

# **IS ONE NIGERIA A DREAM OR A REALITY?**

**(Being a Keynote Address)**

**BY**

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**ON**

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All protocols observed.

Thank you for having the courage in choosing this topic as it is timely to identify Nigeria's problems and discuss it in a forthright manner so that we can proffer appropriate solutions; so long we continue to gloss over them so long our people will continue to suffer.

Nigeria, a country of about 140 million people occupying a land area of 351,649 squared miles about the size of the state of California in the USA is an amalgam of different ethnic nationalities.

Nigeria gained independence on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1960 from the United Kingdom which account for this celebration of at a ripe age of 46 long years of existence as a nation.

Nigeria is a complex nation with over 250 ethnic groups with the main tribes being Hausa/Fulani to the north, the Tiv to the middle belt , the Yoruba, Ibo, Ijaw, Edo, Ibibio to the south of the of the country. The country is divided into 36 states and a federal capital territory rearranged into six geopolitical zones and the South /South zone being the most complex.

Nigerians are about 50% Muslims which implies that Nigeria is home to the world's sixth largest Muslim population; about 40% Christians and rising rapidly and 10% traditional religion and dwindling slowly. In 2004 the estimated literacy rate was 68% and the life expectancy rate has dropped from 51 in 1963 to 46 in 2004.

The main problems of the country include greed, lack of transparency, accountability and corruption in government, repeated military coups with incursion of the military into government, tribalism, nepotism, inequality in the distribution of the national wealth with associated marginalization of the southern minority ethnic groups, and changing attitudes and erosion of traditional values. There is gross lack of discipline and unimaginable yearnings for foreign made & pleasurable goods by the few Nigerians who can afford them after corruptly enriching themselves. These corrupt officers due to their flamboyance became the role model of the teeming youths; and this does not augur well for the future of the nation.

.In spite of our problems, research has shown that Nigerians are not only the most religious people in the world, they are also the happiest people on the surface of the earth.

Having set down this background information, I shall move on to give the overview of the debate: Is one Nigeria a dream or a reality?

First and foremost can I state categorically to everyone here that I believe that Nigeria is an indivisible nation under God with one destiny so that the labour and sacrifices of our heroes past shall not be in vain? Nigeria is a land of milk and honey, well endowed with human and natural resources; that there is abundance for the population of our nation; but that we are where we are because of the greed, corruption and evil intention of some of our past national leaders who have other agendas like the islamization of our nation that is constitutionally a secular nation instead of laying good foundation for an equitable and fair distribution of the national wealth. The other serious problem is the transfer of national wealth to foreign banks in Europe and America thereby impoverishing the people.

For a lot of Nigerians there is a strong belief that one Nigeria is a dream. They advance very good reasons for their belief.

International as well as local authorities have predicted doom for our nation and a possible failure by '2015' for the Nigerian State as they believe that there are sound indicators that one united Nigeria is a dream.

Going back to the genesis of Nigeria as a nation, the southern protectorate and the northern protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated by the British colonisers in 1914 without any strong reason to take that decision except for ease of governance and movements of the produce from the north to the sea ports in the south and subsequent shipment to Europe through the Atlantic ocean and people view this as a mistake which can be corrected today by balkanization of the nation.

There is a lot of diversity between these two protectorates till today. Whereas the north used to be mainly nomads and cattle rearers, the southerners are subsistence farmers. While we have northern Moslems, the south are mainly Christians While there were many nationalists fighting for independence from the south, the north was mainly satisfied with the status quo hence they gained self governance in 1959 two years later after the southern protectorate gained self governance. The colonialists tactfully handed the nation to those who least wanted a change after a census whose figures were seriously disputed.

There is the worrying undying concept of the north started by Othman dan Fodio that he would dip the Koran in the sea by the jihad movement. His forces were stopped at Igala the present day Kogi State by the forces of the Ancient Benin Empire led by Queen Idia, queen mother who was the first woman to ever go to war and by the Ibadan forces in the south west.

