



FROM LEFT: NAHCON Chairman/CEO Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, Nigeria's Minister of state, Foreign Affairs, Hon. Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Hajj & Umrah Dr. Muhammad Saleh Benten while signing the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 2019 Hajj.

Nigeria Signs MoU on 2019 Hajj

Nigeria's Minister of state, Foreign Affairs, Hon. Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim, today signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 2019 Hajj on behalf of the country. The agreement signing ceremony was conducted in the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, Makkah Saudi Arabia led by Dr. Muhammad Saleh bin Taher Benten, the Saudi Arabian Minister of Hajj and Umrah. In the agreement signed, the Nigerian Hajj quota for 2019 remains 95, 000 as the previous year.

During the ceremony, Dr. Taher Benten commended the Nigerian Hajj Commission for the successful management of the 2018 Hajj operations. He appreciated the general conduct of Nigerian pilgrims during the exercise and assured of the Kingdom's readiness to assist the Nigerian government and people in making the exercise even easier and more comfortable.

In her response, Hon. Khadija Ibrahim extended warm felicitations to the Kingdom on behalf of Nigerian government for the honorable reception of Nigerian pilgrims. She applauded all persons involved in Hajj planning for the smoothness of the exercise while observing that the task is not an easy one, though they make it seem so due to the efforts they commit during preparations.

Before the signing ceremony, a technical session chaired by Deputy Minister of Hajj, Saudi Arabia, Dr. Hussain Ibn Naser Alshariff, was held to discuss bilateral issues on Hajj and

Umrah with the view of forging a way forward. Nigerian delegation to the session was led by NAHCON Chairman and among his entourage were Nigeria's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Rtd Justice Isa Dodo; Nigeria's Consul General to Saudi Arabia, Ambassador Muhammad Sani Yunusa; Dr. Yusuf Adebayo Ibrahim, NAHCON's Commissioner for Policy, Personnel Management and Finance; Alhaji Modibbo Saleh; NAHCON's Commissioner for Operations, Alhaji Muhammad Galadima, Consul's Hajj Desk Officer; Alhaji Saidi Tiggi, Desk Officer on Hajj Matters, Nigeria's Embassy in Riyadh; and Dr Aliyu Tanko, NAHCON's Head of Inspection and Licensing.

The Saudi Arabian delegation at the meeting comprise, representative of the Minister of Interior, Majeed Al'Rakan Al'Ajami; Representative of immigration department, Yusuf Muhammad An'namri; Deputy Minister in Charge of Madinah, Muhammad Ibn AbdulRahman Albijawi; Deputy Minister in Charge of Makkah Emirate, Fahad Munir Alkhuthami; representative from Madinah Emirate, Turki Ibn Barkai Abu Raba'a and Manager in Charge of Hajj and Umrah at the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA), Mazeen Ibn Ahmad Bazuhair.

Among the issues raised by the Commission for consideration is a request for waiver of 2,000 Saudi Riyals charged on pilgrims participating in Hajj for the repeated time in less

New Milestones from NAHCON's First Pre Hajj Meetings

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has successfully retained its previous year's hotel accommodation in Markaziyya District of Madinah. This attainment was possible due to the early expression of interest by the Commission, because accommodation in this area are limited and in high demand, thus reserved on the basis of first to come, first to be served.

In a meeting with Adillah Establishment in Madinah, which is the regulatory umbrella of a conglomerate of service providers in Madinah, its Chairman made few observations after acknowledging NAHCON's continuous cooperation in making its task easy. He reaffirmed it on record that NAHCON staff on ground in Madinah did exceptionally well in their assignments, to the delight of the Adillah.

While, praying for the continued success of NAHCON management, Vice Chairman of the Adillah, Uztaz Usam Diyadi, hopes the two parties will continue to enjoy this cordial working relationship for long.

Meanwhile, one of the complaints made by the Adillah Establishment is that some Licensed Tour Operators do not give them adequate time notification for release of pilgrims' passports to enable the operators to transport their pilgrims to the

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than five years and for visa issuance be made less cumbersome. It was also requested that Nigeria be included in the newly introduced arrangement tagged "Makkah Road Project"; where pilgrims will undergo all necessary Immigration clearance at the airports in their home countries before proceeding to the Holy land, such that, upon arrival at Saudi airports, they will simply pick their bags and proceed without further scrutiny. Another request by the Commission was for GACA to regard NAHCON as a guarantor for air carriers so that allocation of airlift slots and flight schedules can be fast tracked for the convenience of Nigerian pilgrims.

In his response, the Deputy Minister assured Nigerian delegation that the process of visa issuance will only get better as the Kingdom is keen on seeing to that. However, to curtail abuse of visa, both

parties agreed to work together to address the menace of immigration violators who overstay their permit in the Kingdom. In another development, The Saudi delegation emphasized on the rule banning exportation of kolanuts into the Kingdom while calling on the Nigerian delegates to intensify enlightenment over the matter.

