

## **FRSC IS ON TRACK- CORPS MARSHAL ASSERTS**

The Corps Marshal and Chief executive of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Osita Chidoka has asserted that "FRSC is on track".

He made the assertion while appearing on "Radio Link", a weekly phone-in programme of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) held on Saturday, 24 April 2010.

The programme which was specifically organised for the Corps Marshal to throw more lights on the increasing cases of road crashes in the country and FRSC's preparedness to tackling the challenges was anchored by Solomon Upev.

It could better be described as explosive, illuminating and educative with questions, contributions and comments coming from listeners across the nation in participatory form.

For the benefit of those who did not listen to it, the excerpt is produced as follows:

**MODERATOR:** You have spent nearly three years on the seat now, how would you describe your experiences?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** It has been very interesting years in all ramifications; the major challenge being the driver's license. There had been a break down in the system, where people were no longer undergoing training and testing before issuance of the driver's license. But the series of road carnage couldn't just wait for this to be sorted out. We injected more operational vehicles, established Abuja emergency ambulance services; embarked on free safety checks; called stakeholders' meeting on tankers/truck operations in the country. We launched the Road Transport Safety Standardization Scheme (RTSS) for regulating transport company operations; created the safety Engineering Department (SED) for road audit and vehicle type specification and launched the Driving School Standardization Scheme (DSSP) for which 224 of them have been licensed in the country.

There was Operation Eagle Eye to deal with seasonal traffic challenges during Christmas, Sallah and other major festivals and institutionalized free safety checks on every last Saturday of the month for public awareness only, without enforcement. All these put together, I can say "we are on track"

**MODERATOR:** What are you doing to sustain all these programmes?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** We are aiming at becoming a high performance organization. That is why we have subjected ourselves to the requirements of ISO 9001; we embarked on salary automation, and in fact, the first government agency in the country to start the policy of e-payment, six months before it was made compulsory by the Federal Government. We have cleared the backlog of promotion; institutionalised promotion examination as a hallmark for merit and level playing ground; commissioned micro finance bank and housing estates at Masaka for junior officers and 256 at Lokogoma which is under construction.

**MODERATOR:** Impressive! Your work is quite demanding, how much of training is your staff setting?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** We take staff capacity building very serious. A whole cadre of officers were made to undergo regimental and leadership training at leadership training centre Jos last year; we have institutionalized promotion examination to build intellectual capacity of personnel; our academy at Udi is under construction for training of officers and will admit its first batch of intakes next year. All these are tailored toward ensuring mental and intellectual capacities of our personnel.

**MODERATOR:** Will you say FRSC has lived up to expectations?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** There may be issues here and there; but I can say that FRSC of today is one of the best organizations in the world.

**MODERATOR:** How are you handling the challenges of road crashes?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** Through public enlightenment, data collection, subtle enforcement and aggressive enforcement through mobile courts. We have embarked on the electronic updating of offenders' register; commissioned ambulance services in FCT and established road accident clinics/help areas in other strategic areas across the country under the system approach we have adopted. We have more people being arrested with more than ₦1 Billion coming into the Federation Accounts through fines last year and we are intensifying efforts to enhance our enforcement capacity this year.

**MODERATOR:** You took over in 2007, would you say Road Traffic Crashes have reduced since then?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** The rate of crashes does not tell the whole story. The capacity we have now to capture data wasn't there before. There has been tremendous increase in vehicle population and our commands have increased with capacity to capture more data. You can therefore not calculate it mathematically and get it right through the cases recorded

**MODERATOR:** There is conflict between the figures released by the World Health Organization (WHO) and FRSC, why the conflict?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** WHO has a rule: victims of road crash who died 30 days after the crash are counted as having died from the crash.

**MODERATOR:** There are several factors of road traffic crashes: overloading, over speeding and non use of seat belt, people say if FRSC does what it is supposed to do, there would be no need recording much carnage.

**CORPS MARSHAL:** People must first have responsibility for their lives and vehicle they drive. We continue to educate people to realise that obedience to traffic rule is not a favour to FRSC. People should not pass the buck; they should realise that they own themselves a responsibility to do the right thing with or without law enforcement agents being present. Many people operate without driver's license or expired ones and FRSC cannot check all drivers and vehicles every day, no matter how much we try. We apprehended over 300,000 offenders last year, but law enforcement in Nigeria is made more difficult because of the problems of poor identity and address system. That is why we are trying to link the driver's license to the number plates of vehicle to address the challenge of enforcement.

**MODERATOR:** If the driver's license is linked to plate number, what happens when the owner sells his vehicle?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** Then the old plates should be returned to the office

**MODERATOR:** How does an average driver understands the law on seat belt in Nigeria?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** The law on seat belt is one of the most successful traffic laws in the country. The compliance level is very high among motorists and is growing.

