

MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS CENTRE REPORT

HAJJ ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

As suggestions for improvement of Hajj Administration in Nigeria. Being a report submitted to the Technical Committee on Hajj

MPAC, Nigeria

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Scope and Purpose:

It is our sincere intention to look at the Hajj operations with an outsider's view and understanding. Given that we have directly been affected with the problems of Hajj administration in the country, we intend to make suggestions from our own point of view that we believe will contribute positively to eradicating the problems of Hajj Operations in Nigeria if the suggestions are implemented. We ask for Allah's Mercy and Forgiveness wherever we err in the process.

Abstract:

The problem set is to select the combination of leadership, processes and resources that guarantee safe, pleasant and successful Hajj experience for Nigerians.

Problem definition:

Every year, Hajj administrations are characterized by reports of botched air-lifting operations, stranded intending pilgrims, accommodation, widespread lack of religious education amongst the hujjaj and cases of gross neglect in the holy lands. These have enabled private Hajj agencies and operators to gain an inroad into the whole exercise, leaving a host of Muslims at the mercy of these, more often than not, ill-equipped and mostly incompetent private agencies.

Constraints:

It would have been useful to borrow from the operational practices of large Muslim nations like Indonesia, Malaysia who have large presence in Hajj. It is not contestable that Indonesians are usually the largest immigrant Muslim population at every Hajj, with an average population of around 200,000 pilgrims, yet one cannot see Indonesians been stranded or facing other types of problems our own hujjaj face in any place during Hajj. It will be useful to study their situation and learn from their methods and sincerity.

The Board:

Federal Pilgrims Welfare Board

Considering the enormous nature of the Hajj operation, there is the need to give the body some level of autonomy and independence if the Hajj operation must succeed. There is an urgent need to reconstitute and restructure the Hajj

pilgrims' board in the Ministry of External Affairs in order to equip and position it to be wholly accountable for the success or otherwise of the Hajj pilgrimage.

Muslim Public Affairs Centre ("MPAC") calls for the reformation of the Hajj administration body, called Federal Pilgrims Welfare Board. We suggest a systemic phasing out of the current structure over a short period, possibly 2 years, and replacing it with a central and independent Muslim Pilgrimage Welfare & Practices Regulatory Authority which will direct all Hajj administration affairs nationally. This body will be managed by a team of 6 stakeholders; comprising of Islamic Scholars, Islamic Academics, and Member from a prominent national Islamic organization and Government Appointees (in that order). All members will hold the position for a single term of two years only with opportunities for members who performed outstandingly to be re-appointed. Capable people will be recruited to work within the body (from the position of National Amir upwards) and these employees must be tested professionals, recruited through open advertisement and the **National Amir** especially must be qualified with both appropriate **Islamic, academic credentials**, suitable **industrial experience and track record of success/good performance** in similar or related assignment. (See fig 1 below for illustration)