The host ministry treated the Nigerian delegation to a lunch feast alongside contingents from Malaysia and Iraq.

The MoU signing meeting is an annual event whereby countries are invited separately to commit to agreements that will shape their participation in the yearly pilgrimage. Nigeria is honored to be among the early nations invited for the prestigious ceremony.

NAHCON and Licensed Tour Operators Begin Preparations for 2019 Hajj



National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) and Licensed Tour Companies (LTCs) held a meeting to review the 2018 Hajj operations. The meeting identified some of the challenges encountered during the year's exercise and how they were managed. In addition, the parties collectively laid out plans in preparation for a successful 2019 Hajj.

Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, the NAHCON Chairman, observed with dismay that some private Tour Operators, perhaps inadvertently, allow themselves to be used in unethical activities during Hajj and Umrah. He therefore made a strong call to members to be more vigilant and to tighten the loopholes that allowed these unwholesome activities to take place. He reiterated the need to cooperate with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia government in curtailing the embarrassing situation. Therefore every operator needs to study and abide by Saudi Arabian Hajj and Umrah guidelines.

Conversely, the NAHCON CEO charged LTCs to remain sincerely committed to their clients by rendering to them standard services according to terms and conditions collectively agreed upon. In the same vein, the LTCs were advised to report to NAHCON any infringement on delivery of services by

service providers. The Commission lamented that both LTCs and pilgrims lack knowledge of the right channels to lodge complaints for prompt action to be taken.

On remittance of funds for Hajj registration, it was agreed that doing this belatedly is detrimental to welfare of pilgrims since it takes a minimum of three weeks for NAHCON to transfer funds to the relevant authorities in Saudi Arabia. Hence any delay leads to disorderly arrangements that affect the pilgrims directly.

Additionally, to a request for the LTCs to fill their prequalification forms correctly, they were also demanded to accompany the forms with appropriate documents to forestall any unnecessary verifications between NAHCON and Saudi Arabian licensing authorities that also leads to avoidable delays.

In conclusion, the meeting commended Saudi government and its missions in Nigeria for the successful handling of 2018 Hajj exercise. It was generally resolved that all members will partner with the Saudi missions in Nigeria to address the menace of Hajj or Umrah over-stayers. Considering the fact that some LTCs were involved in unethical activities, it was also agreed that there is a need to sanitize the private tour operator's industry,



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New Milestones from NAHCON's First Pre Hajj Meetings

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next destination. He reflected that all Hajj/Umrah transactions are turning electronic and a minimum of 24 hours is the regulated time for release of passport. He frowned at the manner in which some pilgrims would be assembled, loitering outside their hotels while waiting for arrival of their passports, which is unacceptable to the Kingdom. He said the Establishment takes directives from Ministry of Hajj and Umrah which in turn takes its orders from King Salman Ibn AbdulAzeez, the Custodian of the two holy mosques. He therefore appealed to the Commission to address this issue.

On his part, NAHCON Chief Executive Officer, commended the performance of Adillah. He harped on security challenges faced by some pilgrims. And the need to regulate companies involved in fixing golden teeth so that those willing to patronize their services would be guided in making choices.

MEETING WITH UNITED AGENTS IN JEDDAH:

Purpose of the invitation, according to Chairman of the United Agents (UA), Mr. Faruq Yahaya Buhari, is to review last year's Hajj exercise with the purpose of finding solutions to them. Another purpose of the meeting is to introduce new procedures as ordered by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. And for both parties to work out modalities towards adjusting to the new reforms conveniently. The U.A Chairman commended the understanding between NAHCON staff and his men, an alignment that is making coordination of pilgrims' movement easy. He opined that Nigerian Hajj mission "... moved from the most difficult to deal with in the last ten years to become the easiest mission to work with today."

The Chairman of NAHCON, Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, acknowledged his appreciation and that of the people of Nigeria over the warm reception accorded to Nigerian pilgrims. He thereafter made few demands.

Firstly, he re-echoed a request that was tabled by the Commission in the previous year for Nigerians legally resident in the Kingdom to be employed by the U.A as part of the workforce serving Nigerian pilgrims. The advantage in doing this is ease of communication between the pilgrims and the Arab-speaking agents, in addition is the extra funds these Nigerians will make under this plan. These legal residents have an identifiable umbrella through which they can be located.

Mr. Faruq Buhari responded that the U. A has no objection to this request as long as the Commission can vouch for the people to be employed. However, he warned that anyone that will be involved must have the temperament to be patient with pilgrims and to also be cautious of tardiness. This is because a few minutes delay in the timetable could lead to disruption of flight schedules of other

countries. Hence, NAHCON must take note of this.