Ahamadu Bello the then Sarduna of Sokoto also toyed with the idea during the first republic until his death and Ibrahim Babaginda has resurrected the idea again when he unilaterally normalised the status of Nigeria as a member of the Organization of Islamic States (OIC) from its observer status during his ruler ship. This move led to the resignation of Ebitu Ukiwe from his government as the matter was never discussed in the then Armed Forces Ruling Council. This singular move by IBB to change Nigeria from a secular state into an Islamic State is inimical to the existence of a united Nigeria even as we speak IBB is still bent on ruling Nigeria with a Christian as a weak vice president so that he may complete the process of total islamization of the nation which he started in the 1987.

There is a more serious problem of radical islamization of Nigeria today. In addition to the Sharia law in the Nigerian constitution and the threat that some states may implement the law when there are cases involving Christians which could lead to unrest, there is the frequent sudden explosion of Moslem youths who kill and main southern Christians at the least provocation.

Nigeria has experienced increased ethnic and religious violence and tensions after 12 of the country's 36 states adopted the Islamic Sharia law. It has been reported that over 15,000 people may have died in communal and religious violence since the inception of the current democratic dispensation. You can see that this idea of forceful conversion or the jihad being perpetrated by the Moslems can accelerate dismemberment of our nation if these incessant irate young Moslems who unlawfully kill and main southern Christians living in the northern part of our nation are not checked by security agents.

To obviate the deterioration of this tricky situation, the Federal Government should rein in these Moslem youths who either on their own or spurred on by their elders indiscriminately kill and main southern Christians in addition to wanton destruction of their properties resulting from international issues unrelated to Nigeria at all. If the situation is not checked, the Christians may review the doctrine of "if you slap me on the right check, I will also give the left check as well which can deteriorate to a full scale religious conflict.

After independence, Nigeria adopted the parliamentary system of government of the United Kingdom but lacked the smooth debating ability that made that system of democracy effective as major policies and voting were done on tribal lines in the Nigerian parliament and not on merit of the debates. Some of the nationalists were very federal in their approach. Nationalists like Nnamdi Azikiwe who contested election in the old Western Region but was unable to form a government as parliamentarians crossed the carpet in favour of their kinsman Obafemi Awolowo. Many believed that singular act in the Western Region election in 1957 entrenched tribal politics in our national life, which today has grown into an incurable cancer.

In a united Nigeria, anybody who is domiciled in any part of the nation for more than two years should be able to contest election from that geopolitical zone of the nation irrespective of his ethnic or religious affiliation or origin. Presently that is not possible due to tribal and ethnic politics.

The governance of this nation has most of the time be carried out by the northern oligarchy who over these years have come to see the ruler ship of our nation as a birth right hence some present political aspirants like IBB tell Nigerians that '*only God can prevent him from becoming the nation's next president*'. Such statement infuriates and should not be spoken in a civilised society where people have sensitivity. In the 46 years of the life of Nigeria as a nation, the northern oligarchy of Nigeria has produced rulers but not leaders for about 80% of the time.

From Abubakar Tafawa Balewa who was said to be the premier of the nation on behalf of the Ahamadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto to Generals Yakubu Gowon, Murtalla Mohammed, through President Shehu Shagari, to Generals Mohammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Sanni Abatcha and Abubakar were all northerners who were never mandated by the electorate to rule as they ruled by the barrel of the gun apart from Tafawa Balewa and Shagari.

When you compare the total period above to the period of governance of General Aguiyi Ironsi (6 months), Shonekan(about 3 months) and Obasanjo who stepped in after the assassination of Murtalla Mohammed in 1973 against his personal wish and desire to the present as he is the current President of the nation. Many Nigerian believe that he was sponsored by the same northern oligarchy to ameliorate the tension that resulted from the annulment of June 12 presidential elections in 1993. Such rule by force by a small group of individuals cannot predict a sound and stabilised future for our nation.

