and operations in the country", Abubakar said.

According to him the conference would enable Hajj stakeholders to review the operations of NAHCON since its inception and chart a new course to improve Hajj and Umrah. The Sultan,



NAHCON Chairman explaining a point of interests to His Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar III

however, advised the Muslims to always be sure of their facts before coming out to comment or condemn any person or institution.

In his address, the guest speaker Dr. Usman Bugaje called on NAHCON to double its efforts in overcoming the myriad of problems hindering smooth Hajj operations in Nigeria, saying that despite its ten years of existence, NAHCON is yet to begin the actual work it was established to perform.

Dr. Bugaje called on the leadership of NAHCON to firstly study and understand the scope and depth of their mandate and the opportunity the mandate presents.

He added that the mandate of NAHCON does not end with reinventing Hajj management and operations only, but also reinventing and re-orientating the entire Muslim Umrah in this country.

He further advised NAHCON to squarely face the challenges of establishing the highest ethical standards to build the most needed credibility and trust to succeed in its herculean tasks, saying that NAHCON needs trustworthy, competent, dedicated, highly committed,

dependable and reliable Staff to succeed in its mandatory assignment.

Earlier in his speech, the pioneer Chairman of the Commission and current FCT Minister, Malam Musa Muhammad Bello said the experience he gained in the eight years of his tenure, has made him to conclude that hardly would Hajj operations be hitch-free, because every year comes with its peculiar new problem. He advised Hajj managers and handlers to be steadfast and have the fear of Allah, saying they should not be deterred by any challenges.

The communiqué issued at the end of the two day Conference explained that the participants maintained that the Commission should remain under and answerable to the Presidency and also advised against government's withdrawal from Hajj matters and to take necessary diplomatic measures to convince the Saudi government to have a rethink over its policy of air lifting forty five percent of Nigerian pilgrims.

Moreover, they called on NAHCON to immediately kick-start the Hajj Savings Scheme with Ja'iz Bank as well as to look into the possibility of reducing the number of days Nigerian pilgrims spend in the Holy Land.

According to the communiqué, NAHCON should cooperate with Saudi authorities to ensure total eradication of Nigerian miscreants and at the same time commended the Commission for the measures taken so far to ensure Nigerian pilgrims got value for their money and its efforts that saved Nigerian pilgrims three hundred dollars each for the year's Hajj. ■

FG Expresses Satisfaction with the Way NAHCON Handled 2017 HAJJ Operations

By Abubakar Jeddah Usman

The Federal Government has expressed satisfaction with the improved manner the 2017 Hajj was handled by the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), calling on State Pilgrims' Welfare Agencies/Boards/Commissions and other stakeholders to join hands with NAHCON to maintain the tempo and the successes recorded.



President Muhammadu Buhari

The Minister of State, Foreign Affairs, Hajiya Hadiza Bukar Abba Ibrahim made the commendation in a speech at the Post-Arafat Stakeholders Meeting held at Makkah, in preparation for the return journey of Nigerian pilgrims, who joined millions of other

Muslims in performing the 2017 Hajj exercise.

Hajiya Hadiza who was represented at the occasion by Ambassador Halliru Sodangi Shuaib said there was a remarkable improvement for the year, compared to previous years, in Hajj administration.

She said the improvement has thrown greater challenges to Hajj administrators to ensure they never relented in their efforts to achieve higher goals. "I have confidence in the present leadership of the Nigerian Hajj Commission (NAHCON), under the able leadership of Barr. Mukhtar and he needs the support of State Pilgrims' administrators and other Stakeholders to achieve greatness", she said.

Speaking at the occasion, the Chairman National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, (NAHCON), Barrister Abdulla Mukhtar Muhammad, who glorified and thanked Allah for all that was achieved, commended the Saudi authorities, State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards, stakeholders, the pilgrims and all those who contributed in wading through the storm of challenges, to come thus far.

The Chairman who attributed the successes recorded to team work and selfless service as demonstrated by both NAHCON and States officials also advised that all should note that, "it's not over, until it is

really over", when all pilgrims reunite with their loved ones safely and successfully.

He commended the Nigerian Embassy, Consulate and NAHCON Management Staff for their remarkable sense of humility and service to Allah and to humanity, and for their decision to share their facilities at Masha'ir with some stranded pilgrims.

Barrister Mukhtar who acknowledged the challenges of shortages of facilities to pilgrims and officials, but said the Nigerian resilience and perseverance nature came to the fore and with Allah's help and guidance the challenges were overcome, or at least minimised.

In their separate speeches at the occasion, Commissioners of Operations and his counterpart of Finance and Administration, Alhaji Abdullah Saleh Modibbo and Alhaji Adebayo Yusuf Ibrahim respectively, gave account of their stewardship, which included habitable

IDB Slaughters 15,601 Sacrificial Animals for Nigerian Pilgrims

Meanwhile, the Saudi project for the utilisation of Hajj meat, known as **Adahi**, which is managed by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), has facilitated the slaughter of 15,601 sacrificial animals for Nigerian pilgrims during the year's Hajj.

The ritual was performed on behalf of those Nigerian pilgrims whose collections were made through JAIZ Bank, which was appointed by Nigerian hajj authorities and IDB as the sole collector in the country for the sacrificial animals.

Representatives of Jaiz Bank, along with Nigerian Hajj officials, visited the slaughter houses complex in Mina near Makkah during the Hajj days and was conducted round to witness the laughter.

This is the third successive Hajj season that Jaiz Bank handled collections for the Hajj sacrifice, following its appointment as the sole agent in 2015 to collaborate with IDB to perform the ritual on behalf of Nigerian pilgrims.

Interested Nigerian pilgrims paid for their sacrifice animals through the bank, and subsequently the slaughter was handled by IDB at the Mina slaughter houses.

The **Adahi** Project was established in 1983 to oversee the slaughter of sacrificial animals for hajj and other Islamic rituals. The project aims at serving pilgrims by providing livestock that meet Shari'ah and health requirements, and also help to make the meat available to beneficiaries around the world.

accommodation, feeding and transportation which Nigerian pilgrims never had it so good in the past, like that year.

On their part, excess luggage carriers said their fixed charge on excess luggage is fifteen Riyals per kilogram for Northern pilgrims, while the Southern pilgrims will pay sixteen Saudi Riyals.

Representing the Air Carriers, the Managing Director of Med View Airline, Alhaji Munir Bankole hinted that the return journey was the most challenging aspect of the airlift exercise, advising that state pilgrims officials should ensure that any set of pilgrims for the next flight should be made ready

seventy two hours before their departure time.

The Tour Operators decried the unpleasant challenges they faced, which were somehow tackled but had left a bitter taste in the mouth and required going back to the drawing board to take stock and map out strategies against reoccurrence.

The chairman however announced that the homeward journey was expected to start from September 07, 2017 with the movement of Gombe State pilgrims to King Abdiaziz International Airport, Jeddah for takeoff on Thursday, September 7th, 2017 to Nigeria. ■



Some of the Animals provided to pilgrims for Hadaya at Mina slaughter houses



Borno State Pilgrims listening to a lecture on Hajj rites

NAHCON Achievements Within



His Excellency **Muhammadu Buhari**, GCFR
President and Commander-in-Chief Federal Republic of Nigeria

Introduction

May 2015 witnessed to great events in the history of Hajj in Nigeria. The most important event was the transition from the Second to the Third Board of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria. Since then, three Hajj operations have been conducted and numerous achievements made. In 2016 and 2017 Nigeria experienced a period of economic recession that drove Foreign Exchange rates to unprecedented heights. In view of this trend and the resolve of the Commission to align itself with the policy thrust and direction of the new administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR in combating corruption and delivering good governance to Nigerians, that the leadership of the Commission initiated and implemented a wide range of policies that improved services to Nigerian pilgrims and also delivered on the promises of good governance and prudent management of resources for all. The achievements made by the Commission, have been documented below and are verifiable:

1.0 Introduction and Gazetting of Hajj and Umrah Regulations

The Commission on 14th December, 2015 issued rules and regulations to guide the operation of Hajj and Umrah by all

Two Years of Buhari Administration 2015 - 2017



Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, MON, FCIA, ESQ
Chairman, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON)

entities. The rules, which have been gazetted, provide a framework for Hajj and Umrah Operations by all entities. Before now Nigeria did not have a common standard for pilgrims registration and provision of basic services such as airlift, accommodation, catering and medical services. The introduction and gazetting of rules and regulations guiding these activities have provided a bench-mark against which the services can be assessed and improved.

2.0 Licensing of State Pilgrims Welfare Boards/Agencies

The Commission introduced for the first time, licensing of State Pilgrims Welfare Boards/Agencies/Commissions in line with the provisions of NAHCON (Establishment) Act and its rules and regulations. Each body is assessed and graded 'A', 'B', 'C' or 'D' in accordance with its structure, staffing, and capacity to operate as a Hajj Agency. Apart from providing a services delivery framework, the policy served as morale booster to the State bodies to maintain their excellent performance or work harder to aspire for higher licensing categories

3.0 Improvement in the Quality/Capacity of Service Providers

NAHCON's regulations on the involvement of various service providers in Hajj and Umrah activities in Nigeria has

raised the standards of Tour Operators, Accommodation and Catering Service providers from briefcase companies, to full-fledged companies with permanent and verifiable addresses, bank accounts, adequate share capital and qualified staff to carry out their activities.

4.0 Increase in Efficiency of Airlift and Related Activities

4.1 Conclusion of all phases of Airlift ahead of schedule

Before the establishment of the Commission, it was a norm for Nigeria to be unable to airlift its pilgrims. In 2005 for example, over 10,000 pilgrims missed the Hajj exercise due to inability of Nigeria to airlift them to the Holy Land. In 2015 and 2016 However, the airlifts were concluded 2 and 5 days ahead of schedule respectively. In 2017, the airlift was concluded in time which enabled the carriers operate rescue flights for some Tour Operators who were unable to airlift their pilgrims because of visa delays.

4.2 Reduction in time spent by pilgrims at Camps during Saudi-bound airlifts.

Before now, pilgrims usually spent many days at Hajj camps across Nigeria awaiting airlift to Saudi Arabia. Now, better coordination with the assistance of a newly established Command and Control centre, makes airlift more efficient. Pilgrims hardly spend 24 hours in camps without being airlifted to Saudi Arabia

4.3 Direct Landing and arrival into Madinah before Arafat.

The efficiency of pilgrims' airlift and arrivals into Madina saw a marked improvement. The table below shows a four-year comparison:

Activity	2014	2015	2016	2017
Arrivals into Madina by Air	57%	64%	67%	61%
Visiting Madina before Arafat	89%	92%	100%	99%

4.4 Reduction in time spent by pilgrims at Jeddah airport during Nigeria-bound airlift from days to hours.

Pilgrims used to spend days in Jeddah airport during the return journey to Nigeria. The Commission initially introduced lodging them in hotels and charging the airline or State that caused their delay. In the last few years however, pilgrims only spent hours before departing for Nigeria.

4.5 Conveyance of all pilgrims' luggage together with or ahead of pilgrims.

Pilgrims normally spend days and sometimes, weeks awaiting the arrival of their luggage at various Hajj camps. This practice has stopped and pilgrims now collect their luggage on arrival at Nigerian airports because the luggage arrive with them or ahead of them.

4.6 Taking Over the Responsibility of Delivering Zamzam water to Nigeria for all pilgrims.

Return journeys were before now always full of various challenges of multiple hand luggage in addition to Zamzam

water. Despite the huge efforts put in by pilgrims, some State Boards and airlines and in addition to time wasted in collecting, screening and managing Zamzam, only a fraction of Nigerian pilgrims eventually get their Zamzam water in Nigeria. Many were lost as a result of handling, theft, misplacement and many other reasons.

To address this, the Commission introduced the bulk purchase and delivery of Zamzam in Phase I of the pilgrims airlift. This measure ensured adequate provision was made for delivery of Zamzam to all pilgrims while reducing the management challenges. The measure took off the burden of purchase and handling off the pilgrims, eliminated the hours lost in screening during return journeys as a result of Zamzam and also increased safety and efficiency of Hajj return flights. Below is a brief comparison of Zamzam delivery to Nigeria in the last four Hajj operations.

Activity	2014	2015	2016	2017
Delivery of Zamzam water	0%	82%	100%	100%

4.7 Reduction in cases of multiple hand luggage.

It used to take between 6 and 8 hours to screen a 500 load flight of Nigerian pilgrims at Jeddah airport. With the introduction of Pre-airport screening, the same flights are screened in 2 hours or less thereby ensuring timely departures of flights.

5.0 Improvement in quality of Buses used for Transportation in Saudi Arabia.

Nigerian pilgrims were used to being conveyed between Jeddah, Makkah and Madina in old buses. Reports of breakdown of such buses on the road were a daily occurrence. In 2017, the Commission entered into an agreement with one of the reputable companies to convey Nigerian pilgrims in VIP buses at no extra cost. This arrangement ensured that Nigerian pilgrims enjoyed being carried in the best quality of buses during the 2017 exercise. Only one case of a bus break-down was received in 2017. Below is a pictorial comparison of the old and new buses.

Pictorial Comparison of Old and New Pilgrims' Buses



6.0 Improvement in quality of Pilgrims' Accommodation in Saudi Arabia.

6.1 Improvement in Madinah

Before 2015, Nigerian pilgrims were usually accommodated in furnished apartments mostly about 20 – 30 minutes' walk from the Haram in Madina. Now, pilgrims are all accommodated in 3, 4 and 5 star hotels that are in the high-brow Markaziyya area of Madina which is between 1 - 5 minutes walk from the Haram. Below is a comparison of the grade of buildings used:

Activity	2014	2015	2016	2017
No of Buildings in Madinah	49	48	27	27
Grade A	15	7	25	25
Grade B	16	24	2	2
Grade C	18	17	0	0

6.2 Reduction of Rates for Pilgrims' Accommodation in Madina.

Another milestone recorded by the Commission is the reduction of Madinah accommodation. In 2017, the Commission decided to eliminate agents and deal directly with Landlords that owned buildings in the choice area of Markaziyya in Madina. By doing this, the Commission was able to negotiate prices for bed spaces downwards to a range of SAR3,000 to SAR4,500 which effectively brought down the cost per pilgrim from SAR2,312 in 2016 to SAR1,610 a reduction of SAR702 for pilgrims and a saving of SAR52,650,000. Or USD14,047,491.99 in foreign exchange demand to Nigerian Government.

