

# SULEJA PRISON INMATES TELL THEIR STORIES AS SENATORS PAY VISIT

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11 February, 2013

**Recently, The Senate Committee on Women Affairs and Youth Development, as part of its oversight function, visited Suleja Prison In Niger state. Its members spent substantial amount of time to interact with inmates. This visit was with a view to ascertain the state of their conditions, as well as to help those whose cases were redeemable. The Committee members heard pathetic stories.**



The pleasant air that nibbles on the consciousness of a visitor to Suleja Prison complex in Niger State will contradict the flowing tears within. Thus, a single visit to the prison last recently by the Senate Committee on Women Affairs and Youth Development almost left visitors bleeding with emotion. The visit again revealed how both the good and evil struggled in a seeming endless combat in a troubled society. It also showed the unpleasant reward for wayward young men and women as well as how hapless Nigerian citizens who have no status in the society find it so cheap going to the prison over trivial issues whereas influential and hardened criminals walk freely on the streets.

Therefore, in pursuit of its oversight function, the committee, led by its chairman, Senator Helen Esuene from Akwa Ibom South, visited Suleja prison to acquaint themselves with the state of women and youth in the prison and as well share with their plights.

Her deputy, Senator Aisha Alhassan, another member of the committee, Sen. Joshua Lidani as well as clerk of the committee, Sulaiman Jalam, accompanied Esuene in the visit.

Upon arriving at the gate, the prison officials who had been waiting to receive the senators filed out in large number.

Given the mood of the officials and inmates during the visit, it might be the first time the prison authorities would receive highly placed officials of that magnitude who were perceived to have descended from their lofty heights to interact with inmates in prison cells.

The Senators were received by Comptroller General of Customs in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Mr. Kasali Oladipo Yusuf, Deputy Comptroller of Customs (DCP), Mr. Yahaya Sambo and another DCP in charge of the Suleja Prison, Mr. Olusola Babatunde, who was represented by his assistant, an Assistant Comptroller General of Customs, Mrs. Clementina Chukwu.

Entering the premises, the senators' first commitment was to inspect the prison yard with a view to observing the state of the environs. They were impressed by what they saw. This encouraged the visitors to further enter inside the cells to observe if they were also as clean as the premises. But again, they were not disappointed as the two cells, which housed female inmates who had all moved out to the venue of interactive session within the premises, though relatively small when compared with the number of inmates living inside, were clean and found habitable.

Thus, the senators felt so impressed by the clean state of the premises that they gave kudos to the prison officials for keeping the prison clean and simultaneously asked them not only to keep it up, but also to improve on it. "The environment is small but clean. Even though you are in prison, you still reflect the characteristics of human beings —cleanliness. Officers, congratulations, but it can be better," Esuene said.

However, other visitors to the prison had cause to wonder how only two prison cells available for 25 female prisoners could successfully accommodate such a high number of inmates in the prison custody. But immediately after the inspection, the planned interactive session between the visiting Senators and the inmates started. The senators' main interest was in female inmates, especially nursing mothers. The visit seemed to have been informed by a recent publication that female inmates get pregnant and deliver in the prison custody. While there were insinuations that prison officers were impregnating female inmates in prisons, the officers had been swift to debunk such insinuations, saying pregnant inmates and those who put to bed in the prison custody usually come in with pregnancy.