The incessant use of force by the northern military elite to govern our nation after coups, counter coups and sometimes palace coups does not augur well for a united nation. Can I stress that coups are inimical to the wellbeing of a nation and they are unlikely to be successful anymore in Nigeria. Any group who embarks on a coup now will have a disintegrated Nigeria in his hands as tribal grouping have done so well in organizing their people like the Arewa to the north, the MOSSOB to the east and the OPC to the west. And the various groups in the Niger delta including MOSSOP, MEND and others who are very willing if pushed any further to go it alone as an independent nation. And I quickly add that there are many powerful nations standing on the wings to give these 'new independent states' recognition due to their mineral resources if the worst should happen to Nigeria.

The problem of the Niger Delta has grown over the years as a result of lack of foresight and neglect of the region that lays the golden eggs which has made multi-millionaires out of many northern past military rulers like IBB while the inhabitants of the Niger Delta wallow in misery and poverty with total lack of basic necessities of life like pipe borne water, electricity, schools and health infrastructures. The various rulers of the nation have only succeeded in presiding over the division of the national cake without sourcing for other means of generating national income apart from oil and its exploration and exportation. Every retired general fight today to get an oil block so that he can enrich himself, his family and his friends when the Niger Delta masses and in fact Nigerians in the north as well live in abject poverty and squalor.

The large international corporations have made matters worse without exploring for oil with due care to the environment. As a result there is total environmental degradation in the region depriving the inhabitants of the area their traditional means of livelihood as they cannot farm as the soil is polluted with oil and fishermen can no longer fish as the rivers have also been polluted with oil spillage. You can now see why the youths of the area have taken to kidnapping to eke a living. If this situation is allowed to degenerate further, it can ultimately lead to dismemberment of our beloved nation.

There is a ray of hope in the horizon as the present government has set machineries in motion to obviate the suffering of Nigerians in particular the people of the Niger Delta. There have been recent enlisting of increased quota of the people of this region into the Nigerian Army, Air force, the Navy and the Police. A new university is being established in the area, the Petroleum University of Nigeria, and through the Niger Delta Development Commission, more funds are being channelled into the area to alleviate the suffering of the people. When all these projects bear fruits, it will go a long way in alleviating the suffering of the people in the region as it will increase the employment opportunities in the Niger Delta. Both State and Federal governments and the traditional leaders in the area should allay the anxiety of the youths to take their minds off criminality. The Federal government should adopt a softly humane approach as high handed approach will increase the tension in the region.

The ultimate goal of government should be the improvement of the living standard of the people of the region and in fact improving the living standard of all Nigerians, explorations while protecting the natural ecological state of the region, employment opportunities and free flow of information from both sides i.e. from the government to the deprived people of the region and an effective channel should be created for the deprived people to air their grievances to the government instead of drawing attention to themselves by kidnapping foreign oil workers.

There is some worry though as on occasions, the money earmarked for these developments channelled through the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is being re-channelled to private bank accounts and other private enterprises to the detriment of the people. The immediate past governor of Bayelsa state DSP Alemeseyegba is presently in detention for allegedly enriching himself from the government coffers and not soon after that the wife of the present governor has been indicted by the EFCC for money laundering. In the suit the EFCC named Mrs. Patience Jonathan, wife of Bayelsa State Governor Goodluck Jonathan, as an accomplice in an N104million-money laundering case involving one Mrs. Nancy Ebere Nwosu.

The EFCC in suit number FHC/ABJ/M/340/06 filed on August 21, 2006 at the Federal High Court, Abuja alleged that the governor's wife was the one that instructed her agent to launder the huge sum in a First Bank of Nigeria account number 3292010060711 held in the name of Nansolyvan Public Relations Limited'

These are serious allegations as money met for the development of a deprived area is being re-channelled by indigenous leaders of the same area. This behaviour calls for vigilance by the people of the area in ensuring that good proposals of government are implemented for the benefit of the people. If all the people police all the people all the time, the incidence of corruption and criminality will drop precipitously. As we speak some other governors from the region are under serious investigation for sharp practices by the EFCC. It may be a wise move for the government to use youth leaders and people in the region to monitor project

implementations in the region. Secondly some youths in the area who are involved in oil bunkering have hijacked the genuine struggle of the Niger –Delta people and have used the opportunity to create chaos so that their business can thrive. These group of youths when caught must be severely dealt with.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and has estimated oil reserves of 27 billion barrels (over 2.6 percent of global proven reserves). With recent finds of oil off shore by Total PLC, Nigeria may account for about 3% of proven global reserve. Given Nigeria's location and ports, the country should be an economic hub for western and central Africa. Regrettably, political instability and military coups, combined with inept economic governance and endemic corruption, have squandered Nigeria's advantages. Since independence in 1960, only about 14 years have been democratic government.