6.3 Improvement in Quality of Pilgrims' Accommodation in Makkah

In Makkah, Pilgrims used to be accommodated in over one hundred (100) small and medium houses mostly of grade B and C standard between ten (10) and thirty (30) minutes' walk away from the Haram. Now, they are accommodated in ninety-eight (98) larger buildings mostly of A and B standards.

Activity	2014	2015	2016	2017
No of Buildings in Makkah	108	99	88	98
Grade A	32	53	41	54
Grade B	41	34	40	32
Grade C	35	12	7	12

Pictorial Comparison of Pilgrims' Accommodation





6.4 Reduction of Rates for Pilgrims Accommodation in Makkah

Traditionally, the policy for pilgrims' accommodation in Makkah was through a system of benchmark pricing for all accommodations in Makkah. The system was to ensure that all State Pilgrims Welfare Bodies secure befitting and standard accommodations for their pilgrims at that rate. In 2016 the benchmark price fixed by the Commission for Makkah Accommodation was maintained for the fourth consecutive year at SAR4,000. Some States Pilgrims Welfare Boards (SPWB's) however with the assistance of their State Governments secured accommodations for prices higher than the benchmark and as such financially augmented the pilgrims by paying the difference. This difference ranged between SAR1,000 to SAR2,000.

However, on the introduction of e-payment recently introduced by Saudi Government and adopted by the Commission, it was discovered that some of the properties secured, negotiated and paid for by some States were far below their prices. A particular State was discovered to have paid SAR5,300 Saudi Riyals for an accommodation secured by an Agent at SAR2,500.

Another was discovered to have collected the approved SAR4,000 for a property the Landlord gave at SAR1,800. These shocking discoveries necessitated the need for the Commission to review and extend its regulatory functions in the area of monitoring and negotiating for pilgrims accommodation in Makkah where the State Pilgrims Boards were largely responsible for.

The first step taken by the Commission in 2017, was to abolish the old benchmarking system after discovering that it was abused by some State PWB's in collaboration with Accommodation Providers. It resolved to accept each building based on its merit and market value. It also deepened its involvement in the securing of these accommodations by being involved in the negotiations for each building. The price for each building was negotiated in a forum under the Chairmanship of Commissioner PPMF (Policy, Personnel Management and Finance) staff of the Commission, Chief Executive of the concerned Pilgrims Welfare Board or his representative and the Landlord/Agent.

The Commission reviewed the prices of ALL accommodations in Makkah downward. It is important at this juncture to mention a few examples: Some houses that were previously secured for SAR7,000 were negotiated down to SAR3,900 and SAR3,500.

Similarly, some states that previously paid SAR5,300 for accommodations situated over 3km away from the Grand Mosque, were now able to get same and better accommodations situated less than 2km away from the Haram at SAR4,000. In Makkah Accommodation, Nigeria was able to save another SAR13,637,395 equivalent to USD3,639,000. The Commission's reforms in Makkah have therefore:

- i. Reduced cost of pilgrims accommodation.
- ii. Eliminated the need for financial augmentation by State Governments.
- iii. Uncovered and eliminated the fraud perpetrated under the benchmark arrangement.

7.0 Improvement of Pilgrims' Welfare in Masha'ir

The standard of pilgrims' accommodation in Mina and Arafat has been upgraded to one that is at par with other top ranked countries. Our pilgrims now have matresses and blankets in Muna, Desert coolers in Arafat and improved sanitation in both places which was not the case before.

Pictorial Comparison of Mina and Arafat tents then and now



8.0 Service-Oriented Hajj Management

8.1 Securing a Permanent Site for NAHCON.

Decree no 2 of 1975 gave birth to the Nigerian Pilgrims Commission. The Commission was accommodated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its Headquarters at No 23, Marina Street and later moved to No 27 Kukawa Street, Tinubu Square all in Lagos before moving to Abuja under the Department of Pilgrims Affairs. While in Abuja, it stayed in some rented properties such as no 7 Abidjan Street, Wuse II; No 10 Suez Canal Crescent in Ibrahim Abacha Housing Estate before eventually purchasing its initial base at No 1 Malumfashi Close, Garki. The Commission later moved to its present location, Sokoto House, a rented property due to FCDA regulations prohibiting the use of Malumfashi Close property because it was a residential Area.

With prudent management of resources through savings, increase in off-shore revenue and Government capital allocation, the Commission finally secured a befitting property, Metro Plaza, at Zakaria Maimalari Street, Central

Business District Abuja, to serve as the Commission's Headquarters. The property which cost Two Billion, Four Hundred Million was funded 97.6% by savings and internally generated revenue by the Commission while the Federal Government supported the purchase with a capital allocation of Five Hundred and Eighty-Seven million Naira only being 2.4% was The property has been fully paid for and formally handed over to the Commission.

The new office complex of the Commission sits on a strategically located two plots of Land on 991/992 Zakaria Maimalari street in the Central Business District. The property is neighbouring the National War, College and International Conference Centre. It consists of a four-storey main building, two annexes, a spacious parking space that can hold up to 600 cars, two 500-KVA generators and a motorized borehole and water treatment plant.

Pictorial Comparison of NAHCON's Present and New Office Accommodation

Present Office



Acquired Office



8.2 Relocation of Head Office from Jeddah to Makkah

Similarly, the operational office of the Nigerian Hajj Mission in Saudi Arabia since inception in 1975, had been situated in Jeddah. However, the need to be closer to pilgrims made the Commission to relocate its Hajj operational headquarters to Makkah in 2015 to be closer to pilgrims.

The NAHCON Operational Head Office, Makkah

Before



Now



8.3 Movement of NAHCON Management and Staff from Tent A to Tent C.

Traditionally, Nigerian officials usually stay in 'A' area of Minna which is about three kilometers away from where pilgrims are situated. The Commission decided to move to where Nigerian pilgrims are to supervise and enjoy the same standard of services with them. This has assisted in proper supervision of the services rendered to pilgrims during the period of main Hajj activities. It has also reduced the huge cost associated with the Tent 'A' services as well as eliminated abuse.

Management's Tent In Minna



Management's Tent In Arafat



9.0 Introduction of Automated Pilgrims Management System

In 2016, the Commission secured a beneficial partnership with the Pakistani Hajj Mission where a customised Pilgrims' Management Solution was developed and deployed by the Pakistani Information Technology Bureau (PITB).

The Bureau worked with the ICT unit of the Commission to develop a computer-based multi-faceted solution for pilgrims registration, flight, complaints and health management systems.

The solutions that would have cost the Comission about Five hundred thousand US Dollars (\$500,000.00) was developed and deployed free of charge. This enabled the Commission save money while leveraging on the relationship it established in 2016 to enhance efficiency of Hajj Management.

10.0 Reduction of Cost of Hajj and Cost of Administering Hajj

10.1 Reduction in AirFares

From the year 2012 to date, the airfare for Hajj had been USD1,700 and USD1,750 for pilgrims from the Northern and Southern departure points of Nigeria respectively. In a bid to manage the 2017 Hajj fares, the Commission constituted two committees to further negotiate downwards, the 2017 airfare proposed by the Airlines' Technical Screening Committee. At the end of negotiations, the airfare for 2017 Hajj were negotiated downwards to USD1,700 USD1,650 and USD1,600. This reduced the airfare by USD50 for Northern and Southern Departure Points and USD100 (for Maiduguri and Yola Departure points). The total savings from this amounts to USD4,056,850.

10.2 Reduction in Local Charges

One of the reforms introduced by the Commission in 2017, was the decentralization of Hajj fares. Each State of the Federation proposed the contents and amounts it proposed to charge its pilgrims. The Chief Executive or officer in charge of each state appeared before a special committee where these proposals are defended with reasons. On many occasions, estimates found to be high or irrelevant were reduced or removed till the final amount to be charged is agreed upon and signed off by the Commission and the State concerned. A total savings of One Billion, Five Hundred and Thirty Eight Million Naira (₦1,538,000,000) was made from this exercise. Without the reform, this amount would have been imposed on Nigerian pilgrims as was the case before when the Commission allowed States the free hand to determine their local charges.

10.3 Reduction in Cost of Pilgrims Suitcases

In 2017, the States under the auspices of the Forum of Chairmen and Chief Executives of State Pilgrims Welfare Boards and Agencies had contacted and agreed with a suitcase manufacturer, Lanyo Travelling Bags and Luggage Ltd to supply the suitcases at the cost of N21,500 per set.

NAHCON came to know about the arrangement during the defence of the local charges component of the fares mentioned above. In a bid to further reduce the cost of Hajj, it decided to negotiate the agreed price down to N16,665.

10.4 Reduction of Dependence on Federal Government Spending

The Commission was able to boost its Internally Generated Revenue profile without increasing its charges of pilgrims and reduce its dependence on Government to finance Hajj Operations. The Commission reduced its dependency on Federal Government in funding its offshore operations from 69% in 2014 to 23% in 2017 as shown in the table below. The Commission is gradually moving towards complete independence from Federal Government funding on its entire operations.

Activity	2014	2015	2016	2017
FG financing of Offshore Budget	69%	68%	28%	23%

10.5 Reduction of Hajj officials

The Commission was known for sponsoring many officials to assist pilgrims. This practice of recruiting officials was pruned to essential medical and security personnel as well as institutional representatives.

10.6 Management of Vehicles owned by Nigeria in Saudi Arabia

Nigeria has been described to be one of the countries with the largest fleet of vehicles in Saudi Arabia due to the indiscriminate purchase and mismanagement of vehicles by various State Pilgrims Welfare Boards. The total number of vehicles as at July, 2017 stood at Three Hundred and Sixty-nine (369). Countries like Indonesia and Pakistan with over One Hundred and Fifty Thousand (150,000) pilgrims twice the number of Nigerian pilgrims have less than 20 cars in their fleet.

Recently, the Commission was inundated with complaints from the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and other Agencies over the illegal use of these cars especially outside Hajj seasons. In 2016, the accumulated penalties for traffic violations from all Nigerian vehicles reached Three Hundred Thousand Saudi Riyals (SAR300,000.00) equivalent to Twenty-Four Million Naira (₦24,000,000.00).

To tackle this problem, the Commission introduced measures aimed at curtailing the misuse of vehicles in Saudi Arabia. The measures include a centralized parking and management of the vehicles and a shared responsibility in financing the arrangement.

11 Tackling Corruption and Hajj-Related Malpractices

11.1 Tackling Hadaya Related Cases.

The Commission through investigations by its Security Committee discovered that there was a lot of racketeering going on under the guise of facilitating the performance of sacrifice (*Hadaya*) for pilgrims. Some self-appointed agents in Nigeria and in Saudi Arabia collect monies from pilgrims for the purpose of performing *Hadaya*. The Security Committee discovered that in many instances, the *Hadaya* is either underperformed or not performed completely.

The Commission decided to strengthen its cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank Adahi Project through Jaiz Bank Plc as the only approved medium for *Hadaya* while applying punitive measures on those who seek to disregard the arrangement. The Commission resolved to adopt this approach to ensure no Nigerian pilgrim is defrauded as the reputation and capacity of these banks is not in doubt. Due to this reform, the Commission saved innocent pilgrims from being duped to an estimated \$1.6 Million. It also improved the image of Nigeria in Saudi Arabia.

11.2 Tackling Pilgrims Basic Travel Allowance (BTA) Related Malpractices

Another area touched by the reforms is the pilgrims BTA which was USD750, USD1,000 and USD1,500 for minimum medium and maximum BTA's. It was discovered however that because of the exchange differentials provided by applying official exchange rates, Some State Officials and Stakeholders connived with some bankers to top up the actual forex required by pilgrims who paid minimum Hajj fare, collect the maximum Hajj fare from CBN, remit the amount initially requested by the pilgrims and keep the change. This racket is popularly referred to as "loading". The amount Government lost to this round is mind-boggling. To arrest this, the Commission made all BTA into a uniform amount of USD800.

11.3 Tackling the Menace of Illegal Tour Operator Companies

The extortion, poor services and in many cases, outright defrauding of innocent intending pilgrims by 'agents' were some of the reasons Government started getting involved in Hajj arrangements since 1954. Although significant progress has been made, 'agents' seem to have resurfaced in the guise of Tour Operators many of whom are not duly registered. The Commission in early 2017, toured the entire

length and breadth of Nigeria to sensitize Tour Operators engaged in Hajj or Umrah without licensing on the illegality of their business and gave them time to normalize their operations by being duly registered and coming under regulatory radar. A total of 113 unregistered Tour Operator Companies across the country were visited and given 21 days to regularise their operations. At the expiry of the grace period, 86 companies complied.

The Commission has instituted legal action against defaulters and has so far obtained court injunctions to seal 12 Companies across the country. Many of the owners of these companies had listening ears in the corridors of power hence pursued their fraudulent activities with impunity. The resolve of the Commission to sanitize the industry through its reforms led to these companies utilize their influence to instigate various investigations against the Commission.

12.0 Ensuring Value for Money.

12.1 Refunds to Pilgrims for Un-rendered or Poorly Rendered Services.

The Commission in March 2016, refunded the sum of 1.75 Billion Naira to Pilgrims Boards of the 36 States of the Country and the FCT for onward refund to pilgrims. Similarly, it refunded the sum of 526 Million Naira in 2017. This refund was as a result of services not rendered or poorly rendered during the 2015 and 2016 Hajj exercises while that of 2017 is being processed for payment. The refunds were publicized in National dailies while Government Anti-Graft Agencies were involved in monitoring the refund to pilgrims. It was a demonstration of commitment to ensure that Nigerian pilgrims got value for money.

13.0 Expansion of Public Enlightenment and Engagement.

In line with Section 4(1)g of the NAHCON (Establishment) Act, the Commission embarked on enlightenment activities and was able to achieve the following:

13.1 Introduction of Radio and Television Enlightenment.

The programme, tagged. Hajj: As You Answer the Call is always aired on NTA Network Television on weekly basis with the aim of enlightening pilgrims as well as showcasing activities of the Commission. The same programme is being conducted through the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) network.

13.2 Introduction of the National Media Team.

The Commission also introduced a harmonized system of covering and reporting Hajj activities through the establishment of a National Media Team for each Hajj operation to ensure Nigeria operated as Country and all Media activities are properly managed and journalists given the necessary support to perform their duties. The Nigerian public in the last two years have enjoyed an improved reportage of Hajj activities.

