

## **A NATION WITHOUT SHEPHERDS**

**BY**

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**The Inaugural Address at the first Nigeria Rally held on Friday, December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria.**

Good morning Nigerians. You are all welcome to the first Nigeria rally in a series of rallies which shall be held across the land. I must begin by introducing myself. I am Leonard Karshima Shilgba, a Nigerian and Mathematics professor at the American University of Nigeria, Yola.

Just like many of you are concerned about the state of your nation, so am I; and that is why we are gathered here today. Many Nigerians at home and abroad have expressed in diverse ways their support of this undertaking-The huge leap of faith to mobilize Nigerians of all shades of descriptions towards the task of national renewal and collective engagement for a better Nigeria that works for all of us and not just for a privileged few. May I say how grateful we are to those Nigerians. May your labors, faith and support not be in vain.

I would like to thank Mr. Paul Unom and John Bul, who together with their friends worked with admirable commitment and sacrifice to package this event. Thank you my friends. When the history of this movement is written, may your labors not be forgotten; more importantly, may your labors not be in vain. We have this line in our national anthem: "The labors of our heroes past shall never be in vain". But the labors of our heroes past seem to be in vain.

Nigerian heroes suffered many indignities and afflictions for a better society. Some like Dele Giwa and Ken Saro Wiwa lost their lives in the struggle for a just and equitable Nigeria where opportunities are made readily available for every Nigeria who chooses to try to succeed. Maybe Nigerians are waiting for more blood of their heroes to wet the Nigerian soil before they will pick up their rusted diggers to dig up their dreams which have been buried by their callous rulers down the line of time.

Some Nigerian heroes like Gani Fawehinmi have since before some of us were born suffered numerous arrests, torture, and imprisonments in their dogged demand for a better society. Maybe Nigerians are waiting for many more of their heroes to suffer the same eerie fate before they will stop their idle murmurings and loitering and arise to deliver their dreams from the prison yards of their oppressive rulers.

We are gathered here today to warm our hearts away from the coldness of failed promises, dashed hopes, and petrifying fear of the oppressors. We cannot die two deaths in one single life, otherwise we've got a miracle on our hands.

We are assured by the fact captured in those timeless words of one of our slain heroes: “No evil deed can go unpunished. Any evil done by man to man will be redressed, if not now, then certainly later, if not by man, then certainly by God, for the victory of evil over good can only be temporary ”. When a parcel bomb-the first of its kind in this part of the world-was delivered in order to kill Dele Giwa 22 years ago by Nigerian rulers, I was a teenager in college. That day was a sad one for us.

22 years after, Nigerian rulers have refused to deliver to Nigerians new and sophisticated quality education, roads, railways, bridges, and hospitals with the same seminal imagination and technical creativity they had exercised in eliminating Dele Giwa. 22 years after, the idly crafted “Vision 200”, “Vision 2010”, “Vision 2020”, and “7-point Agenda” have failed to match the effectiveness in the conception and delivery of the parcel bomb in 1986.

So, Nigerian rulers have demonstrated more expertise in eliminating Nigerians from the surface of the earth than they have in eliminating crushing poverty from their lives. So, our killers are never found because those who should find them are the same killers. The killers of Dele Giwa are not found. The killers of Bola Ige are not found. The killers of Harry Marshal are not found. The killers of Funsho Williams are not found. The killers of Aminosoari Dikibo are not found. The roll call continues- Andrew Agom, Hajia Sa’adatu Rimi, Uche Orji, and many slain Nigerians whom time may not permit me to mention now. What can I say about the massacre by federal troops of hapless Nigerians in Odi in Bayelsa State in 1999 and in Zaki-Biam, Benue State in 2001?

Nigerians are today scattered like sheep without a shepherd. They are humiliated and harassed abroad at will, and no one demands answers because they have no shepherds. At home they are torn by wolves that pretend to be shepherds. So, Nigerians are fainting today; they appear hopeless, neither knowing what to do nor where to turn for help. This is the story of Nigeria today. That is why we are gathered here today to tell you “Cheer up”, there is something we can do together.

