

PRESS RELEASE

THE GREATEST THREAT TO NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

The Foundation for Good Governance and Development in Nigeria (FGGN), a UK based international organisation of Nigerian professionals has once more found it necessary to raise concern about recent happenings in Nigeria. Apparently, concerted and despicable efforts are being made by a shadowy cabal around President Olusegun Obasanjo to prolong the life of his administration beyond 2007. Unfortunately, such moves have not only succeeded in creating so much uncertainty in the political landscape, but it is also threatening to plunge the country into deep crisis. We are not unaware of the desperate, albeit futile, attempts to further muddy the waters by introducing sectional, ethnic and religious sentiments into the crisis. The irony of it, however, is that Obasanjo now clearly seems to be at the centre of this contrived crisis.

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

Since the return of Obasanjo to power, as an absolute and corrupt dictator, Nigeria is now more divided and polarised than ever. Sadly, Nigeria during Obasanjo's tenure has earned more in massive oil windfall than ever before, yet the average citizen is much poorer. The level of insecurity is so abysmal that virtually no one and no part of the country is safe.

The moribund and decayed infrastructure he inherited and promised to rehabilitate and rebuild, despite the so-called massive investment, has either completely collapsed or been auctioned to members of his government, their family or cronies at ridiculous prices.

Even the war torn Iraqis now enjoy better power supply than Nigerians. And Chief Tony Anenih, former works minister and now chairman PDP board of trustees, is yet to

explain to the nation how he squandered the over N300 billion he was given to rehabilitate our road networks, which to date have remained death traps, maiming and killing hundreds of Nigerians daily. Those Nigerian elites who thought they could escape this fate by flying now know better with three avoidable fatal air crashes in less than two months. Similarly, it appears no one is interested in investigating the massive fraud retired Admiral Ola George committed at the Nigerian ports authority. What Anenih and George have in common is that they were both the arrow heads of the '419' election fraud of 2003, and now at the forefront of the infamous third term project, hence the presidential protection, and by implication immunity from harassment by EFCC, they enjoy at the moment.

The EFCC was, however, credited with the arrest and prosecution of the former inspector general of Police, Tafa Balogun. Shockingly, but not surprisingly, despite the atrocities he was said to have committed, he was only slapped with a six-month jail sentence, out of which he spent a few months and he is now a free man. The reality of the situation surrounding the Balogun saga is that it has nothing to do with fighting corruption. Rather, it was meant to ensure Balogun remained silent about his role and what he knows about the political assassinations and the fraudulent elections in 2003. For now, the Pandora box remained sealed!

It is now common knowledge that the Governors of Bayelsa, Oyo and Plateau states have been taunted and put in trouble not because they are the most corrupt Governors in the country. Far from it, they are being hounded simply because of their opposition to the third term project.

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INSECURITY AND POLITICAL KILLINGS

The Obasanjo government can go to any length to protect their Eldorado. Those perceived as threats, real or imagined, have continued to suffer all tribulations, while others have paid the ultimate price. We are yet to unravel the assassinations of leading political figures like Harry Marshall, Chuba Okagbibo, Dikibo and even a serving Minister of Justice, Bola Ige. Lately, Abubakar Rimi, a renown anti third term and outspoken critic of the government would have been added to this list. However, as fate had it, his time is not due yet, but unfortunately the wicked and cowardly assassins slaughtered his beloved wife in cold blooded murder.

The catalogue of this government's misdeeds and atrocities against the Nigerian state and its people is legendary. It suffices to say that more of the same after 2007 is not an option Nigerians are prepared to contemplate, let alone accept. We expect them to honourably play by the rules and quit like true sportsmen, come May 2007. Sadly, Obasanjo and his associates do not play by the rules of the game, as they regard themselves as untouchables. This is attested to recently by Chief Justice Uwais who lamented their penchant of selecting which Court order to obey.

