

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE: THE GERMANE ISSUES

The Third Rufus Okikiola Ositelu Foundation (ROOF) Keynote Lecture

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Your Holiness, My Lords Spiritual and Temporal, Fellow Nigerians, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Preamble

I thank God and the organizers of this event for inviting me to make this presentation. I join everyone present to wish His Holiness a happy birthday and many more years of service to God and humanity. Incidentally, the motto of my institution, Caleb University, Imota, the only bachelor's degree awarding private university in Lagos State, is: "For God and Humanity."

I would like to commend this initiative of generating ideas out of informed debates on various aspects of the Nigerian Project. The initiative of the ROOF shows that the relationship between Religion and the State does not have to be adversarial or conflictual. I hope that enlightened religious leaders can take a cue from the organizers of this event to engage with the State in order to make it work for everyone. Religion can be a positive force in nation-building and, so, should not be an instrument of coercion and subversion in a diverse society such as ours.

Please, permit me to state clearly from the outset that my specialty is History, an all-encompassing subject that is too often sidelined in debates on constitutionalism and governance. It is blissfully forgotten that all disciplines are rooted in History. That said, my position is that governance is too serious a matter to be entrusted to any single group of specialists since all of us are victims of wrong-headed policies inflicted on us by the so-called specialists. So, governance is everybody's business and everyone is entitled to their considered views or positions on the subject. The point is that I respect the right of others to make their contributions, and I will shortly make mine based on my knowledge of Nigerian and comparative political history, and a sustained engagement with issues of governance and nation-building.

I wish to make an open confession that I am a late convert to the idea of a National Conference at this time. I am now somewhat persuaded that, in spite of several unanswered questions and lingering doubts, we should make "the most of the imperfect situation." (Onwe, 2014: 69) I also associate myself with those who argue that this might be the time to correct the lie in our Constitution – "We, the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" – whereas, in truth, it was "We, a cabal within the Nigerian military" that gave us the current (1999) Constitution. "At least,

for once,” it has been contended, “let the Nigerian people be the ones to come together and take ownership of deciding their fate.” (Onwe, 2014: 69) True patriots and concerned stakeholders must be fully engaged this time in spite of our misgivings. To do otherwise is to repeat the mistake of 1998/99, when those who fought for the restoration of civilian democratic rule stayed on the sidelines, unconvinced about the sincerity of the departing military. Opportunists, who had been the military apologists that supported the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election won by M.K.O. Abiola, and later clamoured for an Abacha Life Presidency, then filled the void. The rest is history.

Conferences, Consensus Building and Constitution Making

A cursory survey of the histories of nation-states which emerged from colonial rule reveals that, for heterogeneous – multi-ethnic and/or multi-religious – entities, the struggle for independence and the nation building process that followed involved consensus building and constitution making, which required the convening of Conferences. The independence of India (1947), Zimbabwe (1980) and South Africa (1994) followed a series of negotiations aimed at achieving a workable consensus among the diverse (racial, ethnic, social and religious) groups in each territory. The point is that dialogue, consultations or constitutional conferences are unavoidable in the construction of a heterogeneous country.

Back home in Nigeria, the Lugardian, Clifford, Cameron and Richards constitutional arrangements of the period 1914-46 were imposed without the direct involvement of the indigenous peoples or their representatives. (Olukoju, 1997a) This was because the era was the heyday of British imperial rule, which came to an end with the conclusion of the Second World War. Despite pretences to the contrary, British rule was already in its terminal stage in Nigeria from at least 1945, benchmarked by the successful labour strike of that year and the conclusion of the Second World War, which had reduced Britain to a second-fiddle world power behind the United States and the emergent Soviet Union. It can now be appreciated why opposition to the Richards Constitution even before its formal inauguration in 1946 was irresistible paving the way for the Macpherson Constitution, the making of which was preceded by unprecedented consultations from the village to the regional level. The Ibadan Conference of 1950 was a

watershed because it was the outcome of the consultations there that shaped the 1951 Constitution.

I have used the Macpherson Constitution as a benchmark as it was the first time in Nigerian history that such thoroughgoing conversations took place among Nigerians and that standard has never been matched. Further Conferences took place in Nigeria and the United Kingdom to address perceived defects in the 1951 Constitution, and these led to the Lyttelton Constitution of 1954. The Independence Constitution that took effect from 1960 resulted from conferences in Nigeria and London in 1957/58.

