

# FOREIGN JUDGMENTS (RECIPROCAL ENFORCEMENT) ACT

## ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

### SECTION

1. Short title.
2. Interpretation.

### PART I

#### *Registration of foreign judgments*

1. Power to extend Part I of Act to countries giving reciprocal treatment.
2. Registration and application of judgments for enforcement in foreign countries.
3. Rules of court.
4. Cases in which registered judgments must or may be set aside.
5. Power of registering court on application to set aside registration.
6. Foreign judgments which can be registered not to be enforceable otherwise.
7. Application of Part I of Act to Her Majesty's dominions other than Nigeria.
8. Provisions respecting certain existing judgments.

### PART II

#### *Miscellaneous*

1. General effect of certain foreign judgments.
2. Power to make foreign judgments unenforceable in Nigeria if no reciprocity.
3. Issue of certificates of judgments obtained in Nigeria.

## FOREIGN JUDGMENTS (RECIPROCAL ENFORCEMENT) ACT

**An Act to make provision for the enforcement in Nigeria of judgments given in foreign countries which accord reciprocal treatment to judgments given in Nigeria, for facilitating the enforcement in foreign countries of judgments given in Nigeria, and for other purposes in connection with the matters aforesaid.**

[1960 No. 31.]

[1st February, 1961]

[Commencement.]

## 1. Short title

This Act may be cited as the Foreign Judgments (Reciprocal Enforcement) Act.

### 1. Interpretation

(1) In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires-

**“appeal”** includes any proceeding by way of discharging or setting aside a judgment or an application for a new trial or a stay of execution;

**“country of the original court”** means the country in which the original court is situated;

**“judgment”** means a judgment or order given or made by a court in any civil proceedings and shall include an award in proceedings on an arbitration if the award has in pursuance of the law in force in the place where it was made become enforceable in the same manner as a judgment given by a court in that place, or a judgment or order given or made by a court in any criminal proceedings for the payment of a sum of money in respect of compensation or damages to an injured party;

**“judgment creditor”** means the person in whose favour the judgment was given, and includes any person in whom the rights under the judgment have become vested by succession or assignment or otherwise;

**“judgment debtor”** means the person against whom the judgment was given, and includes any person against whom the judgment is enforceable under the law of the original court;

**“judgments given in the superior courts in Nigeria”** means judgments given in a High Court, Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court and includes as the case may require given in any courts on appeals against any judgments so given;

[L.N. 139 of 1965.]

**“Minister of Justice”** means the Minister of the Federation charged with the responsibility for justice;

**“original court”** in relation to any judgment means the court by which the judgment was given;

**“prescribed”** means prescribed by rules of court;

**“registration”** means registration under Part I of this Act and the expressions **“register”** and **“registered”** shall be construed accordingly;

**“registering court”** in relation to any judgment means the court to which an application to register the judgment is made;

**“superior court in Nigeria”** means the High Court of a State or of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja or the Federal High Court.

(2) For the purposes of this Act, the expression **“action in personam”** shall not be deemed to include any matrimonial cause or any proceedings in connection with any of the following matters, that is to say, matrimonial matters, administration of the estates of deceased persons, bankruptcy, winding up of companies, lunacy, or guardianship of infants.

## PART I

### *Registration of foreign judgments*

#### **1. Power to extend Part I of Act to foreign countries giving reciprocal treatment**

(1) The Minister of Justice if he is satisfied that, in the event of the benefits conferred by this Part of this Act being extended to judgments given in the superior courts of any foreign country, substantial reciprocity of treatment will be assured as respects the enforcement in that foreign country of judgments given in the superior courts in Nigeria, may by order direct-

(a) that this Part of this Act shall extend to that foreign country; and

(b) that such courts of that foreign country as are specific in the order shall be deemed superior courts of that country for the purposes of this Part of this Act.

(2) Any judgment of a superior court of a foreign country to which this Part of this Act extends, other than a judgment of such a court given on appeal from a court which is not a superior court, shall be a judgment to which this Part of this Act applies, if-

(a) it is final and conclusive as between the parties thereto; and

(b) there is payable thereunder a sum of money, not being a sum payable in respect of taxes or other charges of a like nature or in respect of a fine or other penalty; and

(c) it is given after the coming into operation of the order directing that this Part of this Act shall extend to that foreign country, or if it is a judgment to which section 10 of this Act applies.

