



***EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION AS AN ANTIDOTE AGAINST
ABUSE OF POWER BY THE EXECUTIVE IN NIGERIA***

BY

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***A PAPER DELIVERED AT THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS***

***ORGANISED BY THE
FOUNDATION FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA***

***HELD AT
IMPERIAL COLLEGE, LONDON, SOUTH KESSINGTON CAMPUS
ON SATURDAY 25TH, JUNE 2005***

Mr. Chairman
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

In this new information age in which the entire world has truly turned into a 'global village', both in terms of time and space, it is indeed little wonder that Nigerians in diaspora are maintaining an ever-increasing interest in events back home in their motherland. It is, no doubt, this keen and up-to-the-moment interest in the state of affairs in our dear country, Nigeria, that has informed the decision of the organizers of this occasion, that is, the Foundation for Good Governance and Development in Nigeria, to extend the invitation to me to speak on the subject: "*Effective Opposition as an Antidote Against Abuse of Power by the Executive in Nigeria.*" In accepting this invitation, I feel both humbled and honoured, and I would like here and now to congratulate the Foundation on its courage, commitment and concern over events and happenings back home in our dear country. Back home in Nigeria, the Hausa have a saying that '*Kowa ya bar gida, gida zata bar shi*', that is, he who forgets about his country of origin would in turn be forgotten by his country of origin. You have all proved that even though you are beyond the shores of your motherland, the interest and well-being of your country remains deeply ingrained in your heart. You can remain assured that Nigerians will always remember that.

2. The Historical Inevitability of Opposition

It is no exaggeration that without opposition, life and nature would be incomprehensible. This is so because both nature and life itself are organized and structured on the basis of the unity of opposites. For instance, matter is opposed to spirit; male opposed to female; day opposed to night, good opposed to bad, white opposed to black, et cetera. There is, thus a dialectic in the very essence of nature, life and society which ensures that every thesis attracts an anti-thesis in opposition to it. And it is this dialectical relation of struggle between the two that provides the engine behind both natural and social progress.

In the specific case of political systems, both old and new, political opposition has historically taken different forms depending on the different ideological traditions and the socio-economic realities of the society in question. In the slave-owning political and economic systems, the opposition consisted of the chattels themselves and their rebellious leaders. Under feudalism, it was the peasants and emergent merchant class that formed the political opposition. In theocratic political systems, the opposition is made up of adherents of rival interpretations of the 'holy books.' Under the capitalist system, the working class organizations and peasant associations constitute the main source of opposition to the system. And under socialism, with its strong tendency towards one-party rule and its adherence to the principles of democratic centralism, opposition emerges within the structure and organs of the party as was demonstrated, for example, by the rift between Stalin and Trotsky in the former Soviet Union. This internal opposition is, of course, distinct from the obvious opposition to the socialist order which is mounted from both within and outside of the system by sympathizers of the capitalist path.

However, in particular reference to the present situation it must be admitted that the idea of institutionalized political opposition is essentially the product of Western liberal democratic thought and practices, introduced to Nigeria and other parts of the so-called 'Third World' through the mediation of colonial rule and imperialist penetration and, today, through the all-pervasive influence of globalization. It is not that the pre-colonial political structures and

systems in Nigeria were devoid of institutional opposition to absolutist rule. The various secret societies, the age grades, the traditional male and female cults, the messianic preachers of traditional religions and the non-conformist *mallams* and *Alkallai*, all to a lesser or larger degree performed this role for the pre-colonial Nigerian political systems. However, in terms of the modern state, the form and content of institutionalized opposition is today essentially modeled and tailored along the basic lines of Western liberal democratic political traditions.

And in this tradition, the opposition may be conceptualized as constituting two distinct, but not mutually exclusive, components: namely, the *Constitutional opposition*, on the one hand, and the *Social opposition* on the other. The constitutional opposition consists of all those institutions provided for by the constitution to serve as a check on the Executive in the exercise of the enormous powers at its disposal. These institutions would include the Judiciary, the Legislature, the political parties, electoral commissions, et cetera. On the other hand, the political opposition consists largely of civil society organizations such as organized labor, the press, employees' organizations, religious organizations, student's associations, and such other interest and lobby groups.