In the post-independence era, informal discussions among key stakeholders, and formal conferences and consultations (notably, Regional Leaders of Thought meetings and the Aburi Summit) took place in the face of constitutional crises and national emergencies – such as the census crises, disputed elections in Western Nigeria and the events leading to the civil war. Subsequently, there were the 1977 Constituent Assembly as a prelude to the return to civil rule in 1979, Babangida and Abacha’s schemes (1987 Political Bureau and 1995 conference) to perpetuate themselves in office, and the alleged third term agenda of the Obasanjo government (2005). The latest attempt by President Goodluck Jonathan, an ongoing concern, is the subject of this lecture. We shall tackle the germane issues in the main but, first, some comment will be made about the controversies swirling around the project.

The National Conference of 2013/14: Ancillary Matters

That some issues are deemed germane presupposes that less critical issues have been or may be raised. We may note some of these miscellaneous or ancillary matters in passing. These include the nomenclature, cost, timing,¹ formula for representation and the cloud of mistrust surrounding the project. The issue of nomenclature has been laid to rest, but not before confusion arose whether the exercise was a “dialogue,” “conference,” or “conversation.” Indeed, someone even came up with the name “Diaference” to indicate that it was a cross between dialogue and

¹ Ojo (2014:15) commented as follows: “I strongly feel this conference, desirable as it is, should have held after the 2015 elections when politics will not be a major distraction and time will not be a pressure point.” *The Nation*, 16 February 2014, pp. 39, 42-44, is a wideranging analysis of various aspects of the Conference, admittedly from a critical standpoint.

conference. There had also been calls for a “sovereign national conference,” which attracted both passionate support and opposition. “The common denominator in all the calls,” it has been noted, “is that Nigerian peoples must sit down and carry out an honest dialogue on some fundamental issues and challenges.” (Okoye, 2013) The related issues of motivation for, and timing of, the conference were raised for three reasons.

First, President Goodluck Jonathan, like his predecessors, had been apathetic, if not hostile, towards the idea of a National Conference (“sovereign” or otherwise), especially as strident advocacy had been made, since the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election won by M.K.O Abiola, by vocal elements to make the Conference “sovereign,” that is, that its outcome would be binding on all irrespective of the preference of the executive and legislative arms of the incumbent government. The fear of the possible breakup of the country also lay behind the phobia for the qualification “sovereign.” (Osuji, 2014) So, some questions have been raised: Why did the President and even the Senate President, David Mark, suddenly do a volte-face? When and why did they lose the fear that such a conference might pose the much feared threat to national peace and stability?²

The second was the series of events in the country which had placed the federal government on the defensive – the insurgency in the North, which seemed to have defied a decisive solution; the lacklustre performance of the federal government in critical areas of national life, such as road and rail transport infrastructure, electric power supply, youth unemployment and poverty reduction; the flourishing climate of impunity and inaction in the face of reported financial scandals, which provided fodder for the opposition; and the rolling crises in the ruling party. It thus appeared that the Conference was a stunt to keep people talking to divert attention from the federal government’s woes or even a strategy to postpone or render impossible the 2015 general elections that the ruling party was not sure of winning with a divided house and lack of stellar record of performance on which to run. (Ayobami-Ojo, 2014)

² Omole (2013) had stated that the national conference is a “family meeting of ethnic components (nationalities) and other special interests in this nation.” Consequently, no fear should be entertained about the outcome of the Conference. “Family meetings do not break or disrupt families,” he assured, “they rather unite and strengthen family members for individual and collective progress.”

A third issue raised by commentators is that the Conference is a duplication and waste of public funds. (Ayobolu, 2014) To buttress this, in addition to the report of the 2005/6 confab, the current National Assembly had commenced the process of constitutional amendment. It was felt that the Obasanjo-era report (shorn of the tenure elongation clause) could have been adopted for debate by both the executive and legislature, thus saving the N7billion (compared to Obasanjo's N900million) that the current exercise would cost. The exercise is thus seen as a jamboree and a means to enrich a few hundred delegates.

