

PRESS STATEMENT BY MR. MAHMOOD ALI-BALOGUN, CHAIRMAN, AUDIO VISUAL RIGHTS SOCIETY OF NIGERIA (AVRS) IN COMMEMORATION OF THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF LICENSING OF AVRS BY NIGERIAN COPYRIGHT COMMISSION (NCC) ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2015.

The wanton exploitation of intellectual property rights in Nigeria and the unrelenting struggle by rights owners to confront such abuse have necessitated the establishment of copyright Collective Management Organizations otherwise called CMOs. Fortunately, the Nigerian Copyright Commission have been on the same page with rights owners in this struggle, hence its approval of Copyright Society of Nigeria (COSON) and Reproductive Rights Society of Nigeria (REPRONIG) few years ago as CMOs for musical works and sound recordings, and literary works respectively.

Encouraged by the successes recorded by these CMOs, the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC), announced in October 2014, to the pleasure of stakeholders, that it had approved AVRS to function as the sole CMO for cinematograph films in Nigeria, upon the satisfaction of the NCC and the Office of the Attorney-General of the Federation that the promoters of the new CMO had met all necessary conditions required for the establishment of a CMO. On November 20, 2014, history was made as the AGF formally presented the certificate of approval of AVRS to its Board members, led by the Chairman, Mr. Mahmood Ali-Balogun, at a ceremony organised by NCC in Abuja.

Following its approval, AVRS embarked on series of stakeholders meetings across the country with a view to further enlighten stakeholders in the film industry on the purpose, nature and operations of the new CMO, as well as their obligations to the Society, with a view to establishing cordial working relationships with various stakeholders in the film industry. The meetings brought an unprecedented boost to the membership of AVRS. The sensitization drive also afforded AVRS the opportunity to interact with some major commercial users of audio visual works including Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) on their obligations to the Society.

To consolidate on the immediate benefits of the stakeholders meetings, and preparatory to the commencement of actual licensing and distribution of royalties in line with its core approval mandate, AVRS has been in the process of

continuous public enlightenment, membership data analysis and documentation, capacity building training for its Directors and key management staff, as well as strategic partnership building within and outside the country to further boost its capacity to manage the rights of its members whose works are massively exploited in Nigeria and beyond. Presently, AVRS can boast of an authoritatively large repertoire of audio visual works by hundreds of its members across the country. The Society is also firming up MOUs and agreements for reciprocal representations with sister CMOs and organizations such as the Ugandan Federation of Movie Industry (UFMI), Audio Visual Rights Society of Ghana, Copyright Society of Botswana (COSBOTS), Copyright Society of Malawi (COSOMA) and the Anti-Counterfeiting Agency of Kenya, among others. Still in pursuit of the primary objective of ensuring global protection of Nigerian audio visual contents, AVRS has equally initiated high level discussions with relevant international organizations such as the France-based Confederation of International Societies of Authors and Composers (or Confédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Auteurs et Compositeurs, CISAC), the Geneva-based Association of International Collective Management of Audio Visual Works (or Association de Gestion Internationale Collective des Oeuvres Audiovisuelles, AGICOA), and the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (MPLC) based in the United States. With strong international alliances, accreditations and endorsements, AVRS shall not only guarantee global copyright protection and payments for the works of its members in due course, but also achieve the assignment of the International Standard Audio Visual Number (ISAN) for its members' works. ISAN is a peculiar identification number similar to the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) for books, which makes for seamless identification and tracking of audio visual works globally.

As we prepare to commence with actual licensing for use of audio visual works from the first quarter of 2016, I would like to urge members of the public, particularly persons and organizations whose businesses and operations involve the commercial use of audio visual content, such as broadcasting stations, cable transmitting and re-transmitting companies, advertising agencies, hotels, telecoms companies, hospitals, restaurants and relaxation spots, transport companies including luxury bus operators, airlines and airports facility managers, banks, super markets and chain retail outlets, barbing and hairdressing salons, etc, to cooperate with us and meet their copyright obligations in line with extant laws.

The past one year has been very challenging but we are grateful to God for milestones so far recorded. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our profound appreciation to the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC), Office of the Attorney-General of the Federation, Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC), Norwegian Copyright Development Organization (NORCODE), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Copyright Society of Nigeria (COSON), for their support before and during the year under review. I would also like to thank our friends in the media who have been active partners in our drive to institute the culture of motion picture copyright compliance in Nigeria. Similarly, we are grateful to the leaderships and members of all Nollywood guilds and associations for their steadfast support during the formative period of AVRS and afterwards, and we ask for continued support. Permit me also to specially thank our top celebrities in Nollywood who have selflessly lent their star power to the promotion of our anti-piracy campaign and core objectives.

Let me use this opportunity to urge all of us in the creative industries to identify with, and play our parts by sharing our opinions on the on-going review of the Nigerian Copyright Act initiated by the Nigerian Copyright Commission. Laws are not reviewed frequently, therefore we should seize this opportunity to contribute to the evolution of a Copyright Act that will comprehensively and adequately protect our interests.

Furthermore, a lot has been said about the size, net worth and massive impact of the creative industries, particularly Nollywood, on the Nigerian economy. In order for our nation to maximize the value of our creativity, a lot still needs to be done on the part of government at all levels to protect intellectual property rights and drastically reduce counterfeiting and piracy. President Muhammadu Buhari has stated, at different occasions, the Federal government's resolve to empower the creative industries, re-equip government agencies charged with the regulation and protection the creative sector, and boost the overall performance of the creative economy. I commend the stance of Mr. President and the Federal Government in this respect, and call for action on the foregoing pronouncements. In particular, I urge the Federal Government to speedily implement the Copyright Levy (on material) order of 2012! The time for action is now.

Finally, the months and years ahead promise to be much more challenging and rewarding for AVRS, and I appeal for everyone's cooperation as we move to establish a solid and inclusive collective management regime for the audio visual sector.

Thank you and God bless.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mahmood Ali-Balogun', written in a cursive style.

Mahmood Ali-Balogun

Chairman

Audio Visual Rights Society of Nigeria (AVRS)

November 20, 2015.