(3) For the purposes of this section, a judgment shall be deemed to be final and conclusive notwithstanding that an appeal may be pending against it, or that it may still be

subject to appeal, in the courts of the country of the original court.

(4) The Minister of Justice may by a subsequent order vary or revoke any order previously made under this section.

### **1. Registration and application of judgments for enforcement in foreign countries**

(1) A person being a judgment creditor under a judgment to which this Part of this Act applies, may apply to a superior court in Nigeria at any time within six years after the date of the judgment, or, where there have been proceedings by way of appeal against the judgment, after the date of the last judgment given in those proceedings, to have the judgment registered in such court, and on any such application the court shall, subject to proof of the prescribed matters and to other provisions of this Act, order the judgment to be registered:

Provided that a judgment shall not be registered if at the date of the application-

(a) it has been wholly satisfied; or

(b) it could not be enforced by execution in the country of the original court.

(2) Subject to the provisions of this Act with respect to the setting aside of registration-

(a) a registered judgment shall, for the purposes of execution, be of the same force and effect; and

(b) proceedings may be taken on a registered judgment; and

(c) the sum for which a judgment is registered shall carry interest; and

(d) the registering court shall have the same control over the execution of a registered judgment, as if the judgment had been a judgment originally given in the registering court and entered on the date of registration:

Provided that execution shall not issue on the judgment so long as, under this Part of this Act and the rules of court, made thereunder, it is competent for any party to make an application to have the registration of the judgment set aside, or, where such application is made, until after the application has been finally determined.

(3) Where the sum payable under a judgment which is to be registered is expressed in a currency other than the currency of Nigeria, the judgment shall be registered as if it were a judgment for such sum in the currency of Nigeria as, on the basis of the rate of exchange prevailing at the date of the judgment of the original court, is equivalent to the sum so payable.

(4) If, at the date of the application for registration, the judgment of the original court has been partly satisfied, the judgment shall not be registered in respect of the whole sum payable under the judgment of the original court, but only in respect of the balance remaining payable at that date.

(5) If, on an application for the registration of a judgment, it appears to the registering court that the judgment is in respect of different matters and that some but not all, of the provisions of the judgment are such that if those provisions had been contained in separate judgments those judgments could properly have been registered, the judgment may be registered in respect of the provisions aforesaid but not in respect of any other provisions contained therein.

(6) In addition to the sum of money payable under the judgment of the original court, including any interest which by the law of the country of the original court becomes due under the judgment up to the time of registration, the judgment shall be registered for the reasonable costs of and incidental to registration, including the costs of obtaining a certified true copy of the judgment from the original court.

## 1. Rules of court

(1) The power to make rules of court conferred by any Act or Law establishing a High Court shall, subject to the provisions of this section, include power to make rules for the following purposes-

(a) for making provisions with respect to the giving of security for costs by persons applying for the registration of judgment;

(b) for prescribing the matters to be proved on an application for the registration of a judgment and for regulating the mode of proving those matters;

(c) for providing for the service on the judgment debtor of notice of the registration of a judgment;

(d) for making provision with respect to the fixing of the period within which an application may be made to have the registration of the judgment set aside and with respect to the extension of the period so fixed;

(e) for prescribing the method by which any question arising under this Act whether a foreign judgment can be enforced by execution in the country of the original court, or what interest is payable under a foreign judgment under the law of the original court, is to be determined;

(f) for prescribing any matter which under this Part of this Act is to be prescribed.

(2) Rules made for the purposes of this Part of this Act shall be expressed to have, and shall have, effect subject to any such provisions contained in orders made under section 3 of this Act as are declared by the said orders to be necessary for giving effect to agreements made between Her Majesty and foreign countries, and in force in Nigeria at the date of the making of the order concerned, or made between Nigeria and foreign countries, as the case may be, in relation to matters with respect to which there is power to make rules of court for the purposes of this Part of this Act.

[L.N. 139 of 1965.]