There is yet another perspective in conceptualizing the opposition in the context of the traditions of western liberal democracy. This may be done extrapolating the role of the opposition in the two main governmental systems of western liberal democracy, namely; the parliamentary system and the presidential system. Under the parliamentary system, the opposition has a very prominent and clearly defined role. It is made up (say, in Britain) by the largest minority party in the parliament and constitutes 'Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.' It generally offers critiques of government policies and programmes and presents alternative vistas fully garnished with even a shadow cabinet. Under the presidential system of government, however, the role of the opposition is encapsulated in the dictum or doctrine of the separation of powers.

The doctrine of the separation of powers propounded by *Montesquieu* in his *De L'Esprit des Loise* in 1748, states that:

“When the legislative and Executive powers are united in the same person or in the same body of magistrates, there is no liberty. Again there is no liberty, if the judicial powers is not separated from the legislative and executive powers. Were it joined with the legislative powers, the life and liberty of the subject would be exposed to arbitrary control – for the judge would be the legislator. Were it joined with the executive power, the judge might behave with violence and oppression. There would be an end of everything were the same man or the same body to exercise these three powers”.

This doctrine according to the architects of the American Constitution says:

“The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive and judiciary, in the same hands whether of one, a few or many, and whether hereditary, self appointed or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny”

3. Opposition and the Nigeria Constitution

Nigeria presently operates a presidential system of government and the Nigerian Constitution is accordingly tailored along the broad principles of the separation of powers as expounded by the founding fathers of the American presidential system. This 1999 Nigerian Constitution has clearly defined the powers of the three tiers of government accordingly.

Section 4(1) – (9) clearly spells out the functions and powers of the Legislature. For instance, section 4(2) says “*the National Assembly shall have powers to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the federation or any part thereof with respect to any matter...*”

The power of the Executive, which is vested in the President is clearly stated under section 5(1) – (5). Section 5(1)(a), for example, says “*the executive power of the federation shall be vested in the president and may, subject as aforesaid and to the provisions of any law made by the National Assembly, be exercised by him...*”

The powers of the court are stated under Section 6(1) – (6).

This section, especially subsection (1), vests in the courts all the judicial powers of the federation.

It is obvious from the provisions of the Constitution quoted above, that the legislature is the most potent arm of government to guard against any act of executive recklessness. In fact, the late legal luminary, Chief Romiti Williams, who chaired the committee which produced the draft that became the 1979 Constitution said in 1977, that;

“Human nature being what it is, most people tend to act capriciously or oppressively when they have the assurance that their conduct can never be reviewed by any other person or authority”

Chief Williams further argued that the principles of separation of powers is the surest guarantee and the most effective instrument against abuse of power in a democracy. Its intention is that:

“The legislative Houses are given the investigatory powers over all executive and administrative action by any department of government. These include all actions of the President as well as the administrative decisions or executive actions of the judiciary. These are vital powers and are calculated to have important effects on executive and administrative actions by public authorities”

4. The weaknesses of Constitutional Opposition

It is quite evident from the foregoing discussion that the authors of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution saw these constitutional provisions of checks and balances as the major guarantee against arbitrary and autocratic abuse of power by the Executive in the Nigerian polity. But every constitution is operated not in an ideal setting but within the context of concrete historical, cultural, economic and social realities, and the specifics of the society in

which it is operational. In the case of Nigeria, those very institutions which the 1999 constitution provided for as checks on executive arbitrariness and a guarantee against the abuse of executive powers and privileges have all but turned out to be weak and ineffective.

This weakness is amply demonstrated by the ineffectiveness of the legislature in Nigeria to check President Obasanjo's abuses and breaches of the Nigerian Constitution. The weakness of the Nigerian Legislative arm of government in the performance of its constitutional duty of checking executive excesses originated partly from historical factors and also from ideological considerations. Since 1966 when the military first took over the reigns of political power from a discredited and disunited political elite, 'democratic' civilian rule existed only for a total of four solitary years until the onset of the present democratic experiment in 1999. During this period of more than three decades of military rule, the institution of the legislature was in complete abeyance as the military government combined in itself both executive and legislative powers. The military ruled by decrees and diktats. Thus, the needed experience in legislative work was absent at a time when the powers of the executive were getting more concentrated. So, on the inception of the present 'democratic' civilian dispensation, we had an executive arm of government that was overreaching, overbearing and all-embracing on the one hand, and on the other, an emaciated, inexperienced and enervated legislature lacking in both infrastructural support and cognate skills.

