
Downsizing deals - Nigeria to sack 2,255 steel workers

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Ms Diezani Allison Madueke Nigeria's minister of steel and solid minerals development has told the House of Representatives Committee on Steel that at least 50% of the 4,510 workforce of Ajaokuta Steel Complex Limited, ASCL and the Nigerian Iron Ore Mining Company would have to go as government could no longer pay their wages.

This is coming after the Federal Government, last week, paid the workers a sum of NGN 3.1 billion as their 10 month salary arrears.

But the Iron & Steel Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, in a swift reaction, said that its members were ready to go if government meets all the conditions for disengaging them, saying it is the Nigerian Steel sector that would be the loser.

Appearing before the Committee headed by Mr Aminu Shagai, Ms Allison Madueke said that the burden of paying workers in a sector that is non-producing is one that the Federal Government is no longer disposed to and the Federal Ministry of Finance has made it clear that it would no longer approve the payment of such huge amount to the two companies, when there is no production going on.

She said that "We have set up a committee to work out their gratuity and pension."

Mr Comrade Otori Saliu president of ISSSCAN, while, speaking to newsmen after the minister's submission, said that it is unfortunate that after the government had spent so much money to train his members in Ukraine to acquire a rare professional skill in steel making and others, most of them would have to be laid off just when it seemed that the two companies may go into operation in the near future.

He added that "We are not saying that we will not go, as long as they pay us all outstanding arrears, our gratuity and make adequate and acceptable arrangements for our pension, we will go and face our lives elsewhere but, it is the country that would be the ultimate loser."

Mr Saliu said that "While in Japan, Russia and Ukraine, most of the able old hands in their steel sectors are being recalled to handle their expanding steel industry, we in Nigeria are sacking the ones trained on government bill, and never used for twenty years." He then accused government of unduly publicizing the payment of their salary arrears, saying it has made armed robbers to attack some of their members.

On the salary arrears paid the steel workers, Ms Allison Madueke told the Representatives committee that the total amount paid ASCL workers was NGN 2.24 billion for 3,166 workers and that the 1,344 NIOMCO staff got NGN 865.14 million.

On his part, the Committee Chairman said he was happy that the workers have been paid, saying it was a major achievement of the minister. He said that "If we cannot produce liquid steel by 2011, we will never be among the 20 most industrialized countries even by 2050."

(Sourced from <http://allafrica.com>)

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