



NITEL office, Ikoyi, Lagos. Photo: FEMI ADEBESIN-KUTI

Company Pleads Guilty in Halliburton Scandal

By Nicholas Ibekwe

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While the Nigerian government is foot dragging on revealing the identities of those implicated in the Halliburton bribery scandal, WM Kellogg, the company believed to have been used as the conduit for most of the bribes paid to Nigerian officials, is preparing to enter into a plea bargain with the UK's Serious Fraud Office (SFO).

According to a report on KHL group website yesterday, a UK based international construction information provider, WM Kellogg, from regulatory filings made by its former majority owner, Halliburton, is ready to admit to paying bribe to Nigerian government officials.

"WM Kellogg is into a plea negotiation with the SFO, and the SFO is said to be looking on this self-reporting with a lenient view," the website reported. However, it could not ascertain if the anti-graft organisation will press any criminal or civil prosecution against WM Kellogg.

Admission of guilt

WM Kellogg's admission of culpability in the scandal that involved the payment of N27 billion in bribes to Nigerian officials to secure the contracts of the construction of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plant worth \$6 billion (N9 trillion) is coming on the heels of Halliburton staff pleading guilty to bribing Nigerian officials through its former subsidiary KBR, early 2009. Halliburton was ordered to pay a fine of N83.8 billion in an out of court settlement reached with the Department of Justice and the US Security and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Foot dragging on corruption

Since the news of the scandal broke, the Nigerian government has been reluctant to call to name and shame the bribe takers. After a long period of silence, the federal government eventually announced its resolve to identify Nigerians indicted in the scandal. Former Attorney-General of the Federation, Michael Aondoakaa said, May 2009, that the government was exploring all diplomatic channels to get the US to release the names of officials identified to have received bribes.

"The President is not and will not protect anybody," Mr. Aondoakaa said.

"He has asked me to proceed to prosecute anyone found culpable. And we will go to any length to bring them to book", he added.

However, a probe panel set up by the federal government to investigate the bribery scandal is yet to submit its report after the initial deadline to submit its report and another eight weeks extension expired last August. Nothing has been heard of the panel or its report.

Late 2009 the Senate buckled to public and international pressure to identify those implicated in the scam. It directed its drugs, narcotics, financial crimes and anti-corruption committees, the committee on judiciary, human rights and legal matters, and committee on gas to investigate the scandal. The committees have submitted their report but it is yet to be debated in the Senate.