THE BATTLE LINE

At the moment, the most crucial issue at hand and which we must remain focussed on, is the issue of third term agenda. Unless we check Obasanjo's inordinate desire to perpetuate himself beyond 2007, we may inadvertently find ourselves sliding into a state of anarchy and chaos, and consequently into a failed state like Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and recently Cote d'Ivoire.

THE WAY FORWARD

We in the Foundation believe Obasanjo and his gang must be resisted at all cost. Like all dictators before him, the oppressed Nigerian masses will always be the eventual victors. It is just a matter of time. We should simply refuse to be dragged by this cabal into deeper waters. Well meaning Nigerians must continue to act either alone or in concert with others to stop the machinery of the third term project.

The National Assembly, despite the obvious, must not succumb to blackmail any longer. It is gratifying to see the commendable stand taken by the leadership of both the Senate and the House of Representatives on the third term issue and constitutional amendments. While we are not averse to any constitutional amendments, they should be done in order to sustain a viable democratic culture and not to undermine it – certainly not to impose a civilian dictator on the nation under any pretext. The issue of immunity of political office holders, desirable as it may be to be revisited, must not unwittingly hand Obasanjo another weapon with which to totally blackmail into submission all the governors, many of whom are corrupt, and indeed should be probed and if found guilty prosecuted under the current laws. If the constitution must be amended, it should be done with the incoming batch in mind.

Regrettably, other institutions that are supposed to nurture, promote and sustain our current democratic experiment have either been compromised or blackmailed into being willing participants in the rape of democracy in Nigeria.

The Nigerian police under IGP Sunday Ehindero is not different from that under Balogun, and is seemingly singing from the same script. The dubious extension of Ehindero's service by another year, as if there are no other competent officers to do the job, smacks of a recruitment to an inglorious act.

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His role in the Mobitel's MD's saga, that of Hisba commission in Kano and the silence over the assassination of Rimi's wife as well as the looming strike by the rank and file in the police are not good omens.

The Judiciary's record so far has been disappointing and deplorable. The injustices of the various election tribunals had seriously left a bad taste in our democratic experiment, such that a repeat will simply seal off its coffin. Those criminals, many of whom are still in the system, who sat in those tribunals must be weeded out, because given a similar circumstance they are likely to inflict further injuries on the system. We do not have confidence in the Judiciary at present, as it is anything but impartial.

INEC must not only be truly independent, but must be seen to be so. They need to be reconstituted with balanced representation of all stakeholders of unquestionable integrity, and they must only be answerable to the National Assembly and not the president.

It is a shame that a government that is unable to pay its pensioners, including retired soldiers, unable to pay the police their entitlements and is planning to sack 160,000 workers, still has money to bribe serving military officers with cars. In any case, no one should begrudge them as they are more deserving in any proper setting by right. However, if the plan is to buy their acquiescence into the immoral third term project, then we believe, like before, that the Military will always be on the side of the Nigerian people and not any brutal dictator. Babangida has tried that before and failed. It will surely fail again this time around.

The Nigerian people should henceforth hold any security official personally responsible for implementing any unlawful order and abuse of human rights. We must therefore document what ever we witness for future

prosecution either within or outside the country.

Ours is a generation born and bred as Nigerians, and we have no country other than Nigeria and we must not despair at the enormous task and sacrifice needed to reclaim our country. It begins with Obasanjo and his gang vacating office in 2007, either voluntarily or we chase them out by any peaceful means necessary, including civil disobedience. He must also not be allowed to tinker with the choice of whoever we may decide to elect as our president in a free and fair election, irrespective of which part of the country he may come from.

Obasanjo too has a choice; either to follow the path of honour of the likes of Mandela and Rawlings or that of infamy as treaded by the likes of the Mobutu, Bokassa and Idi Amin. We pray that he will make the right choice.

Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria!

Long Live the Foundation for Good Governance and Development in Nigeria!!

For and on behalf of *the Foundation*:

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