Consequently, the conference was birthed in an atmosphere of doubt and mistrust. A commentator (Akinloye, 2013) expressed it thus: "Like the previous attempts at a national conference, Jonathan's announcement has also been met with suspicion, particularly around the timing of the conference." Worse still, the Committee constituted by President Jonathan to lay the groundwork for the Conference was mired in controversy over the issue of representation – by ethnic group, zonal, senatorial/ house of representatives constituency or any combination of these – and the existence or otherwise of a minority report. As we speak, some of these matters arising or matters miscellaneous are still smouldering and it remains to be seen whether they would not haunt or hamper the conduct of the Conference.

That said, we need to comment on the Presidential Advisory Committee on National Dialogue, the body that President Jonathan constituted to develop a roadmap for the Conference. Led by Senator Femi Okurounmu, the 13-member Committee considered memoranda from various social, political, cultural and professional groups, interacted with critical stakeholders, and submitted a report signed by all but one of its members. The dissenting member, Chief Solomon Asemota, a septuagenarian Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), submitted a minority report which, though officially denied, has been published in the newspapers. (Asemota, 2014)

The Majority Report recommended direct election of delegates by universal adult suffrage on non-party basis to represent the existing House of Representatives constituencies, complemented by nominated representatives of eleven designated interest groups. Members had considered several options and adopted the one with the greatest support. The Committee also recommended a duration of three to six months, between February and July 2014, for the conduct of the Conference. On the legal basis for the Conference and its outcome, the Majority Report

recommended the enactment of an enabling law deriving from an Executive Bill by the President. In the alternative, the President could convene the Conference in the exercise of his powers under Section 5 of the Constitution. Other recommendations were the change of nomenclature of the Conference to “The National Conference”; choice of Abuja as venue; decisions to be reached by consensus, failing which by two-thirds majority; two-thirds of delegates to be elected; and adoption of rules of procedure of the House of Representatives.

The Minority Report (Asemota, 2014) differed in a few significant ways. The author had participated in the earlier Conference convened in 1987 by General Ibrahim Babangida, which had culminated in a draft 1989 Constitution that was never promulgated. Asemota opted for selection of delegates through the ethnic associations (a position that is critiqued in a footnote below) as he doubted INEC’s capability to conduct the direct election recommended in the Majority Report. He contended that the fears of the ethnic minorities, which the Willink Commission of 1958 had failed to allay, remained potent and needed to be addressed. Hence, he recommended representation by ethnic nationalities on the basis of senatorial districts, with some modifications that he included in a draft Bill attached to his report which provided for, among others, a referendum to ratify the outcome of the conference and presidential powers to appoint delegates recommended by the “Ethnic Associations in the Country.”³

Asemota also differed on a fundamental issue, which had been taken off the table – the inviolability of the unity of the country. “Nigerian unity is not only negotiable,” he asserted, “but must be re-negotiated for it to stand or survive the test of time.” He submitted that, in spite of the best efforts of successive Nigerian leaders, “Nigerian unity is not guaranteed. It is simply, at best, an aspiration and not yet an achievement.”⁴ To claim that the country’s unity was “not

³ Ethnicity as basis for representation is both controversial (the groups are historically artificial and inherently divisive) and problematic (their number and relative sizes are unknown). Afenifere chieftain, Ayo Adebajo, and members of similar groups rooted for a conference of ethnic nationalities. Adebajo had argued that the British amalgamated territories belonging to ethnic nationalities, “the owners of Nigeria,” which are, therefore, the only ones qualified to attend the Conference (Okpi, 2014:9). But, Okoye (2013) had contended that the composition of the dialogue “must never give pre-eminence to ethnic and religious irredentists.”

⁴ Asemota’s position was corroborated independently by a constitutional lawyer, James Ezike: “the problem of Nigeria is that Nigeria has not been formed.” (Nwannekanma, 2014)

negotiable” was to commit “a historical fallacy.”⁵ Asemota declared that though the people love the country, most were losing the dream of a united Nigeria because of “the obstinate resistance of a few to any idea of reform or restructure of the country.” He fingered the continuing operation of colonial era Indirect Rule, the Tripodal construction of Nigeria on the hegemony of the three majority ethnic power blocs (“Hausa-Fulani”, Yoruba and Igbo) and the concomitant attempt at erasure of ethnic minorities, as major obstacles to Nigerian unity and progress. If Nigerians were pushed to the brink, he warned, they would “choose their liberty/freedom” above their country as it is. However, he concluded, given the chance to freely examine the past, most Nigerians would realize that “1914 is a blessing not a mistake and Nigeria transformed from a geographical expression to a country would become a nation and the giant of Africa.”

