



# NunaLexis

## SOLICITORS

### STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF INNER GALAXY STEEL COMPANY LIMITED IN RESPECT OF THE CALCULATED ORCHESTRATED CAMPAIGN OF CALUMNY, BLACKMAIL AND DEMARKETING OF THE COMPANY BY FACELESS INDIVIDUALS.

1. We are Solicitors to Inner Galaxy Steel Company Limited, a steel, iron and allied products manufacturing plant located at Umuahala, ObuzorAsa, Ukwu West LGA, Abia State and their Chinese management Staff (hereinafter referred to wherever the context so admits as “our clients”, “the company” or “IGS”) and this formal Statement is issued at their instruction and on their behalf. This Statement is meant to put the records straight and correct/clarify the deliberate, contrived misinformation, falsehoods and blackmail against our clients.
2. In the past few days, Nigerians have been scandalized, alarmed and agitated by a post by an unnamed, faceless individual with the Twitter handle **@Truthfully83** which made very grievous, highly defamatory, false, unfounded and mischievous allegations against our clients and their Chinese employees. In a post made from his Twitter handle on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2020, this individual whose identity we do not know at the moment, made unsubstantiated, damaging and incredulous allegations which has led to public outcry and agitation from every quarter in Nigeria, including among Nigerians in the diaspora and has exposed our clients to odium, opprobrium, hatred, harassments, threats, destruction of their business interests and psychological/mental torture. This individual in the said post of 12/08/2020 claimed that he embedded himself in the premises of our clients for sixteen (16) days in the course of which he made the findings published to the entire world in his aforesaid Twitter page. The kernel of the accusations this individual made against our clients can be summarized as follows:
  - (i) That our clients run a “**MODERN DAY SLAVE CAMP**” where employees are imprisoned against their will. His exact words: *“for over 3 months and counting, Inner Galaxy Group has been **holding workers on hostage** because of Covid19 ‘in a prison like accommodation’. They locked the gates, denying workers access to go home. If you dare complain, the @PoliceNG DPO of Obehie Police Station CSP Isiguzo will be called, to arrest you”*.

- (ii) That the Nigerian employees of our clients work under the ***“most dehumanizing conditions known to mankind”*** while the relationship between the employees and our clients/their Chinese employees are like ***“a slave master relationship”***. This individual further claimed that ***“Nigerians are violated and molested by their Chinese employers daily”*** while ***“female counterparts are sexually assaulted without consequence”***.
- (iii) He claimed that a picture which he posted which showed two feet of which the toes of the left foot was (without the legs, torso and face of the person the feet belonged to being shown or disclosed) is an unnamed employee of our clients who ***“was injured right inside the company premises, while on production duty”*** and that ***“up till this moment, he has not been compensated, but has long been sacked by the company”***.
- (iv) This individual claimed that the Government of Abia State ***“is fully aware of these atrocities, the governor of Abia State OKEZIE IKPEAZU @GovernorIkpeazu is fully aware. In fact, the governor is a regular visitor to INNER GALAXY GROUP. But he chose to be silent, despite the atrocities”***. This individual went further to claim that ***“INNER GALAXY GROUP, has Abia State government, in its armpits in the name of ‘Employers of Labor’. They bought over the @PoliceNG and the @HQNigerianArmy around them with bribes. They now detect to the Army and Police how to treat and oppress Nigerians who are their employees”***. This individual went further to claim that ***“Nigeria has failed are (sic) citizens, @Abiastategov has failed her people. Okezie Ikpeazu @GovernorIkpeazu is a failure”***.
3. The aforesaid post by the handle **@Truthfully83** was retweeted **six thousand, one hundred (6,100) times** as at the 15<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2020. It attracted **three thousand, two hundred and seven (3,207) likes** and **one thousand, one hundred and sixty-nine (1,169) Quote tweets**. It went viral on both social and mainstream media; the latter, very surprisingly, also published the defamatory, fabricated falsehoods, hook, line and sinker without any attempt to verify, interrogate or investigate the truthfulness or otherwise of the allegations. The false allegations were therefore shared across several media platforms and read by millions of people in Nigeria and also across the world.
4. Although as at the time of publishing this Statement, there is not, to our knowledge any written Petition to any Federal or State authorities or their agencies by any of our clients’ employees or workers (whether current or former) or indeed by anyone else, the outcry and agitation by the Nigerian public, fed by these satanic, cooked up stories, compelled the Federal Government and the Abia State Government to send separate, independent fact-finding/investigative teams