In another vein, the U.A Chairman elaborated on the earlier reported 'Makkah Road Project' designed to hasten immigration screening and to reduce congestion experienced in Saudi airports. He explained that Saudi immigration personnel shall temporarily relocate to departure centers of countries signatory to this agreement to conduct the pre arrival screening. All passengers successfully screened are expected to travel together in a uniformed attire, the same aircraft, arrive the same time and be moved in the same buses to the same accommodation facility. In view of this, the United Agents sought for maximum support to make this new method as smooth and quick as possible. Similarly, their luggage should be of same color code for easy identification so that they will be ferried right up to their lodging reservations without mix-



ups. And where two states must travel in the same plane, they must be in different colors for their separate dispatching.

Also introduced for 2019 Hajj are train services to Madinah, especially for Licensed Tour Operators' pilgrims who arrive the Kingdom late, at a time when buses are scarce. For this, any such pilgrim who arrives the Kingdom by 25th /26th of Dhul Qa'ada has the option of traveling to Madinah by electric rail and be received at the arrival station by agents who will take them to their Hotel reservations. Any operator interested in this arrangement is urged to indicate interest accordingly.

VERIFICATION EXERCISE FOR PILGRIMS' ACCOMMODATION AND CATERING SERVICES IN MAKKAH AND MADINAH

Among other activities carried out by NAHCON in the first Pre-Hajj visit is Verification of Pilgrims' Accommodation and Catering Services in Makkah and Madinah. Following advertisements placed in Saudi Arabian newspapers inviting interested and qualified organizations to apply for inclusion as service

providers, a total of 128 applications were received. Those returned include 75 for Makkah catering and 38 for accommodation. In Madinah, 14 are for catering while six were returned for accommodation. It would be recalled that introduction of verification and screening exercise helped NAHCON in eliminating unqualified companies from providing services to Nigerian pilgrims and promoted a culture of competition from the best hands. In addition, it ensured that pilgrims get value for money from all service providers. Some members from state pilgrims welfare boards formed part of the verification exercise team.

MEETING WITH STATE PILGRIMS' BOARDS EXECUTIVES:

State Chief Executives were briefed on general outcomes of the various meetings held in preparation for 2019 Hajj exercise. In particular, the Commission drew their attention to newly introduced regulations correlating to time consciousness. Two of such are early booking of airlift slots and advance passenger information, which, General Authority for Civil Aviation (GACA), requests latest by 30th of March 2019. Therefore, to avoid delays and mix-ups, need for early completion of pilgrims' registration was reemphasized, notwithstanding any number of pilgrims that might have registered by then.

NAHCON TEAM IN A MEETING WITH GACA OFFICIALS

The Commission also reminded state Chief Executives of some of the losses incurred during the previous airlift exercise where some flights took off with many empty seats because pilgrims were not fully prepared. This in turn affected the return journeys.

The Establishment of Mutawwifs for pilgrims from African non-Arab Countries also made a presentation during the said meeting. The presentation was to address the challenges faced in 2018 as a result of inaccurate input of pilgrims accommodation data. Be informed that the new e-track registration requires full names of pilgrims and their lodging information in securing their visas. A mixup in entering these details on the e-portal caused numerous problems that resulted in delays in pilgrims being allocated accommodation on arrival in Makkah.

NAHCON Chairman concluded his address at the meeting with a call on all participants to be mindful of the trust between all Hajj handlers and pilgrims. They were also admonished not to compromise quality while inspecting possible accommodation and other facility choices.

Present at the meeting with state Chief Executives of pilgrims' welfare boards was Senator Monsurat Sonmonu and some members of the Senate and House Committees on Foreign Affairs.

NAHCON Reads Riot Acts to Licensed Tour Operators/ States over Violation of Saudi Immigration Laws

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, met with members of the Association of Hajj and Umrah Operators of Nigeria (AHOUN) and some State Pilgrims Welfare Boards' Executives on issues relating to breach of Saudi immigration laws. The meeting, which was held at the NAHCON head office, was geared towards addressing the current concern and finding a lasting solution to the matter.

Information reached the Commission to the effect that some states and some Licensed Tour Operators had pilgrims that overstayed their visas in the Kingdom, thereby infringing on the Saudi Arabian laws. The Chairman therefore drew the attention of participants to the security risk as well as the bad image the embarrassing situation brings upon the country. He urged all those present to educate their pilgrims on the proper mode of applying for extension of stay visa in Saudi Arabia if needs be.

Barr. Abdullahi Muhammad warned that any state under which this contravention persists risks having its license downgraded or withdrawal of a Tour Operator's license; in addition to possible prosecution of defaulters in accordance with the laws of the land.

To tackle this menace, the following measures are

considered:

- Further enlightenment of pilgrims on consequences of overstaying in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Downgrading of license of any state found to be involved in this activity.
- Revoking of Tour Operator's license if found negligent.
- Introduction of guarantor forms for pilgrims under Licensed Tour Operators in 2019 Hajj registration.

The Chairman reiterated NAHCON's resolve never to tolerate any agency that will violate Saudi Arabia's regulations, as it is the Commission's responsibility to safeguard terms and conditions of engagement contained in the Memorandum of Understanding to which NAHCON is a signatory.