Having outlined the matters arising, we can now focus on the main issues of the Conference. In dealing with the germane issues, a starting point is the Majority Report submitted by the Okurounmu Committee.

The National Conference of 2013/14: The Germane Issues

Of immediate relevance to this lecture is a list of items proposed for discussion at the Conference. For the record, the items for consideration by the Conference listed in chapter 4 of the Majority Report are as follows:

1. Political Restructuring of the Country: political federalism; fiscal federalism; definition of federating units (states or geopolitical zones)
2. Forms of Democratic Governance: presidential system; parliamentary system; unicameral versus bicameral legislature; full-time versus part-time legislature
3. Good Governance: cost of governance; corruption and national development; anti-corruption agencies; immunity of political office holders; citizenship (indigenes versus

⁵ Onwe (2014:69) contended that excluding the discussion of the unity of the country was “uncalled for.” He opined that, in spite of their differences, most Nigerians believed that their interests were best served in a big, united country. Consequently, “our unity will be stronger and more valuable if we sit down, walk ourselves through its essence and then take ownership of it.”

settlers); justiciability of the fundamental objectives and directive principles of State policy

4. Judicature: fundamental human rights; impunity of judicial officers; review of judicial institutions; Sharia and Customary legal systems; delays in the administration of justice
5. Democratization: deepening democracy; de-militarization of the national psyche; democratic culture and orientation; mechanisms for a more inclusive participatory democracy
6. Political Parties, Godfatherism and Challenges of Internal Democracy
7. National Security and Security Challenges: review and re-design of national security apparatus; local policing; other security agencies
8. State Creation and Merger of States
9. Education: investment in education; decentralization and national education policy; return of missionary and private schools to original owners; institutionalizing Tsangaya/Almajiri education system; nomadic education
10. Health: health policy; investment in health; healthcare delivery
11. Science, Technology and Development: science and technology education; technological adaptations and the national economy; research and development; promotion and improvement of indigenous technological innovations
12. Restoring National Ethics, Morals and Core Values
13. Religion, Secularism and the Secularity of the Nigerian State
14. Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development: decentralization of national agricultural policy; grazing reserves and cattle routes demarcation
15. The Environment: environmental degradation (flooding, soil erosion, oil spillage and desertification); climate change

16. Defence: national defence policy; the armed forces and challenges; international peacekeeping operations
17. Tenure of Public Officials – President, Governors, etc.
18. The Independent Electoral Commission and the Challenge of Conducting Free and Fair Elections
19. Population and Credible National Census
20. Land Use Act
21. Role of Traditional Rulers and Institutions in Governance
22. The Economy: poverty and wealth creation; productivity; diversification of the economy; industries and industrialization
23. Oil and Mineral Resources Management, Exploitation and Sharing Mechanism
24. Revenue Generation and Mobilization
25. National Youth Service Corps Scheme
26. Gender Issues
27. Youth Unemployment and Development
28. Physically Challenged Persons and National Development
29. Investment in Sports
30. Boundary Adjustment
31. National Inland Waterways
32. Elective Mayoralty and Status of FCT
33. Special Status of Lagos
34. Unsettled Issues of the Nigerian Civil War

35. Revisiting Bakassi
36. Language and Language Policy
37. Pension Matters and Rights of Senior Citizens
38. Federal Character

As comprehensive as this list is, the position of this speaker is that several of these items come under a general rubric, such as the structure of the federation, or the reform of public institutions and do not deserve to stand alone. Indeed, they could also be captured under “good governance” while some, such as health, sports, role of traditional rulers and the Almajiri issue, can safely be delegated to zonal/state management, where they are relevant. Hence, only the most critical issues will be raised in the following passages. Such issues are those that ordinarily cause friction at the national level or otherwise affect the vast majority of Nigerians.