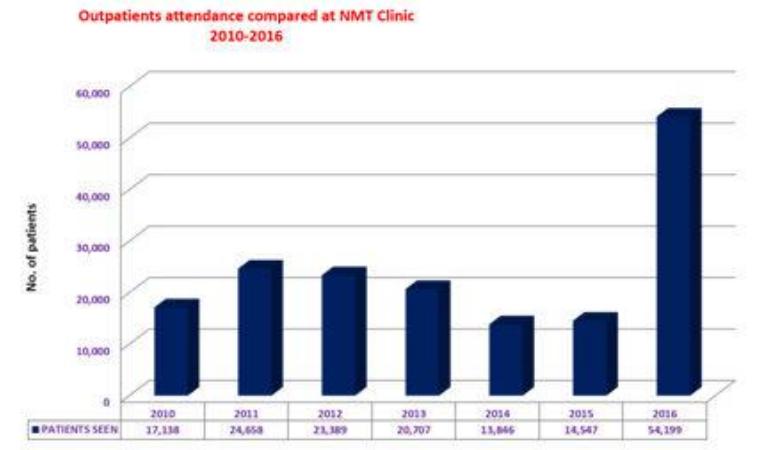
13.3 Public Engagement over Social Media

The Commission also established various public engagement mechanisms through use of Social Media to inform, enlighten, engage and receive feedback from the

public about its activities. The Commission's account on Facebook; Twitter and Instagram handles @nigeriahajjcom took off from 2016 to complement print and broadcast media coverage of the Commission's activities.

14.0 Introduction of National Medical Team

Nigeria used to go to Hajj with a medical team for each state as well as a Federal medical team. The combined manpower prior to 2015 used to be over 2000 personnel that include, Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacists and Environmental Health workers to serve 95,000 pilgrims. This duplication of efforts and wastage was curtailed from 2016 when a single National Medical Team to serve all Nigerian pilgrims was formed. The entire team was less than 500 and it served all Nigerians. Statistics of pilgrims served was discovered to have increased considerably as indicated in the chart below:



There was initial resistance to this initiative by some States partly due to beneficiaries of budgetary allocations to State Medical teams and partly due to the fear of change. However with explanations backed by facts and interactions at various fora including the Nigeria Governors Forum, better understanding of its benefits was secured which led to better cooperation in 2017.

15.0 Establishment of Pilgrims' DNA Database

In the aftermath of the unfortunate stampede 2015 in which 317 Nigerian pilgrims and officials lost their lives, the Commission resolved to establish a DNA bank for Nigerian pilgrims through the collection of buccal swabs from pilgrims. The measure was to enable the Commission quickly identify and trace pilgrims in the event of death and absence of any form of identity. It will address the challenge of identification that was faced in 2015.

16.0 On-Going Activities

16.1 Implementation of Hajj Savings Scheme.

One of the core mandates of NAHCON as provided for in section 7 of its (Establishment) Act, is providing a Hajj Savings Scheme which will provide for gradual payment for Hajj and reduce dependence on Government for funding through investments. The Commission has commenced the process of implementing the Scheme which is expected to

take off fully before the end of the tenure of 3rd NAHCON Board.

16.2 Establishment of Training Institute for Hajj Managers.

In view of the non-existence of professional training for Hajj Managers in Nigeria, the Commission initiated the process of establishing a Hajj training Institute in collaboration with local and foreign institutions. The proposed institute will serve as a professional training centre for all Hajj Managers in Nigeria and neighbouring African Countries.

17.0 Conclusion

The achievements listed above by the Commission are a credit to the current Administration as they have direct

bearing on the welfare of common Nigerians. Each Nigerian pilgrim under Government quota benefits from a cost saving of about \$300 while the Nigerian economy as a whole was saved from foreign exchange demand of \$21.7 Million in 2017 alone. This is in addition to Billions of naira saved from State Government Augmentation. They have also put a stop to numerous fraudulent practices that hitherto held sway in BTA processing, *Hadaya* and inflated costs of pilgrims' accommodation in Saudi Arabia. The modest achievements recorded are just the beginning of a journey to achieving excellent service delivery for Hajj Administration in Nigeria. ■

NAHCON Advocates Global Discussion On Hajj Quota

...as the Commission ready to take over Makkah Accommodations

By Yakubu Musa and Abubakar Jidda Usman

The Chairman, Chief Executive Officer of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad has advocated for global discussion on Hajj quota to ensure effective utilisation of facilities in Mina and Arafat.

The Chairman made this call during the 2017 post Arafat meeting with stakeholders held at Ruqiyah Hall, Makkah, following the challenges of inadequate space in Mina, adding that the previous three years Hajj exercise did not experience these challenges because of the reduced number of pilgrims from across the world on the orders of Saudi government due to the expansion services being undertaken in most of the Holy mosques.

He said the restoration of the 20 per cent quota by Saudi Arabia led to a higher number of pilgrims this year which in the end impacted on the resources in Mina tent city, suggesting that all countries should collectively agree on the need to reduce the quota thereby making it easier for the authorities to manage Hajj well and successfully.

"Hajj Management should be a global responsibility, through an articulate

policy and plan to ensure responsive conduct and behavior of all pilgrims while in the holy land to guard against stamped and all forms of

"It could be recalled that in 2015, I addressed a gathering like this, and there I said we should give the issue of Makkah accommodation a two-year mopping up period. I think today we are in 2017 and so we should consider that period expired."

discomfort not only among the pilgrims themselves but to their officials and those of the host government and its security agencies."



Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad
NAHCON Chairman/CEO

"The Saudi Arabian Government under the leadership of the custodian of the two holy Mosques has shown great wisdom in managing and making Hajj easy for all. Our prayer is that God will give them the wisdom to address the challenge of Mina just like they did for them in Jamarat and Haram," he said.

Towards meeting the required standard of accommodation facilities for Nigerian pilgrims, the chairman said NAHCON will centralise accommodation for Nigerian pilgrims in Makkah during 2018 Hajj season, saying that

"Centralising the accommodation means having Nigerian pilgrims from

different states housed together in large hotels, a departure from current experience where all states individually seek for accommodation for their pilgrims in Makkah”, the chairman stated.

The chairman, who reappeared after his first speech specifically to make the announcement, expressed dismay over the rate of complaints the commission received on the nature of pilgrims’ accommodations in Makkah.

NAHCON took over the provision of accommodation for pilgrims in Madinah which has seen Nigerian pilgrims staying in Markaziyya area, steps away from the Prophet’s Mosques.

While states independently seek for their hotels in Makkah and some of them end up housing their pilgrims far from the Grand Mosque making it difficult for the pilgrims to observe their daily prayers at the Haram.

“Very soon we will discuss with states our proposal to take Makkah accommodation collectively as a nation, not individual states. The idea is to get closer to Haram by occupying bigger hotels that can house pilgrims from 10 to 12 states.

An official from one of the states is already discussing with one of the hotels which can accommodate 16,000 pilgrims at a time”, said Mukhtar.

Barr. Mukhtar who expressed the hope that all the 36 states, Federal Capital Territory and the armed forces will key into the proposal, also said “What we are going to pay is not going to be too different from what we are paying the smaller hotels at the moment”.

He explained that this is coming just as the commission has put stringent measures to monitor the activities of the state pilgrims’ boards in 2017 Hajj.

“It could be recalled that in 2015, I addressed a gathering like this, and there I said we should give the issue of Makkah accommodation a two-year mopping up period. I think today we are in 2017 and so we should consider that period expired.

He stressed the need for all Hajj participants to come together to address the challenges and proffer a lasting solution.

“I know there might be some level of resistance, but this is just what we have to do; you either be in the ship or you be on your own. Any state that decides to stay away should be prepared to organise visas, negotiate for services and interface with all relevant Saudi Arabian authorities on their own”, the chairman warned.

Barr. Abdullahi commended Saudi Arabian authorities for organising a hitch free Hajj exercise during the four-day stay in Mashaer. He also commended Nigerian pilgrims and officials from the states for their ability to overcome challenges during the observation of Hajj rites.

“Kano, Sokoto, Lagos and some pilgrims from private tour operators under service office 19 all had challenges of inadequate space in Mina. However, the situation was well managed by the officials concerned and the Muassassa was made to provide a better, more spacious tent; while Lagos moved without a hitch, others decided to stay due to logistics reasons.

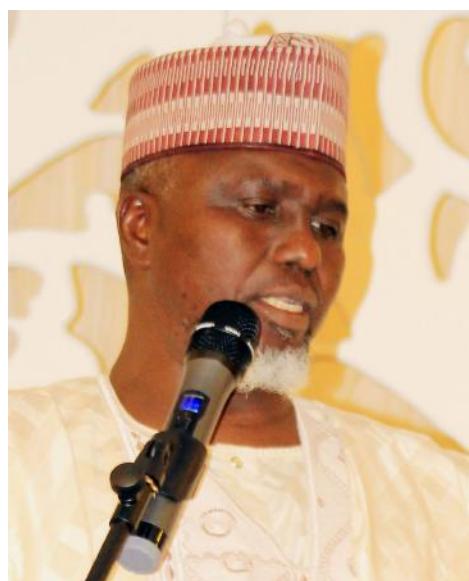
“This exceptional behaviour by Nigerian pilgrims and officials deserve exceptional commendation,” he said.

In a related development, the Commission has again been called upon to ensure, in subsequent years, that all Nigerian pilgrims were accommodated in houses close to the Haram in Makkah as fully obtained in Madinah.

The Chairman Senate Committee on foreign Affairs, Senator, (Alhaja) Monsurat Sumonu made the call expressing displeasure over the distance of the accommodation of some pilgrims who must cover over two kilometers to get to the Haram for their daily prayers.



Senator Alhaja Monsurat Sumonu
Chairman, Senate Committee on foreign Affairs



Dr. Abdullah Balarabe Salame
Chairman House of Representatives
Committee on Saudi-Nigeria Inter-Parliamentary
Friendship and Hajj matters

Senator Mansurat who stated that the joint committee of the National Assembly would continue its visit to some pilgrims’ accommodations to complete assessment of the exercise they began on arrival to the holy land, also said the move was to confirm that pilgrims were not shortchanged and that they really got value for their money.

While commending NAHCON for effectively wading through the typhoon of



His Royal Highness, Alhaji Rilwan Sulaiman
Emir of Bauchi and representative of the
Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs



Alhaji Abdullahi Moddibo Saleh,
NAHCON Commissioner in charge of operations

challenges faced during 2017 Hajj operations, particularly at the Masha'a'ir areas, she urged the commission to wield the big stick on any State Pilgrims Welfare Board found to defraud its pilgrims.

In his remarks, the Chairman House of Representatives Committee on Saudi-Nigeria Inter-Parliamentary Friendship and Hajj matters, Dr. Abdullah Balarabe Salame commended NAHCON's handling of this year's Hajj, saying there is

however, room for improvement.

He said this required cooperation, good will and understanding from the State Pilgrims Welfare Boards. Barrister Abdullah stated that a comprehensive plan was being worked out to pull resources together between NAHCON and the state Boards for the realisation of this objective.

"Next year a large number of Nigerian pilgrims are housed few meters away from the Haram in Makkah. And this was possible without much heavier financial implications".

The Chairman opined that there was the need to put heads together among Muslim nations for a round table discussion on a realisable and manageable quota of pilgrims for all nations to reduce pressure on the facilities at Masha'a'ir areas.

The Chairman confirmed that the Commission has already swung into action to ensure that next year a large number of Nigerian pilgrims are housed few meters away from the Haram in Makkah. And this he said would be possible without much additional financial implications.

In a related development, it has been suggested that the practice of sending old persons, who can hardly bear the rigours of Hajj exercise, to perform the annual religious rites should be discouraged. NAHCON's Commissioner in charge of health matters, Dr. Ibrahim Kana gave the advice in his speech at the stakeholders' meeting.

He said it was touching and disheartening to see the hardship the extremely elderly persons undergo during the Hajj rites, without guides or

assistants, saying there's a limit to which Hajj officials can go in handling such case?

Speaking earlier, Nigeria's Charge 'D' Affairs in Riyadh, Salisu Umar, urged NAHCON to carry out sensitisation of Nigerians holding visitors' visas to enlighten them on its illegality. Mr Umar said some Nigerians performing Hajj with such visas instead of Hajj visa were recently arrested.

He also asked NAHCON to take note of all the challenges faced in this year's hajj in order to address them before the next one.

"About 85 per cent of 'Zamzam' water for pilgrims have already been transported back to the country and will be distributed to pilgrims upon return".

Meanwhile, the Commissioner in charge of operations at NAHCON, Abdullahi Saleh, in his presentation said the commission has concluded all arrangements for a hitch free return journey by Nigerian pilgrims adding that

"This year a large number of Nigerian pilgrims are housed few meters away from the Haram in Makkah. And this was possible without much heavier financial implications".

which commences its flight operations Wednesday will conclude its return flight on October 2, while, Medview will begin on September 10 and finish on September 25 and Max Air, which begins airlift on September 9, will conclude on October 5th.

Mr. Saleh called on pilgrims to avoid carrying excess luggage saying "the conveyor belt at the Airport is calibrated to reject any luggage weighing over 32kg." He urged states to provide weighing scales for pilgrims at their accommodation to weigh their luggage "even before heading to the airport."

He said about 85 per cent of 'Zamzam' water for pilgrims have already been transported back to the country and will be distributed to pilgrims upon return. ■

Picking Lost Item at Haram May Take you to Jail -NAHCON Warns Pilgrims

By Nasiru Adamu El-Hikaya

Security operatives at Masjidul Haram in Makkah whisked away a Nigerian pilgrim from Sokoto State suspected of picking a lost item within the vicinity of the Grand Mosque.

The item might have fallen out of the pocket of another pilgrim and the security operatives suspected that the pilgrim had intention to convert the item to his personnel belonging.

Speaking to a cross section of pilgrims in Makkah, Nigerian Consul General in Jeddah Ambassador Muhammad Sani Yunusa advised pilgrims against picking any item that does not belong to them.

He explained that the premises of Haram have over two thousand CCTV cameras.

According to him, he and other officials of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) had made frantic efforts to locate the whereabouts of the victim of circumstances to secure his release.

The Consul General used the medium to ask the pilgrims to always use the best opportunity in the holy land to pray for peace and unity to prevail in Nigeria. ■



Nigerian Consul-General in Jeddah, Ambassador Muhammad Sani Yunusa listening to one of the State officials while on pilgrims' accommodations visit in Makkah



The front view of the Al haram of Makkah

WHAT A FRIENDSHIP: 80yrs Friend Waits for 25yrs to Perform Hajj With Friend

"Over 25 years have passed since Ejaz raised enough money to go to Hajj alone but he did not go. He waited for me. I will always be indebted to him and will never forget what he has done for me."

