



Speech of the Executive Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) at the 11th Human Rights, Sexuality and the Law Symposium

Distinguished guests, representatives of civil society, development partners, members of the diplomatic community, state and non-state actors, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen:

It is with great honour and a deep sense of responsibility that I welcome you to the 11th edition of the Human Rights, Sexuality and the Law Symposium. I extend warm appreciation to The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs) for their continued partnership with the National Human Rights Commission in convening this important annual dialogue.

Today, we all gathered for this critical moment. The theme of this year's symposium, "Responsive Democracy: Protecting Human Dignity through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," challenges us to reflect not only on the structures of our democracy, but a very fundamental aspect of it, which is the capacity to recognise, respect, and protect the dignity of every person. A truly responsive democracy is not measured only by elections or institutions, but by how it treats its most vulnerable and its diverse populations. It is judged by whether justice is accessible to all; whether protection is accorded to all; whether voices from the margins are heard; and whether difference is treated not as a threat, but as a strength.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria affirms the inherent dignity and worth of every human person, and at the same time prohibits discrimination of any sort. We should note that any law or practice that promotes the diminishing of the humanity of anybody does not accord with human rights principles and democracy. As a National Human Rights Institution, the NHRC remains firmly committed to promoting, protecting, and enforcing the rights of every person in Nigeria. Our mandate compels us to serve every Nigerian, regardless of sexual, gender, ethnic, social or cultural identity as well as belief, social status, or circumstance.

This symposium, held annually to mark International Human Rights Day, has become a very important platform for having hard conversations, honest reflection, and collective action. Today's programme, including the keynote address, the launch of the 2025 Human Rights Violations Report on real or perceived Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics, as well as the research presentation and panel discussions, represents an important contribution to national dialogue and policy reform. The NHRC is honoured to host you in Nigeria's 'Human Rights House', a place of refuge, a Palace of justice for all Nigerians.

The NHRC has mobilized our mandate for the protection of the rights of sexual minorities. We have represented and appealed successfully, the conviction of the 'Ningi 3' in Bauchi. Together with civil society organisation, we have also challenged the constitutionality of the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act.



Speech of the Executive Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) at the 11th Human Rights, Sexuality and the Law Symposium

Recently, we have responded to indiscriminate arrests and detention of persons perceived to be homosexuals in Anambra, Delta, Gombe, Kogi, and Edo states. Following from this, the NHRC has drafted and approved a Standard Minimum Guideline on the Arrest, Detention and Prosecution of Key and Vulnerable Populations in Nigeria.

We are currently finalizing the launch of an Emergency Response Framework which will enable a rapid response system to the violation of the rights of persons in the key populations communities.

Just few days ago, we held our 4th CSO Forum on Human Rights commemorating our 30th Anniversary. The forum included 10 technical and thematic workshops including on the theme – “Their rights matter: Are we losing the battle to protect the LGBTQI populations in Nigeria.” We are grateful to the co-hosts to this workshop including TIERS.

In the New Year and beyond, the NHRC will be strengthening its protective mandate to secure the rights of key populations in Nigeria. We will be launching state level capacity building for Law Enforcement, community-based organisations and key populations communities. We estimate that the NHRC will be training over 5,000 Law Enforcement and civil society actors on the protection of key populations in the first half of 2026.

Let me be clear: conversations around sexuality, identity, and inclusion are often complex and sensitive. Yet, they are essential. We cannot claim to uphold human dignity while ignoring the lived realities of communities who experience stigma, violence, exclusion, and injustice. A responsive democracy must be brave enough to confront uncomfortable truths and compassionate enough to protect everyone.

The NHRC as an independent body remains resolute in its role as a bridge between the state and the people, facilitating dialogue, promoting accountability, and strengthening systems of protection. We recognise that progress is not achieved through silence, denial, or exclusion, but through openness, collaboration, and respect for the rule of law. As we gather here to deliberate today, I encourage all participants to engage constructively with respect, listen attentively, and think boldly. Let this gathering move us beyond statements of principle to commitments of action, legal reforms, institutional strengthening, community engagement, and public education that deepen inclusion and strengthen our democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, the future of our democracy depends not only on the laws we enact, but on the values we live by. Diversity must be protected, equity must be pursued, and inclusion must be practiced, not as optional ideals, but as a democratic exigency.

Thank you.



Speech of the Executive Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) at the 11th Human Rights, Sexuality and the Law Symposium

On behalf of the National Human Rights Commission, I reaffirm our commitment to working with all stakeholders to build a Nigeria where human dignity is not conditional, and justice is not selective.

I thank you all for your presence, your partnership, and your dedication to the cause of human rights.

Thank you.