A striking feature of every national dialogue organized in Nigeria has been the recurring focus on the nature or character of the Nigerian State. Two of the leading issues are the type of government and the control of its organs and agencies— federal, unitary or confederal; and recently, parliamentary or presidential (whether French or American presidentialism) – and control or ownership of the country’s resources. The recurring buzzwords are: “geopolitical restructuring;” “political decentralization;” “true federalism;” “fiscal federalism;” “resource control,” and even “confederation.” (Ukaegbu, 2014; Nwannekanma, 2014) It is within this general ambit that germane issues that will play out during the conference may be considered. Hence, the following issues: fiscal federalism; structure of the federation (how much power or authority devolves to the constituent units); checks and balances among the three arms of government; inter-governmental relations; creation of states and local government units; boundary adjustments (especially between the North and Southwest); autonomy of local governments; the independence of the judiciary, electoral commissions, anti-corruption agencies, the military, police and security services, and citizenship (indigenes versus settlers), will receive due consideration.

Perhaps the greatest issue for consideration is the political restructuring of the federation. From all indications, most enlightened Nigerians now accept that military-era, command style pseudo-

federalism cannot work well for the benefit of the people in a democratic setting in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country. Consequently, it is the content of the federal system that must be worked out in any meaningful conference. History is a reliable guide here. The 1951 Constitution, based on the 1949/50 consultations, opted for a federation with a relatively weak centre and powerful regions. But within a few years, it was discovered that the regions were becoming too strong for the centre, which needed to be bolstered in the face of bickering centrifugal movements. This was addressed in the 1954 Lyttelton Constitution that strengthened the centre and moderated the seemingly excessive devolution of the 1951 Constitution. The position was further reinforced in the 1960 (Independence) Constitution which clearly delineated the constituents of the Exclusive, Concurrent and Residual Lists, by which certain items were the exclusive preserve of the federal government. A second provision was that where a regional law contradicted a federal law, the latter prevailed, thus underscoring the supremacy of the centre vis-a-vis the regions. It can be said that the creation of a fourth region (Midwest) in 1964 and an increasing number of states between 1967 and 1997 weakened the regions and strengthened the centre. The tendency was intensified by prolonged military rule with its top-down, command style of administration. Its lingering effect is the suffocating grip of an imperial presidency⁶ on the nation prompting a longrunning agitation for the restructuring of the country into a fair, equitable federation. A commentator (Onwe, 2014) noted that the common denominator among Nigerians, irrespective of their differences, “is their disaffection.” We are thus “united” by our “differences” and “disaffection.”!

The case for restructuring has been founded on two planks: ethno-regional self-determination and sub-national development. The former is driven by the assumption that cultural and ethnic homogenization could propel solidarity or cooperation for local development tapping into local patriotism. This argument has been faulted by critics who argue that ethnic affinity has not prevented communal clashes and population displacements as witnessed during the bloody clashes between the fellow Yoruba of Ile-Ife and Modakeke, the Igbo kinsmen of Umuleri and Aguleri, and the sectarian bloodletting that accompanied the Maitatsine religious uprising in

⁶ Lasisi (2014) stated, with reference to the record of President Goodluck Jonathan, that the Nigerian “President’s power is not just overwhelming but also overbearing.”

Kano and Yola in the early 1980s. The point is that it is not enough to devolve authority and responsibility to ethnically homogeneous regions or zones. (Ukaegbu, 2014)

The other argument for devolution – local or regional development – has drawn strength from the examples of localized development in Nigeria’s multi-ethnic regions of the First Republic. This position emphasizes “far-reaching politico-economic decentralization ... based on the idea that the more the destinies of the constituent parts are in their own hands, the more they brace up to tackle the resulting challenges arising from their social and economic environments.” (Ukaegbu, 2014)

After all is said and done, the *raison d’être* of the Conference is getting Nigerians to live in harmony and work together to make life meaningful for everyone and make the country greater. In the words of Kupoluyi (2014:22), the ultimate aim of the Conference should be “to find lasting solutions to the main problems plaguing Nigeria” and attain “economic, social, cultural, religious and political justice and equity” for all Nigerians.

My Considered Position

As a practitioner of applied history, whose professional knowledge should be put to use for national development,⁷ I make bold to state my personal position on the issues raised above. I believe in the merit of the continued existence of the Nigerian State but I am not satisfied with the quality of its leadership and the management of its resources. As Omole (2013) argued, “a major objective of the National Conference should be to restructure our nation for more viability and economic competition and cooperation in our zones/states.” The unity and future of Nigeria should, therefore, be discussed at the Conference and re-affirmed by the federating units on the basis of mutually agreed principles. No section should be a part of Nigeria against its will. If, however, other zones/states consider that disaffected section vital to the continued existence of the family, they should make concessions within reasonable limits to keep it within the fold.