To secure their power base, past military governments enacted repressive economic policies and undermined the rule of law. It is only in the last few years that there have been changes in the national fiscal policies that will attract investment and employment opportunities thanks to President Olusegun Obasanjo for identifying and placing a Diaspora Nigerian in the person of Dr Ngozi Okojo Iweala as the nation's finance minister a complete square peg in a squared hole who did a good job worthy of emulation before her sudden resignation.

The Index of Economic Freedom ranks Nigeria as a "mostly unfree" economy due to high trade barriers, heavy regulation, and excessive government intervention. Instability and misguided economic policies have curtailed foreign investment outside of the oil sector. In the last two years, the economic policies of the present administration has somewhat changed all that, making Nigeria an investment friendly nation which will translate into employment for the people thereby reducing tension, violent crimes and robberies amongst the populace. What is baffling to some of us is that those who led the country into the wrong direction for example devaluing the naira and taking the IMF loan in spite of the outcome of the national debate by Nigerian intellectuals that Nigeria did not need the loan as we had a huge windfall from the sale of oil at the time are still fighting to rule this country and complete the ruination of the nation.

IBB did not only take the IMF loan, he devalued the Nigerian currency the naira and enriched himself with the oil sale wind fall and refused to testify in the Justice Oputa panel peace and reconciliation panel. Due to strong feelings of opposition to IBB's rule, his second coming if he succeeds which is unlikely might lead to the disintegration of the Nigerian nation.

"Islamization of Nigeria for which he is a strong advocate, is not going to be an easy task due to general people's awareness today and the heightened alert state of the world. If it is tried by force, the end product is probably going to be worse than what obtained in Bosnia – Hzegovinia.

Whereas transparency International's 2003 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Nigeria as the second most corrupt nation in the world, {CPI Score relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people and country analysts and ranges between 10 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt)}. In 2005, Nigeria ranked 152<sup>nd</sup> position out of the 158 countries studied. This is a small positive shift in position for the nation but a giant step for our country. President Olusegun Obasanjo has pledged to end corruption and adopt appropriate economic reforms, but vested interests who are determined to maintain the status quo oppose changes; hence the EFCC has been described in various terms as being

selective in its operation and as an arrow point of the president's immolating machinery.

Presently some steps have been taken to introduce transparency and accountability in government, although only moderate changes have been seen in budgeting practices, contract awards, monetary policies, privatization, or public service reform"; and we hope these modest changes are not reversed after elections in 2007 when a new leader steps in.

Corruption and notorious governmental inefficiency as well as a harshly repressive military regime characterized Abacha's reign over our country, turning it into an international pariah. A UN fact-finding mission in 1996 reported that Nigeria's "problems of human rights were terrible and the political problems are terrifying." You all will remember the role NADECO played during Abacha's regime broadcasting into Nigeria from a hide out. With mobile phones everywhere today and the internet accessibility, such government will fall quite easily if that is what the people desire. With this level of awareness amongst the populace, a repeat of Sanni Abacha's regime will accelerate the disintegration of the Nigerian nation.

During the 1970s, Nigeria had the 33rd highest per-capita income in the world, but by 1997 it had dropped to the 13th poorest. The latest report in 2005 placed Nigeria as the 26<sup>th</sup> poorest country of the world in spite of our oil wealth there should be hope for Nigerians as there is improvement using these indices (World Bank GDP Ranking). The hanging of writer and leader of the MOSSOP Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 because he protested against the government was condemned around the world and that single event contributed in no small measure in turning Nigeria into a pariah nation. The action was as wrong as the timing during the Commonwealth Heads of Governments meeting in Auckland New Zealand. It is obvious therefore that it is not repression that will solve the Nigerian and Niger-Delta problems; it is only dialogue with the spirit of understanding, mutual trust, accountability, transparency, love and sensitivity that will resolve the issue of the problem of derivation and resource control.

