Not Bound by Verbal Eviction Order

Contributed by Pita Ochai
Friday, 16 December 2011

More than one month after, most of the federal agencies evicted from the seaports have refused to leave, insisting that a ministerial directive to them to do so was verbal

More than A month after the federal government of Nigeria ordered about nine of its agencies to vacate the seaports, most of them are yet to comply with the order. At the Tin-Can Island Port, Apapa, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, NAFDAC, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, NDLEA, the Nigerian Quarantine Service, comprising the plant and the veterinary units and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, FEPA, are still involved with cargo examination at the ports. This is contrary to the federal government’s directive that they should leave as part of its effort to reform operations at the seaports. Out of the nine agencies given the eviction order, only the Standard Organisation of Nigeria, SON, has left the premises of the seaport. The federal government’s reason for the expulsion of the agencies from the sea ports is due to persistent complaints that several agencies at the ports, were performing overlapping functions which slow down the clearance time for goods. The government also made it clear that the presence of a multiplicity of agencies impedes the efficiency of port processes and private businesses. The government hopes to reduce cargo clearing time to a minimal level to meet the practice at other seaports in other parts of the world. The government approved that the Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, NCS, the Nigerian Ports Authority, NPA, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agencies, State Security Service, SSS, and the police are allowed at the ports. While giving the vacation order, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, minister of finance, and chairperson of the federal government working committee on ports reform, assured the expelled agencies that the NCS would call on any of them whose services were needed at anytime in the ports. The agencies were given two weeks to leave. But more than a month after the order, they are still seen at the ports. Most of the officers of the evicted agencies who spoke to Newswatch under anonymity, said they have remained at the ports because the minister’s order was a verbal directive not backed by a corresponding circular. A source told Newswatch that most of the agencies refused to take the order because they hope that it would be revised soon in their favour. It was learnt that three of the agencies are lobbying the National Assembly to revise the vacation order. In areas of the ports where the recalcitrant agencies are operating, most of the staff operate without their uniforms possibly to avoid public condemnation of their presence. To many in the maritime sector, there was palpable fear that the order might not be obeyed by the agencies. James Obiora, a freight forwarder, said based on experiences of similar directives, it would be difficult to evict a government agency from the port. “These agencies know what they gain daily from their activities at the port and would not want to give that away easily,” he said. Ibrahim Afolabi, an importer, said the federal government should ensure that the unwanted agencies leave the port as soon as possible to make the seaports more efficient. He said that cargo flows were being held up at the ports by the multiplicity of duties of the different agencies. Afolabi commended the decision of the government and suggested that the government should review port tariff downward to compete in the emerging regional market when the unwanted agencies are out of the seaports.