Some of you have come here out of sheer curiosity to see what we are doing here. Some of you have come here to spy out what we are doing here so that you may report to your masters, while some of you have come here out of a strong conviction in your heart that this is a good and timely thing we seek to accomplish. Whatever the reason why you are here today, let there be no doubt in your mind that we mean what we say and we say what we mean and there is no turning back from this time going forward until we win the prize-A Nigeria that works for us all.

Nigerians, for this prize and crown, we must endure heroically the opposition that may come against this struggle. For this prize, we must despise the shame that oppressive governments at the local, state, and federal levels may put us through. We must all strive to focus on the big picture, the ultimate prize-A Nigeria that works for us all.

47 years ago, it was predicted that 3 developing countries at the time would join the league of the industrialized countries 20 years later. Those countries were Brazil, India, and Nigeria [The BIN nations]. Today, we are all witnesses to what Brazil and India are doing and what Nigeria is not doing.

In the EFA 2000 Assessment: Country Report on Nigeria, we have the following report about the state of education in Nigeria:

*Nigeria is a signatory to the 1990 Jomtiem Declaration of Education for All by the year 2000 and also a member of the group of E-9 Nations committed to the total eradication of illiteracy. In spite of this, the nation’s literacy rate is presently estimated to be 52 percent. Education statistics for 1996 shows that only 14.1 million children are enrolled in primary schools out of the 21 million children of school-going age.*

*The completion rate was 64 percent while the rate of transition to junior secondary school was 43.5 percent. There is overwhelming evidence that these vital literacy indicators have not improved.*

*There are substantial shortcomings in Nigeria's institutional and personnel capacities for the delivery of a sound basic education for all citizens. There are also wide spread disparities both in quality and access across the nation. Available infrastructural facilities, teaching and learning materials as well as qualified teachers are grossly inadequate. For Nigeria to attain the desired 100 percent national literacy rate soon, it is imperative that provisions be made and actions taken to universalize basic education, enthrone a conducive learning environment and improve quality and standards.*

Let me provide some statistics of Nigeria's federal government spending on education in the period 1990 to 2002 as a percentage of annual budgets within the period (a period following the lofty goal and signing unto the vision to provide "Education For All-EFA- by the year 2000". The source is Federal Ministry of Education (2003), Education Sector Report):

1990-5.45 percent; 1991-4.62 percent; 1992-4.60 percent; 1993-7.20 percent; 1994-14.86 percent; 1995-11.50 percent; 1996-10.81 percent; 1997-11.53 percent; 1998-9.61 percent; 1999-11.13 percent; 2000-8.70 percent; 2001-7.00 percent; 2002-5.90 percent.

It is clear from the above data that Nigeria did not demonstrate commitment to eradicating illiteracy with that paltry, miserable, uncoordinated, and whimsical funding of public education within the same period of time she should have bound herself to the goal of eradicating illiteracy, if for nothing else, at least for honor as she had religiously signed a piece of document-*Declaration of Education for All by the year 2000*.

Following the failure of Nigeria to meet the objective of eradicating illiteracy in Nigeria by the year 2000, the report proposed Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme, which was *designed to address the challenges stated in section 13.04*:

#### ***13.04 Goals and Objectives of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme***

*The goals of the UBE Scheme are to universalize access to basic education, engender a conducive learning environment and eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria within the shortest possible time. The specific objectives of the scheme are to:*

- i. develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;*
- ii. provide free, compulsory Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school age;*
- iii. reduce drastically, dropout rate from the formal school system through improved relevance and efficiency;*
- iv. cater for dropouts and out-of-school children/adolescent through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education;*
- v. ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative and live skills (as well as the ethical, moral and civic values) needed for laying the foundation for long-life learning.*

8 years after, the state of public education in Nigeria is yet bleaker and parlous. Nigeria had set similar targets for Health, Housing, and Food security-Health for All by the year 2000,-House for All by the year 2000, and -Food for All by the year 2000. In the second half of the decade (1990-2000), another lofty

vision was crafted-Vision 2010. Yet again, in the midst of another decade (2000-2010), another vision was born-Vision 2020, when Nigeria hopes to become one of the 20 most industrialized nations of the world by year 2020. Now, we have the nauseating “Seven point-Agenda” of the non-performing Yar’Adua!