Nigeria's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) was about \$248 in 2002--lower than in 1970 in constant terms. The present activities of the Niger Delta Militia that often disrupt oil production have dramatically affected the Nigerian national economy in which the oil sector accounted for 65 percent of budget revenue, 95 percent of exports, and 20 percent of the GDP in 2004. The implication of the above is that any serious problem affecting the oil sector will set the index of the Nigerian national economy spiralling downwards. This realisation should lead to an urgent call for diversification of the national economy to include other export products like agricultural products. Cocoa, rubber, cassava, oil palm trees are crying for attention and investment. Okomu Palm Oil Company is at the top of the Nigerian stock exchange presently debunking the saying that money does not grow on trees. Money will grow on trees especially in southern Nigeria if efforts are made to develop the agricultural sector of our economy. Such advice will probably land on deaf ears as Nigerians generally like quick results and profits since agricultural investments take a long time to mature and yield profits.

Free and fair election is a sine qua non for national stability. In a situation where the mandate of the people have been stolen, or when a position have been purchased from a god father for a godson, then the yearning of the electorate becomes secondary as the god fathers dictate the tunes of events in the nation at all levels of government. There is therefore the erroneous belief that when the god fathers are satisfied and happy, it translates into the electorate being happy and satisfied which is not the case.

Those who will actually make a difference in governance of the nation are scared to take part in the election process as they fear for their lives. To succeed in elections in Nigeria, you have to have a small 'army' to ward off attacks from your opponents which make electioneering an expensive and dangerous process in Nigeria.

Nigeria is one of the rare places on mother earth where majority of progressives, good and honest people usually run away from politics for fear of untold consequences to themselves and or their families.

There is need therefore for the re-orientation of the attitude of the Nigerians in the north of the Niger and Benue Rivers as regard their relationship with their southern brothers.

There is need for liberalisation and opening up of the north and their minds for the total integration of our nation. Recently one of the northern states went to South Korea(State withheld) to recruit medical staff who were ultimately found to be the equivalent of doctors assistants in Nigeria when there are very many Nigerian Doctors seeking employment from the south. How could that state governor explain his attitude as a Nigerian? Such behaviour and attitude shows we despise our own nationals and our educational system. In situation where southerners are employed by northern state governments on contract until there is a qualified local 'boy' and the southerner is relieved of his post an attitude which does not augur well for a united nation and it should be stopped or at least discouraged.

There is another problem when Nigerians are seen as being settlers and non-indigene in some regions of his own country. This is widespread in Nigeria in both north and south of the country. It is a delicate issue that needs intellectual analysis by the National Assembly. A Nigerian should be indigenous to anywhere he likes to stay in the country as it is practised by the Edo of Edo State who are very welcoming to fellow Nigerians.

The inability of the Nigerian national conference to solve the recurring problem of adopting a workable revenue allocation formula for the nation is a sore point that will keep recurring until it is dealt with in an acceptable manner to the people of the Niger Delta in particular and all Nigerians in general.

The bill is currently before the national Assembly and it has been recently revealed that the Federal government has tampered with it in its favour. Presently; Federal government takes 56 per cent, while all the 36 states share 24 per cent and 774 local councils take 20 per cent of the total revenue of the nation in spite of the Supreme Court ruling. This makes the central government too rich and too powerful to the detriment of the state governments.

The Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission recommended 46% of the national revenue for the Federal Government. You can see the lion share of the national revenue goes to the central government hence every group is keen to control that centre. Apart from the above, revising upwards the percentage of the revenue that goes to mineral producing states as suggested by the national conference will ease the tension and the anger simmering amongst the people of Niger Delta in particular.