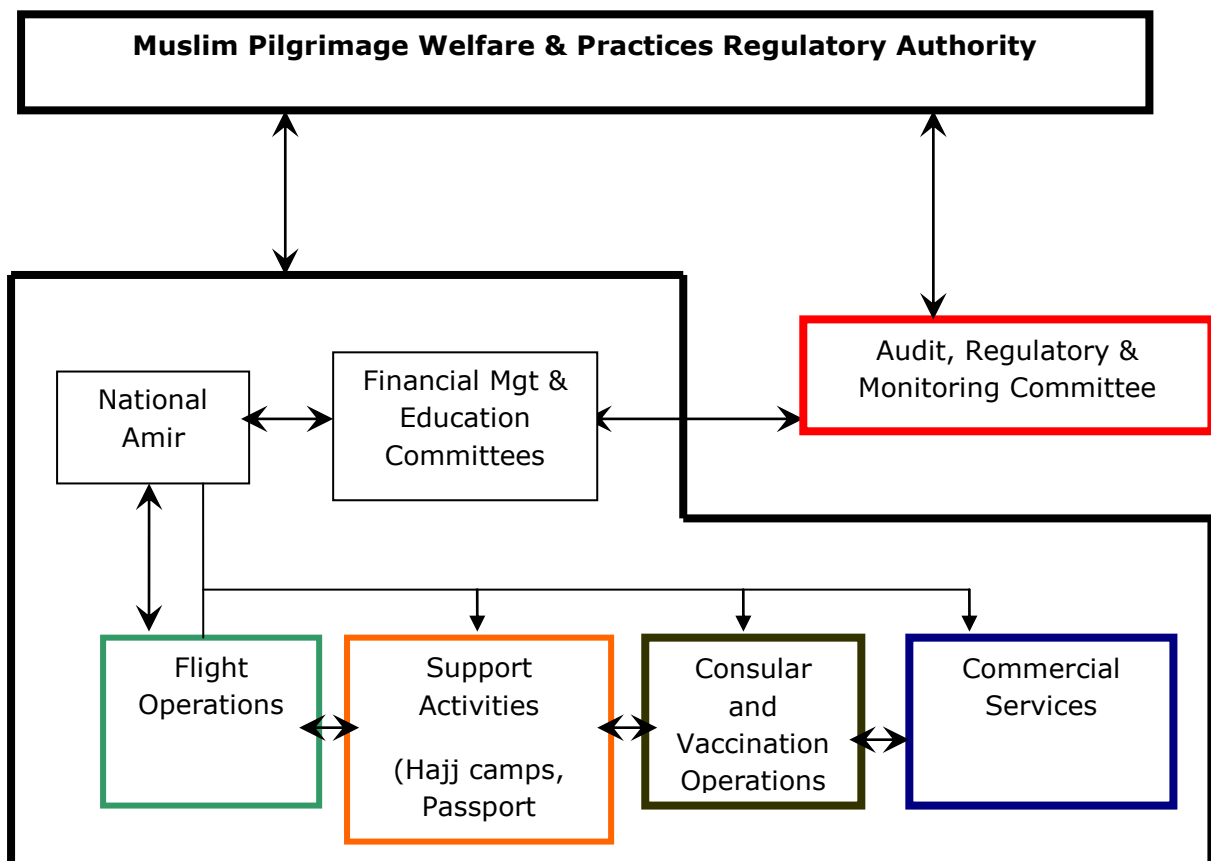


Figure 1: Muslim Pilgrimage Welfare & Practices Regulatory Authority organogram

Among the roles we think the new body should perform and be wholly responsible for are:

- a. Facilitate Hajj operations by providing infrastructural supports (Hajj camp services, passport services), provide consular services (principally visa services), provide commercial services (pilgrimage services to interested persons in the competitive market of the Hajj industry), to regulate and monitor the 'pilgrimage industry' against exploitation, monopolistic tendencies, fee fixing, etc. The body will objectively regulate and monitor the activities of private operators to forestall sharp and unethical practices. At the moment, there doesn't seem to be formal and enforced operational requirements and service delivery conditions set for the private operators to protect their patrons. These conditions must be measurable and should be directly linked to the following year's operational permit. Conditions that will ensure that agency responsibilities transcend only conveying patrons to and fro the holy land.
- b. Contracting performance bonded, credible airlines e.g. Middle East Airlines, Saudi Arabian Airlines who ordinarily operate Jeddah route. The Board should have on its staff contractual and legal experts who can draw up agreements that will ensure strict breach clauses, with significant performance bonds.
- c. Drawing up Hajj timetable for airlifting to and fro making provisions for slight variations in case of unplanned eventualities. (Our suggested time-table is attached).
- d. Appointing the National Amirul Hajj. The Amir must not be a partisan politician or a traditional ruler. He must be a seasoned Muslim technocrat, with proven organizational skills who should not see the nomination as a political one but a call to serve Allah only. He should travel with the last batches of Nigerian pilgrims and reside amongst them while in the holy lands.
- e. There must be heavy investment in educating intending pilgrims about Hajj rites. All stakeholders - Mosques, Muslim Associations etc, must participate in ensuring that all pilgrims attain a minimum standard of religious education capable to enable performance of the Hajj rites. This should be monitored and enforced. Hajj Guides should also be appointed to complement this education programme.

The success or failure of the Nigerian Hajj operation has been largely dependent on the problem of leadership. So a lot of energy and efforts will have to be spent to select the right team with the requisite knowledge, technical, logistic and

administrative capabilities that will tackle serious problems like accommodation, morals and pilgrims' conducts and the all pervasive problem of Hajj tourists who deprive genuine intending pilgrims' seats to be in the holy lands for other reasons than to perform pilgrimage.

Also the Federal and State governments should stop sponsoring people on pilgrimage. Individuals who desire Hajj should do so only from their own personal monies (or through private sponsors) rather than from the public fund. As lofty, noble and grand as the idea may seem, selection of beneficiaries will never be transparent and honest. The current trend is being mostly exploited to reward loyalists and fund hajj tourism.

Conclusion:

The Hajj is an important national matter. It is also a complex undertaking. The degree of complexity increases when it is agreed to have each State Government undertake its planning and execution. This involves the performance of more-or-less the same actions in each State with more people and higher costs as would have been done at a national level. This increased complexity neither improves the odds in favour of success nor does it guarantee it. The earlier we take central operational controls now to forestall the shameful and inexcusable annual show of shame the better for the Nigerian Muslims.

We should bear in mind that Hajj is a religious obligation and not a jamboree of some sort; Government apparatus should be deployed to positively assist the process and not hinder it as has been the case. There is absolutely no need for the Government to continue to send security and medical personnel to accompany the pilgrims because these services are provided by the Saudi Arabian authorities to all hujjaj and their presence is costly and serves no meaningful purpose. Consistent with the Government economic reforms programme, Hajj operations should be private-sector driven.

We hope that our views meet with the blessing of Allah (SWT).

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Hajj Project Team

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