

Nigeria's former oil minister blasted over court bid

LAGOS - A Nigerian judge accused the country's former oil minister of trying to "avoid justice" in Britain, as he dismissed an application for her to face corruption charges back home.



Diezani Alison-Madueke, Nigeria's former oil minister

Judge Rilwan Aikawa told the Federal High Court in Lagos that an attempt by Diezani Alison-Madueke's lawyers to add her name to a fraud case he was hearing was an abuse of process.

"The action of Diezani is to avoid justice in the United Kingdom. On the whole I found the application to be lacking in merit and accordingly dismissed," he ruled.

Alison-Madueke was one of Africa's highest-profile female politicians, having served under former president Goodluck Jonathan and been the first female president of OPEC.

She has been on bail in London since her arrest in October 2015 as part of a British investigation into corruption and money laundering.

Since then Alison-Madueke, 56, has been part of a number of separate corruption and asset-recovery cases in Nigeria, Italy and the United States.

She has always denied claims that billions of dollars were syphoned from oil deals and state accounts.

In recent months, property worth millions of dollars has been seized in Nigeria, while a British judge has frozen houses linked to the former minister in exclusive areas of London.

Wednesday's case was unusual in that her lawyers sought to have her extradited, charged and tried alongside two other defendants in a \$1.4 million fraud case.

Onyechi Ikpeazu tried to justify the move because his client was named as an accomplice in the four-count charge faced by two defendants, one of whom is a former planning minister.

"I know that she will be happy to come and face the trial," he said.

Prosecutor Rotimi Oyedeop said Alison-Madueke could still be charged and tried if and when she returned to Nigeria at a later date.

President Muhammadu Buhari has embarked on a wide-ranging anti-corruption campaign since coming to power in 2015, which has seen several top politicians arrested.

Source: *AFP*

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