This already bad situation has been further compounded by the ideological and class base from which the bulk of the members of the legislative arm were recruited in 1999. Drawn largely from the remnants of feudal, traditional and an elitist middle class that had been bred and weaned by the military in the seventies and the eighties, these legislators were schooled in the arbitrary style of governance of their emirate and military bosses and were generally bereft of virtually all semblance of political credibility and civic responsibility. Fortune hunters and cynical political adventurers that they were, they largely concerned themselves with the search for material largesse from the executive branch of government. Whenever they summoned the nerve to bark timidly and unconvincingly at the Executive, they did so only as a strategy for the anticipated 'Ghana-must-go' baggage of hand outs from the Executive. Obviously, this kind of a legislature was, and is, hardly in any position to check the constant abuse of executive powers now prevalent in the present Nigerian polity.

Of course, in relative terms, compared to the legislature the judiciary in Nigeria fared far better during the dark days of military dictatorship. But it fared only just better. For, during the military era, the judiciary too performed its duties literally at gun-point: harassed, intimidated and generally emasculated, Nigerian courts were wont to deliver judgments that would not upset the military bosses or upturn the applecart. Not being self-accounting, the judiciary's budget was approved, and financial releases made, by the ruling military junta, thus firmly relegating the Judiciary to the position of a mere second fiddle. These problems were all inimical to the emergence and growth in the country of an independent and robust judiciary capable of fulfilling the onerous responsibility of serving as a check on either the executive or the legislature. Things have been worsened by the endemic corruption that bedevils the judiciary and which has been slowly, but steadily, nibbling away at the very heart of the judicial system.

Although in the past six years of the so-called democratic civilian rule in Nigeria, the judiciary has begun to reform itself with some laudable landmark decisions being returned by the courts, these basic weaknesses still pervade the judicial arm of government. It would,

thus, be expecting too much to see the judiciary in Nigeria as the effective constitutional check on the abuse of executive power which the authors of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution envisaged it to be.

One other constitutional check on executive misrule and abuse which the constitution provides is the provision for periodic elections as contained in sections 76, 116, 117, 132, and 178 of the Nigeria Constitution 1999. For instance, section 132 subsections (1) and (2), which specifically refers to the election of the President, states that

“(1)An election to the office of president shall be held on a date to be appointed by the Independent National Electoral Commission.

(2) An election to the said office shall be held on a date not earlier than sixty days and not later than thirty days before the expiration of the term of office of the last holder of that office.”

The point here is that, the knowledge that once every four years the president would have to present himself to the electorate for re-election should serve as a deterrent only when these elections are, as is assumed by the authors of the constitution, not only free and fair but also transparent. The experience in Nigeria so far does not bear out this assumption. Not only have Nigerian elections been massively rigged and manipulated, but in most cases the results are even predetermined in advance. The ruling of the Court of Appeal in the case against the so-called re-election of President Obasanjo in the 2003 presidential elections brings this out very clearly. Obviously, when a sitting president knows that his re-election is assured, no matter what, the deterrence effects of periodic elections on his tendency to abuse his powers while in office is no longer there.

5. Obasanjo's Excesses and Abuse of Power

Given the weaknesses of the constitutional institutions and instruments for checking executive excesses in Nigeria, it is little wonder that the President has gone overboard in his wanton abuse of his powers.

As someone with dictatorial tendencies, Chief Obasanjo does not appear satisfied with the powers vested in him by the constitution. He goes about acquiring more. In the process he is destroying all the mechanisms the framers of our constitution put in place to safeguard the principles of checks and balances. This systematic abuse of power started with the onslaught on the powers of the Legislature and Judiciary.