### 1. **Cases in which registered judgments must or may be set aside**

(1) On an application in that behalf duly made by any party against whom a registered judgment may be enforced, the registration of the judgment-

(a) shall be set aside if the registering court is satisfied-

(i) that the judgment is not a judgment to which this Part of this Act applies or was registered in contravention of the foregoing provisions of this Act; or

(ii) that the courts of the country of the original court had no jurisdiction in the circumstances of the case; or

(iii) that the judgment debtor, being the defendant in the proceedings in the original court, did not (notwithstanding that process may have been duly served on him in accordance with the law of the country of the original court) receive notice of those proceedings in sufficient time to enable him to defend the proceedings and did not appear; or

(iv) that the judgment was obtained by fraud; or

(v) that the enforcement of the judgment would be contrary to public policy in Nigeria; or

(vi) that the rights under the judgment are not vested in the person by whom the application for registration was made;

(b) may be set aside if the registering court is satisfied that the matter in dispute in the proceedings in the original court had previously on the date of the judgment in the original court been the subject of a final and conclusive judgment by a court having jurisdiction in the matter.

(2) For the purposes of this section the courts of the country of the original court shall, subject to the provisions of subsection (3) of this section, be deemed to have had jurisdiction-

(a) in the case of a judgment given in an action *in personam*-

(i) if the judgment debtor, being a defendant in the original court, submitted to the jurisdiction of that court by voluntarily appearing in the proceedings otherwise than for the purpose of protecting, or obtaining the release of property seized, or threatened with seizure, in the proceedings or of contesting the jurisdiction of that court; or

(ii) if the judgment debtor was plaintiff in, or counterclaimed in, the proceedings in the original court; or

(iii) if the judgment debtor, being a defendant in the original court, had before the commencement of the proceedings agreed, in respect of the subject matter of the proceedings, to submit to the jurisdiction of that court or of the courts of the country of that court; or

(iv) if the judgment debtor, being a defendant in the original court, was at the time when the proceedings were instituted resident in, or being a body corporate had its principal place of business, in the country of that court; or

(v) if the judgment debtor, being a defendant in the original court, had an office or place of business in the country of that court and the proceedings in that court were in respect of a transaction effected through or at that office or place;

(b) in the case of judgment given in an action of which the subject matter was immovable property or in an action *in rem* of which the subject matter was movable property, if the property in question was at the time of the proceedings in the original court situate in the country of that court;

(c) in the case of a judgment given in an action other than any such action as is mentioned in paragraph (a) or (b) of this subsection, if the jurisdiction of the original court is recognised by the law of the registering court.

(3) Notwithstanding anything in subsection (2) of this section, the courts of the country of the original court shall not be deemed to have had jurisdiction-

(a) if the subject matter of the proceedings was immovable property outside the country of the original court; or

(b) except in the case mentioned in sub-paragraphs (i), (ii) and (iii) of paragraph (a) and in paragraph (c) of subsection (2) of this section, if the bringing of the proceedings in the original court was contrary to an agreement under which the dispute in question was to be settled otherwise than by proceedings in the courts of the country of that court; or

(c) if the judgment debtor, being a defendant in the original proceedings, was a person who under the rules of public international law was entitled to immunity from the

jurisdiction of the courts of the country of the original court and did not submit to the jurisdiction of that court. Power of registering court on application to set aside registration

(1) If, on application to set aside the registration of a judgment the application satisfies the registering court either that an appeal is pending, or that he is entitled and intends to appeal, against the judgment, the court, if it thinks fit, may, on such terms as it may think just, either set aside the registration or adjourn the application to set aside the registration until after the expiration of such period as appears to the court to be reasonably sufficient to enable the applicant to take the necessary steps to have the appeal disposed of by the competent tribunal.

(2) Where the registration of a judgment is set aside under subsection (1) of this section, or solely for the reason that the judgment was not at the date of the application for registration enforceable by execution in the country of the original court, the setting aside of the registration shall not prejudice a further application to register the judgment when the appeal has been disposed of or if and when the judgment becomes enforceable by execution in that country as the case may be.

(3) Where the registration of a judgment is set aside solely for the reason that the judgment, notwithstanding that it had at the date of the application for registration been partly satisfied, was registered for the whole sum payable thereunder, the registering court shall, on application of the judgment creditor, order judgment to be registered for the balance remaining payable at that date.

### **1. Foreign judgments which can be registered not to be enforceable otherwise**

No proceedings for the recovery of a sum payable under a foreign judgment, being a judgment to which this Part of this Act applies, other than proceedings by way of registration of the judgment, shall be entertained by any court in Nigeria.

### **1. Application of Part I of Act to Her Majesty's dominions other than Nigeria**

(1) This Part of this Act shall apply to any part of the Commonwealth other than Nigeria and to judgments obtained in the courts thereof as it applies to foreign countries and to judgment obtained in the courts of foreign countries, and the Reciprocal Enforcement of Judgments Ordinance shall cease to have effect except in relation to those parts of Her Majesty's dominions other than Nigeria to which it extended at the date of commencement of this Act.