Responding on behalf of Licensed Tour Operators, the immediate past President of AHOUN, Alhaji Abdulfatah Abdulmojeed, and the Acting President of the association, Alhaji Salisu Butu, appreciated the manner in which NAHCON carried everyone along in its activities and how it sought for contributions from all members. They urged all AHOUN members to do the needful in addressing issues raised during the gathering.

2019 Hajj: NAHCON reserves 5-star hotel for pilgrims in Madinah

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) has retained the Andalus Suites, a five star hotel accommodation in Markaziyya District of Madinah used by 2018 hajj pilgrims.

The agreement to this was reached in a meeting between NAHCON and Adillah Establishment in Madinah, the regulatory umbrella of a conglomerate of service providers in Madinah during hajj. Vice Chairman of Adillah, Uztaz Usam Diyadi who led the Adhila team commended NAHCON staff that operates on the ground in Madina during 2018 Hajj. He expressed the hope that the two parties will continue to enjoy this cordial working relationship.

Meanwhile, one of the complaints made by the Adillah Establishment is that some Licensed Tour Operators do not give them adequate time notification for release of pilgrims' passports to enable the operators to transport their pilgrims to the next destination. He said that all Hajj/Umrah transactions are now being done via the internet and a minimum of 24 hours is required as the regulated time

for release of passport. He frowned at the manner in which some pilgrims would be assembled, loitering outside their hotels while waiting for arrival of their passports, which is unacceptable to the Kingdom. He said the Establishment takes directives from Ministry of Hajj and Umrah which in turn takes its orders from King Salman Ibn AbdulAzeez, the Custodian of the two holy mosques.

He therefore appealed to the Commission to address this issue. On his part, NAHCON Chief Executive Officer commended the performance of Adillah. He harped on security challenges faced by some pilgrims. And the need to regulate companies involved in fixing golden teeth so that those willing to patronize their services would be guided in making choices.





Architect Mrs Peju of Federal Ministry of Works explaining the progress of the structural designing of Lagos Hajj Camp to NAHCON Chairman/CEO, Esq Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, procurement Director Sule Habu Ningi..

Aliero's C'ttee report unfair— NAHCON

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, NAHCON, has refuted all the allegations made by the Senate Aliero led ad hoc committee on pilgrims accommodations, feeding, logistics, off-shore and on-shore.

The commission in its reply to the Senate on the allegation of fraud and misappropriation, maintained that the report of the ad hoc committee was unfair, urging the Senate not to allow the subjective view of a few individuals to derail the upper chamber from its onerous responsibility. It will be recalled that Senator Adamu Aliero, chairman of the ad hoc committee presented a report before the senate during recently accusing NAHCON of "over bloated" charges. Aliero said his committee discovered that the commission's procurement processes were in not in line with the public procurement act.

According to NAHCON in its letter to the Senate said; "The 34-page report presented on the floor of the Senate on Thursday 18th October, 2018, in our opinion, was not fair to NAHCON as none of its explanations featured or were considered in the report. The commission also maintained that the report contains several 'findings' that are based on wrong information and wrong conclusions. "That NAHCON does not have procurement planning committee, plan or officers; That NAHCON issues dud cheques; that it rented houses in Makkah that are 5 to 10 km from the Haram; That certain countries pulled out from Saudi policy on traffic sharing; That NAHCON gives preferences to a company owned by a Nigerian; that NAHCON doubled transportation charge in Saudi Arabia from SR180 to SR360 and others too numerous to cite here are incorrect or misinformed assertions that can't be proved or substantiated." On issues

of procurement, NAHCON said it had duly observed all the provisions of the public Procurement Act in all aspects related to the appropriated or proposed appropriated funds. It stated that at every point in time there was a resident procurement officer deployed by the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) to the commission who headed the Commission's procurement department, maintaining that all the Commission's procurement processes followed due processes and the records are available for examination by all and sundry. "In light of the foregoing, I wish to appeal to the leadership of the Nigerian Senate to consider the submission above while deliberating on the Ad hoc Committees Report. I also wish to draw the attention of this distinguished institution that some of the matters deliberated upon by the Ad hoc Committee are subjects of litigation before two FCT courts with reference FCT/HC/CV/3018/17 and CR/96/18.

A third suit is before another court in Kano with no K/332/2017. Similarly, one of matters raised has a subsisting judgment from General Court of Makkah no 392776 delivered on 5th Muharram, 1439 AH.. "The Senate has established a reputation of being the vanguard of justice for Nigerians. It has upheld the highest standards of legislative practice and procedures. It must not allow the subjective view of a few to derail it from this onerous responsibility. "The Commission still maintains that the increase in the 2017 Hajj fare was as a result of the rise in the exchange rate from NGN197 /1USD in 2016 to NGN305/1USD in 2017. All we appeal for is fairness to all concerned as the report in its totality is unfair to the Commission, State Pilgrims Welfare Boards/Commissions/Agencies.