The National Assembly which is supposed to be the main organ to check the excesses of the executive has since been cowed and rendered ineffective through bribery and subterfuge. In less than six years, Chief Obasanjo has succeeded in removing four senate Presidents and made several failed attempts to remove the speaker of the House of Representatives. Consequently, Chief Obasanjo does not appear to need the approval of the Legislature to spend public funds. Furthermore, since he came into office in 1999, Chief Obasanjo has not implemented a single annual budget approved by the National Assembly. Instead he spends money at will. Such unilateral decisions include; the over 60 billion Naira he spent to build

the Abuja Stadium, (part of which collapsed shortly after completion), and the hosting of the Commonwealth Games and the Commonwealth Summit. In fact, it is now alleged that more than N3 billion has already been spent on the Political Reform Conference, even though the National Assembly has not appropriated any funds for it. Again, during his first term in office, Chief Obasanjo, without the consent of the National Assembly, deployed armed soldiers to Odi in the Niger Delta area and Zaki Biam in the North Central part of the country to exterminate whole communities in the guise of maintaining law and order. As a result of these assaults, more than 3,000 people were either killed or maimed. To date, nobody has been prosecuted and no compensation has been paid to the victims of this gross abuse of human rights.

The judiciary has also become a victim in the serial abuse of power by the executive through acts of bribery and intimidation. It is today completely subdued and now does the bidding of the Executive. A majority of the Judges uncritically and invariably hand out verdicts favorable to the government in any dispute. For example, the immediate past senate president, Chief Adolphous Wabara, was not even a candidate in the 2003 election, but a high court declared him the winner of those elections, and he was subsequently appointed the Senate President. The few courageous decisions of the courts which are unfavourable to the government are simply ignored by the Executive.

In his own Party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Chief Obasanjo, has removed four National Chairmen, one of them even at gun point, all in an effort to eliminate opposition within the Party. He has now even organized the removal of some members of the National Executive Committee of the party opposed to him and replaced them with his loyalists, in utter contravention of the PDPs constitution which vests that right only in the National Convention of the party. With his tacit support, his cronies organized the successful abduction of the Governor of one of the states and the destruction and torching of public property worth millions of Naira in the same state. Yet not a single person was arrested or prosecuted by the law enforcement agencies. Nobody dared to arrest and prosecute these cronies!

History has shown that people can put up with a little abridging of their rights provided their living condition is improving. This is far from the case in Nigeria. The economy is deteriorating and unemployment is growing by the day. Infrastructure is fast collapsing, while the security of life and property is deteriorating on a daily basis, such that more people have been killed in Nigeria since 1999 than during the civil war period. Sadly, this deterioration in the conditions of living of most Nigerians is happening at a time Nigeria is earning more money from the export of petroleum than at any period in its history. Most of the money is being siphoned overseas while the rest is being wasted on foreign junketing, white elephant projects, and satisfying the kleptomaniac obsessions of thieving officials.

Chief Obasanjo's administration is a failure in all respects. Even the much vaunted so-called war on corruption is half-hearted and selective. Things are so bad that most Nigerians are asking; is this the democracy we fought for? Does democracy mean increasing poverty and marginalization?

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the umbrella labour organization, has fought consistently against the Government's increases of fuel prices with some measure of success. However, Chief Obasanjo has used the police, a section of the leadership of the NLC and, in

some cases, a pliant judiciary to thwart their strikes or mass action with the result that the government has been able to raise the pump price of petroleum from twenty naira per litre in 1999 to sixty naira per litre today. Not satisfied, he recently rushed a law through the Legislature which made the declaration of strikes by the NLC almost impossible.

Furthermore, Obasanjo has continued to hurriedly pursue his programme of the wholesale privatization of Nigeria's major public assets in arrant disregard and fragrant violation of sections 16 to 18 of the Nigerian Constitution which are clearly opposed to this. For example, section 16 (1) and (2) of the Constitution states that:

“ 16.-(1) The State shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this constitution-

- (a) harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, a dynamic and self-reliant economy;*
- (b) control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity;*
- (c) without prejudice to its right to operate or participate in areas of the economy, other than the major sectors of the economy, manage and operate the major sectors of the economy;*
- (d) without prejudice to the right of any person to participate in areas of the economy within the major sector of the economy, protect the right of every citizen to engage in any economic activities outside the major sectors of the economy.*