For how long shall my nation continue down this path of cynical substitution, substituting one vanity vision with another? The painful truth, however is that Nigeria has never truly had a vision; Nigeria has merely announced wishes and dreams in the past. An examination of the supposed visions reveals that no measurable strategies and milestone-littered routes were explicitly charted. For instance, the 2000 EFA report on Nigeria states that, “*Available infrastructural facilities, teaching and learning materials as well as qualified teachers are grossly inadequate. For Nigeria to attain the desired 100 percent national literacy rate soon, it is imperative that provisions be made and actions taken to universalize basic education, enthrone a conducive learning environment and improve quality and standards*”.

Nigerians, our rulers have destroyed our values.

1. ***The value of hard work and service***-Example, the police force has been dehumanized and traumatized with no motivation to work; without general life insurance to provide cover for family members who may survive them should they die in the line of service for their nation.
2. ***The value of education and enlightenment***-Now, money talks even as Nigeria’s rulers have devalued the teaching profession and the public education. The ladder of quality education has been taken out of reach of the masses
3. ***Value of excellence***-Nigeria’s rulers have replaced merit with mediocrity; while having the proper connections in high places has displaced complimentary skills and expertise.

It is not a privilege for a Nigerian worker to be paid their salary. They have given their labor to the employer in exchange for a salary; their labor is a commodity and their salary is the price tag. But Nigeria’s rulers have so dehumanized the people and devalued their service so much that it has now become a great achievement if a Nigerian ruler pays salaries regularly. Things that citizens of more serious nations take as a given, Nigeria’s rulers have deemed it a privilege to dispense at their convenience-even the Nigerian worker’s wages and salaries, as paltry as they are! Nigerian people have been devalued both by their rulers and foreigners. [A former ITF staff, after giving his service for 20 years to Nigeria, retired with a difficult-to-get pension of about N28, 000 a month, is now striving for 40 points in order to qualify for social security in US by 2014, when he will be 73 years old!]

The salary of the Nigerian worker is a joke because their labor has been devalued even as their public education has been devalued. Graduates of our schools and Universities have been devalued in the labor market even within Nigeria because our education system has collapsed [Example-The discriminatory conditions of service at the American University of Nigeria].

Nigeria’s rulers have destroyed public education and built private schools and Universities for themselves and children. The shepherds have forsaken the sheep. So, Nigerians must run abroad for greener pasture since their rulers have destroyed the pasture at home.

- If Nigerians must get quality education in order to possess valuable certificates, they must either run overseas or find a way to pay the exorbitant tuition charged by up-market private Universities and schools in Nigeria.
- If Nigerians must live a bit long, they must find a way to fly abroad even as their rulers fly abroad for treatment of “cold” and other diseases.
- The Nigerian people have been abandoned by their shepherds.

We pray to a Mighty God who answers prayers. He has heard our cries, seen our afflictions, and now sends this message to our pharaohs-“Let my people go!” If Nigeria’s rulers- from the local government councils to the president-fail to heed and free Nigerians from the bondage of preventable ignorance and poverty, “their firstborn shall die!”

If Nigeria’s rulers fail to take a hefty cut in their wages, salaries, and allowances, and begin to invest in the Nigerian people, “their firstborn shall die” [Example-Top Executives of HONDA motor company have agreed to take a 10 percent cut in their salaries at this time of global economic crisis.] Nigerian rulers have rather given themselves an outrageous salary increase while minimum wage remains the same. Now, more than half of Nigeria’s revenue goes to about 18,000 political officials [elected, selected, and appointed]. This puts an enormous burden on the finances of the nation so much that unless the Nigerian people cast off their idle disposition and rise and demand for a significant slash in the salaries and allowances of those privileged few among a population of about 150 million Nigerians, we shall not invest significantly in education of the twenty first century; thus Nigerians will be seriously devalued in the gathering of the world’s nations. The choice Nigerians must make is between sitting down idly and standing up to their rulers to tell them to stop pissing on them and telling them it is raining. The choice is between permitting a complete destruction of the dreams of millions of Nigerians and picking up the little boldness required to deliver our education system. The choice between Nigerians is allowing their rulers send their children to super schools both in Nigeria and abroad who will come back and rule over their children and fighting to rescue their children’s future through quality public education.

The curse has gone out in the land against Nigeria’s rulers and their households; a plague has broken out against them. Nigerians should prepare to go out for a spoil.

