

## **NIGERIANS, IT IS TIME**

**BY**

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Millions and millions of Nigerians lament their situation and look up to the skies, seeking for some divine intervention, which is noble and good. But the farmer who searches the sky for any signs of rain must have broken up the ground and sown seeds first. He only awaits the rain from the Almighty God upon his labor.

Nigerians, it is time to break up our fallow ground. We must sow, but not among thorns. Then and only then can we look up and hope for the rain from the Almighty upon our labors.

**Fallow Ground:** There are things we have not done right for a long period of time-

1. *Failure to know our enemy:* We have failed to understand who our enemies are, and what their strength, weaknesses, strategies, and methods are. Religion and ethnicity have never been our enemies; these are not! Our diversity is our blessing and not a curse. Nigeria is not the North, neither is Nigeria the South. Irrespective of the manner and motive of our union in 1914, we can yet sow the seed of nationhood after clearing the thorns of ethnic and religious discrimination, acrimony, and suspicion. Instead of using these as daggers and knives to cut through our body of unity, we can use religion and ethnicity as the colorful threads that they are to weave a beautiful mosaic of the largest black nation on earth.

We have been deceived that the solution to the chronic malaise of our nation is the creation of more states and local government councils until each ethnic group and each local clan has a state or a local government area. We have moved from the 3-region structure to a 4-region structure; then, to a 12-state structure, and furthermore to a 19-state structure. Nigeria eventually became a 21-state structured nation before the present 36-state structure that it is today. The country has a weird unbalanced number of local government areas-774 in number. It is a deception framed in golden rims by Nigeria's rulers that more states and local government areas means peace and better governance for the wellbeing of the people. The somber truth remains that they seek the creation of more states and local government areas for themselves to become more important fish in smaller rivers. But then, more Governors and local government chairmen means more unnecessary officials appointed by them with additional cost of governance and concomitantly less resources for the people.

I would even propose a merger of ineffective states which cannot even pay staff salaries without reliance on statutory allocation from the federation account. Besides, allocation from the federation account, in addition to dispensing at least 50 percent of revenue generated to the localities, regions, and states from where the wealth is derived, should also take into account the

internal revenue generation in the states, having regard to section 162 (2) of the 1999 constitution, in a formula designed to reward great and nifty strides at local generation of revenue. Also, allocation from the federation account should be between state and the federal governments only, and a state should be only so called and recognized if it can demonstrate through regenerative assets and investments that it can independently pay the wages and salaries of its staff.

2. *Abandoned struggle to a few*: Another thing we have not done right is to abandon the struggle for a just, equal, and better society to a few Nigerians. While we applaud them, it has always been from afar-on the stands as cheering supporters while they shed drops of sweat and sometimes even blood on our behalf. We have refused to even offer them the first aid of brotherhood and camaraderie when they have sustained bruises on the field for our sake. And when they are left with broken limbs by our oppressors, we don't even volunteer to nurse till they are whole again. So, some of our gallant soldiers have become secretly discouraged, disillusioned and sad, concluding that "Nigerians are not worth dying for".

Nigerians, a few soldiers on the field for us cannot contend with the oppressive rulers who also have the referees on their side. Let us rush down from the grandstands and protest this abuse of the sport. Let us play together; let us not leave the fight to a few compatriots like Gani Fawehinmi, Nuhu Ribadu, Anthony Enahoro, Cardinal Anthony Okogie, etc. Some of the soldiers have grown old and grizzled; some are sick and feeble. All Nigerians must answer the call to this service-Who is on Nigeria's side?

3. *Sacrificed good governance*: Another error we have committed is that we have sold our birthright for a pot of porridge. When we demand for and collect from politicians campaigning for elective offices naira and kobo in exchange for our votes, we have technically given up our legitimate high ground to demand for good governance. When instead of contributing to the campaign fund of a candidate for an elective position, we expect them to give us of their money before we can "elect" them to "serve" us, we cannot expect them to serve us while in office since it has become an exchange -Money for votes. Nigerians, now is the time to take away the foreskin of our hearts. We must be prepared to think clearly. We have to invest in good governance if we must be beneficiaries of its dividends.
4. *Lack of interest in public budgets*: Local, state, and federal budgets have been used in Nigeria to siphon money from the public into private pockets. The people of Nigeria must demand for budget implementation reports and list of contractors for each project announced in a budget and the amounts advanced. Nigerians, it is high time we showed real interest in actively demanding for proper accounting of monies voted and spent by our governments.

Persistent mass protest, civil disobedience, and picketing of state and national Assembly buildings and government houses in order to dramatize both their plight and displeasure are noble considerations before Nigerians.

Since contractors have become conduit pipes through which corrupt government officials drain funds from the people, the Nigerian people must shut down offices and operations of contractors and firms that have so given themselves to be common accomplices in the wanton stealing that is going on. Contractors are middle men for highly inflated contracts which are publicly announced, huge sums advanced before commencement of work, and a handsome chunk of the money is paid behind Nigerians to public officials who announce such contracts. Then, the projects are poorly executed, canceled, or abandoned and no contractor is brought to book. The people do nothing, and so the charade is repeated year after year.