Members of the Senate Adhoc Committee on committee on pilgrims accommodations, feeding, logistics, off-shore and on-shore.

NAHCON BEGINS WORK ON KANO, KADUNA AND LAGOS HAJJ CAMPS

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) said the upgrading work on the Hajj Transit Camp at Mando, Kaduna, had commenced. Malam Yunusa Abdullahi, Public Relations Officer, Kaduna State Muslim Pilgrims Board, made the disclosure in a statement in Kaduna. Abdullahi said the contract for the renovation of mosque, building of toilets and places of ablution for males and females were also at advanced stages of completion.

He said "Inspecting the project early this week, the Chairman of NAHCON, Barr. Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, said the projects were being executed from development levy of N5,000 charged each pilgrim since 2012." Abdullahi said that the ongoing project at Mando was the first phase of upgrading the Hajj camp with modern facilities.

He disclosed that the process of awarding the second phase would include the building of a five-star hotel and a clinic at the camp. The PRO gave assurance that similar projects would be awarded in other pilgrims' shelters across the country. He said Muhammad urged the contractor to execute the project according to the contractual agreement and speed up its completion.

PHOTORAMA

First Pre-Hajj Visit in Pictures



Pre-Mou Signing meeting at the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah



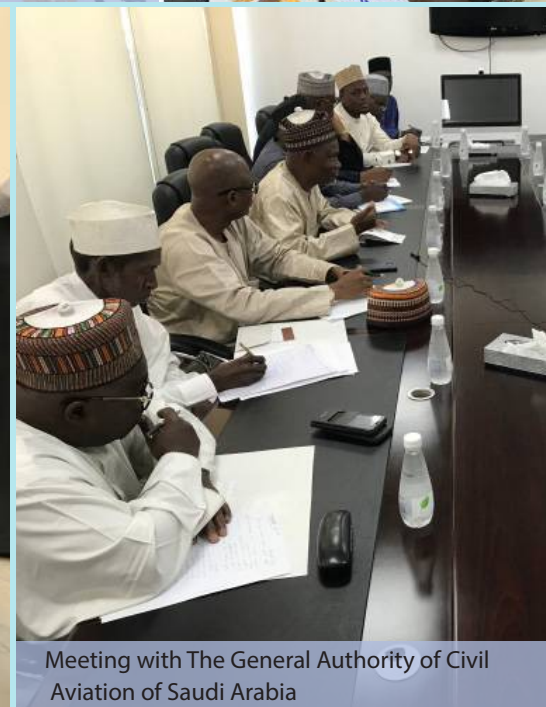
MoU signing between NAHCON and General Car Syndicate on transportation for the 2019 Hajj



Meeting with General Car Syndicate



NAHCON Management at the Adillah Madinah



Meeting with The General Authority of Civil Aviation of Saudi Arabia

PHOTORAMA



Nigeria's Minister of state, Foreign Affairs, Hon. Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim and Saudi Arabia's Minister of Hajj & Umrah Dr. Muhammad Saleh Benten



E-Track Meeting at Ministry of Hajj & Umrah Makkah



Meeting with States Pilgrims Welfare Boards, Agencies & Commissions at the NAHCON Makkah Headquarters Ummul Judd



United Agents Office Meeting with NAHCON in Jeddah



Hajj Saving Scheme, In-House training of Staff at the Commission's Head Office



DD Admin Dr. M. Ibrahim Sodangi FCIA meeting with Islamic Development Bank (IDB) representative.



DD Admin Dr. M. Ibrahim Sodangi FCIA (middle) alongside Abbas Adewale and Mustapha Alhaji Ado receivers of SGF merit award



Members of staff during the SGF merit award at the Musa Yar'adua center Abuja

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), on Thursday 18th October 2018, held a post Hajj joint meeting with Chief Executives of State Muslim Pilgrims' Welfare Boards/Agencies (SPWBs). The meeting was to review salient challenges from 2018 Hajj with a view to finding solutions to them. At the end of the deliberations, some major decisions were taken.

Late registration of pilgrims was identified as a major setback in the success of Hajj operations, hence, it was resolved that all state welfare boards should commence online registration of intending pilgrims. The meeting agreed to tentatively peg the Hajj fare at 1.5 million Naira (one million, five hundred thousand Naira) pending final calculations. If the fare is deposited by installments, it was agreed that all payment should be concluded by February 2019. Meanwhile, intending pilgrims are to note that Hajj registration is to be done online, cost of which is five-hundred Naira only (500 Naira only), and these charges are already included in the total Hajj fare. No extra amount is to be charged for purchase of Hajj form because Hajj form is obsolete.

It was also resolved that as part of measures to safeguard timely planning, state welfare boards should propose a tentative date for airlift of their pilgrims and submit such resolutions to NAHCON within 30 days from date of this meeting.