Two Pakistani pilgrims have set a real example of true friendship. Ejaz Dalali Ahmad and Ahmad Dalo Raj, both over 80 years old, decided to perform Hajj together. They made a promise to one another decades ago that they would raise money together and go to Hajj together. What makes the lifetime journey all the more interesting is that Ahmed Dalo Raj is blind; he lost his sight many years ago.

When they finally made it to Makkah, the two friends showed the world that the bonds of friendship is so thick, that even at this age they disclosed that they could depend on each other — for Raj, who is totally blind,

depended on his friend Ahmed for guidance and direction.

The two close friends from Pakistan waited for 25 years to come to the Haj together. Ahmed refused to do Hajj alone and insisted that his longtime friend, Raj accompanied him but the latter did not have enough money to meet the expenses of Hajj.

"I always had enough money to meet Hajj costs but my friend Raj did not. So I had to wait for him for about 25 years until he had collected sufficient funds needed for Hajj," Ahmed said.

He said he was overjoyed and exultant when his friend told him that now he had the



True Friends! Ejaz Dalali Ahmad and Ahmad Dalo Raj, over 80 years old friends

required amount of money so they could realize their dream of a quarter of a century of doing the fifth pillar of Islam together.

"My friend Raj is blind. We were together since our early childhood. We agreed to do the Hajj together when we were both 55 years old but it took him about 25 years to save the amount of money needed for the Hajj," I always had the money which was enough for Hajj but I waited for my friend until he had the

During Hajj, Sign Language Most Common Among Pilgrims

Sign language is the most-used language at the holy sites, as it can be used to guide crowds, organize them safely at the Jamarat and warn people about overcrowding.

Crowd flow expert Akram Jann said there are more than 100 languages used at the holy sites, but the only one that can unify them is sign language, which does not need dictionaries and can help pilgrims of all nationalities.

Fayza Netou, president of the Deaf and Mute Club, said signing is used to guide lost people, and is not limited to the hard of hearing.

"I've seen many pilgrims lose their way, and sign language has been the only solution to help and guide them. This made me and the volunteer teams want to serve pilgrims," said Netou.

She added that the club, in cooperation with the Presidency of the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques, has organized training sessions for presidency members to teach them about sign language in order to help pilgrims.

Volunteer teams have used sign language at the holy sites for 16 years. There are eight sessions organized at the Haram in Makkah to train women and men to use sign language. The sessions help workers who do not speak the most common languages, enabling them to communicate with all pilgrims. ■

sufficient amount. This only came true this year, following 25 years of wait," Ahmed said.

Raj depended completely on Ahmad during his movements in Makkah and the holy sites. "Ahmad is the guide on whom I depend on going to the tent, the toilet, the Jamarat and other places," he said.

Raj said he could not thank Ahmad enough because he waited for him for a long time until he was able to save the Haj costs and also for guiding him during the Hajj.

"Ahmad is my eyes by which I can see. He is the stick I am using to find my way. He is the power on which I lean. He has always been faithful and loyal friend to me," he said.

Raj said he could not thank his friend enough and does not know how to reward him for his good deeds. "I prayed for him during the Haj and will continue to pray for him for the rest of my life," he said.

Raj said: "Over 25 years have passed since Ejaz raised enough money to go to Hajj alone but he did not go. He waited for me. I will always be indebted to him and will never forget what he has done for me." ■



An Asker directing an Indian with hands sign language

Sudanese Pilgrim's Wish Fulfilled

As Sudanese pilgrim, 73 years old, was happy when he received a call informing him that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques invites him to perform Hajj and be one of the guest of King Salman's Program of Hajj Guests, Saudi Press Agency reported.

The program bears the full costs of travel and stay of guests in Makkah and the Holy Sites. "I was overjoyed when I received the call. It was a dream coming true. I have always wanted to perform Hajj and visit Makkah and the Holy Sites," Mubarak Abu Dhar said.

Dhar lost his son in action as he was killed as martyr during his participation in the Arab Coalition Forces aiming to restore legitimacy in Yemen.

His son was chosen to take part in the Decisive Storm and was dispatched to the Saudi borders to fight alongside his fellow brothers. "My son had always wanted to die as a martyr serving his country. He promised me and his mother that he would take us to Makkah to perform Hajj when he returns but he died as



martyr," he said.

Jalal Fadallah, 90 years old from Sudan, lost his son too in action, who was a first lieutenant in the Sudanese army. "My son was a loving, kind, and ethical person who loved his country. He called me few hours before he was killed and told me that he would take me and his mother to perform Hajj when he returns home. I am happy that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques fulfilled my son's dream and gave us a chance to perform Hajj." ■

Culled from ArabNews & Saudi Gazette report

Blue Print On Hajj Media Coverage Under Way –NAHCON

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, (NAHCON), is developing a blue print for the media to ensure effective coverage and reporting of Hajj operations in Nigeria and in the Holy Land.

The Chairman of the Commission, Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad disclosed this during a dinner organised for the NAHCON 2017 media team and State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards public relations officers at the NAHCON headquarters in Makkah.

He said there was the need for adequate knowledge of Hajj regulations by anyone reporting Hajj activities.

The Chairman stated that the Saudi authorities have their extant rules and regulations on every aspect of the Hajj exercise that reporters must be conversant with to ensure informed and balanced reportage.

Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar promised that after the completion of the airlift of pilgrims back home, NAHCON would set up a special Hajj coverage,

reporting and management Committee to achieve the desired aims and objectives.

Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar thanked the media team for the way members carried out their assignments and urged members of team to verify the veracity of any information before they go to press.

While confirming that the airlift of pilgrims back home has been going on smoothly without any hitch, he however, implored all to fervently pray for Nigeria to overcome her present trying period and good health and wisdom for all the leaders, particularly the President.

Nigeria Will Maintain Markaziya Accommodation –Tambuwal

For the first time, the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria NAHCON secured accommodations for pilgrims in **Markaziya** area of Madinah as part of efforts to move pilgrims closer to Masjid Al Nabawy to give them access to the Masjid at ease. In this interview with Madinah Coordinator and secretary to the Commission, Dr. Bello Muhammad Tambuwal, Hajj Mabrur sought to know what other benefits were derivable from having accommodations in **Markaziya** area. The excerpts:

Dr. Bello Muhammad Tambuwal as Madinah Coordinator, we will like to hear from you how 2017 Hajj operations arrangements went, especially in Madinah?

Tambuwal: Actually, I have been in Madinah for the last nine to ten years. So, I can give you very good account of what or a comparative analysis of various operations within the decade. Throughout my experience of staying in Madinah since from the time I was deputising up to the time I took over the mantle of coordinating the activities of the office, I can say 2017 is the best outing we have in Madinah. I am saying it without prejudice or without any iota of the feeling to praise anybody. It is based on reality and the facts I mentioned. 2017 have been a very peculiar year, because it was the second year that we have provided 100% accommodations for Nigerians within Markaziya in Madinah. The houses we have rented are by far better than



NAHCON chairman fielding questions to journalists at National Assembly, Abuja



A cross section of members of the 2017 media committee

that of 2016. Feeding was also improved from one meal to two meals per day and pilgrims were confined within a radius of maximum of about 500 meters to Haram.

With the commencement of the *Iqamah*, he will be able to perform ablution and come down from his hotel accommodation and attend the five daily prayers, unlike before, when pilgrims were accommodated within the range of 1 to 2 kilometres. So, in that circumstance if you attend to one prayer, you walk one kilometre, you go back one kilometre, next prayer you may miss it.

In the yester years, we have witnessed a lot of road traffic accident while crossing the road, but this time around all of them were confined within *Markaziya* area. The environment is very clean. There is no road crossing, food is made available and they perform their rites with ease.

The second issue I think is the issue of feeding, this year we tried to introduce Nigerian menu so that at least people would feel very close to home, because even the Saudi know sometimes they do tell us Nigerians are so agitated their food. No matter what type of food you bring they prefer *Tuwo*. So, let us include the *Tuwo* into the Menu, so that we prevent them from buying the *Takari* to eat.

Therefore, this year we introduced Semovita and *Tuwon Shinkafa*, but unfortunately, we have some challenges at the beginning in respect of this. Most especially with the two companies contracted to provide the Semovita and



Dr. Bello Muhammad Tambuwal, Madinah coordinator

Tuwo for them. So, we had to reverse and replace them with supergette and Macaroni. But for the other companies, I believe those that perhaps have African touches, prepared almost the best Semovita and the pilgrims enjoyed it. They came here and told me, we've heard that you have suspended the provision of Semovita of so and so caterers, but for us don't do it because we are enjoying our Semo, we are Ok with our Caterer, let him continue.

So, up to now the man is supplying them and even yesterday somebody told me, he ate not the Semovita but even their rice and beans as if he was a Nigerian.

So, that made me very happy. And not only that, to ensure we give the taste and to ensure the quality of the food, some members of the feeding committee were

stationed inside the kitchen of the caterers, from morning till evening to see how the food is prepared, the ingredients, the taste and even how it is packaged and distributed to pilgrims.

So, a lot has been done this year on feeding but gradually In Sha Allah one day we will get there to be able to cook our own food in our own way to give the Nigerian taste. Therefore, the chairman in his magnanimity has requested the caterers engaged to employ the services of some Nigerians who are experienced in preparation of Nigerian Menu and this is just the beginning. I believe by next year or so, and subsequent years we will be able to provide the needed taste for our pilgrims to eat and feel at home.

Let us take you back on the issue of accommodation in

Madinah, what challenges have you face in getting accommodation within Markaziya, considering that is the area eyed by almost all the powerful countries when it comes to pilgrimage?

Tambuwal: Really we faced challenges during the entry of contract agreements, because you need to match the contract number into the system for optimum benefit because all transactions were done online. If you have a hotel very close to haram, such contract number of that hotel should be the first entry and then the landlords approval then it is indicated in the system, then it will appear at hijra stations also it will appear at the airport as well as in Makkah. All these involved in the process of the accommodation.

So, this is the challenge we faced. But we have learnt some experiences which I am sure In Sha Allah we will bring it to bear in the arrangements of 2018 Hajj. We have quality houses so that we can take maximum rotation of these houses because if you have a house that you have rented for one session you need to optimise its utilisation, enter it twice or thrice or possibly four times. Once you can enter the contract you can retake it, but gradually we will be there.

Sir, considering that many countries are looking for those houses close to haram, how did you manage to get them without agent?

Tambuwal: Wallahi, it was just by the will of Allah because upon all the

countries that were looking for the houses, Nigeria was the first or second that came to scout for housing. After last year Hajj, I think Chairman led a delegation to Madinah, the MoUs were signed and after the signing of MoU, he just said lets go and scout for accommodation in Madinah.

We came in, but the process was not starting while the portal was opened. So, we identified those houses, saw the landlords, we discussed with them, we showed them the properties we wanted and both of us agreed then we paid them 10% per cent as an evidence that we are interested. We have sealed that deal. But much later when we went back, the rate for the accommodation rose up, accommodation was no longer available.

Before, some countries used to accommodate their pilgrims 100% per cent inside Markaziya, but they cannot do so now because those houses are not there. This year, over 70% of Pakistan pilgrims were accommodated outside Markaziya and also over 40% of Indonesian pilgrims were outside Markaziya, they only eat within Markaziya.

They have done all they could, some have even top up much higher over and over above what Nigeria paid, but because of early arrangements we have made, they were not able to get these houses.

Going by what you have just said, that many countries are pursuing those houses within Markaziya, what effort is NAHCON putting to maintain these houses?



Dr. Bello Tambuwal fielding questions from Hajj Mabrur Correspondents

Tambuwal: Of course some countries are waiting to take over from us. That's why somebody was advising that if NAHCON wants to maintain these houses, definitely immediately after 2017 Hajj before going back home we must seal another deal with landlords, otherwise, next year there is no guarantee.

Another thing I observed with regards to these houses is that, we need to educate our pilgrims on hygiene. Indiscriminate eating of food bought from road side vendors has to stop. It is unfortunate to see our pilgrims sitting down in the open and eating on the floor simply because they want to be eating and watching vehicles passing by.

So, they never know the implication of what they are doing. You have a very good accommodation, but then you came outside eating until somebody goes round to talk to you, only then for you to decide to go back. Alhamdu Lillahi that situation has now improved because of frequent enlightenment. So, next year we will emphasize more on this issue.

"Previously, you were getting the houses all through agents popularly called accommodation providers and this year we learnt that you eliminated all of them. When the operations began we read a report that they are planning to destabilise the operations even threatening to make the entire Hajj operations impossible, have you faced any challenge from them?"

Tambuwal: Really we came with that impression from home and we got prepared for that. Whoever was there to dislocate the arrangement of Hajj, we are ready for him. So, we came in with security men and we screened our casual staff we recruited including our permanent staff. We also set observers for each of the casual staff we employed to observe their attitude and how they conduct themselves.

So, later we realised that the atmosphere was not prevalent in Madinah, maybe in Makkah but in Madinah there was nothing like that. And in Madinah there were no too many agents that were eliminated,

maybe two or three companies.

What we did was, conditions were set, one, if you own a property of your own bring it. If you don't have a property, definitely we would not do business with you. Two, if you are limited liability, NAHCON can do business with you, but if you are one man proprietor, NAHCON would not do business with you because you can't take millions of pilgrims' money and just give it to an individual.

In the event that anything happened, you have nothing to fall-back on whatsoever. So, what explanation NAHCON would give back to government? That's why we said Limited Liability Company.

Therefore, you must know the company and its equity capital. If the share capital is too low, you cannot do much business with that company, in the event of any risk, we have a fall-back.

Therefore, in Madinah I can tell you that since the time we started to date, the owners of these properties did not allow any body to

come in between them and the commission.

We signed the contract with them. We paid the initial deposit and when pilgrims enter the houses, second payment was made and after the whole operations reconciliation will be paid and they will be settled.

So, in essence you are saying NAHCON did not make any deal with agents?

Tambuwal: No! To the best of my knowledge, there was no agent here in Madinah.

Earlier on you said that NAHCON never had it so good like this year, what is responsible for these successes, Sir?

Tambuwal: Wallahi, we know Nigerians want to the best all times and leadership also is ready for what the pilgrims want. Number three, since the day after the conclusion of 2016 Hajj, I can tell you that Chairman and I, none of us have gone on annual leave. We concentrated on preparations as if Hajj is tomorrow. So, Hajj is tomorrow you have to prepare today.

Therefore, we sat down in office, planning! planning! And planning! That's how we were able to get good accommodations in Markaziya within the earlier possible time. We also got good business especially in food even though in feeding much is left to be perfected because still we need to do a lot more. Now we have a plan that in future we are thinking about allowing people who are interested through the State to negotiate the type of meals they want to take.