who paid surprise unscheduled visits to our clients' factory complex without prior notice to our clients. We leave it to the Federal and State authorities to make their findings known to the public in due course, but we are obliged to state our clients' side of the story vide this statement.

## THE FACTS.

5. Inner Galaxy Steel Company Ltd. was registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission, (CAC) Abujain 2012 and built a multi-billion-naira iron, steel and allied products manufacturing plant in Ukwu West LGA of Abia State. The company premises which is almost a mini-city is located at the border between Rivers State and Abia State on the side of the latter State. The major product of the company is **Steel/Iron Rods**. The company has all these years operated peacefully with its employees and lived peaceably with its host communities.
6. It is instructive that the faceless operator behind the Twitter handle, **@Truthfully83** stated clearly in his reference post that it is **"IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS AND COUNTING"** that the alleged hostage imprisonment of workers arose. There is no allegation that any such situation has existed in the previous years of the existence and operations of the company. *The critical question which any unbiased, open minded, truth-seeking person should ask therefore is: what happened in this **LAST THREE MONTHS AND COUNTING** from the 12<sup>th</sup> day of August 2020, that led to the alleged "hostage imprisonment of workers"?*
7. The foregoing allegation of holding workers' hostage in the last three months in prison-like camps is a deliberate fabrication, mischaracterization and misinformation concocted by the operator of the said Twitter handle at the instance of those who engaged him for the hatchet job. The true facts of the matter are as follows:
  - (a) With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide, individuals and companies were confronted with a situation of unprecedented crises the likes of which had not been witnessed by most people alive today and which no one predicted or planned for. Companies were confronted with so many issues for which difficult decisions had to be made. With respect to the specific matter in issue, our clients had to determine what to do in respect of about forty percent (40%) of their workforce who live and come to work from Obigbo and environs in Rivers State, which is about ten minutes' drive from the Company's premises. This was because the Rivers State Government had announced that it was going to completely lock and seal its borders with its neighboring States, of which Abia State is one. This meant that those employees of our clients who live and come to work from Obigbo and

environs will be unable to come to work for a period which it was difficult to determine as no one knew when the pandemic would be over.

- (b) At the same time most States in the country, including Abia State, announced lockdowns and curfews such that even intra-state movement became cumbersome.
- (c) Furthermore, it also became clear that for a long period which would be difficult to determine, our clients will be unable to operate at full capacity, rendering many workers redundant. This is because, the main input of production of our clients is scrap iron and the suppliers send trucks/trailers of the materials from all corners of the Federation, ranging from far-flung locations like Sokoto, Maiduguri, Lagos, etc. All intra State borders were to be closed and only vehicles bearing food, medicines and other essential items were authorized to operate; scrap irons and other raw materials of our clients was not one of the items excluded from the ban on inter-state movement. Even distributors would find it difficult to come and evacuate their goods. The entire production process and business of the company was to be severely impacted negatively, one way or the other.
- (d) Again, a different conundrum presented itself. At the time this pandemic crisis began, many factories/plants in Europe and the Americas were being completely shut down because they had become **“super-spreaders”** and hotspots of Covid-19. The environment and conditions prevalent in big factories and plants such as those operated by our clients are such that if very strict safety protocols are not implemented, it takes only for one employee to bring the Covid-19 virus to the plant from home, and it will quickly spread among workers in the factory/plant until it becomes uncontrollable. In one Company in Sagamu, Ogun State, (which was widely reported), about 107 employees contracted the Covid-19 virus within the factory premises, within a forty-eight (48) hour period and the company was shut down by the Authorities. Inner Galaxy therefore immediately instituted very strict and rigorous Covid-19 protocols, providing one mask every day for each worker and making provisions for over 55 hand-washing/sanitizing stations all over the premises. The problem was that there was no way of controlling and guaranteeing that when the workers return to their homes, they would be able to keep to the same rigorous safety measures/protocols being implemented within the factory complex.
- (e) In view of the foregoing, the management of the Company called a meeting of all the workers and made it clear that by virtue of the foregoing factors/considerations outlined above, those of them who wished to continue working during the indeterminate period of the pandemic, will have to be