Example: If facts emerge that the immediate past Governor of Benue State (the State where we hold the first Nigeria Rally) had awarded a 2 billion naira water project to a company-Biwater and “mobilized” the company with the sum of 800 million naira, only for the present Governor to cancel the contract and award it to another company-Gilmor for 4.9 billion naira with a mobilization amount of 2.9 billion naira paid to the new contractor the same day the “new” contract was signed, the Nigerian people in Benue state must not only ask questions, but take more direct action to demand for accountability and prosecution. We pose the following questions:

- i. Why was the contract with BiWater canceled?
- ii. If the fault lies in BiWater, what legal and other steps have been taken by the Benue State government to not only recover the 800 million naira that was paid to BiWater but also claim some damages due to time wastage?
- iii. What factors led to the new cost for the project, which is 245 percent of the initial cost?
- iv. What were the terms of the first contract with BiWater?

Nigerians, we must force contractors like BiWater and Gilmor to release documents of truth about the contracts they get from government and publish how much they have truly collected for the contracts, contrary to phantom amounts announced.

Failed and collapsed projects which give way no sooner than they are completed must attract the outrage of the people demonstrated in diverse ways-including but not limited to mass protest and picketing of the premises of such contractors- until quality repairs are effected at no additional cost.

*There is a rude distraction in Nigeria-the establishment of offices and agencies for “fighting poverty” or “alleviating poverty” across the land or offices for the “achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDG)”.* These are equally drain pipes of the people’s resources which we must push to be scrapped! If enough resources are directed to the relevant ministries whose traditional functions are either taken over or shared by those bogus agencies and departments for “fighting poverty” or “alleviating poverty” and expenditures monitored, then poverty can be reduced.

The Nigerian rulers have for too long pissed on us and told us that it is raining.

Historical precedents have convinced us today that creation and creativity neither are singularly divine outputs nor only accidental attributes, but those are brought about by rational configurations and permutations. I therefore, can’t agree more with Karl Heinrich Marx (May 5, 1818-March 14, 1883) when he wrote those words in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848): “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles.” If discontented people in any society in a given generation choose the response of silence, creation will never take place as far as the desired state is concerned. “Let there be, and there was”, is the testimony of scriptures. The inescapable testimony of commitment to the ideal and desired is the ensuing struggle that is unyielding in the face of opposition, threats, and indignities. In other words, societal and individual estates are erected by rational engineering. This accentuates the requirements for nifty leadership, orchestrated by deep thoughts and reasoned social pondering.

A man can never love truly and believe deeply without hope. Love for and faith in one’s nation all spring from a deep and abiding hope they share about the future. History has taught us so.

Revolutions that happened in different parts of the world-North America (1776), Haiti (1791-1804), France (1789-1799) etc, although different in their foundations and motivations, all shared a common denominator-*Discontent*. Discontent is an evidence of hopelessness, while revolution simply means revolt against the status quo, establishment, or ordained order. Discontent is both an indication and expression of

faithlessness in the journey of state, whose destination is either unknown by the majority or completely unattractive to the forced wayfarers.

If the Nigerian people are truly discontented, then it is time to show it by mass sustained agitation even as **Frederick Douglass, an African-American Abolitionist** said: *“Those who profess to favor freedom, yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightening. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.”*

We come here today to demand of power in Nigeria to concede that we have superior argument; they are wrong about governance and we are right about our assessment. More importantly, we are gathered here today to demand that Nigeria’s rulers concede our dreams to us which they have held back for too long. Martin Luther Jr. once said, *“There is nothing more dangerous than to build a society, with a large segment of people in that society, who feel they have no stake in it; who feel that they have nothing to lose. People who have a stake in their society protect that society, but when they don’t have it, they unconsciously want to destroy it.”* We are gathered here today in order to send a genuine message to rulers of Nigeria in the hope they will change their ways and prevent a crisis from evolving into a cataclysm. It is dangerous for Nigeria’s rulers to continually ignore the feelings and hurts of Nigerians simply because they assume “Nigerians are peace-loving people” with eternal endurance. Many Nigerians feel they have no stake in this country; they feel they have nothing to lose should they go wild one day; that day is at hand.

I feel strongly convinced that the time is ripe for organized action which shall end the internal contradictions of the Nigerian system. I have to try and be as lucid as possible.