For example, like Borno people who are well known with local food called '**Barabisko**' should start preparation, next year, we need to take Barabisko and we need to drink Fura da Nono. So, NAHCON will write to Saudi Authority, we process, get licences and we import these items into the Kingdom for our people to enjoy the local meals. The Tabung Hajj which people always quote as an example has spent by today more

thought that these buildings were meant for black people like him, until when he was accommodated in it now. Another Malam was saying "you Nigeria should try to accommodate your pilgrims inside Markaziya, if you do that Allah will give you Paradise. That was why NAHCON try her possible best and Almighty Allah has accomplished that, today all our pilgrims were accommodated inside Markaziya.

more challenges in 2018 as many countries are looking for accommodations in Markaziya due to its facilities and the nature of the environment.

Since you have already foreseen there will be more challenges in 2018, what effort is NAHCON making to maintain these houses?

Tambuwal: Usually before the closure of the operations, Chairman used to invite all the stakeholders for a meeting and ask for their observations, experiences and challenges. There and then we will put all together and start preparations for the subsequent year's Hajj.

So, 'I believe we will be equal to the task and I am sure the Commission will meet some of these accommodations providers to start planning against 2018 Hajj so that we can maintain the status quo.'

With all these successes you mentioned and with feedback NAHCON is getting from its staff, what are the areas that need to be improved?

Tambuwal: The areas that need to be improved on are: one, feeding as I mentioned earlier; two, pilgrims' education and orientation; three, we need to improve on interaction because one of the essence of staying in Madinah is to allow pilgrims to interact. Let Edo people interact with Sokoto, let Kano and Enugu meet and Borno and Osun pilgrims meet and socialise so long we are Muslims. Friendship could be established here and it will last forever even after Hajj. ■



Malam Kabiru Yusuf Kano, Hajj Mabrur Coordinator (right) listening to Dr. Tambuwal while answering questions

than 50 years in operation while NAHCON is just ten years old, but one day incrementally, we will get there.

Let me tell what our pilgrims were saying about their accommodations closeness to Haram: one of them was saying "I don't even prepare to go to the Mosque until when Azan is called for prayer, then I will perform abolition and go and get Salat. Another lady was quoted telling her relation that our accommodation is closer to the Haram much more closely than our house to the Mosque in Nigeria.

Another pilgrim from Nigeria was saying he never

Look even people from other nations were surprised that Nigerians are accommodated in Markaziya area because one of those pilgrims from the foreign countries was quoted saying "So, Nigerians are accommodated in Markaziya, well, next year we too will try to be there."

That's why Pakistan is coming there today and Sudan too is there. So, the challenge is always there. Last year, the challenges were less because Iranian did not perform Hajj, but this year Iran came, therefore next year there will be more challenges since the figure of Iran was restored and I believe there would be

NAHCON Begins Preparation for 2018 Hajj

By Sani Tukur and Tunde Akanbi

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, (NAHCON), has commenced preparations for the 2018 Hajj. "We already have a team in Madinah to start negotiations and kick-start planning our operations for 2018 Hajj."

The chairman of the commission, Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, revealed this while addressing members of the national media team and spokespersons of State Pilgrims' Welfare Agencies at a dinner organized for them by the Commission at NAHCON's office in Makkah.

According to him, the committee comprised representatives from the Nigerian mission in Saudi Arabia, representative of Forum of State Chairmen and secretaries from the six geo-political zones, comprising Lagos, Adamawa, Kaduna, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Enugu and Rivers State.

He stated that the committee's terms of reference would include to plan for the organisation of accommodation in Madinah, to consolidate on the feat achieved during the 2017 Hajj and to review and negotiate the price of the accommodation downward if possible.

Barrister Mukhtar said that the decision to form the committee was to effectively plan ahead to secure the pilgrims' accommodation in the Markaziyah area of Madinah.

According to him, NAHCON's accommodation is being challenged by some other countries such as Pakistan, Iranian and Indonesian missions who wanted to acquire and displace Nigeria from exclusive and highbrow neighborhood which is just a short distance from the Madinah Haram Mosque.



Members of the NAHCON's Committee on 2018 Hajj Accommodations holding negotiations with one of the Service Providers, Sheikh Talhat Elyas in Madina

He also said the team may discuss downward payments for services, considering the early engagements saying that the commission will work with states to get "befitting houses that are close to the Haram for our pilgrims as Nigerian pilgrims are currently housed in various hotels acquired by state Muslim Pilgrims' Welfare Boards and agencies across Makkah. It is our hope that we can accommodate many states in one building for the 2018 Hajj," he said.

Turning to media relation, the chairman said efforts will be made in 2018 to bridge what he called the existing gap between members of the national media team and those from the states. "We will network media services such that all information coming from the states will be shared by those in the national media team and vice versa in order to avoid duplication of stories."

While giving example of a report saying a Nigerian pilgrim had been sentenced to three months in prison

for picking a purse at the Haram and refusing to handover to the owner, he stated that the reporter who filed the story just spoke with a local government chairman who gave him wrong information and he went to press.

"The truth is the pilgrim in question has not been sentenced, the authorities here are investigating the issue and our lawyers are closely following the matter," he said. He urged members of the media team to "always monitor the progress made but verify facts and figures from the commission before going to press."

In his response, the chairman of the 2017 Hajj national media team, Malam Ubale Musa, thanked NAHCON for giving journalists the chance to perform Hajj and serve Nigeria and Nigerian pilgrims. "We are happy with what we have seen and as far as we are concerned NAHCON has done very well," he said.

He however praised the Commission for its foresight in forming the media team to cover the 2017 Hajj



Abdullahi Musa Suleja of NTA first from right and Dankama of FRCN Kaduna listening to NAHCON Chairman during the occasion

exercise, saying the measure has accorded reporters the opportunity to have firsthand information on many aspects of the exercise, hitherto unknown to them.

Malam Ubale Musa, however, called on NAHCON to ensure that synergy exists between it and state

welfare boards and agencies in terms of information management, advising NAHCON boss not to shy away from calling on any member of the media team for any assignment in future as the need arises. ■

Feeding in Makkah, Madinah and Masha'er, is Pilgrim's Right -Makarfi

By Kabiru Yusuf Kano

The Chairman/CEO of NAHCON, Barr Abdullahi Muktar Muhammad, inaugurated a 25-Member National Feeding Committee (NFC), on 27th July 2017 under the Chairmanship of Alhaji Ibrahim Adebayo, the Commissioner in Charge of Policy, Personnel Management and Finance (PPMF) with a view of monitoring and supervising the feeding of Nigerian pilgrims at Madinah, Makkah and Masha'er during the 2017 Hajj operations.

Immediately after inaugurating the committee which was later divided into three; batch one and three were dispatched to Madinah under the leadership of Abdullateef Onimago and Shehu Makarfi as Coordinator, to coordinate

and manage the feeding exercise in Madinah. The other batch departed to Makkah under the leadership of the Committee Secretary Barr Farah Said.

Among its objectives were to ensure appropriate quantity, quality and

distribution of meals to the Pilgrims, appropriate documentation of the meals served for the purposes of reconciliation, to ensure sanitary, hygienic preparation and delivery of wholesome meals to the Pilgrims and facilitate uniform and coordinated feeding system for Nigeria pilgrims.

Others were to ensure the Pilgrim get value for his/her money in the feeding exercise, appraise performance and supervise Caterers in the feeding exercise, document Successes, challenges and recommendations leading to the achievement of the above listed objectives of feeding exercise.

Hajj Mabrur team met Alhaji Shehu Markarfi being the Coordinator of one of the three sub committees and sought to know how their sub-committee kick started its assignment beginning with Madinah?

Makarfi: Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim. Let me start by saying, sequel to our arrival to Madinah on the 10th August 2017, we meet with the Madinah Coordinator who doubled as the Secretary of the commission, Dr. Bello Tambuwal, discussed and strategized on how to face the assignment.

So, in Madinah there were three (3) Caterers selected for the exercise. They are Andalus Kitchen, Jabir and Hijrah Kitchens, each kitchen is expected to feed 30,000, 35,000 and 10,000 Pilgrims in Madinah respectively. While there were 13 Kitchens selected by states to provide feeding for them at Makkah and Masha'er (Mina and Arafat).

Some States exclusively selected Caterers for Makkah and a separate Caterer for Masha'er, some states selected one Caterer for both while some selected two caterers for their State i.e. dividing the total number of Pilgrims between the two Caterers.

Therefore, without wasting time, our committee quickly designed some monitoring and evaluation tools to appraise the menu, quality, quantity of



Nigerian Consul General in Jeddah, Ambassador Muhammad Sani Yunusa supervising pilgrims' meals while the Chairman, National Feeding Committee, Alhaji Shehu U M Makarfi and other C'tee members look on

food, timely delivery, hygiene of the kitchens, hygiene of the eating area, provisions for special diet needs (HBP, Diabetes etc), provision for desserts (Fruits, Water & juices), the packaging of the food, means of conveyance.

Also a tool was designed to appraise the view of the Pilgrims on their satisfaction or otherwise and another tool for assessing the performance of the kitchens too was designed and administered.

Sir, among the objectives of your assignment was to ensure appropriate quantity, quality of the meals to the Pilgrims as well as sanitary, hygienic preparation and facilitate uniformity and coordinated feeding system for Nigeria pilgrims. How do you go about carrying this laudable assignment?

Makarfi: Yes! In Madinah three caterers were selected for the exercise they are Andalus Kitchen, Jabir and Hijrah Kitchens, each kitchen is expected to feed 30,000, 35,000 and 10,000 Pilgrims in Madina respectively and there were 13

Kitchens selected by states to provide feeding for their pilgrims at Makkah and Masha'er (Mina and Arafat).

Some States exclusively selected Caterers for Makkah and a separate Caterer for Masha'er, some states selected one Caterer for both while some selected two caterers for their pilgrims. That is to say, they divide the total number of Pilgrims between the two caterers.

So, on the 11th of August, 2017 we took a quick action by visiting the pilgrims at their various accommodation hotel during breakfast period [6. 30 am] which some challenges were experienced like late delivery of meal, deficient quantity and quality of meal supplied especially by one of the Caterers, distribution system and lack of co-operation by Pilgrims.

On the 12th of August, 2017 the committee gave the three caterers a surprise visit in their respective kitchens as a result we observed at Jaber catering Kitchen that the environment of the kitchen was not clean and was not hygienically sound for cooking. Refuse disposal system was bad especially behind the kitchen.

The dress code of the staff were fairly good except that there was no nasal cover for cooking staff and some of their finger nails were long. Also we observed that the production capacity of cooking for large volume is available but due to his poor attitude, he underutilized the required production output leading to shortfalls and low capacity.

Similarly, the quantity of food per-pilgrims was low compared to what other Caterers are providing; the storage system was good and had capacity to store large volume of food and there were cold rooms for perishable products and related items.

Moreover, most of the electronic Cabin warmers for preserving and transporting the cooked food were faulty because the door lock systems were bad, cello tapes were used as improvised to hold the doors tight and a major discovery was made that 26 bags of raw rice stored in the warehouse expired and we wasted no time in counting and banning the product from usage. "The caterer accepted and promised not to use them again", he added.

But as for Andalus Kitchen we saw the environment of their kitchen was very clean and hygienically good for cooking, the dressings of the staff were excellent and good orderliness.

There was large production capacity for cooking in the kitchen. In fact, there was optimal utilization of their production capacity because they feed other countries too.

Sir, a part from the environment which you gave pass mark, what about the quality and quantity of the meals?

Makarfi: Yes, the quality of the food was good and the quantity with the fish per-pilgrim was satisfactory. The storage system was good and has the capacity to store large volume and cold room for perishable products. And he claimed to have four Nigerian workers, but we saw only one.

As for Al Hijra catering, they have a clean and hygienic kitchen but their toilet needed proper cleaning daily; their cooking equipment were modern for medium scale production, all the stored products and goods were within the safe period of consumption and the head of the kitchen was a Nigerian with good experience

As you already gave pass mark to some and others needed to catch up in your assessment, what were your achievements and challenges?

Markarfi: Yeh! We can say over 90% of the planned food at Madinah were delivered, 80% at the Masha'er also delivered and 97% in Makkah delivered and Nigerian Pilgrims were able to access food and drinks that their sources were unquestionable in terms of its wholesomeness and hygiene. Secondly, Nigeria has joined the committee of nations that have an organized way of feeding its Pilgrims, hence have reduced means of food related complaints in hospitals like food poisoning and other related

diseases as the risk of contracting food poisoning was reduced to zero level. No evidence from the hospital records showing any complaint of stomach upset and food poisoning among others reported by any Pilgrim.

Another achievement was, Nigerian dishes were introduced to increase the palatability and taste of the food, while efforts are on the pipeline to create a relationship that will facilitate the importation of Nigerian spices officially into the kingdom. This is to improve the intake of the food by the Pilgrims and promote Nigerian food culture to the kingdom.

Wherever you recorded successes, there must be some challenges. So, what were the challenges your committee faced while performing your duties?

Makarfi: Really we can't say there were no challenges, there were. One of them was the inadequate kitchen space: Taking into cognizance the number of pilgrims to be catered for in every field office, the current size of kitchens and its facilities cannot produce the quantity of food required within the hours specified.

The kitchens were used for cooking, storage of both raw and cooked meals and serving points to pilgrims. This resulted to late delivery of most meals at the Masha'er.

Then there was the poor attitude of some state representatives on the feeding exercise. Some state representatives are still of the opinions that the exercise is a NAHCON' affair, so they isolated themselves from the exercise. It was very clear that states that showed interest and concern to the exercise recorded greater success while others didn't, resulting in some wastages of food especially in Madinah.

Also, there were disorderliness of some pilgrims in receiving meals, due to poor presence and coordination of State officials. Typical of Nigeria attitude was displayed in rushing, picking double or triple plates by one

person in addition to lack of standard in the use of different sizes of plates.

This made some Caterers to use smaller size, some medium size while some used a bigger size plates and

lastly, there was a rejection by Pilgrims of some food belonging to Jabir Kitchen at Ilyas 1 & 2 Hotels due to its bad nature.

Finally, if NAHCON seeks your advice, what will be your recommendation in this regard?

Makarfi: Our recommendations will be as this, NAHCON should set up a committee on comparative study and standardization of pilgrims' feeding before 2018 Hajj exercise and there is the need for nomination of standing members of the Committee to sustain the gains and institutional memories of the exercise.