(2) The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring –

- (a) the promotion of a planned and balanced economic development;*
- (b) that the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good;*
- (c) that the economic system is not operated in such manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group; and*
- (d) that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.”*

And in order to leave no room, whatsoever, for any doubts about the intendment of the authors of the Nigeria Constitution 1999 that the State should be in control of the commanding heights of Nigeria's economy, sub-section (4) of the same section 16 states as follows:

“(4) For the purposes of section (1) of this section-

- (a) The reference to the “major sectors of the economy” shall be construed as a reference to such economic activities as may, from time to time, be declared by a resolution of each House of the National Assembly to be managed and operated exclusively by the Government of the Federation; and until a resolution to the contrary is made by the National Assembly, economic activities being operated exclusively by the Government of the Federation on the date immediately preceding the day when this section comes into force, whether directly or through the agencies of statutory or other corporation or company, shall be deemed to be major sectors of the economy.”*

Yet, in spite of these clear constitutional provisions, the wholesale privatization of key public assets continues to be a central plank in Obasanjo’s so-called economic reform agenda.

But, perhaps, by far the greatest case of abuse of power by the Executive has been the misuse of the state apparatus – the Police and the Army - to massively rig the 2003 elections, killing and maiming innocent citizens in the process. It is indeed tragic that in spite of reports by local and the international election monitors, the beneficiaries of this travesty are sitting pretty. The hapless Nigerian masses are forced to put up with people they did not elect as leaders.

All these are some of the reasons why it is indeed a great misnomer to call the state of political affairs in Nigeria today as a democracy. For, democracy in its true sense, that is, as the supreme will of the people, encapsulated in a government run by the people, and for the people, does not exist and has never really ever existed in Nigeria up to date. What is happening in Nigeria today, and what indeed has been happening in Nigeria since 1960, is that we have had civilian and military rule alternating with each other, but with each tending to be as dictatorial and non-performing as the other!

6. Civil Society as the Opposition

In the face of this executive assault on the Nigerian polity, and the endemic weaknesses of the constitutional instruments for checking it, civil society has now become the last bastion of opposition in Nigeria. This civil society opposition includes groups such as organized labour, the press, professional associations, as well as the political parties. All of these groups, of course, have their own endemic limitations and weaknesses in their various roles as an opposition to the Executive’s recklessness and abuse of power. And, indeed, the Executive has spared no effort whatsoever in exploiting these limitations and weaknesses to undermine their effectiveness. We have already referred to how the government has attempted to weaken the effectiveness of the Nigerian Labour Congress through the enactment of the so-called labour reform act. Similarly, the effectiveness of the press as a voice of the opposition has been severely undermined by, amongst other things, the obstructionist machinations of the Obasanjo administration. A case in point is the Administration’s treatment of the newsmagazine, Insider Weekly. Because of the magazine’s critical reporting and commentaries about the Executive, Obasanjo’s government, without the necessary judicial

imprimatur, just simply ordered its intelligence organs to ransack its premises and facilities, confiscate its print-run and to shut it down in the true fashion of military dictatorships!

But there is little doubt that of all these components of the civil society opposition, the one that should ordinarily bear the greatest responsibility for activism are the political parties. On their shoulders lie the primary tasks of agenda setting, opinion moulding, vote canvassing and mass mobilization. However, in order to do these effectively, the political parties must have an organic linkage with the people whose interests they are supposed to articulate, defend and promote. They must also have the capacity to offer articulate, comprehensive and comprehensible policy and program alternatives from which the electorate may choose.

Unfortunately, giving their antecedents, the circumstances of their formation, the class origins of most of their leadership and the political, legal and material constrictions within which they have been forced to operate, the parties have so far not been as effective as is expected of them in the struggle against executive autocracy and the enthronement of a truly democratic order in Nigeria. But all these have not been for lack of trying, as the formation and struggles of the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP) in the past few years has amply demonstrated.