The Federal Government 56 per cent seems unjustifiable. The enormous revenue at its disposal is drained by corruption, leakages, cronyism and rent-seeking and diversion. With roughly 80 per cent of its earnings spent on recurrent expenditure, the nation's infrastructure is comatose and living standards are generally depreciating. Too much funds for the centre fuels bitter political rivalry among the nation's federating units. The National Assembly should be strictly guided by the Constitution, as interpreted by the Supreme Court judgment of April 2002, in handling the new bill.

This recurring issue if not morally and thoughtfully dealt with can fuel disintegration of the nation.

We can live in peace as a nation if we adopt national re-orientation of attitude to fellow Nigerians, looking at fellow Nigerians as brothers,

Re-orientation to de-emphasising tribalism and ethnicity in our body politics

Re-orientation to glorify Nigerian made products and curtailing our craving for foreign made goods.

Re-orientation of Nigerians' minds to invest in the economy of our nation rather than taking the people's money to foreign banks.

Re-orientation of Nigerians to abhor corrupt and sharp practices in our national life and be satisfied with one house, one car and one wife if possible.

Re-orientation of the attitude of the major tribal groups in Nigeria in a way to avoid marginalization of the smaller ethnic groups.

Re-orientation of attitude of Nigerians as regard the sharing of the national wealth with the introduction of a more equitable distribution formula of the revenue accruing to the nation.

Re-orientation of the attitude of Nigerians to facilitate economic progress of the nation.

Re-orientation of Nigerians to invest in agriculture and therefore facilitate employment opportunities for our people.

Re-orientation of the northern oligarchy of Nigeria that the Nigerian nation belong to all Nigerians and not to a select few.

Re-orientation of Nigerians in a way to have free and fair elections where the leaders actually have the mandate of the people to govern rather than godfathers purchasing positions for their godsons with stolen mandates.

Re-orientation of Nigerian youths not to use a rich flamboyant man as his role model and not to develop a compulsive urge to make money by any means.

Total re-orientation of the Nigerian military to protect the territorial integrity of our nation rather than dabbling in politics.

There is need for Nigerians to be more vigilant to counter religious extremists in our population especially as the major religious groups were both imported into the nation.

The problem of national security should be the duty of all Nigerians and should not be left to the armed forces and the police alone. Our people should police the system in a way to guarantee the safety of life and property of our people.

Above all in this recommendation is the need for total education of Nigerians to value life, love self, love our nation and Nigerian traditional way of life and religion instead of becoming fanatical about the these imported religion which has no semblance of our national traditional life.

Nigeria is neither attractive as a single entity nor as different ethnic nationalities. This, for obvious reasons is because either way, the same people will live within. The sheer size of our nation and the large population is the envy of many nations. One in every four Blackman is a Nigerian and should be a cause for joy and national pride and not a national curse.

No society will survive when most of its leaders and elites believe that charity begins abroad by so wickedly robbing their own people only to deposit the loot in foreign banks for the benefit of foreign nations.

Only ignorant and wicked leaders can rob the people they are supposed to serve to lubricate foreign economies. An eminent Nigerian in one of his interview believes that such leaders must be suffering from an acute overdose of inferiority complex who are proud to build greener pastures in foreign countries when their own people are dying daily due to lack of pasture. The belief that charity begins at home guarantees growth, progress and development; the belief that charity begins abroad assures self-destruction and national disintegration.

Indeed, any society that encourages capital flight, embezzlement of public funds, corruption, abuse and misuse of public property in its midst is guilty of committing crimes against humanity.

The greatest hurdle presently for the Nigerian nation and the current democratically elected government is to conduct a free and fair election in 2007 and ensure a peaceful handover of power to another elected civilian government to perpetuate a democracy in the nation.

Nigerians look forward for a leader, who is detribalised and not ethnically biased, should be a civilian in the real sense and not an army general masquerading as a civilian in agbada. A leader who can make his government all inclusive without bias of religion, party affiliation or geopolitical zone in choosing his cabinet; that the best Nigerian patriots serve their people in peace and harmony and put to shame the evil prediction that our nation Nigeria will not survive 2015.

Thank you for your patience

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