Then, there is the need for early preparation in forming the Committee within Nigeria, including early nomination and orientation of State committees on feeding and sustainable education and awareness program to States/Tour Operators and their pilgrims on the feeding exercise. Many Pilgrims do not know that they have paid for the food.

NAHCON has to tackle the problem of lack of adequate communication between the Caterers and State because most states could not relate with their Caterers earlier because they did not know them or they could not communicate with them as at when due.

There should be a permanent representative from NAHCON committee at each kitchen of the Caterers in Madinah, and State officials at Makkah kitchen and there is the need for enlightenment campaign for the Pilgrims to be aware that it is their right to be fed in Madinah, Makkah and at Masha'er because they have paid for it. ■



Type of food serving Nigerian pilgrims



An example of a meal for a single pilgrim

2018 Hajj/Umrab Visa

SECOND-TIME TO PAY SR 2,000 EXTRA FEE -SAUDI

...even some officials must pay

New amendments have been introduced to visa fees in Saudi Arabia, the country's cabinet of ministers has announced. Most notably, the changes will see all visa fees completely waived off - and fully paid for by the Saudi government - for all first-time pilgrims coming for either Hajj or Umrah.

The newly introduced fee structure includes a single-entry visa that will cost travelers 2,000 Saudi Riyals (\$533), applicable to all visitors for Hajj or Umrah, except first time pilgrims.

The chairman National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Barrister Abdulla Mukhtar Muhammad confirmed the new policy, adding that the policy has been applied in 2017 Hajj operations, "for Hajj, it come very sadden, our expectation is that the policy will be implemented in 2018 Hajj, but along the line they changed the portal for the process of securing visas for the pilgrims".

Barr. Mukhtar who said that he is sure Saudi authority will not reverse its decision on the issue suggested that it only remained for NAHCON and State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards/Agencies have understanding on how to address that without going back to the pilgrim because it is an issue that come unprecedent and unexpected. Come 2018 definitely it will be part of the Hajj fare. So, NAHCON

"I don't see Saudi Authority going back on that because they have made it very clear that anybody going to perform Umrah or Hajj for the first time the visa is free, but if you want to go for the second, third, fourth or as many times as one wishes, he has to pay 2,000 Saudi Riyals."

"It is easy for them to identify whether a pilgrim is new or old timer, because they have all the information in their database. So, immediately they slot your passport automatically it will show and it will deduct the 2,000SR from our account. Virtually all those that have been to Hajj last year, 2,000SR have been deducted", the chairman made it clear.

He said already NAHCON and State Pilgrims' Welfare Boards/Agencies have understanding on how to address that without going back to the pilgrim because it is an issue that come unprecedent and unexpected. Come 2018 definitely it will be part of the Hajj fare. So, NAHCON



NAHCON Chairman/CEO, Barr. Abdulla Mukhtar Muhammad

will announce it that whoever intents to repeat Hajj beside whatever will be the total cost of the Hajj fare, 2,000 mandatory Saudi Riyals must be paid.

According to him, Saudi government has never hidden to anybody that they are moving away from oil economy revenue to non-oil revenue. He further advised that "If we as Muslims are contributing that amount of money to better the facilities being used in performing Hajj, I think we should support the Saudi government towards that direction."

"If you look at the amount of money Saudi is spending in taking care of all the Hajj areas, it is huge. So, I personally don't think there is any wrong in Muslims coming to support them, but if one could find his way, he

could have prayed that Saudi should continue to allow particularly Hajj visa to be free no matter how many times one wishes to go and perform the Hajj."

"Look, there are various circumstances that lead people to go and perform Hajj for the second time. It may be they made mistakes in their last Hajj and they decide to go back and correct the mistakes which even Islam allows. Or one did something that invalidated the Hajj without knowing and when he gets back home, scholars publically guided him, so, he needs to go and repeat his Hajj. Really such kind of persons should be exonerated", he suggested.

The chairmen foresaw that many countries involved would seek for dialogue with Saudi

Authority on the possibility of waiving that 2,000 Riyals. "Maybe Saudi may play the big brother role to say that having heard from all Muslims from different parts of the world appealing, I think the King may decide to use his Royal power to cancel that."

"I think in sha Allah, Allah would raise the Saudi more in the same manner He is blessing them and give them greater capacity to overcome whatever economic challenges they are facing like any part of the world and they will continue to do the needful for the Muslims to perform the Hajj with ease".

"But, if it became inevitably, as Muslims we should proudly contribute with intent that we are contributing towards an everlasting course and everlasting rewards which is believed that will be used to better our facilities for the use of the entire Muslim communities from all over the world. So, if we do this, that we declare that intension and give out that 2,000 Riyals will earn some rewards from that", the chairman stated.

Talking on how the new policy will affect the so called Hajj officials, the chairman who categorized officials into four types, explained that the first are the one recognized by Saudi Authority. This category of officials, are 850 for the entire Nigerian pilgrims. Each State has its own quota; these are the one recognized as officials and the fee is not applicable to them.

Other category, he said is the State own officials as

each State has its own level of officials which is as NAHCON and Saudi are concern are pilgrims. But, within the State level they are called officials because they are given official letters; they are allowed to have official's identification.

Those people are mostly welfares, guides, the preachers, first aid, personnel and staff of the State and accompany the pilgrims. They are not part of the officials recognized by the Saudi authority, but they are only within the category of officials recognized and known by the State. 'If one comes to process their visa, you should process them as ordinary pilgrims and that remain their status if they come to Hajj. Most of the journalists falls under the same category.'

The third category of the officials as mentioned by the chairman, are from the local government. In some predominant Muslim States, you will see that even local government sponsor some one or two persons to assist pilgrims from that particular local government. It is a good idea since there is nothing wrong in doing that because sponsoring people to officiate in assisting pilgrims to discharge their responsibility, there is nothing wrong in that.

These two groups as mentioned by the chairman are not known by Saudi. It is just a local arrangement. He further said NAHCON is thinking of injecting a reform whereby no human resource is wasted and too much of public funds in financing officials not

needful stopped. Definitely, something has to be done because the State with just 1,000 or 2,000 pilgrims, but with 300 or 500 officials, what for?

"We will continue to bring in some reforms that will address that in the same way we addressed that of the medical services. I know it may be a very painful reform because the beneficiaries of the old order may not like it, but in the spirit of managing our resources transparently, we should be able to make that Hajj is not a means or a tool of wasting public funds. No! But it is a means of meeting the best use of public fund where necessary to assist Nigerians to discharge their religious obligation with ease", he concluded. ■

NAHCON to Establish Hajj Training Institute, Saving Scheme by 2018 – Chairman

By Kabiru Yusuf Kano

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), has concluded arrangement to establish Hajj Training Institute and Hajj Savings Scheme before 2018 Hajj operations. The Commission's chairman Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, disclosed this adding that the Investment Scheme will assist intending pilgrims to perform Hajj through installment or part payment.

Other plans to be executed as highlighted by the chairman are formation of a twenty four hour Haram Committee to be headed by him, online

registration of pilgrims, perfecting the e-medical registration and recording, among others.

According to him, institutlising Hajj saving scheme if established, would ensure financial autonomy for the commission as the scheme would be run like micro-finance institution, that the money from such savings will be invested in specific projects and profits shared in line with Islamic principles, adding that under the scheme Muslims will be able to perform Hajj when their savings are reasonable and sufficient.

The chairman said: "The commission by the provision of the Act is looking at the

possibility of rolling out what we call "Hajj Savings and Investment Scheme", which will be like a Micro-finance outfit through which the intending pilgrims will be paying for their Hajj installmentally within a short or long period of time and the money will be invested into the Nigerian economy."

"By the end of the day the pilgrim, who invests will have portion of the profit to augment or balance up his or her Hajj and the commission will also get some benefits. Similarly, the State Pilgrims Welfare Board or any agency that register the pilgrim will also get some benefits."

While urging Nigerians especially Muslims who have intention to perform Hajj, he further said "Our target at the end of the day will be a win-win situation as intending pilgrims will be paying their Hajj without too much stress."

One of the advantages of the scheme, he added is that savings will be commensurate with one's income and it will in turn create employment opportunities in the country and NAHCON would do everything within its mandate to ensure that Hajj, as a religious obligation, is no longer a drain on the government coffers. According to him, the concept of the scheme is largely to encourage inward looking by religious agencies on how best they can effectively manage their affairs without depending totally on government.

"Discussion is under way between Saudi authorities and the commission toward fostering partnership in some strategic areas of human endeavour for mutual benefits and we should not just embark on pilgrimage to spend money but we should also explore the possibility of bringing something of economic value back to the country."

Also speaking on the same subject, the commissioner in charge of Policy, Personnel, Management and Finance (PPMF), Alhaji Yusuf Adebayo Ibrahim explained that the scheme will put sanity into Hajj operations in



The Chairman/CEO, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad explaining the advantages of the scheme

Nigeria and put a permanent end to rush by pilgrims to pay their Hajj fares.

He stated that the introduction of the scheme will not only enhance Hajj

operations in subsequence exercise but will give more comfort to Nigerian pilgrims in Saudi Arabia.

"We want to roll out Hajj Savings Scheme which is going to serve as lasting solution to some of the problems we encounter in the course of our preparations. Money comes in trickles not in bulk and if you don't have bulk money, you cannot plan and say you want to go for Hajj."

"Our target at the end of the day will be a win-win situation as intending pilgrims will be paying their Hajj without too much stress."

"Some will pay their money a week or two to Hajj and they want to fulfill their religious obligations. With this scheme we are bringing on board, you keep saving and you will know when you are going for Hajj. So, this issue of rush will not be there."

"Once you start your savings, you know how much they are collecting, if it is 2018, 2019 or 2020 you know when you are going and plan ahead rather than rush or be looking desperately for money that is not there," Adebayo stated. ■



Alhaji Yusuf Adebayo Ibrahim, Commissioner in charge of Policy, Personnel, Management and Finance (PPMF)

2017 Hajj, A Beautifully Executed Operation –Director, PRSILS

Alhaji Sulaiman Usman is the Makkah coordinator of the 2017 Hajj. Hajj Mabrur team met him and discussed on how he coordinated 2017 Hajj, considering the threats from some quarters that they concluded all arrangements to make the exercise a nightmare. In this interview with **Sa'adatu Albashir, Kazeem Ategbeshe and Hassan Umar Faruq**, he explained in details how NAHCON changed the bad thinking of these undesirable elements into executing a beautiful Hajj operation. Excerpts:



Director Planning, Research, Statistic, Information and Library Services (PRSILS) consulting NAHCON chairman on how to make things work perfectly

H/M: How can you describe your coordination in Makkah for the 2017 Hajj?

Sulaiman: In one word, Alhamdulillah. I am grateful to Allah for bringing us this far. The bottom line of anybody going for Hajj is to stand at the plain of Arafat, in the part of the day and a bit of the night. That has been accomplished. Over twenty thousand pilgrims were airlifted to Nigeria and the rest are on transit back

home. Therefore, the main aim of coming for the Hajj has been accomplished. If I'm to rate it, I'll give it about seventy to eighty percent successful.

Indeed I'll say that this is a Hajj that threatened to be a Hajj managers' nightmare, but turned out to be beautifully executed, proving the dexterity of the top management of handling crisis and making ends meet despite all odds. Once again Alhamdulillah.

H/M: You said there were some challenges, can you explain further on that?

Sulaiman: There is this maxim that says Hajj is like a silken gun, which, the time you fold the right side is exactly when the left side is loosening. In other words, it is a continuum of challenges, never ending. The proof of your mantle as a manager is to be able to handle these expected and unexpected challenges. Indeed, building upon the precept that human

arrangements are never ever perfect, man himself is not perfect. After all that's why we are said to be human.

Let me look at it this way. Take all the major indices of the Hajj. The fare has been collected. No pilgrim has been left at home for lack of visa, BTA or an aircraft to convey them to the holy Land. Indeed you could say about the same thing even to tour operators companies. The Commission had to come in to arrange special flights to evacuate their pilgrims at the last minute.

Another example is, at the onset, the exchange rate for the dollar ballooned due to economic circumstances the world over. We collected the dollar at N197 last year, it came to be N305 this year. By the calculation of the Commission, indeed, even by the actions of the Commission, the quantum of the dollar to be charged each pilgrim was lowered down, relatively, yet, the total amount to be paid in naira ballooned from about N1.1 million to N1.5 or even N1.6 million simply because of the exchange rate.



Part of the State Pilgrims' officials putting head together to ensure hitch-free 2017Hajj

This is an obstacle. You can't blame the Commission, you can't blame the States, you can't even blame the government. Government has to be realistic. Government cannot play the ostrich and pretend that there's no problem and give the dollar at N20 per dollar. Then will Nigeria be there tomorrow, if the economy is treated anyhow and if the monetary policy is treated haphazardly?

There was then this response that efforts would be made in response to public outcry to bring down the exchange rate. A few paid. Many people waited for that so that they would pay. They had paid about a million naira and even more, so they felt if the exchange rate was going to be reduced, there would be no need to pay anything more or even get money back. For that, we were also waiting, on and on and on

until it was getting too late. So the Commission reacted to this.

They sent officers including yours truly to various zones in the country to confer with the ulama in the areas to appeal to the members of the public that are willing and capable of paying for the Hajj to pay so that if at the end of the day, there is a reduction, then they will get there difference. After all the Commission is already known for making refunds that reach the pilgrims even when they least expect it.

The fare calculation template was publicized widely, everybody had to see. It was at the national assembly, Radio, TV. Circulation was very wide. That was another challenge and because of this delay, against the backdrop of the early arrangements made, accommodations, feeding and so many other things in

Saudi Arabia, had almost been concluded, which was started immediately after the 2016 Hajj, contracts had been entered into, memorandum of understanding, Hajj payments made.

And suddenly, the figure was hovering around 20 to 30 thousand dollars. So what are you going to do, tell the people in Saudi that nobody was coming and I don't need your house again even though I've given you my commitment. Or are you going to allow people, now that you have mobilized them through the ulama to come and pay and you continue to collect the money so that you make good their contractual agreement here (Saudi) but then you have a Hobson's choice, you have the devils alternative as they say.

You continue to collect the Hajj fare then your planning is zeroed. It's flattened

because you are supposed to stop at a reasonable time, enough for the states to finish their operational preparation and documentation, enough to airlift the pilgrims, enough to do everything on time. So, obviously, difficult as it is, this painful choice was made to allow people to continue to pay almost at the last week of the airlift.