1. I do not believe or accept that the salaries and remuneration of Nigeria’s elected and public officials should be divorced from the minimum national wage. In other words, monetary reward of public officials should be tied to measurable societal conditions of living. For instance, if the minimum wage that the economy can support is N8000, Nigeria’s public officials should only earn N8000x where x is in percentage, which must not exceed 1000 percentage. In countries where minimum wage is about 6 USD an hour, a worker doing 8 hours a day could bring home to their family 1344 USD every 4 weeks or 17472 USD a year. It could be accepted for a senator for instance in that country to earn 174, 720 USD a year. It is completely irritating for a Nigerian Senator to earn more than 100 times the national minimum wage. Is this fair? The most senior USA senator does not earn more than 10 times the minimum wage! The principle of my conviction is to marry the fate of the ruling elite to that of the proletariat; they both fall or stand together. Moreover, it imposes a responsibility on the bourgeoisie to seek out the interest of the commoners in society. If the Nigerian system continues to ignore the bread and butter issues facing Nigerian families and to reward in perpetuity those who continue to mortgage the future of our children while pretending to lead, whereas the worker’s wage remains a classic example at parody, I fear the premises for a new social order are being set.
2. The CEOs of public companies benefiting from investors’ funds must equally have their salaries and bonuses tied to the minimum wage of workers in those companies in the same way I have described in 1) above.
3. In order to avoid waste and discourage irresponsibility, increase in salaries and wages should reflect growth of the economy measured in terms of such indices as GDP.

If the welfare of state is made to determine remuneration of public officials, the improvement of state shall be a priority they must focus upon.

But the Nigerian system cannot be made to change for the benefit of the majority if we the people consistently abdicate our responsibility to God while hoping to mask our cowardly and idle disposition with piety.

*Nigeria must face up to its own internal contradictions:*

- i. With daily inflow of petrodollars, can we sincerely say we have any excuses for the nonexistence of a modern railway transport system?
- ii. Death traps, which federal roads are, are a testimony to the selfishness of the Nigerian ruling elite, whose free ride is coming to an end soon.
- iii. The citizenship which Nigeria offers cannot be guaranteed everywhere within her borders; neither are its benefits appealing. There is need to define who the Nigerian is both within and without their immediate domains.
- iv. Social services like education and health have been highly privatized and commercialized; the result? Society has become more ignorant and sicker. The children of the rich and poor are being separated within our borders-segregation among blacks. Enlightenment makes revolution easier to forge. This deliberate default policy by government to ignore public education while encouraging the establishment of high quality but expensive private schools and Universities is meant to spread ignorance among the majority poor and thereby assure an indefinite lethargy of Nigerians towards government's inactions and abuses, because ignorance can be egregiously frustrating in any attempts to promote a revolution whose premises are set.
- v. Government has so privatized many services that it is left with little or nothing to do; yet, the revenue commission (RMAFC) keeps donating outlandish salaries to our near idle public officials.

To promote a new social, economic, and political order, there is great need for public enlightenment in order to peel off the mind of the people the veneer of ignorance which naturally inclines them towards insipid ethnic and religious fraternities, which the ruling elite often exploit. The Nigeria Rally is meant to cure this general ignorance as patiently as it may require.

**Permit me to take you through the objectives of the Nigeria Rally. The Nigeria Rally is conceived to accomplish the following:**

- i. **Educate consistently the masses about their condition, even though many think they know enough, and the DANGERS of doing nothing (*siddon look* disposition).**
- ii. **Create a relevant concentration of anger within Nigerians which is a necessary fuel for agitation for improvement of their estate.**
- iii. **Develop a persistent, tenacious spirit in Nigerians that will not thaw under the heat of government persecution until a true Nigerian spirit is born, which shall**

- unite Nigerians around a common project, devoid of tribal, ethnic, or religious colorations.
- iv. To demand for and attain a just and equitable remuneration of political officials (Nigerian rulers) with respect to the national minimum wage and the quality of “service” they offer society.
  - v. To achieve access by the true bosses (Nigerians) to relevant information which includes but is not limited to that which has to do with accrurement of revenue into the Nigerian purse, the trajectory of expenditure of same and by whom.
  - vi. Release of the various constituents of Nigeria to develop at their pace. The current pretentious efforts at review of the 1999 constitution must be seized upon for a genuine review which allows each village, community, and state to keep at least 50 percent of whatever revenue is generated from their domain.
  - vii. The attainment of true nationhood, where citizenship is defined by either place of birth or place of productive residence with appropriately derived rights rather than by some weird determinants like ancestral roots.

**The above objectives, if achieved, shall free resources and needed energies for investment in education, health, modern agriculture, roads and railways, clean and efficient energy and power for the improved quality and quantity of a Nigerian life. Besides, Nigerian workers can then be assured of a living wage.**

Let Nigerians choose a number each from 1 to 7 (each corresponding to a day of the week). Let Nigerians with the requisite infrastructure for mass rallies and mobilization donate them to us. Let Nigerians descend on Abuja and our state capitals on days corresponding to their chosen numbers in a sustained manner. For each Nigerian that will choose a number from 1 to 7, the call will be only once a week or 52 times a year. We shall move into those towns and cities, not with cudgels and guns, but with placards and words that will not only enlighten and awaken Nigerians to the dangers of doing nothing, but which will also focus the mind on the big picture-A re-engineered Nigeria that works for all of us and not only for a few.

The stolid rulers and “owners” of Nigeria shall feel us daily. It may take us 10 years (like the French revolution) or 13 years (like the Haitian revolution), but things won’t be the same again. We need leaders and coordinators for all states and the FCT. We have got no salaries but our thanks, no wages to pay but Nigeria’s tributes at harvest.

Thank you!