[L.N. 139 of 1965. Cap. 175 of 1958.]

(2) If an order is made under section 3 of this Act extending Part I of this Act to any part of Her Majesty's dominions to which the Reciprocal Enforcement of Judgments Ordinance extended as aforesaid, the said Act shall cease to have effect in relation to that part of Her Majesty's dominions, except as regards judgments obtained before the coming into operation of the order and registered in accordance therewith.



(3) In this section, the expression "any part of the Commonwealth other than Nigeria" shall be deemed to include any British protectorate or protected State and any territory in respect of which a mandate or trusteeship under the League of Nations or United Nations has been accepted by the President.

## **10. Provisions respecting certain existing judgments**

Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act-

(a) a judgment given before the commencement of an order under section 3 of this Act applying Part I of this Act to the foreign country where the judgment was given may be registered within twelve months from the date of the judgment or such longer period as may be allowed by a superior court in Nigeria; and

(b) any judgment registered under the Reciprocal Enforcement of Judgments Ordinance at the time of the coming into operation of an order made under section 3 of this Act in respect of the foreign country where judgment was given shall be treated as if registered under this Act and compliance with the rules applicable to the former Act shall satisfy the requirements of rules made under this Act.

[Cap. 175 of 1958.]

PART II *Miscellaneous*

## **11. General effect of certain foreign judgments**

(1) Subject to the provisions of this section, a judgment to which Part I of this Act applies or would have applied if a sum of money had been payable thereunder, whether it can be registered or not, and whether, if it can be registered, it is registered or not, shall be recognised in any court in Nigeria as conclusive between the parties thereto in all proceedings founded on the same cause of action and may be relied on by way of defence or counterclaim in any such proceedings.

(2) This section shall not apply in the case of any judgment-

(a) where the judgment has been registered and the registration thereof has been set aside on some ground other than-

(i) that a sum of money was not payable under the judgment; or

(ii) that the judgment had been wholly or partly satisfied; or

(iii) that at the date of the application the judgment could not be enforced by execution in the country of the original court; or

(b) where the judgment has not been registered and it is shown (whether it could have been registered or not) that if it had been registered the registration

thereof would have been set aside on an application for that purpose on some ground other than one of the grounds specified in paragraph (a) of this subsection.

(3) Nothing in this section shall be taken to prevent any court in Nigeria recognising any judgment as conclusive of the matter of law or fact decided therein if that judgment would have been so recognised before the passing of this Act.

## **12. Power to make foreign judgments unenforceable in Nigeria if no reciprocity**

(1) If it appears to the Minister of Justice that the treatment in respect of recognition and enforcement accorded by the courts of any foreign country to judgments given in the superior courts of Nigeria is substantially less favourable than that accorded by the courts of Nigeria to judgments of the superior courts of that country, the Minister of Justice may by order apply this section to that country.

(2) Except in so far as the Minister of Justice may by order under this section otherwise direct, no proceedings shall be entertained in any court in Nigeria for the recovery of any sum alleged to be payable under a judgment given in a court of a country to which this section applies.

[L.N. 139 of 1965.]

(3) The Minister of Justice may by a subsequent order vary or revoke any order previously made under this section.

## **13. Issue of certificates of judgments obtained in Nigeria**

Where a judgment under which a sum of money is payable, not being a sum payable in respect of taxes or other charges of a like nature or in respect of a fine or other penalty, has been entered in a superior court in Nigeria against any person and the judgment creditor is desirous of enforcing the judgment in a country or territory to which Part I of this Act applies, the court shall, on an application made by the judgment creditor and on payment of such fee as may be fixed for the purposes of this section by rules of court of the High Court in question, issue to the judgment creditor a certified copy of the judgment, together with a certificate containing such particulars with respect to the action, including the causes of action, and the rate of interest, if any, payable on the sum payable under the judgment, as may be prescribed:

Provided that, where execution of a judgment is stayed for any period pending an appeal or for any other reason, an application shall not be made under this section with respect to the judgment until the expiration of that period.

FOREIGN JUDGMENTS (RECIPROCAL ENFORCEMENT) ACT

**SUBSIDIARY LEGISLATION**

*No Subsidiary Legislation*