NAHCON closes the evacuation of pilgrims on the first phase some 3 to 4 days before the closure of Jeddah Airport. But this year, we had to seek for special clearance to bring in pilgrims some 2, 3 days after the official closure of Jeddah Airport and even the Madinah Airport, allowing Nigerian pilgrims to proceed to Madinah days after the route had been closed. Pilgrims had to go to first before Madinah afterwards. Another challenge, in the last 3 years,

pilgrims go first to Madinah before Makkah.

Another challenge is the shortage of tent accommodation at Mina. You did not communicate with the organizing body the number of pilgrims you're bringing and how many to each state, in good enough time, to enable them collect the spaces from the ministry of Hajj. So they work on the figure they had initially which is 40 thousand before it was increased to over 60 thousand. Don't forget other countries are also negotiating for space. Resultantly some pilgrims did not have space in the camp. This also affected logistics for food delivery and preparations. If all these have been concluded on time, these would not have arisen.

H/M: What message do you have for Hajj managers on how best to handle related challenges because the job seems to be a hard one.

Sulaiman: It's a hard one really, no doubt about it. To me, a Hajj manager should follow that maxim of planning for the best but preparing for the worst, at all times. But however, never ever lose hope in Allah's guidance and support at all times because who you're dealing with are His guests. He'll always be there for you if you do it sincerely. That does not mean you'll not continue to plan against any eventuality.

H/M: What would be your advice for the next batch of pilgrims, come 2018,

knowing what you know. Because pilgrims have high expectations without necessarily knowing what intricacies that go on at the background.

Sulaiman: Hajj is a call from Allah SWT. Whoever Allah has called should just answer the call, if you have the means. By means, it means your level of readiness or preparedness. Your physical readiness, mental readiness, economic readiness, among others, so as long as these things are fulfilled by you and the fare is announced, just go ahead and pay. How much is Al Jannah worth? So as long as you have it, just pay...GO, worry about the change afterwards. Just go for Hajj, that's my advice.

Taking about managing expectation, I'll say that people should monitor the exchange rate, each year. The time is gone when government would give you concessionary or special exchange rate. It's simply not realistic. Now, should our economy go back to the Gowon era, when the then government said our problem is not money but how to spend it? Then you can expect but as long as the issue remains how to get the little that would enable us do the necessary, people should continue to be ready to pay for their Hajj. After all, Hajj in Islam is not a Sadaqa thing.

H/M: The Chairman of NAHCON had said in his speech during the post-Arafat briefing that the Commission would work out modalities to be the

coordinator of pilgrims' accommodation in Makkah. What is the situation to that regard?

Sulaiman: I would have loved you ask the chairman, but now that you asked me.....I'll respond to the best of my knowledge, and my limited understanding of the subject. You see, when people started shouting over this issue, like I told my colleagues here, I laughed, yet I understood. I understood because it's a new thing coming. Not everybody accepts change at the very onset, it takes time.

The obvious reaction of most people is to resist, not even look at it in depth, at the justification or the moral or even the necessity for these changes. After all, one needs to look at the fact that, in life, nothing is constant but change itself. So how would you expect to remain static. Because states have been organizing accommodations for their pilgrims in Makkah for many years, why would you expect that they would continue like that.

Let me give you a scenario. Suppose, which is a very likely supposition, the Saudi government decides to build a Hajj village, some one hundred, two hundred kilometers away from Makkah, and says that's where it's going to accommodate the pilgrims, because Makkah is hilly, Makkah is choked up, there's no flat land that can accommodate everybody.

And then they provide shuttle bus service and or

railway tube that would bring you to and fro, 30 or 40 minutes maximum. Take you to Madinah. If they are able to do that and they move everybody there, then they look for a chunk and say, 'Nigeria, two hundred thousand', because proportionately we are allocated two hundred thousand because our population has grown, they give us a space, paid for electronically to the Saudi government for this accommodation.

Are you trying to tell me that each state should individually negotiate for only their people. The Saudis will give it to one body. If they give to Indonesia that brings two hundred and fifty thousand and above, deal with one body, why should they deal with thirty four or thirty eight entities from Nigeria, where the total figure is less than a hundred thousand. That is one scenario.

But where do you expect to get a better bargain when you have collective bargaining advantage of number or when you have divisive individual bargaining arrangements. Where do you get more advantage? Definitely in collective bargain. So is it because of the interest of some people, the interest particularly being 'that's what they are used to', so you would not move onto this obvious practical things! It cannot continue to happen. Change must happen and the most important thing is look at it and adapt, or die as they say. ■



NAHCON Felicitates With Saudi On National Day

The Chairman/CEO of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), Barr Abdullahi Muhammad Mukhtar ,MON ,FCIA has convey his warmest congratulation to King Salman, the Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman and the people of Saudi Arabia on the occasion of the Kingdom 87th National Day anniversary.

Barr. Abdullahi, said the Kingdom has come a long way since the building and unification into a nation as shown in its role as the defender of the two Holy Mosques and a towering nation in world affairs. He particularly praised the Kingdom for her friendly disposition as good host of over five million guests of Allah who visited it during Umrah and Hajj.

"The Kingdom has made tremendous expansion and improvement of its infrastructural facilities which has eased the performance of religious rites in the Kingdom and enabled many teaming pilgrims to achieve Hajj Mabrur."

He therefore expressed the confidence and hope that the brotherly relationship between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia on one hand and that between the Commission and Ministry of Hajj on the other would continue to be sustained and strengthened for the betterment of the people of both countries. "While we look forward to strengthening the existing cordial relationship between us, we want to wish the Kingdom the best of goodwill especially in achieving its Vision 2030 goal", the chairman said.

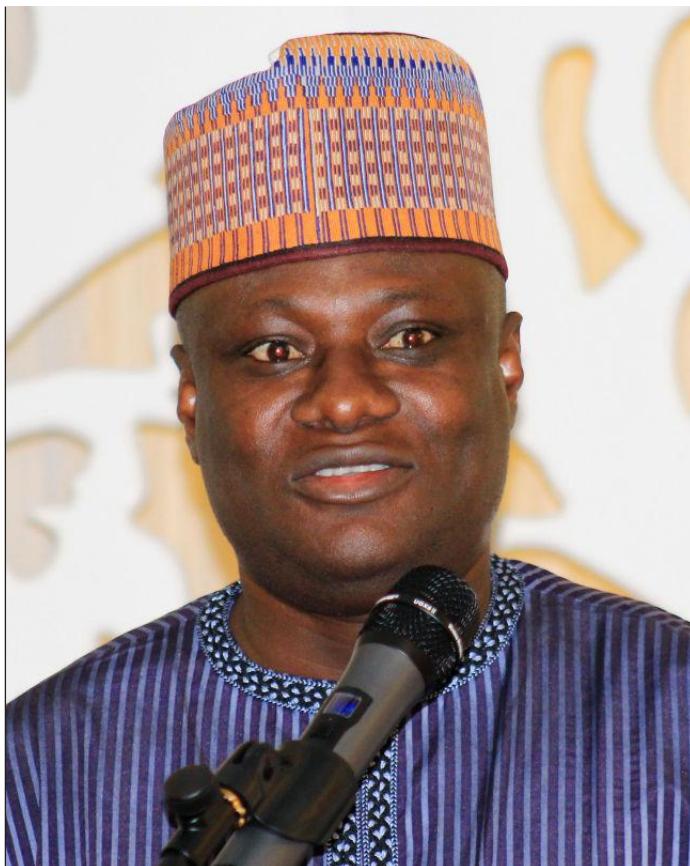
HAJJ 2017:

National Medical Team Goes Fully Electronic

By Dr. Ibrahim Abubakar Kana, MBBS, FMCOPh, PGDPA,
Cert. Health Financing/PBF

The 2017 Hajj started with plenty of excitement, for two reasons: firstly, consolidation of our dream National Medical Team and secondly, the deployment of Electronic Health Medical System (EHMR) into the medical operation. We felt our dream of having real time data is here with us, not to talk of the availability of computers in all the clinics, albeit with full internet connection. There was also the feeling of indirectly making all the medical personnel ICT compliant.

Following the success recorded in the first ever National Medical Team in 2016, the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) set up a committee chaired by Dr. Ibrahim Abubakar Kana to: review performance of the 2016 medical operation, discuss and address all observed challenges/concerns/misconception that emanated from the 2016 operation, and agree on modalities for the joint conduct of the 2017 Hajj and beyond. Membership was drawn from some States of the country as well as the Tour Operators and the Armed Forces. Far



Dr. Ibrahim Abubakar Kana, Head Medical Team 2017 Hajj

reaching decisions were taken which included: That for 2017 and beyond, Nigeria will present ONE SINGLE NATIONAL MEDICAL TEAM whose membership will be contributed jointly by NAHCON and States; and that Electronic Medical Records should be deployed in all the clinics.

The Electronic Health Medical Record

Prior to implementing the EHMR, the NMT used paper as medical record system that manually stored summary of daily patients' consultations. The previous system made it cumbersome to check if patients have accessed

services in any of the NMT clinics. Collecting data for analysis was also tedious. The new system, EHMR, was commissioned to ensure that the operations at the clinics run as smoothly as possible, and also accurate and timely data can be collected. Activating the EHMR involved multi-disciplinary approach to prepare the new system, ensure privacy and security compliance, design practice workflows, train the care team and manage adoption process.

Implementation of the EHMR

The EHMR system is a web application; therefore the first stage of implementation after the tool was developed was to host it on a web server. The design decision to make the system a web application was taken because of the advantages of such a system, which are:

*The application is platform independent and can be used from any device that has a web browser and access to the internet. This means that there is no need to install the software on any computer, which cuts down cost and reduces setup time.

*The software developer can access the system to do maintenance and troubleshooting remotely at any time. Any changes he makes to the system can be seen instantly by the users.

On-The-Job Mentoring and Mentorship

The Chairman/CEO of NAHCON who has always supported the EHMR graciously approved the procurement of computers which were deployed to all the clinics: six All-in-One computers were distributed to each clinic and one to the Central Medical Store.

Although training was conducted in Nigeria on the use of the EHMR, we identified that there was still need to continue on the job training for the users. On-the-Job mentoring was conducted to staff at various stations during start-up of each clinic. Also, Head of Clinic or identified staff was assigned in each clinic to:

- *Ensure that the staff knows how to use the system, encourage and motivate them to do so;

- *Create and assign roles to new users;

- *Provide assistance and troubleshooting on technical issues not related to the backend codes of the EHMR;

- *Act as a liaison between the staff at the clinic and the person in charge of the EHMR;

- *Alert/Send reports in case of system failures and also ensure that the problem is addressed within the shortest time possible.

Challenges of the EHMR

Although the implementation of the EHMR was successful, there were few challenges that needed to be

addressed. Most of these challenges were effectively handled. The challenges are listed in the table below including the priority level to show how significantly

they affected operations and the solutions that were provided. The recommendation for future operations are provided for each challenge identified.

Challenge	Priority Level	Solution	Recommendation
IT competency among a considerable number of staff was very low which made them incapable and sometimes unwilling to learn or use the system	High		IT competence should be considered as one of the criteria for the appointment of members of the medical team in the future/more rigorous refresher training before the Hajj period.
Lack of internet connection at some clinics due to poor network reception in the area	Medium	A local server was created for that particular clinic and they were granted local access to the EHMR.	Proper planning to identify the best network for each area and make prior arrangements for internet access before operation begins.
Internet access was inconsistent immediately after Arafat due to the high demand on the service providers	High	A backup of paper-forms were prepared in case of down time of the EHMR and these were used to continue operations at the clinics. When the network became more stable, the information from the forms were inputted into the system later.	Use of local server in the KSA to connect all clinics can address this. However, it has additional cost considering its 3-months Operations.
Some modules were not working well. This was expected because the tool has not undergone any rigorous testing in a real world environment	low	The system developer was on standby in Nigeria to address any such issues and he was able to fix them within 24 hours of after notification.	

Give Your Utmost Best; Hajj Is A Divine Duty ...Chairman Charges Ad-hoc Staff

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has charged its Saudi based ad-hoc staff to diligently carry out their assigned responsibilities adding that “be very conscious of your job and be responsive in terms of passing any information that will make Hajj easy for the Pilgrims and general staff”.

The Chairman of the Commission, Barrister Abdullah Mukhtar Muhammad who gave the advice while addressing the ad-hoc staff at the NAHCON headquarters in Makkah further said they

should always be responsive to the yearnings of pilgrims whenever situations demanded.

He said it was a divine duty on any permanent or ad-hoc staff or official of NAHCON to give his utmost best to simplify and make things easily possible to the Nigerian pilgrims.

According to him, the role and importance of the Saudi-based ad-hoc staff would not be overemphasized as they give assistance not only to pilgrims but also to some core staff and officials of the Commission who accompanied pilgrims



Dr. Bello Muhammad Tambuwal, Secretary to the Commission being examined by medical doctors in one of the clinics in Madinah



One of the doctors examining a member of the 2017 Hajj Media Team member, Alhaji Sufyan

Health Awareness Committee

Another innovation in the 2017 medical operation was the Constitution of the **Health Awareness Committee (HAC)**. The committee was mandated to create awareness in pilgrims accommodation, NMT clinics, Mina, and Arafat.

The awareness was on basic health practices including health education, environmental sanitation, personal hygiene and preventive measures for common illnesses associated with Hajj. We hope that in subsequent Hajj operations, the Committee would work in close liaison with the Ulama in order to

increase the potency of its work.

Mina/Arafat

Staying in the tent city of Mina and plains of Arafat constitute a special part of Hajj with its inherent health challenges. This is due to high population density, close contact among

pilgrims, limited areas of convenience and increased physical activities from the long walks and standing. These are compounded by the high environmental temperature causing exhaustion and ultimately, heat stroke which is common during this short period.



Chairman/CEO assigned himself Head of Haram Committee for 2018 Hajj after hearing issues that needs special attention.



Discussion session: provision of translators at all hospital was decided.

from Nigeria to the Holy Land, due to language barrier.

Barrister Abdullah Mukhtar called on them to assist with relevant, useful and practicable information and suggestions that would improve service delivery, to ensure that pilgrims got value for their money.

He enjoyed them to pray for good health and Allah's guidance for the President, all leaders and the wisdom to lead Nigeria to the Promised Land of progress, stability, peace and development.

In their contributions, the ad-hoc staffs that including drivers, cleaners and messengers, comprising males and females suggested that NAHCON should in subsequent Hajj operations consider the possibility of engaging the services of more interpreters, particularly at various hospitals that attend to Nigerian pilgrims for proper understanding of the patients health challenges and accurate diagnosis of ailments and proper medication.