State chief executives who spoke on accommodation challenges commended the Madinah pilgrims' accommodation and appealed to NAHCON to sustain the feat. It was therefore accepted that standard of accommodation in Madinah shall not be lowered. Momentarily, for the Makkah accommodation, a committee comprising two representatives from each geo-political zone was set-up to review possibility of securing large buildings as unified accommodation for Nigerian pilgrims.

On the issue of catering services, it was suggested that each state should negotiate feeding of pilgrims directly with the caterers and bypass any intermediary in the name of agents. They were also counseled to look at the possibility of exporting/supplying the caterers with Nigerian variety of foodstuff...

NAHCON URGES SAUDI TO WAIVE 2,000 SR HAJJ/UMRAH REPEATER FEE

Nigeria has formally made a request to Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah to waive the 2,000 SR Hajj/Umrah Repeaters fee for Nigeria pilgrims who intends to repeat hajj/umrah.

The request was made by Nigeria's delegation leads by Nigeria's Minister of state, Foreign Affairs, Hon. Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim, during the signing of Hajj 2019 agreement with Saudi Ministry of Hajj

A statement signed by the Fatima Sanda Usara, NAHCON's head of public affairs division said that "Among the issues raised for consideration when the commission meet with Saudi Hajj ministry is a request for waiver of 2,000 Saudi Riyals charged on pilgrims participating in Hajj for the repeated time in less than five years and for visa issuance be made less cumbersome.

"It was also requested that Nigeria be included in the newly introduced arrangement tagged "Makkah Road Project"; where pilgrims will undergo all necessary immigration clearance at the airports in their home countries before proceeding to the holy land, such that, upon arrival at Saudi airports, they will simply pick their bags and proceed without further scrutiny. Another request by the Commission was for GACA to regard NAHCON as a guarantor for air carriers so that allocation of airlift slots and flight schedules can be fast tracked for the convenience of Nigerian pilgrims.

In his response, the Deputy Minister assured Nigerian delegation that the process of visa issuance will only get better as the Kingdom is keen on seeing to that. However, to curtail abuse of visa, both parties agreed to work together to address the menace of immigration violators who overstay their permit in the Kingdom."

Independent Hajj Reporters had earlier made similar request as published by some national dailies. Part of the statement reads "A civil society organization, Independent Hajj Reporters, IHR, has called on President Muhammadu Buhari to appeal to Saudi Arabia to waive the SR2,000 tax imposed on visa for Umrah and Hajj pilgrims on Nigeria pilgrims to enable more Nigerian Muslim perform Hajj/Umrah with ease.

"The statement said that "there has been uneasiness on the part of Tour Operators and intending hajj/Umrah Pilgrims over the new rule introduced by the Saudi Arabian Hajj Authority which obligates any person wishing to do 'Umrah a second time in consecutive hijri years, to pay the second time a sum of 2000 Saudi Riyals (approximately N200,000:00) before being granted visa. This is a fee collected by the Saudi authorities and has nothing to do with the travel agents.

The policy is that if you perform 'Umrah in consecutive Hijri years then you will have to pay a charge on the second time you apply for a visa. So that means if you did 'Umrah at the beginning of a Hijri year, you would have to actually wait virtually two full years before you can do 'Umrah again without a new fee".



During a meeting with State Pilgrims welfare board chairmen, Secretaries and Directors



NAHCON STAFF AWARDED BY THE OFFICE OF THE SGF FOR OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE
National Hajj Commission of Nigeria staff have been awarded by the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation for their outstanding performance, Abbas Adewale (senior category) and Mustapha AlhajiAdo (Junior Category) received the awards respectively.

Members of Staff flagging the awardees



Management Meeting in Pictures



NAHCON bids farewell to two retired staff: Alhaji Sulaiman Usman, who retired as Director Planning, Research, Statistics, Information & Library Services (PRSILS) and Dr Ashiru Sani Daura, Director of ICT, today NAHCON Conference Hall



R.O Abdulsalam Head Monitoring and Evaluation with members of Staff during Wedding Fatiha of Muhammad Sanda Birma Held at Annur Mosque



Muhammad Maikudi of Accounts Department married Wasila Abdu Mashi in Katsina



Cross Section of NAHCON board members during a meeting in Abuja

2019 HAJJ: NAHCON DIRECTS STATE PILGRIMS' BOARDS TO COMMENCE ONLINE REGISTRATION

The National Hajj Commission of Nigeria has directed state pilgrims welfare boards, agencies and Commissions to commence online registration for 2019 intending pilgrims in the country.

The Head, Public Affairs Division of NAHCON, Fatima Usara, made this known in a statement on Saturday in Abuja.

Usara stated that NAHCON gave the directive during a post-Hajj joint meeting with chief executives of the boards and agencies on October 18, 2018.

She noted that the meeting reviewed salient challenges faced during the 2018 Hajj, with a view to finding solutions to them.

She explained that late registration of pilgrims was identified as a major setback in the success of the 2018 Hajj operations, hence it was resolved that all state welfare boards should commence online registration of intending pilgrims.