- **Fear:** We cannot afford to fear, lest we perish with hunger, disease, and ignorance. Nigerians, when a ruler ignores the education of the people, he has killed them-he has killed the innovator in the people; he has killed the great thinker; he has killed the great scientist; he has killed the great business thinker and developer. Business and society progress only at the speed of thought, and only quality education provides the fertile ground for the growth and flourish of developmental thought.

A good leader must invest well in education and every other thing takes shape in society-hospitals have well-trained personnel to care for the sick, agriculture becomes modernized as investment in research produces results which in turn increase productivity, which creates jobs that reduce poverty. An educated person can ask and answer the questions- WHY and HOW? Those questions require more than one word to answer, unlike questions on WHAT, WHERE, and WHEN, which could be answered with just one word. Only quality education equips a man to answer questions bordering on WHY (innovation) and HOW (creativity). Nigerian rulers have deliberately allowed public education to collapse so that the people cannot ask them hard questions that could expose their inefficiency, lack of vision and preparedness for leadership.

- **Failure of the traditional institution:** Nigerians by tradition, hold old age in high esteem. But old age must give us a genuine reason to respect and admire it. But our traditional rulers have failed us. The Tortiv, Lamido, Emirs, the Sultan, the Obas, the Obis etc have failed the Nigerian people. They love the gifts from Nigeria’s corrupt and pathetically incompetent rulers more than they love the Nigerian people,-their supposed subjects. Since they have refused to speak for us, we must learn to speak for ourselves. Nigeria’s traditional rulers have failed to ask our political rulers why they have neglected education; they have not asked Nigeria’s rulers to give the people the needed infrastructure like quality schools, roads, railways, bridges, and hospitals instead of buying jeeps and expensive gifts for them. Our traditional rulers are a greedy cabal that has connived with Nigeria’s political rulers to oppress, harass, and deprive the Nigerian people of the basic

necessities for good and happy living. They are not royal fathers; they are undeserving of the “royal” pre-fix and also undeserving of the father’s respect of the Nigerian people until they learn to speak the truth to Nigeria’s political rulers on the behalf of the people by deeds and words.

- **The leader within you:** There is one leader the Nigerian seems to either ignore or overlook-The leader within. Nigerians, you must arise and shine this time. The wind of change which has begun to blow across the globe has reached our nation, the biggest hope of the black race. Let us believe in our ability to initiate a new thing, an unlikely thing- a new Nigeria. Let us not ask, “What are they doing?” Rather, we should ask, “What can I do?” We are gathered here today, not only to remind us of our tremendous abilities if we can believe, but also to know how we can channel those abilities properly for a new Nigeria that works for us all. We must cast off the ultimate falsehood:
  - a. **Nigerians are weak:** Nigeria’s rulers believe that you are weak; that you don’t have the nerve to challenge them. [Thailand and South Korea examples.] If the Thai people and South Koreans did it, Nigerians too can.
  - b. **Nigerians are stupid:** Nigeria’s rulers believe Nigerians are stupid; so, they can divide Nigerians by easily playing the religion and ethnic cards.
  - c. **Nigerians are cowards:** Nigerians, your rulers believe that you are cowards who easily retreat in the face of threats and intimidation. They believe you cannot sustain a struggle even for a week, not to talk of a month, a year, or years.
  - d. **Nigerians are selfish:** Nigerians, your rulers believe you are too selfish to work together against their oppression.
  - e. **Nigerians are too unpatriotic:** Nigeria’s rulers believe Nigerians are too unpatriotic to commit their time, resources, and let it be said, their life for a better society. They believe the majority of Nigerians hold this conviction to be an unassailable fact-Nigeria is not worth dying for! So they believe a typical Nigerian, safely out of Nigeria with the privilege of a second citizenship (of USA, UK, Canada, Australia, etc) will half-heartedly commit to the struggle for a new and better Nigeria, if at all.

**We must send a clear and strong message that they are wrong; that we genuinely seek a new Nigeria that works for us all.**

We must tell them with our action more than with mere words that Nigerians are not weak; that Nigerians are not stupid; that Nigerians are not cowards; that Nigerians are not selfish. We must let it be known that Nigerians are not unpatriotic.

By our deeds, let us demonstrate commitment for a Nigeria that works for us all.

Thank you!