

WHY BAKASSI PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE MOVED FROM BAKASSI PENINSULAR.

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The truth and enormity of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision was brought home to all Nigerians by the recent Greentree Accord to reinforce and implement the ICJ verdict.

We have seen scholarly legal arguments for and against the ownership of Bakassi Peninsular without taking the reality of the situation into consideration which is that the

Bakassi people are indigenous to the peninsular before the coming of the Germans, the British or the French; before any treaty was considered, written or signed and before the ICJ ruling.

These people have a strong cultural, historical and ancestral tie to their land and therefore should be given an opportunity to make an informed judgement of what they should do; to either leave Bakassi or stay put in Bakassi as the case may be. So far the Nigerian or Cross Rivers State government in conjunction with or without the UN have yet to do that. This argument is premised on UN declaration of Indigenous Rights in the Articles of the United Nation.

More importantly the Greentree agreement carefully stipulated the following which I would like to refer people like Senator Ita Giwa, Mr Erin Chairman of the Bakassi local government council and their colleagues who are arguing for relocation to read the Greentree agreement again before misadvising their people into relocating. I have wondered why they are in support of this relocation and could find no reason other than personal desire to keep their positions in government. to the detriment of future happiness and satisfaction of their people.

Article 3 of the Accord states that Cameroon shall not

a, force Nigerian nationals living in Bakassi Peninsular to leave the Zone or to change their nationality

- b, respect their culture, language and beliefs
- c, respect their rights to continue agricultural and fishing activities
- d, protect their property and their customary rights
- e, not levy in any discriminatory manner any taxes and other dues on Nigerian nationals living in the zone
- f, take every necessary measure to protect Nigerian nationals living in the zone from any harassment or harm.

Nigerian Bakassi citizens by remaining in the Bakassi Peninsular are therefore not breaking any law that is why we are concerned that their leaders are pleading with the President that they be relocated. How can any government in Nigeria relocate about 4 million human beings in less than sixty days? It is not humanly possible if they intend to do a good job of it. Even in a year there will still be problems. They are just not facing the reality of the situation. Are we just going to move them into tents in virgin land like refugees when they have a choice to remain in their decent homes in Bakassi peninsular?

One wonders why Senator Ita Giwa should be leading her people astray as she is doing in pleading for re-location within Cross Rivers' State. Their continued stay in the area administered by the Cameroonian government will not change the status of 99% of the people apart from the Senators and members of House of Representative and the local government chairman who will lose their posts as their local governments cease to exist. This personal interest may account for their choice of moving the Bakassi indigenes to a virgin land. This decision which is bothering on self interest rather than the interest of the larger Bakassi community is totally wrong.

The most appropriate thing to do is not to destabilize these people by moving them to any a virgin land; but for the Federal Government to maintain a consular office in Bakassi Peninsular in co-operation with the Cameroonians, the United Nation and other interested parties. Or better still to argue for a permanent Mixed Commission as agreed in Article 6 of the Greentree agreement. After all Nigerians are in Togo, Ghana, the USA and many other countries for that matter. One therefore wonder why this senator is pushing her people to relocate to within the geographical position called Nigeria.

Technically speaking, the land neither belongs to Nigeria or the Republic of Cameroon but to Southern Cameroon People's Organization who are presently clamouring for their statehood. Ceding the land to Cameroon would be a mistake and clamouring for the

movement of the Bakassi people to a virgin land will be a heinous crime against humanity.

Although I am not arguing for disregarding the decision of the ICJ there are many nations including Israel, South Africa, China etc that have at some point in the life of ICJ disregarded its decisions. Nigeria government is just running even when we are not being pursued and the Senate spokesman seems not to be in tune with the problem at hand at all.

Considering the utterances of the Senate Spoke person that the hands of the Assembly men are tied; is another good reason for looking critically at the Nation's constitution. I supported the constitutional review but as result of short sightedness and party politics and the link of the constitutional review to Obasanjo's third term, the attempt was killed. It is better not to have a constitution at all than to have one with so many flaws. Do you ever consider or imagine what will happen to Nigeria if we have a President with minimal brain damage who signs ungodly treaties on our behalf? That Nigerian Constitution needs tidying up seriously.

Senator Ndoma-Egba at his recent briefing said that under the constitution the senate has been left with little or nothing to do in determining the content of any treaty between Nigeria and a foreign country and he did not proffer any solution to the serious problem or how best to remedy the unacceptable situation.

Our biggest problem is that our leaders allow their personal interest to over-ride national interest. Sani Abacha went to the ICJ because he wanted international recognition when Nigeria was a pariah nation without listening to his Attorney General. The speed with which OBJ signed the Greentree accord may be as a result of a rebound of the failure of his third term bid in trying very hard to maintain the status quo of a Statesman.

What we do not understand as Nigerians in international politics is that there are no permanent friends but permanent interest. To subjugate national interest to personal interest is a hollow judgement but critically speaking OBJ alone should not take all the blames as he has a retinue of advisers of all sorts and yet so many blunders are being made.

Nations have gone to war for national interest like the UK in the Falklands, Spain in Basque Region and many countries are occupying disputed land from Israel on Palestinian land, to through UK in Gibraltar in Spain to the USA in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and there are many more examples, the only difference from the Nigerian case is that they were sensible enough not to go to the ICJ. Respecting a constituted authority like the ICJ as we are doing is good but to now move our people from their ancestral land will be adding salt to injury.

Can I use this medium to advice our President, Obasanjo, Donald Duke (Governor of Cross Rivers State) and all members of the movement implementation committee that they should leave the Bakassi people in their ancestral land and support their ultimate self determination in due course democratically. Letting them be in Bakassi peninsular does not break any international law whereas moving them from their ancestral land breaks many natural laws.

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