

# Apapa port re-opens as freight forwarders call off 2-week strike

BY UCHE USIM

**F**reight forwarders operating at the Apapa port in Lagos have called off their two-week old strike, which led to the closure of AP Moller Terminal (APMT), the biggest seaport terminal in West Africa.

The strike was to protest the alleged arbitrariness, high charges, double billing, racist comments and other under-hand dealings of APMT.

A statement by the Joint Freight Forwarders Committee made available to Sunday Sun directed all members to resume work at APMT immediately, as most of their demands have been accepted and a Memorandum of Understanding signed with APMT manage-

ment to seal the deal.

Penultimate Sunday, the freight forwarding associations in Apapa directed the withdrawal of services by its members, from APMT and ENL with effect from Monday, November 3 for alleged "inefficient services and collecting money continuously for services not rendered by the terminal operators."

Experts say the development robbed the nation of about N50 billion in 10 working days:

The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) was the highest victim; reportedly losing an average of N1 billion daily.

Other losers are shipping lines, manufacturing companies, haulage/trucking firms, terminal operators, Nigerian Ports Authority, importers, clearing agents

and other agencies of government. Their losses are estimated to be about N4 billion daily and with that of the Customs, N5 billion was lost on each working day.

Aside the revenue loss, the strike also left several cargo-laden vessels stranded as dock workers who ought to unload and load the ships were also part of the strike.

There is also a backlog of uncleared containers; which will attract scores of trucks and then possibly lead to congestion.

Part of the grouse of the freight forwarders was the alleged racist comments, attitudes and behaviours.

The National President of the Association of Nigerian Licensed Customs Agents (ANLCA), Prince Olayiwola Shittu, at a meeting with members alleged that

APMT officials publicly believe that, when Nigerians are hungry, they will go back to work. "This unsolicited, unwarranted and undeserved comments, infuriated the protesters. Rather than douse the embers of anger arising from the bare-faced fleecing of Nigerians of their hard earned money, APMT, because of some 'powers' they rely on, aggravated the situation," he stated.

Continuing, he said: "the strike is a reaction to the high-handedness, arbitrariness and non-challant attitude towards Nigerian importers and agents, by the APMT officials, who are being touted as the great one that cannot be tamed. Therefore, other shipping and terminal operators follow suit, whatever APMT does," he said.