Second, I strongly recommend a federation based upon devolution of power and authority to the six geopolitical zones. By implication, I deplore any return to the regional structure of the First

⁷ My previous interventions include Olukoju, 1997a, 1997b, 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2013.

Republic and regard references to a monolithic “North” or “South” as a negation of the continued existence of Nigeria. In fact, the idea of a monolithic North has been one of the perpetuated lies to manipulate the destiny of Nigeria for personal gains. The ongoing attempt to create a Southern counterpart serves the same purpose. Those who do so are cowards and weaklings, who cannot stand on their feet, and who wish to employ atavistic weapons to undermine national progress in their selfish interest.

Third, fiscal federalism should accompany devolution to the zones/states. This will compel the optimal exploration and exploitation of human and natural resources in the respective zones/states, and promote more prudent resource management and accountability. Yet, a redistributive pool should be created from contributions from the zones/states on the basis of their wherewithal to enable the federal government intervene by way of affirmative action in aid of less endowed zones/states – by mutual agreement. But we must be careful to avoid overprotecting less endowed states to a point where they become perpetual panhandlers totally bereft of creative ingenuity!

In the same spirit, I support regional economic development based on locally formulated and implemented plans in any of the six zones. Regional economic competition drove the accomplishments of the First Republic. This does not preclude cooperation across zones, since there are common challenges, such as flooding, desertification, insecurity and logistics, which straddle boundaries.

Fourth, the six zones are at liberty to create states or merge unviable ones on the overriding principle of economic sustainability (viability). No benefit should accrue to any zone creating more states and no state should expect to survive on, or be hostage to, handouts from the centre.

Fifth, I am a strong advocate of Zonal/State Police. We have seen enough of the abuse of the federal police to drop opposition to the idea of State Police, which is inseparable from the practice of true federalism. Each zone/state should have a complement of Federal and State Police under a joint command.

Sixth, good governance, transparency, popular participation, the nurturing of a Developmental State (Olukoju. 2008) - as we saw in the regions of the First Republic- will make Nigeria and its

constituent zones/states centres of development rather than cesspits of corruption. To this end, the President, Governors, judges and other top government functionaries must have limited immunity. None should be shielded from scrutiny and sanctions for acts of corruption, oppression and criminality in the exercise of their power.

Seventh, the touchy indigene/settler dichotomy is, ordinarily, a non-issue but for our vicious politics.⁸ Everyone knows that, even for nomads, peoples and communities are territorially defined – everyone has a homestead or place of origin to which he owes his primary loyalty and affection. Consequently, the local clamour for the United States-style citizenship that replaces place of birth/origin with residency is arrant nonsense, which betrays ignorance of the basic fact that, except for Native Americans (the so-called Red Indians), all Americans are immigrants. The same cannot be said of Nigeria. It is sheer fraud for me to claim Lagos State citizenship and the right to be Governor just because I have been a lecturer at the University of Lagos since 1987. All my children, including the two who were born in Lagos, are registered as citizens of my native Ondo State. Residency does not prevent me from voting, investing, owning property or exercising my ordinary rights as a Nigerian citizen in Lagos State.⁹ But, as a long-term resident, I respect and defend the rights of Lagos State indigenes, who have no other place of origin, to freely s/elect whoever they want to run their own affairs. If I am dissatisfied, I can relocate to Ondo State, where I have my roots and claim whatever political rights I might have been denied here. I urge other Nigerians to be fair to their host communities, accept this reality and enshrine it in our constitution. I would even suggest that Governors of States whose citizens have found refuge in Lagos because of adverse conditions in those places, should contribute to the Lagos annual budget to mitigate the high cost of maintaining the State/megacity's bloated population.

Finally, our goal in restructuring Nigeria should be to create a slimmer centre, shift resources and initiative to the zones/states, and avert destructive power struggles to control the imperial

⁸ Professor Emeritus Akinjide Osuntokun has made a brilliant case for respect for, and defence of, the rights of indigenes of States, citing his own personal example as an Ekiti State indigene, who is a long term resident of Ibadan, Oyo State and traditional honorary chief of the *Alaafin*. See, Osuntokun, 2014:19.

