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Statement on the Recent Judgment of the Supreme Court on Matters Relating to Local Government Autonomy.

The recent judgment of the Supreme Court on matters affecting the autonomy of LGAs has been welcomed in many quarters. At the same time, some have expressed concern about whether this an unwelcome and ominous incursion of FG influence into subnational matters, and a contravention of the Constitutional requirement for States to maintain the State Joint Account. Others question the motivation and timing of this move.

Fundamentally, there has been no change in the FAAC sharing formula. So if, as is expected, the judgment brings about a significant change in finances for many LGAs, it is only because over the years, they have been denied monies to which they are clearly entitled, under the provisions of this very same Constitution.

As a practical matter, though opinions on it may differ, this latest unanimous ruling by the Supreme Court must now be accepted by all, as the definitive interpretation of the provisions of the Constitution in resolution of this long-standing and vexatious matter.

In all this, what is of paramount importance, and what we should all be more concerned with, is the impact on governance and whether this development will bring material benefit to the people. Most citizens do not care so much whether the monies pass through and are expended by the state or local government or indeed the Federal Government. What the people need is good, competent and well-meaning governance that utilizes societal resources judiciously to improve lives.

No level of Government is immune from bad leadership, no matter how close to the people it may supposedly be. So, as we welcome this news, we must quickly caution the Local Government Councils that with greater authority and resources comes greater responsibility. From those to whom much has been given, much will be demanded.

Outside Government, the people, also have a responsibility. The unfortunate experience has been that Local Council elections are all but ignored by most registered voters. We should all now know that as Local Councils are elected going forward, the stakes have become so much higher. In just the first five months of 2024, FAAC Allocation for LGAs (which is to be disbursed directly to them going forward), amounted to a very significant N1.4 trillion compared with N2.0 trillion for the States and 1.9 trillion for the Federal Government.

I urge us all to remain ever vigilant as we elect those we entrust to manage public resources, whether at Federal, State or Local Government levels and resolve to hold them accountable, perhaps even more critically so, now.

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