**MODERATOR:** How about Crash Helmet law?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** It is not as successful as we would like; but we have recorded appreciable level of success especially in Lagos and some states in the south. In the north however, there are issues of culture and religion which we are tackling through public enlightenment and corporation of the traditional rulers.

**MODERATOR:** You mentioned two things: crash helmets and seat belts, has FRSC not been checking tyres?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** We check tyres, and during free safety checks when we noticed deflections, we advice offenders to change it. But generally, there is no law recommending or banning a particular type of tyre. But when motorists go for their annual road worthiness check that is when the issues are supposed to be raised by the testing vehicle inspection officers (VIOs). We are building the capacity of the VIOs to enable them carry out their functions most effectively.

At this juncture, there was an interlude; and the number of telephone line to call the studio with was announced to the listeners to enable them participate in the discussions. The calls came as follows:

- a. **Siraju Dahiru from Zaria:** Road traffic crash is becoming an issue in Nigeria and this can be attributed to ignorance and government policy. Nigeria does not have transport policy that is proactive; the Institute of Transport Technology (NITT) that is in Zaria is dormant. FRSC staff needs training; we call on government to review the operations of NITT Zaria and standardize it to be able to deal with the challenges of transportation in the country.
- b. **James Aneke from Enugu:** There is need for attitudinal change through incorporation of road safety education in our educational curriculum. There is need for FRSC to advice government not to sell its vehicles with plate number as people use such vehicles to harass and intimidate people and commit crimes with them.
- c. **Chief Ifeanyi Olurubi from Orlu, Imo state:** Aba-Owerri road has become a death trap because the road is not in good shape and people over speed on it. There is need to enlighten convoy drivers especially that of the Governors and Politicians who abuse it. FRSC should collaborate with VIOs to check road worthiness of vehicles and ensure that the necessary road signs are put to warn on-coming vehicle whenever there was a breakdown of vehicle.

- d. **Uduku Ugbaja:** There is need to construct railway in the south-east. Apart from reducing pressure on the road, it will create employment. And it can reduce up to 50% of road traffic crashes. People that operate with fake plate number must be stopped and booked by FRSC.
- e. **Daniel Ameh from Kubwa, Abuja:** I want to commend FRSC for the wonderful job the staff are doing in the country in controlling obstructions and road crashes. There is need for attitudinal change and patience by people if the nation is to witness crash and obstruction-free roads.

### **CORPS MARSHAL'S RESPONSE**

**Corps Marshal answers as follows:** Change of attitude and patience by the people; that is where the media comes in. There is the need for all road users to recognise that others too have the right of way. Without this recognition, you are being immoderate and inconsiderate; and this is not good for us.

On NITT, there is an advert currently for the hiring of the chief executive for the institution. Those who possess the capacity to change the place should now take advantage of this opportunity to apply and change the fortunes of the institution. On the inclusion of road safety in the educational curriculum, all the processes have been followed and the policy is at the last stage of approval.

**MODERATOR:** If the media is to be useful in the campaign, there is need to get support from FRSC, how many of the offenders are big shots?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** Whoever disobeys would be given the same treatment

**MODERATOR:** What awareness programme have you conducted these day?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** We embark on different radio and television programmes to educate the public; we highlight traffic issues in different columns maintained by our staff, and the different motoring pages of newspapers are used to educate the public on different traffic issues

### **TEXT MESSAGES**

At this juncture, the moderator read out the text messages sent by listeners, which contents raised from enquires on the hospital rejection of crash victims; need for capacity building for FRSC personnel; bad roads as a causative factor

in road crash, to the message of the man who wanted to present a copy of the translated Highway Code to Corps Marshal.

There were also text messages calling on FRSC to ban sale of alcohol in motor parks, imploring the Corps to aggressively check the practice of driving and phoning, while some stressed the need to punish offenders who violate overloading rules. Other messages commended and congratulated FRSC for its commitment to ensuring safe roads in the country, while some appealed to motorists to always fasten their seat belt while driving because of its safety benefits.

## **INTERLUDE**

After the interlude, the phone-in session continued with the following people calling to contribute as follows:

- a. **Barrister Maxwell from Abuja:** I want to congratulate the Corps Marshal for the good job he is doing. I believe that if traffic rules and regulations were observed, it will go a long way in reducing the rate of road crashes in the country
- b. **Chinedu Idigwe from Lagos:** What is being done about the road worthiness of vehicle? There is the need to increase the capacity of the vehicle inspection officers (VIOs) in the country for them to do their job.