housed within the company premises as they may not be able to get to work from their homes once the full lock down, curfews and other measures came into full implementation. The issue of the Company management being unable to ensure compliance with full Covid-19 safety protocols while workers were in their individual homes was also highlighted. The company made an offer: those who agree to stay within the company premises until the pandemic is over and restrictions in movement relaxed will be housed in temporarily, hastily erected accommodation as such did not exist prior to this time. Those who could not stay, either because they have families they could not abandon in the middle of a pandemic, particularly when no one could predict how long it would last or for other reasons will be furloughed to be reabsorbed once the crisis was over or abates and things return to normal. While furloughed, they will be paid **fifteen thousand naira only (₦15, 000.00)per month** until they resumed work. Those who chose to remain within the premises to work will receive their full salaries and substantial bonuses calculated according to their level; the bonus is between **twenty thousand naira (₦20,000.00) to thirty thousand naira only (₦30,000.00)monthly**. These can be easily verified by anyone. The company has about 1, 500 Nigerian workers at full capacity with very few Chinese in its employ. There is no way these huge number of workers can be muzzled and happily, when the aforesaid Federal and State delegations paid surprise visits without prior information to the management of the company, they were able to interact with all the workers on the premises, interrogate them and make their own findings of the facts of the matter.

- (f) It is important to stress that at no time was anyone forced to stay within the premises against their will; this was optional and those employees who felt comfortable with the arrangement, agreed to it and are to be handsomely rewarded while those who felt unable to stay were furloughed and also offered compensation for the period they will not work. The company admitted to the Federal and State delegations that the accommodations could have been better but this was **hastily arranged, temporary accommodation** put in place for such vast number of workers at **VERY SHORT NOTICE**. The Federal Government delegation recommended improvements that can be made to the accommodation and stated that they will return within two weeks to determine compliance. The management of the Company is cooperating fully with the authorities in this regard. Already, the management of the Company had immediately after setting up the temporary housing to abide the end of the pandemic period, commenced building permanent structures in case of future emergencies. The company has already started constructing two buildings to house employees when similar situations arise in future. As at the date the Federal and State delegations visited, one of the buildings was already at 90% completion and the other at 65% completion.

(g) All over the world, workers, travelers and other persons are being quarantined and placed in isolation when necessary but because of the now popular Nigerian pastime of bashing all Chinese national and vilifying them as criminals and unethical businessmen, the Covid-19 safety measures/protocols put in place by our clients with the consent of their employees have been mischaracterized and vilified as **enslaving and putting workers in prison camps against their will.**

8. Regarding the case of the worker who lost the toes of his left leg, this is a regrettable accident. This is the only incident of injury of such scale in all the years the company has been operating in Nigeria. The facts of the matter are as follows:

(a) On or about the 30<sup>th</sup> day of March 2017, an employee of our clients, **Mr. ElohorEdehorEshke**, while resting and taking a nap within the factory premises, placed his left foot on the Rail track. The operator, one Mr. Ugochukwu Godwin who failed to observe that Mr. Elohor's left foot was on the Rail track, operated the panel and the moving cart on the Rail smashed Mr. Elohor's left foot.