⁹ This accords with the practice in contemporary China, where the province of origin and the place of residence are clearly distinguished. I owe this insight to my colleague, Dr. Omon Osiki, who earned his Doctorate degree in China.

presidency for primitive accumulation, hegemonic domination and unprofitable muscle flexing. (cf. Oloruntimehin, 2009: 70-72) Some practical suggestions for reducing the unbearably high cost of administration and effecting financial prudence for development are the adoption of a unicameral federal legislature on the House of Representatives basis; reduction in the number and size of Ministries, Departments, Commissions and Agencies; abolition of the legislature at the local government level; reversal of the recurrent/capital expenditure ratio in favour of the latter, and the drastic cut in, and full disclosure of, public officials' emoluments.

Conclusion

Chairman, sir, this lecture has examined the most critical issues among many competing ones worthy of robust debate and consensus building at the proposed National Conference. We may differ on the choice of germane issues but we need to agree on the imperative of sincerity of purpose and consideration for others. I align myself with the view of a constitutional lawyer, James Ezike, who proposed two foundational principles to guide proceedings at the Conference: subsidiarity and complementarity. (Nwannekanma, 2014:67) He employed "subsidiarity" to mean that "government is centred on the people thereby giving more power and revenue to the local areas which will bring less agitation to gain power at the centre." The principle of complementarity refers to decision by consensus while granting the minority their preference on local issues. For instance, if the vast majority voted against state or zonal police, the states or zones that want that institution would have it while others would do without. This is a vote for mutual tolerance and respect for localized demands that do not threaten the security of others in the federation.

Second, whatever the mode of selection and composition of delegates,¹⁰ it is important to stress that this could be the last opportunity for salvaging Nigeria, a country that has long been held down by vested interests. Indeed, contemporary Nigeria has been described as a "geoethnopolity of anti-progress." (Ukaegbu, 2014) These entrenched anti-developmental interests are the

¹⁰ This is a touchy issue, which I have sidestepped. It is feared that the Conference would be a mere rubberstamp. In an editorial entitled "Whose Conference?," *The Nation* (10 February 2014: 19) declared: "A situation where about half of the delegates are handpicked and the other half left to a manipulation of selection that may bear presidential influence or imprimatur does not appear to us like a people's confab."

coalition of conservative elements of the traditional institutions, the old military power elite and their collaborators in the business, religious, academic and professional sectors of the political economy. Asemota (2014:89), for example, singled out the traditional aristocracy which had “never been oriented towards the productive aspect of social life; they only emphasize the distributive dimension and promote the use of ethnicity and ethnic conflict to divide minorities in Nigeria.”

The idea of a Nigerian mega-state, the giant of Africa and the pride of the Black race, is attractive and worthy of support. However, it is one that has to be worked out to the satisfaction of a vast majority of its peoples. Consequently, it is improper to rule out debate on the existence of the Nigerian State. Ezike, for example, argued that the constituent groups must not be denied the right “to opt out” but stated that “it is a fallacy to think that if Nigerians are given a free hand, they will like to break up.” (Nwannekanma, 2014:67) The Pan-Yoruba group, Afenifere, explicitly demanded the insertion of a secession clause in the Constitution resulting from the Conference.

In the final analysis, there is the need to approach the Conference with cautious optimism. As Okoye (2013) cautioned, nobody should be under any illusion that it will be “the panacea to all the problems and challenges of the Nigerian nation.” As far as this speaker is concerned, the short-hand solution to the foregoing is good governance, flashes of which we can see in an increasing number of states. Before now, the exemplar of good governance with an enduring legacy had been the pathbreaking government of Chief Obafemi Awolowo in Western Nigeria. The point is that a good constitution on its own will not deliver good governance. That will take societal attitudinal change and visionary, intelligent, patriotic and principled leadership, the type that we have never had at the national level.¹¹ If this Conference overcomes the rational scepticism of critical stakeholders and sets us on the way to achieving peace, security, stability, socio-cultural and religious tolerance, good governance and developmental giant strides, then, the effort would have been worth it. Only time will tell.

I thank you for your attention. God bless.

¹¹ Ayobolu (2014:64) has stated with some justification that, whatever may the defects of the current constitution, “it is still possible for the country to make progress under it with the requisite leadership.”

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