The Conference of Nigerian Political parties, CNPP, came into existence as a child of circumstances. Its roots can be traced back to the 7th of May, 2002 when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) invited all political associations seeking recognition by it as political parties to attend a consultative meeting with it to consider the military government's guidelines for the formation and registration of political parties. During those consultations all the political associations present rejected the proposed guidelines as undemocratic, unconstitutional, unjust and, therefore, unacceptable. The political associations consequently endorsed a motion formally rejecting the proposed guidelines. Thereupon, the political associations in attendance resolved to constitute themselves into a new consultative forum of political associations christened CONFERENCE OF NIGERIAN POLITICAL PARTIES, with the main objective of eliminating, through both political and legal initiatives, all objectionable and reprehensive aspects of the guidelines for the registration of political parties.

The objections of the parties in the CNPP to the guidelines were subsequently filed in a suit before the courts. The courts later declared the sections of the guidelines objected to by the CNPP to be unconstitutional and, therefore, null and void. What followed, which included (amongst other things) the registration by the INEC of an additional twenty-four political parties, is now history. But the political and legal struggles of the CNPP, and INEC's and the Obasanjo administration's determination to erect hurdles and other impediments to a genuine democratic order in Nigeria, were not to end there. No sooner had the CNPP won its landmark victory over the registration of political parties in the courts than INEC devised another disingenuous stratagem to make that victory hollow. INEC announced the imposition of election fees on candidates, with the obvious aim of preventing the newly registered parties from effectively participating in the impending general elections of 2003. The CNPP again returned to the courts. And again the courts' verdicts were on the side of the CNPP, justice and history, as the courts rejected these fees as both illegal and unconstitutional.

During and after the bungled and massively rigged general elections of 2003 and local council elections of 2004, the CNPP continued to decry the fraud that attended these elections and the illegitimacy of the administrations and public office holders produced as a result of

that monumental travesty. Of course, given the very partisan nature of the present political climate in Nigeria, these interventions by the CNPP have not been always smooth and easy going. Nor have all the parties in the Conference always been cooperative. But these notwithstanding, the CNPP was able to plan a nation-wide mass action to democratically register the Nigerian public's rejection of the results of these massively rigged elections as well as the gross ineptitude of the Obasanjo Administration. Taking cognizance of the partisan nature of Nigerian political parties, the CNPP decided that the mass action should be organized, campaigned for, conducted and controlled by an independent, separate and broad-based national coalition. To effect this, a CNPP delegation toured the whole country and met with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Consequent upon these tours and consultations, the CNPP resolved on the 26th April, 2004 to establish the Nigerians United for Democracy (NUD) as the umbrella organization of political parties and CSO's with responsibility for coordinating mass action and other pro-democracy activities.

At its inception the CNPP's objectives consisted of the provision of an umbrella platform for all political parties to fight against the obnoxious provisions of INEC's registration guidelines. As it gradually evolved the CNPP formulated for itself the more specific tasks of (i) protection of the interests of registered political parties, (ii) sustenance of a democratic, multi-party political system, (iii) defense of Nigeria's national unity and (iv) promotion of good governance. Of course, these objectives are still noble and relevant. However, given the very critical and desperate realities of today, the CNPP has to go beyond these tasks. But in doing this it must decide whether or not to continue with its present posture as the main opposition to the ruling government. We emphasize the phrase ruling government instead of ruling party deliberately, since even the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is supposed to be a member of the CNPP. The question then is: should the CNPP continue to serve as an opposition coalition or should that role be best performed by individual political parties, either as parties per se or in electoral and political alliances with one another? In the present circumstances, in which as a result of numerous factors virtually all the present political parties are individually too weak and too incoherent to serve as an opposition, that role has by default inevitably devolved on the CNPP.

7. What is to be done

In the last resort, the responsibility for promoting and defending the democratic rights of the Nigerian people rests more heavily on the political parties than on any other sector of the society. It is precisely for this reason that the present sorry state of political parties in the country is both intolerable and a major draw-back in the opposition's efforts to check the executive excesses of Obasanjo. In this respect, the first step in the revitalization of the party system must be a thorough-going revamping of the structure and orientations of individual political parties. This exercise must aim at ensuring that due process, constitutionalism and respect for the principles of internal party democracy are scrupulously observed. Serious efforts must also be made at building the capacity of the political parties. One way to do this should be through the institution of a vibrant and determined programme of political education of party memberships.