(b) Our clients immediately rushed Mr. Elohor to Rehoboth Hospital located at No. 2 Winner's Way, off Afam Street, D/Line, P.O. Box 12640, Port Harcourt, Rivers State (Tel: 09026778791, 08037075632, 08033395897, Email: [rehospitalph@yahoo.com](mailto:rehospitalph@yahoo.com)). The full hospital Bill in the sum of **one million, forty thousand, six hundred and sixty naira only (₦1, 040,660.00)** was fully borne and offset by our clients without a kobo contributed by Mr. Elohor.

(c) Thereafter, it was recommended that Mr. Elohor required further therapy and our clients consulted the SAVE A LIFE MISSION HOSPITAL located at No. 38 Uyo Street, off Stadium Road, Port Harcourt, Rivers State (Tel: 07044000014, 08036723503). Mr. Elohor's medical Bill at this latter hospital in the sum of **Eighty-five thousand, seven hundred and fifty naira only (₦85, 750.00)** was also fully borne and offset by our clients. **THE RELEVANT DOCUMENTATION ARE EXHIBITED TO THIS PUBLICATION.**

(d) However, a dispute arose as to the quantum of financial compensation to be paid to Mr. Elohor for his injury as his advisers and Counsel sought to hold our clients to ransom with impossible ridiculous demands. The matter is in Court currently to determine the adequate quantum of compensation to be paid and once the Court makes that determination, the company will comply. As the matter is *subjudice*, we will make no further comments on it except to point out that accidents of this sort, while regrettable, are not unknown worldwide in such large operations as obtains in our client's facilities and the specific circumstances in which this accident occurred does not disclose any

negligence or dereliction of duty on the part of the management of Inner Galaxy as to give rise to the level of vilification of our clients made by the operator of the Twitter handle, **@Truthfully83**.

9. The picture of the back of a person with lacerations allegedly from flogging, whose face or identity was not disclosed has no nexus or bearing with our clients. No such incident has ever occurred within the premises of our clients. No single worker has been molested by security agents attached to the company. The company is located in the middle of a forest in the Niger Delta with threats of adverse actions by militants and/or kidnappers against our clients and/or their employees a constant issue. Security operatives were therefore duly and legally deployed. They have no interface with employees/customers/suppliers/visitors and the regular excoriation and denigration of our heroes in uniform **FOR NO JUST CAUSE**, should be discouraged by all well-meaning Nigerians. As we have all seen with the Black Lives Matter movement/Police defunding/social justice crisis in the USA and other similar issues globally, there is nowhere in the world where security agents are perfect, but it is most unfortunate when some individuals take delight in demonizing Nigerian security agents for no reasons whatsoever and leveling allegations of compromise against them with no evidence at all.
10. No female worker has ever made any complaint or allegation of sexual harassment within the premises of our client against anyone including the Chinese employees. No such person whose name appears in the phone as the person chatting with the unnamed and unidentified female is known to our clients. To the best of our knowledge, no female staff of our clients, both current and former has ever made any complaint to the Police or other authorities of sexual harassment. This allegation is pure fiction.
11. With regard to the other allegations that Nigerian workers are **treated like “slaves” and less than human**, these are lies from the pit of hell. Our clients pride themselves in being among the top tier companies in Nigeria in terms of welfare of workers. Our clients take pride in the harmonious relationship they have with their workers. As already stated, this is a company that has over 1500 staff. Apart from workers, employed directly by the company, there are hundreds of other independent or semi-independent persons present in the company premises at any given time from whom information can be obtained by anyone interested in knowing the real facts of the matter or state of affairs. At any given time, there are scores of trucks/trailers, either bringing in raw materials from different parts of the country or evacuating finished products. These trucks have drivers, conductors, etc. There is a whole semi-independent industry to service their needs, from restaurants, to vulcanizers, to shops, etc. The company premises is a mini-community of its own and there is no gate at the entrance. It is simply

impossible to contemplate that anyone can be held against their will within the company's complex.