Usara noted that the meeting agreed to tentatively peg the 2019 Hajj fare at N1.5 million, pending final calculation of

the total fare.

She added: "It was agreed that installment payments should be concluded by February 2019.

"Intending pilgrims are to note that Hajj registration is to be done online, cost of which is N500, and these charges are already included in the total fare.

"No extra amount is to be charged for purchase of Hajj form because the form is obsolete."

Usara said the meeting also resolved that as part of measures to safeguard timely planning, state welfare boards should propose tentative dates for transportation of their pilgrims and submit such resolutions to NAHCON within 30 days from date of the meeting.

She noted that some State chief Executives who spoke on accommodation challenges had commended the Madinah pilgrims' accommodation and appealed to NAHCON to sustain the feat.

On the issue of catering services, Usara stated that it was agreed that each

state should negotiate feeding of pilgrims directly with the caterers and bypass any intermediary in the name of agents.

She said state pilgrims boards were also counseled to look at the possibility of exporting and supplying the caterers with Nigerian variety of foodstuff to be used in preparing Nigerian pilgrims' meals. She explained that "doing this will form part of revenue generation avenue for the states. "However, such export must be done strictly under Saudi Arabian guidelines and permit."

She said all state boards would join hands with NAHCON and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in ending cases of pilgrims absconding during Hajj and Umrah, which nevertheless had been on the decline in recent years.

Usara assured that NAHCON would ensure that all Umrah and Hajj applicants returned within the stipulated time on their visas.



The Chairman NAHCON (center) flanked by the MD FAAN in a group Photograph

NAHCON VISITS FAAN

The Chairman, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, (NAHCON) on 15th November 2018 paid a courtesy visit to the management of Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria, FAAN, at Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja.

In his opening remarks, the NAHCON Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad, praised FAAN's achievements in its operations all over the country. While calling for further collaboration between the two agencies in pilgrims' enlightenment, particularly on areas of protocol and airport formalities, the Chairman described this as important to especially first time international travelers who eventually form majority of pilgrims.

NAHCON CEO also appealed to FAAN management to improve facilities at pilgrims' departure centers so that pilgrims will receive the same treatment accorded to other international passengers. He specifically mentioned adequate security

and provision of clean convenience areas. He acclaimed facilities at the Abuja airport describing them as standard, however this cannot be said for other centers.

Barrister Muhammad suggested that creating a temporary area for medical emergency services or sick bays at the airports will be beneficial for quick response in case of medical crises. NAHCON assured the FAAN management of its support towards realizing this revealing that so far, NAHCON had purchased wheel chairs for use in the airports during Hajj operations. He also disclosed that plans are under way for the commission to procure ambulances to be deployed during the period.

Reacting, the Managing Director of FAAN, Engr Sale Dunama, acknowledged the long-standing relationship between FAAN and Hajj management. He recalled when Hajj organization used to be chaotic until FAAN began to engage directly with NAHCON that the relationship became perfected. He appreciated the evolvement

of Hajj experience through the years and assured of FAAN's support towards attaining greater efficiency for the comfort of pilgrims at the airports. He promised to address all issues raised, assuring that it has been FAAN's tradition to dispatch a small team that do monitor process flow during times of operation, and this time around, they are starting preparations early.

FAAN members present at the session include, U.S.A Sadiq, Director of Security; Sani Mahmud, Regional Manager, Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport; Akewoshola Adisa, FAAN Chief of Security, Abuja Airport; Henrietta Yakubu V., General Manager, Corporate Affairs who moderated at the event and Mahmud Zakari, Chief of Staff to MD, FAAN. Whereas among NAHCON's entourage were Commissioner Operations, Alhaji Modibbo Sale, Acting Secretary to the Commission, Alhaji Ahmed Maigari, Acting Head of Aviation, Ahmed M. Shira, among others.



The Chairman NAHCON and NAHCON Management staff in a group photo with Defence HQ's representative

DEFENSE HEADQUARTERS PAYS NAHCON A COURTESY CALL

On Wednesday, 5th December 2018, the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria received a delegation from the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS), General Abayomi Gabriel Olonisakin, who paid a courtesy visit to the Commission's headquarters.

The mission was to commend NAHCON for the successes recorded during the year's Hajj, precisely for the cooperation the armed forces contingents always received from the organization. The delegation called for widening of areas of cooperation between NAHCON and the armed forces as well as seeking for additional slots to accommodate their numerous applicants. Among representatives of the CDS were Brigadier General S. G. Mustapha; who is the

Director, Islamic Affairs, (Army) who was also leader of Hajj Team. The other two were Group Captain L.A. Lawal, Director of Islamic Affairs (NAF) and Lieutenant Commander M. I. Wakawa, the Imam of Defense headquarters.