**MODERATOR:** We were not able to get you to do a post-mortem of the last Ember months operations, how was it?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** I am proud of the commitment shown by all FRSC staff nationwide towards the operations. It was a huge success and we received commendations from members of the public who travelled during the period for a job well done. I was on road monitoring across the nation during the period and saw everything.

## **PHONE-IN**

**Andrew Ajayi from Port Harcourt:** I want to suggest that for effective performance of your functions, FRSC should procure helicopters, land cranes and more highway code to increase the knowledge base of the drivers. FRSC should also be involved in the supervision of road design and construction to

ensure durability of the roads and transparency in the system. There is also the need to caution FRSC personnel to be less overzealous in their duties; they should adopt public enlightenment method more, instead of booking for all manners of offences even minor ones that they should have cautioned and released the offenders.

**CORPS MARSHAL:** FRSC is pursuing a policy that would make it possible for our vehicles to be available within every 50km stretch. We created a safety engineering department to handle issues of road audit and vehicle type specification.

### **PHONE-IN**

**Mazi Patrick Okorafor from Jos:** Keke Napep is not ideal for our roads; and why has there not been action on Abuja-Lokoja road?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** Tricycle is the alternative to motorcycle. We have taken note of some of its engineering defects and made the observations known to the manufacturers in India

**MODERATOR:** What is the present status of WARSO? You were in Sierra Leone recently for the General Assembly meeting?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** All the member countries of the organisation are collaborating on the need to harmonise their traffic laws and procedures. This is important because, for the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and goods to succeed, there is the need to create a uniform standard in traffic operations in the sub region, to make people have an idea of traffic procedures in other member countries so that they can operate freely in the countries

**MODERATOR:** What is the United Nations Decade of Action on Road Safety about?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** At the international conference on road safety held in Moscow, Russia last year, there was a resolution calling on the United Nations to declare a decade of action for road safety. This was done this year, making 2011-2020 a UN decade for road safety. FRSC as the lead agency in road safety matters in Nigeria kick-started this campaign in the country through the stakeholders' forum held on Monday, 19 April 2010.

## PHONE-IN

- a. **Dr. Dennis:** I want to congratulate you (Corps Marshal) on the good job you are doing. Road traffic crash is the 9<sup>th</sup> killer of mankind now, but may become the third killer in 2020 if nothing is done about it. There is the need to strengthen the process for the acquisition of driver's license
- b. **Bajog Wakama:** I want to know what has happened to those boys who caught doing motor racing along the National mosque
- c. **Aliyu:** FRSC introduced masking tape before, what is the position now?
- d. **Solomon Iruba:** I want to commend Corps Marshal and his men on their dedication to duty
- e. **Afolabi Paul:** I want to know when FRSC will do its recruitment

**CORP MARSHAL:** Let me say that the law on use of masking tape for now is only made compulsory for tankers and trucks, but remains optional for private cars. We would work out a system whereby only the types that meet international standards are used here. The case of those boys arrested driving at the National Mosque is in court being diligently prosecuted. On our recruitment exercise, when the time comes, it will be heavily publicised, for all those interested to apply.

## PHONE-IN

**Lambert Oje:** There is the need to look at the nature of our road; if FRSC cannot extend their operations time to the night period, then it should ban night journey. There should also be a law on the use of tyres, and our roads should be fitted with traffic signs

**CORPS MARSHAL:** We cannot ban night journey, because it is their fundamental rights to move whenever they want. But we believe that road crash is no accident; that is why we continue to educate the public on the dangers of night travels.

**Dara Uchechukwu:** How many drivers with driver's license went to driving school? There is need for FRSC to build driving schools so that people could be trained before acquiring driver's license

**Sam Onyisi:** I want to commend the leadership of FRSC for establishing ambulance services in FCT and at some crash-prone points across the

country. Government should support FRSC to enforce law on speed limit. Human factor in crash occurrence can be controlled; we should therefore do something about it.

**CORPS MARSHAL:** I am sure the last speaker is the Managing Director of Peace Mass Transport Company. He has done very well in our campaign on national speed limit. All his vehicles are fitted with speed governors to make it impossible for them to over speed. In fact, I commissioned 50 of those buses last year. Interestingly, they were all configured in such a way that only three passengers can be on a seat. I enjoin other transporters in the country to emulate him, because these support our campaign against over speeding and over loading.

**MODERATOR:** What is the situation now with speed bumps in FCT?

**CORPS MARSHAL:** We are aware of the Minister's directives on their removal; but it is evident that road crashes have significantly reduced in FCT since the bumps were constructed. In fact, we have not recorded any crash there after the bumps were constructed. In any case, we are collaborating with the Minister to see how best we could deal with the challenge in the best interest of the motoring public in FCT.

**ENDS**