

**PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE NATHANIEL ATEBIJE FOUNDATION FOR PLANNING ADVOCACY
DURING THE MAIDEN ANNUAL LECTURE HELD AT THE YAR ADUA CONFERENCE CENTRE ON
TUESDAY, 5TH MAY 2026.**

Protocols

1.0 PREAMBLE

We welcome you to this press conference organized as part of the Maiden Advocacy Lecture of the Nathaniel Atebije Foundation for Planning Advocacy. The purpose of this engagement is to draw national attention to the state of urban and regional planning in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the implications for order, sustainability and human dignity in our cities and settlements.

Let us emphatically note that urban planning or physical planning is not a luxury but a necessity in places where people want to grow sustainably. When planning is ignored, cities become disordered, unsafe, inefficient and unjust. Unfortunately, this trajectory is the experience across many parts of Nigeria today; yet called the giant of Africa. I would like to highlight some of these issues and make relevant recommendations to remedy or ameliorate the impacts on our people and their environments.

2.0 KEY PLANNING CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

a. Neglect of Physical Planning for Human Settlements.

Across Nigeria, many towns and villages continue to grow without approved physical development plans or layout frameworks. This has resulted in chaotic settlement patterns, inefficient land use and high future cost of infrastructure provision. This is because, most times planning is treated as an afterthought rather than a foundation for development.

b. Weak Enforcement of Existing Plans

Even where masterplans exist, enforcement remains weak due to inadequate manpower, lack of equipment, poor funding, lack of political will and institutional inefficiencies thus reducing planning regulations to mere guidelines rather than enforceable instruments.

c. Impunity in Land Use Violations

There is a growing culture of unauthorized land use changes, development on restricted or sensitive areas and disregard for zoning regulations in our major settlements; and it is worsening daily particularly in Abuja where land has been commoditised, given to highest bidders even if violates the provisions of the masterplan. This is often enabled by political interference and complicity of corrupt public officials resulting in the breakdown of the essence of planning and loss of public trust.

d. Marginalization of Indigenous Planning Consultants

There is a disturbing trend of preference for foreign consultants over Nigerian professionals and underutilization of local expertise. Governments prefer engaging foreigners or even non-professionals where we have experienced indigenous consultants. At the same time consultancy fees for indigenous professionals remain far lower than their foreign counterparts; and payments are often delayed or unpaid. This weakens the professional base of planning practice in Nigeria.

e. Destruction of Green Areas in Abuja

Abuja, the Federal Capital City was designed as a **garden city**, with approximately **33% of its land area designated for green and open spaces**. Today, we are witnessing rampant conversion of green areas to residential and commercial uses, encroachment on parks and recreational spaces, development on floodplains and wetlands as well as loss of ecological balance. This trend is already seriously threatening Abuja's environmental sustainability and original vision.

f. Inadequate Urban Infrastructure

The abuse of the masterplan and inadequate provision of infrastructure has manifested in poor drainage systems leading to flooding, weak transportation system, growth of slums and insufficient water and waste management systems.

g. Fragmentation of Planning Institutions

Planning institutions are fragmented and made to perform overlapping roles among agencies. They suffer poor coordination between planning, environment and land administration.

3.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

These challenges have far-reaching consequences which include but not limited to dysfunctional cities and urban environments, increased urban flooding and environmental disasters, rising cost of infrastructure provision, traffic congestion and reduced productivity, housing shortages and poor living conditions and declining quality of life in Nigerian cities, especially in Abuja.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS.

To address these challenges, the Foundation calls on governments at all levels, private real estate developers and stakeholders to:

a. Enforce Mandatory Preparation of Masterplans and other levels of physical development planning, to enable all settlements and spaces have approved physical development plans; government should prioritize planning as a precondition for development.

b. Legislating all physical development plans into law in order to make them binding and difficult to change or violate at will.

c. Strengthening Development Control by recruiting and training of qualified planning personnel and provision of adequate resources for enforcement.

d. Protection of the Integrity of Planning through insulation of planning authorities from political interference, enforcement of sanctions against violations and instituting transparent and accountable approval processes.

e. Promotion of Indigenous Professionals by giving preference for qualified Nigerian consultants in planning projects in compliance with the Executive Order No. 5 which mandated all MDAs to give first preference to Nigerian companies and professionals in the award of science and technology contracts. Government should also ensure fair remuneration and prompt payment for professional services.

f. Preservation of Green Areas in Abuja by immediate reversal of converted green spaces and other violated landuses, restoration and protection of existing parks and open spaces and strict adherence to the Abuja Master Plan.

g. Institutional Coordination through clear definition of roles among planning agencies and improved collaboration between federal, state, and local authorities. The National Urban and Regional Planning Commission should be established without delay to enhance the coordination while the Office of the Town Planner General of the Federation be established to focus the executive on plan implementation and ensure compliance with standards and professional practice regulations.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Nigeria stands at a critical moment in its urban development journey. The choice before us is clear. We can either continue on the path of disorder and crisis, or embrace planning as a tool for order, sustainability and national development. The Nathaniel Atebije Foundation for Planning Advocacy calls on government, professionals, developers and citizens to work together to restore order, justice and dignity in our built environment.

We thank members of the press for your presence and for your role in amplifying this message. The future of our cities depends on the actions we take today.
Thank you.