12. The basic salary of the least paid worker in the company, when added to their bonuses, is above the monthly National Minimum wage which many State Governments, public and private companies have been unable to pay. Again, this is easily verifiable and does not need much digging to arrive at the veracity or falsity of this claim. Our client's workers in addition, enjoy the following benefits, among others:

- (a) Each employee gets TWO FREE meal tickets per day;
- (b) Sports, cultural, tourism and recreation activities including picnics are regularly arranged;
- (c) Birth days of employees are celebrated with management providing cards and cakes;
- (d) Workers with outstanding performances are rewarded on a monthly basis with cash prizes;
- (e) All public holidays declared by the Federal Government are complied with and each worker gets the equivalent of two day's pay;
- (f) Adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is provided in accordance with best international practices;
- (g) The company implements social insurance and pension insurance for workers;
- (h) The company regularly provides free supplies of pasta snacks, milk and beverages to staff;
- (i) The company provides cell-phone recharge cards to certain categories of workers;
- (j) The company not only arranges end of year parties for its workers, they also give awards backed by substantial cash and other prizes to the best performing staff.
- (k) The company provides education and training opportunities for employees.

13. Pictures and videos of most of the aforementioned events are normally taken and some of them are published herein for Nigerians to see **how their compatriots are being treated as slaves and sub-humans.**

14. Our clients welcome genuine, authentic journalists and other interested persons to come and verify the facts of the matter for themselves. Nothing can be hidden under the sun no matter the best efforts. **The antics of faceless, nameless persons paid to do a hatchet job of blackmailing and demarketing the Company should be ignored.** It is telling, that on social media, ***THE CAREFULLY CALIBRATED AND SCRIPTED OUTCRY*** is for the company to be **"SHUT DOWN"**. That is the outcome sought by the Company's competitors/enemies who connived with some disgruntled workers, sacked for



stealing and diversion of goods and a rogue, faceless, nameless “investigative journalist” to carry out this hatchet job.

15. The owners of the Company brought in substantial funds in Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), to establish, arguably **the biggest factory/plant in the entire South East**. In the process, they have given employment to hundreds of Nigerians and when other beneficiaries, such as semi-independent or independent businesses connected one way or the other to the operations of the Company. There are unquantifiable spin-off businesses and enterprises reliant on the operations of our clients which if added to the mix, provides thousands of families with succor and means of livelihood. Our clients have been positively aggressive in their **Corporate Social Responsibility(CSR)** obligations to their Host Community with whom they live in peace and tranquility. Covid-19 palliatives worth millions of naira was shared to surrounding communities during the crises of the pandemic in addition to regular interventions which have been ongoing since the Company started operations.
16. We want to use this opportunity to counsel our fellow citizens, that the virulent hatred currently being exhibited by some Nigerians against law-abiding Chinese national, engaged in genuine businesses and other activities, to the extent that they are ready to believe the very worst of allegations against our Chinese guests without seeking or obtaining evidence, should be deprecated and condemned by all well-meaning Nigerians. Just as all Nigerians are not 419ers, Yahoo-Yahoo or drug pushers, not all Chinese citizens should be labeled as criminals and viewed with suspicion. As blacks, we fight against tribalism, racism and apartheid. We implore our fellow citizens to always keep an open mind whenever allegations are made against anyone, including Chinese citizens, until the allegation is thoroughly investigated, interrogated and established conclusively.
17. Finally, as indicated above, the Federal and State authorities who have visited the premises of the company and interviewed the management of the company, the workers/employees, have outlined the areas where they have determined that there should be improvements and the management of the company is cooperating fully with them. Our clients are ready to take corrections where it is determined they have erred but Nigerians can be assured that whatever lapses have occurred in the operations of our clients (if any), they are nowhere near the ridiculous and outrageous picture painted by the rogue, compromised, hired-gun whose mandate is clearly to destroy our clients’ business for no good reason.

Thank you.



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