Expressing gratitude for the visit, NAHCON Chairman Barrister Abdullahi Mukhtar Muhammad commended the men of Nigerian armed forces for their orderly comportment during Hajj exercise. He also praised their efforts in curtailing insecurity in the country and concurred on the need to broaden areas of partnership with the forces. The Chairman assured of NAHCON's readiness to offer assistance to the division whenever and wherever it is needed.

HAJJ 2019: SAUDI ARABIA ANNOUNCES NEW MEASURES FOR Hajj

Saudi Arabian authorities have put measures in place to regulate the movement around the Holy Ka'aba (tawaf) during the 2019 pilgrimage (Hajj).

The measure, according to the authorities, is to help in crowd control similar to the recent innovation in symbolic stoning of the devil (jamarat).

Hitherto, pilgrims were expected to proceed to the jamarat for the stoning ritual from Musdalifa.

However, following the Mina stampede of 2015 in which thousands of pilgrims lost their lives, the authorities introduced a turn by turn arrangements for pilgrims whereby each country is given a time to carry out their stoning ritual.

Also, pilgrims normally proceed to the Holy Mosque to carry out their tawaf as one of the important rituals during hajj after the stoning ritual.

From 2019, the authorities say they will introduce a timetable for countries to carry out their tawaf.

This was revealed Thursday in Makkah by the establishment in charge of African Non-Arabic Speaking Countries, popularly known as muassassa at a meeting with officials of National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON).

Also, according to the spokesperson of (NAHCON), Fatima Usara, authorities of the kingdom also revealed tough penalties await people who overstay in Makkah and their collaborators. Some Nigerian pilgrims often overstay their Hajj or umrah visas.

To this end, NAHCON told the Saudi officials that it has "laid out plans on this issue and was supported by the establishment pledging to offer the commission all necessary backing in doing so.

"Both sides agreed to introduce collaborative measures that will bring visa/immigration violation to an end," she said.

Mrs Usara, in an email to PREMIUM TIMES, said representatives of Nigeria's Licensed Tour Operators, who's pilgrims were most culpable in the act, also pledged that their organisation will not tolerate any member trying to soil their name and business.

NAHCON also took advantage of the meeting to demand that Nigerians pilgrims tent at Mashair should have air conditioners instead of desert coolers.

The manager in charge of Jamrat operations under Mu'assasa, Abdallah Lashkuri, assured that the request will be given consideration.

"Relevant papers on terms and conditions were signed legally binding the two sides in a contractual agreement," she said.

HIGH TRANSPORTATION COST

Also, the President of General Car Syndicates, the agency in charge of pilgrims' transportation throughout Hajj season, Abdulrahman bin Mayouf AlHarbi, responded to allegations that Nigerian pilgrims are being overcharged on transport fares compared to those from other countries.

"He expressed surprise on how this could be possible seeing that the charges are officially determined, government controlled as well as a matter of policy with payment made within financial regulations and transparently," Mrs Usara said.

On current contract for pilgrims' conveyance during 2019 Hajj, the official disclosed that because government had rolled out a comprehensive social safety transport system, henceforth, it mandated all transport companies to provide new buses not more than 10 years old.

"This policy therefore jerked up the cost of transportation, which had remained the same in the past 30 years. "NAHCON's Chairman, Barrister Abdullah Mukhtar Muhammad made a plea for this increase to be shelved aside this year due to general economic downturn all over the world.

"Besides, he argued, procurement of these vehicles is a long-term investment whose proceeds should be reaped gradually.

"However, his counterpart in the GCS declared that it is a decision solely under the purview of Ministry of hajj and umrah," the NAHCON spokesperson said.

She also said the GCS President expressed satisfaction with the commission, proclaiming that NAHCON has been one of the best in the last three years and has remained a role model to other countries.

"Agreements for basic transport services were signed," she said.

HAJJ OPERATORS ASSOCIATION DISSOLVES EXCO

The Association of Hajj, Umrah Operators of Nigeria (AHUON) Kano branch has dissolved its zonal executives due to poor performance and replaced them with a caretaker committee.

The action was taken at an emergency session called by the association and chaired by Alhaji Mustapha of Agaji Travels.

The dissolved exco were accused of performing below expectation and not protecting the image and dignity of members of the association.

The members agreed that the Kano zonal exco should be replaced with a 5-man caretaker committee led by Alhaji Abdulaziz Haliru as zonal chairman.



NAHCON CHAIRMAN LAUDS SAUDI ARABIA'S EFFORTS DURING Hajj

The Saudi ambassador to Nigeria Adnan Bustaji met at his office in Abuja with Barr Abdullah Mukhtar, Chairman of National Hajj Commission of Nigeria.

At the outset of the meeting, Mukhtar extended thanks to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince for their continual care and follow-up of the service of the guests of Allah as well as the Saudi concerned authorities for their dedicated job during Hajj.

He expressed admiration of the high-level services being rendered by governmental bodies to make the tough Haj journey a pleasant one for all.

During the meeting, ways of cooperation between the two countries, particularly that concerns pilgrims and Umrah-related procedure for this year, were discussed.