After reviewing all issues discussed and the need for special attention to them, the Chairman volunteered to personally head the Haram Committee to be constituted for next year's Hajj. ■



A Patient being attended to in one of the clinics in Makkah

With the above in mind and institutionalized from last year, NAHCON and the leadership of NMT deployed members and enough drugs to State tents to cater for the health needs of our pilgrims. Twenty five makeshift clinics were operated within State tents. The team also deployed six ambulances stocked with emergency drugs and consumables strategically located and centrally coordinated with emergency numbers provided. The operation was a huge success.

Multinational Survey

The Saudi Ministry of Health invited Nigeria, Indonesia, Pakistan and other countries to participate in two Multinational Surveys namely: *Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) Survey of Hajj pilgrims concerning heat-related illnesses* and *Exploring the experiences of pilgrims and the enablers and barriers to Health Promotion*. The surveys were organized by the Global Center for Mass Gathering Medicine, Riyadh. The Center is a WHO Collaborating

Center for mass gathering. The studies have been reviewed and approved by the King Fahd Medical City Internal Review Board.

The aim of the surveys is to improve mass gathering health and management during Hajj, develop appropriate ways of doing health promotion during Hajj and providing the baseline for further studies regarding health promotion during Hajj. The survey is particularly important in view of the fact that Hajj in the next 10 years will be in hot condition. Dr. Jibrin Suleiman is coordinating the survey.

Conclusion

As the 2017 Hajj is concluded, I have the pleasure to say that the Saudi Arabia WHO Centre for Mass Gathering is organising the 3rd International Conference on Mass Gatherings Medicine titled: *'From Mass Gatherings Medicine To Mass Gathering Health: Evolving Perceptions And*

Practices'. Yours sincerely is the only head of country Medical Mission invited to deliver a lecture amongst world leading experts on Mass Gathering Medicine. His title of presentation is **Non Communicable Disease during Hajj: The Nigeria experience**. This is an achievement and recognition to NAHCON and the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health. The conference is scheduled for 23rd-25th October, 2017 at the King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

At the end of the operations, about 60,000 consultations were documented, over 300 admitted in all the clinics, over 200 referred and three deliveries with one miscarriage. Sadly, 30 of our pilgrims died due to various illnesses. To Allah we come and to Him we shall all return. Alhamdulillah! 450 Medical personnel participated in the 2017 Hajj operations. ■

DESPITE DELAY IN REGISTRATION: NAHCON Airlift all Pilgrims within the Schedule Time – Modibo

Alhaji Abdullahi Modibbo Saleh is the man in charge of operations at the National Hajj Commission. In this interview with Salisu Sani Idris, Muskilu Mojeed and Mikhail AbdulAziz, Modibbo bares his mind on how the operations were carried out successfully despite the delay in registration at the early stage. Excerpts:

Alhaji Abdullahi Modibbo Saleh, Sir you are the commissioner in charge of operations, we observed that both the out bound and the return airlift operations have ended on a resounding success this year, despite the fact that there were delay in registration. Can you share with us an overview of the whole operations?

Moddibo: Alhamdu lillahi. Federal government through NAHCON selected three airliners to airlift Nigerian pilgrims to Saudi Arabia for the 2017 Hajj. Alhamdu lillahi, the entire three approved airlines have done very well. I really commended them. To coordinate and airlift over 80 thousand pilgrims with each individual character successfully is something. In addition, they were able to airlift all the pilgrims within the schedule time.

So, what was the secret behind this success?

Moddibo: The secret of the success was the team work, so we worked as a team, we carried the state alone, we carry the Tour Operators alone and a lot of things that you will image how we overcome those challenges. If not for the spirit of team work it could have been maybe something else.

But we learnt that there were some problems with the food arrangements and the space provided in Mina, what caused all these?

Moddibo: The quality of the food served to pilgrims was very good even though there are pockets of challenges in terms of the timing of delivery of some of the meals and in some cases the quantity but the quality generally from what I have seen and tasted was ok. Therefore, we ensured that Nigerian pilgrims got the best service in all the services rendered to them and some things were very obvious.

Certainly in Mina for some states there were challenges of space particularly in Kano and Sokoto where the space allocated to them was quite inadequate so people were not properly accommodated and on that we will definitely discuss with the Mu'assasah who are responsible for that and we will discuss the possibility of getting refund for any service that was not properly rendered.

Many pilgrims accused Tour Operators in this regard, did NAHCON realize that and if that was true what measure will NAHCON take against these tour operators?

Moddibo: We have observed right from day one that there were some challenges with the Tour Operators. It was more glaring but with our intervention, the Mu'assasah were able to get alternate space in the Turkish area where they moved almost about 6,000 people to



Alhaji Abdullahi Modibo Saleh,
NAHCON Commissioner in Charge of Operations



Pilgrims boarding plane for Saudi Arabia



Nigerian pilgrims at King AbdulAziz International Airport, Jeddah on their way back home

decongest the tour operators' side and of course despite that effort the facilities needed in that place were not put into place.

It took almost one day to get feeding and bedding issues sorted out but all these are lessons that we have to take home to avoid late registration of pilgrims so that we should be able to finish registration in good time, to establish the number of pilgrims that will come for the Hajj and send it to the relevant service providers to enable them plan well ahead of time.

I think that is the challenge they had with the Tour operators but we will

investigate more to get more of the reasons or what led to the inadequate space for the Tour operators so that we will avoid the reoccurrence of that in future and where we establish that a Tour Operator is at fault we will sanction him and where a Tour Operator is not at fault the service provider is at fault then we will go for refund to ensure that our people get value for their money.

Can you shed more lights with regards to the pilgrims' behavior in terms of compliance with Taraddudiya and the medical challenges experienced during Arafat?

Moddibo: By and large the Mina and Arafat outing was a huge success because the movement from Makkah to Mina, from Mina to Arafat and from Arafat to Muzdalifah was accident free and there was no case of any abnormal behaviour on the part of the pilgrims which we really thank Allah for that.

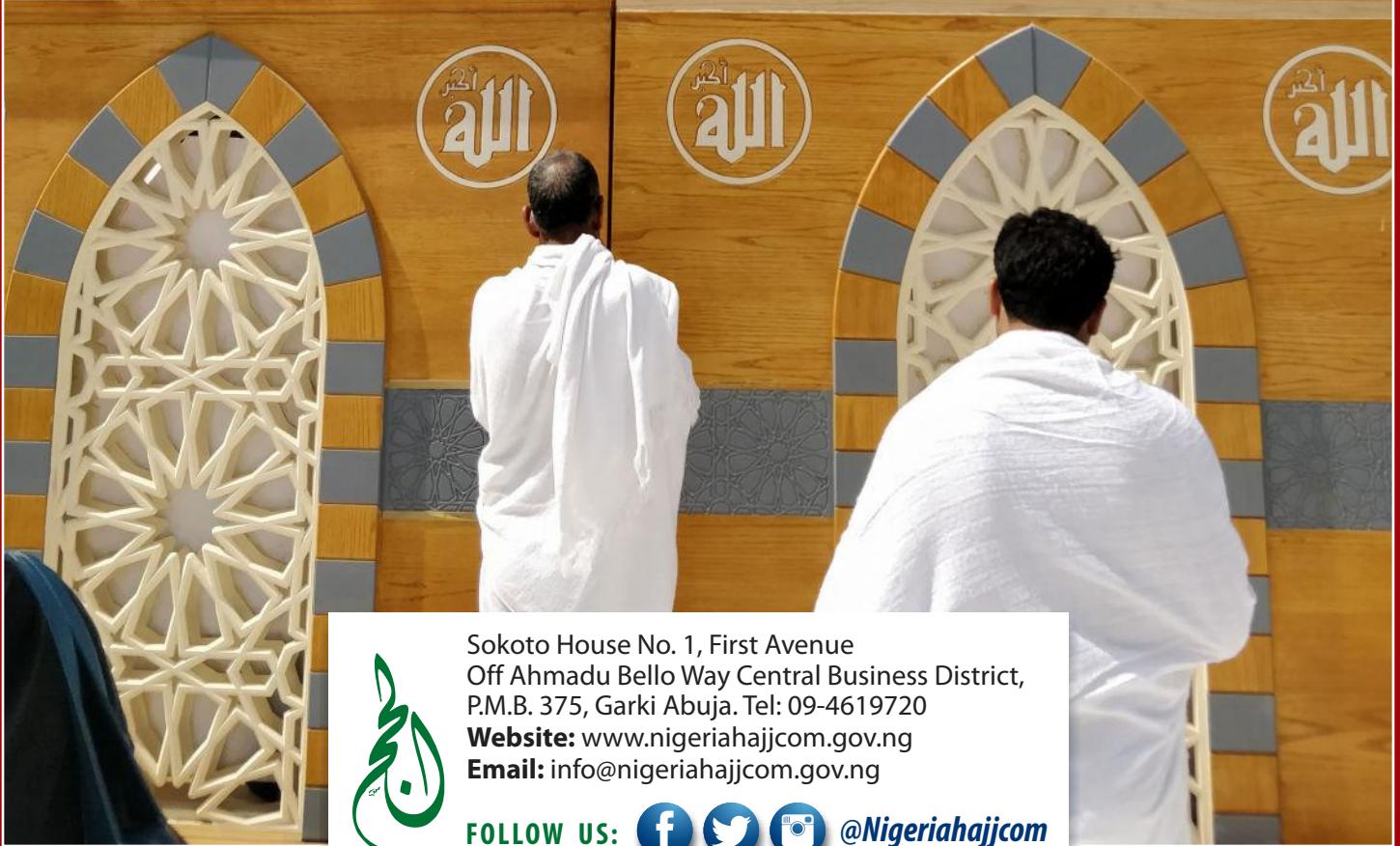
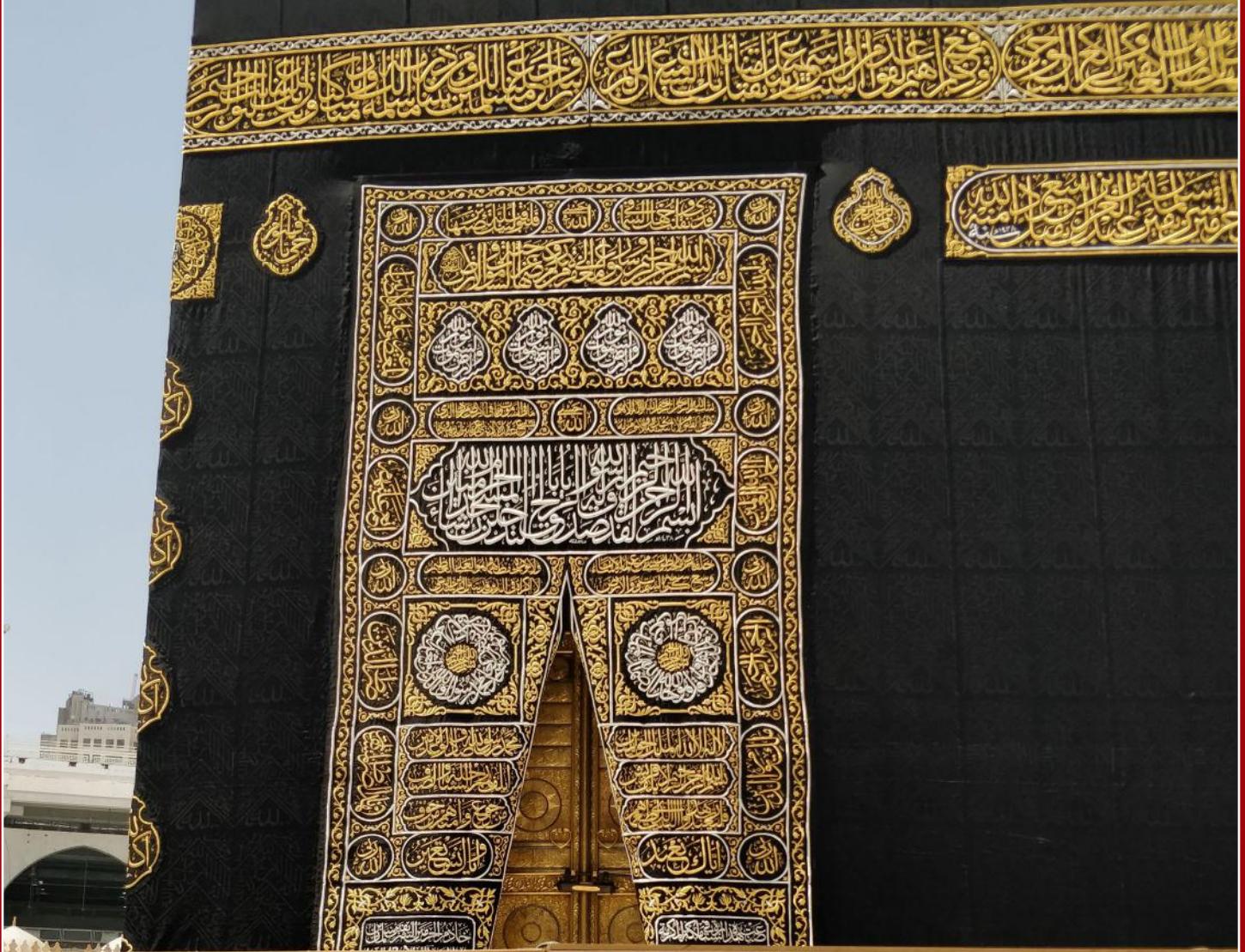
Really, there were some pockets of medical challenges which we experienced, but it was handled promptly by our medical team and to Allah be the glory. In some departure or some vacation centres there were some delays but the delay was attributed to human traffic on the route of the Taraddudiya itself.

So, for safety of pilgrims the movements of the buses were delayed so as to give room for the human traffic to ease out. I really commended Saudi government because they have been on this initiative and at any point they envisage traffic in the buses they will communicate to us that your buses are taking so and so route and that it will be delay for 30 minutes due to human traffic. So, on our own part we will inform our emergency help line to communicate to the state officials and I think it helps a lot.

The most important thing is that most of the state behaves orderly and full of appreciation and commendation even by the Saudi Authority till the end of Hajj operation. The commission ensured that all the stakeholders were fully involved in Hajj operation and most of our officials did not even perform the Hajj rites.

They sacrificed their Hajj for the wellbeing of pilgrims. So if we were to combine performing Hajj and officiating hajj probably we could not have attended the level of success we recorded but we are not there yet. We experienced some challenges which were normal and our prayers are to overcome those challenges as they come. ■





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