While this is ongoing, the political parties in particular, and the political elite in general, must commit themselves to the pursuit of certain basic objectives which should include at least the following:

- ***Promotion and Deepening of Democracy.***

The parties must be at the frontline in the struggle for the promotion and defense of popular democratic institutions, practices and a democratic culture in Nigeria. This task and commitment should be non-negotiable.

- ***Promotion and Defense of the Rule of Law.***

The defense of the rule of law and the promotion of the institution of an independent and responsible judiciary is essential for genuine democracy. The parties must promote and defend these practices and institutions.

- ***Promotion of Civil Liberties and Human Rights.***

The parties must see it as their sacred duty at all times to promote and defend the civil liberties and human rights of the people of Nigeria.

- ***Promotion of Popular Organizations and Civil Society..***

One of the cardinal pillars of a genuine popular democracy is the existence of virile, active and responsible civil society organizations (CSOs). A central objective of the political parties and the political elite must be the promotion and development of a responsible, independent and patriotic labour movement, mass organizations and civil society as a counterweight to the deadweight of bureaucracy, official impunity and executive autocracy.

- ***Defense of Multi-Party System.***

The CNPP itself emerged to defend the constitutional provisions for a multi-party system in the country which INEC and the Government were all hell-bent to undermine. In a plural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society such as Nigeria's, a multi-party system is one of the best insurances and guarantees for National unity. Of recent this multi-party system has come under threat from both President Obasanjo and the ruling PDP. The political parties must continue to regard the defense of Nigeria's multi-party system as one of their cardinal objectives.

- ***Development of Ethics and Code Conduct for Politicians***

Today the noble vocation of politics has been infiltrated by, and is awash with, all manner of adventurers, opportunists and gold diggers, many of whom lack tutorage, decorum or commitment to National service. These so-called new-breed politicians have all but given the vocation of politics a bad image in the popular imagination. Each political party must see as its task the cleansing of Nigeria's political Augean stables through the establishment of a parties-run Institute for Political and Democratic Studies where appropriate training in civilized and democratic political culture and practice would be taught to both aspiring and serving politicians.

- ***Entrenching Self-Reliance in Nigeria's Political Parties.***

One of the most fundamental weaknesses of Nigeria's political system is the fact that presently all the parties depend for their funding not on their memberships, but on money-bags, direct stealing from public treasury (in the case of political parties controlling government) or on handouts from the government. Of course, he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Given this sad situation, it is little wonder that a majority of these parties now constitute no more than electoral machines whose *raison d'etat* is to serve as instruments for the realization of the political ambitions of their rich patrons, or the

Machiavellian schemes of Obasanjo's government. It is thus necessary to creatively fashion-out sustainable strategies for ensuring the self-reliance of the political parties

- ***Defense of Nigeria's Unity and Integrity.***

Without Nigeria, there will be no Nigerian politicians! Each political party must commit itself at all times to the promotion, advancement and defense of the national unity, national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nigeria.

But the state of the state of a nation's politics is inevitably a reflection of the state of its economy. It is thus not really surprising that the Nigerian economy is totally in as sorry a state as is its politics. The Obasanjo Administration's economic development vision for Nigeria, otherwise referred to as his reform programme, is spelt out in what he has chosen to call National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Shorn of its fanciful and populist phraseology, this programme is a classical IMF/World Bank blueprint for the 'development' of Third World economies which have historically proved outright failures wherever they have been applied. In the particular case of the Administration's NEEDS Strategy, the main pillars are wholesale privatization, reduction of both the size and scope of government, deregulation, removal of government subsidies, devaluation of the exchange rate of the naira and export orientation in international trade. It is in pursuit of this anachronistic policy that the Administration has visited on Nigerians all the present hardships, deprivations and travails. Given an economy such as Nigeria's, where the private sector is parasitic and dependent, where crude oil and few primary agricultural products are the main export, where virtually every consumable item is imported, where economic and social infrastructure is unevenly distributed, and where government must play a central role in economic development at this take-off stage, to prosecute a programme of economic development as outlined in NEEDS is only to condemn the vast majority of Nigerians to perpetual poverty and irredeemable suffering, and to surrender the country's national sovereignty to imperialism and neo-colonialism. The political opposition must critique this NEEDS programme and appropriately condemn it for what it is: a despicable and unpatriotic surrender of the economic resources of Nigeria to foreign interests, and a handing over of the sovereignty of the nation to imperial forces. In addition to the foregoing, the Nigerian political opposition must be ready to also take the following measures and commit itself to the following positions:

(i) ***The National Question***

Similarly, the political parties and the other components of civil society must address themselves to the on-going conflict and ferment between and among the various ethnic groups, sub-nationalities and religious groups across the length and breadth of the country and come out with a definite position. This ferment and unease is largely the result of historical and structural inequities, uneven access to economic and political opportunities, failure by government at all levels to meet its basic and fundamental responsibilities to the citizens, mass poverty and unemployment, distrust between communities, etc. Whatever the cause, if this ferment is allowed to go unheeded, it can only undermine national unity and even the corporate existence of Nigeria. God forbid!

(ii) ***Electoral and Political Reforms.***

The injustices and fraud perpetrated before, during and after the 2003 and 2004 general elections and local council elections continue, like an incorrigible ghost, to haunt the polity. Unless and until these injustices are corrected and the perpetrators duly sanctioned, uneasy would lie the head that wears the crown. More seriously, the possibility of a peaceful conduct

of future elections in the country depends on what is done about these injustices and fraud. In this regard, it is imperative that political parties and civil society insist on the overhaul of the composition of both the INEC and SIECs in such a way that political parties, civil society organizations and neutral bodies are adequately represented. Similarly, the country's federal structure should be reviewed in such a way that the central government is made to devolve more powers to the constituent units, with its attendant fiscal empowerment, without at the same time undermining the centre's capacity to effectively carry out its constitutional responsibilities.

(iii) Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

The renewed offensive of the security agencies against the civil liberties and human rights of the people of Nigeria and against free speech and the freedom to protest peacefully must be vigorously fought by the parties and civil society organizations. We must not allow Nigeria under the PDP Administration to slide back to the bad old days of military dictatorship, not even under retired generals! In this respect it is recommended that political parties explore, in consultations with the individuals and groups affected, the possibilities for instituting legal action against the agencies responsible for these as appropriate.

8. Conclusion

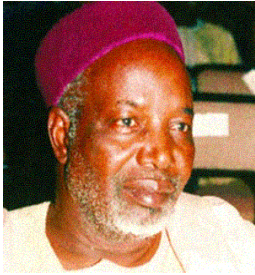
Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, if in the course of this presentation I have placed responsibility for corrective action more on the shoulders of Nigeria's political parties and its political elite, I do not in the least mean that the task is exclusively theirs. Far from it, the task of enthroning a truly popular and genuine democratic order in Nigeria demands the contribution of all democratic forces, both at home in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world.

If the situation in the country is allowed to continue to deteriorate, Nigerians may opt for any socio-economic system of government which will guarantee for them physical, economic and social security, as well as national unity and progress. It is in this respect that many Nigerians are disappointed with senior members of the Commonwealth over their double standards in their relations with Chief Obasanjo's government. The scale of electoral malpractices and rigging during the 2003 general elections in Nigeria is by far greater than was reported during the Zimbabwean elections. Yet, Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth because of the elections, while Chief Obasanjo was elected Chair of the organization.

We, therefore, call on all opposition and progressive groups to unite under the banner of the CNPP to fight the looming dictatorship of Chief Obasanjo and provide a better life for our people. In this regard, we wish to call on the international community to give us a helping hand in this worthwhile effort. Should anarchy reign in Nigeria leading to its collapse, the West African sub-region, nay, the whole of Africa, may not be able to contain the refugees that will be generated from such a crisis. It is instructive to note that hundreds of thousands of Nigeria's elite and their families hold British, American and Canadian passports. These countries would surely be their first ports of call in the event of, God forbid, such a catastrophe. We must remember that after all we are now living in a truly global village and events in one country are bound to reverberate in other countries.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you very much for your attention.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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