SECURITY, WOMEN AND PEACE

It is no gainsaying that promoting security should be a priority for every nation (security of lives and properties). Every life counts, male or female, young or old. Security, peace and development are words that intertwine. A country with a high level of security will experience a high level of peace as well as development.

Narayan et al 2000(as cited in GSDRC Applied knowledge services 2015) opines that safety, security, and justice are of paramount concerns to citizens and these include a stable income, consistent housing, clothing and food supplies as part of the predictability of daily life, protection from crime and psychological security.(1)

Narayan et al 2000;DFID 2007(as cited in GSDRC Applied knowledge services 2015) states “women, men, girls and boys often have different safety, security and justice perceptions, experiences and needs that require targeted responses. For example, insecurity and injustice contribute to gender-based discrimination and social exclusion as a result of women’s inadequate property rights, unequal access to assets and discriminatory social norms and power structures” (2).

When there is a bridge in security a nation creates room for violence, citizens tend to be less patriotic and it becomes a situation of all man for himself, one tends to forget the promise and loyalty to the nation. Eno .A. Fred at the HMGF Peace and Conflict Resolution Talk 2014 states “Our promise as a nation, what I call ‘**The Nigerian Promise’**, remains a distant dream for too many of our compatriots today. We are citizens, yet settlers in the same space we are supposed to protect and preserve as one. How we continue to function as indigenous citizens of Nigeria and yet cannot be indigenes within the same territorial space called Nigeria because I moved from point A to point B is truly the biggest oxymoron of all times. Yet we claim to be building one Nigeria… When citizens work in harmony towards set objectives and the common ideals which they all consider noble and just, they inspire one another. In a nutshell, this is what true PATRIOTISM is all about.”(3)

In recent years Nigeria has been plagued with a terrorist group known as Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’Awati Wal-Jihad, aka Boko Haram. This insurgence has led to a high level of insecurity, violence and truncation of development especially in the Northeast region of Nigeria. Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’Awati Wal-Jihad, aka Boko Haram, translated in English as “western education is sinful” it fights against secular westernization of Nigeria and is against co-educational learning (4); co-education opposes mixed gender education, tutoring both male and female in same environment.

Boko Haram inflicts violence mostly on women and this can be termed gender based violence (GBV). The UN (as cited in Zenn Jacob and Pearson Elizabeth 2010) defines GBV as “physical, sex or mental harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (5). Gender is a huge factor of Boko Haram schemes and violence, women and kids are easy target of these insurgents, and they bear the brunt, worthy of mention is the kidnapping of 276 school girls on the 14th of April 2014 at Chibok Borno state who are yet to be rescued. In May 2013 at Bama Barracks there was an incidence where some government official wives and kids were abducted in retaliation for the arrest of the wives of Boko Haram members as well as some of their members held captive by the Nigerian government. (6). In the course of the kidnapping over 100 lives were lost, but a truce was made by both parties to exchange prisoners, the released military wives in an interview with Al-Jazeera stated that the Boko Haram members had told them that they were been held hostage in retaliation for their captured wives and members (7), this is a classic case of women been victims in times of crisis.

Boko Haram strongly believes that the place of the girl child is at home or to be slaves rather than be educated. Abubakar Shekau had stated that girls should be married as early as 9 years old instead of being educated (8). Since 2014 we hear stories of young girls been strapped with explosives and made to be weapons of mass destruction, suicide bombers in Northeast Nigeria, this is definitely a new tactic of Boko Haram. However it has not been proven that the mass of girls been used for such inhumane act as part of the missing Chibok girls. Some of the victims who were made to carry the explosives have stated that they were coerced and threatened into the suicide mission, even by family members (9). It is also alleged that some female Boko Haram members are used as spies or made to cunningly marry fighters and capture them (10).

Eno .A.Fred (2014) opines that the presence and terror of Boko Haram spread as a result of our collective failure, by letting conflicts fester between and amongst us (11). We need to celebrate our uniqueness and diversity, learn to forgive and forget and most especially love one another unconditionally.

Taking all these into consideration we propose the follow recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

* Gender equality and empowerment cannot be over emphasized, give the woman a voice and empower her to be able to handle cases of violence. Save a woman, a girl child and you save the world at large
* Include women especially those in the rural communities to participate in peace talk forums, let them have the opportunity to express themselves and also dialogue and network with other women facing similar violence and learn security measures.
* Starting from our homes to our communities, our religious places then to the nation at large, we must all be patriotic, peace and security can only be achieved by loving each other as one. We must understand that our strength sure lies in our diversity, and we should strive for peace as a nation, for without peace development is truncated and without development peace become a scarce commodity.
* Sensitization on security measures, teach women and young females how to be security conscious and educate them on measures to protect and handle themselves in times of crisis.
* Women/ mothers are the best vectors of change; they are the ones who groom a child from his early years. With the right home training a child will be set on a good path, very rare will a child with good home training dissuade from the words and teachings of his mom, train a child in the way he/she should grow and he or she won’t depart from it.
* Beef up security across borders and mostly in violence prone area, communities should be taught on how to protect themselves as well, especially in situations where the military are far from the violence.
* Rapid response unit should be beefed up, secured and sustained
* Efforts should also be made through the education sector, a curriculum based on security studies should be taught in various institutions in such communities

In conclusion a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson “peace cannot be achieved through violence it can only be attained through understanding.”

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Keynote Address

HMGF-Abuja Peace Talks 2014

The Shehu Musa Yar A’dua Centre

Abuja-Saturday October 25th 2014.

**THE AUDACITY OF PEACE & DIALOGUE IN TIMES OF WAR, HATRED & DIVISION.**

**By Fred A. ENO**

Our Royal Fathers,

Dear Compatriots & Friends.

This year we are celebrating the centennial anniversary of Nigeria, with its rich conglomeration of nations, creeds and tongues, all united in a common determination to live as one in a country they call their own.

We are also celebrating our most distinguished elder statesman and former Head of State, Gen. Yakubu (Jack) Gowon who turned 80 this week. May we rise and give both Nigeria and Gen. Gowon a befitting round of applause wishing him and our dear Nation more fruitful years ahead.

Thank you.

And before you take your seats, could we please take a moment of personal reflection in solidarity with our fellow citizens who at this very moment are still in captivity, abducted from their homes and schools, particularly our young sisters and daughters from the Chibok Secondary school for whom today marks Day 194, and those most recently abducted.

We also pray for speedy recovery of all those in our hospitals and clinics who have suffered various injuries, both innocent citizens and members of the armed forces as a result of terrorism, just as we pray for the peaceful repose of the souls of thousands more who lost their lives.

We wish a quick and dignified return home for the over six million and counting, of our fellow citizens; women, children, the sick and the elderly who have had to flee, displaced from their homes, towns and villages and are now living a life of misery in camps as Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs, or as refugees in neighbouring countries.

All these as a result of the insurgency activities committed by Nigerians against fellow Nigerians. The activities of Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’Awati Wal-Jihad, aka **Boko Haram**, as appalling as they may seem today, are only symptomatic of our collective failure by letting conflicts fester between and amongst us.

Dear Friends and compatriots;

Today, October 25th 2014 marks exactly 10 years since our dear friend and brother Hayi Mark Godwin, HMG, departed to be with his Creator. To us, Mark’s departure was sudden and too soon, as a result of an accident. But to his Creator, it was no accident. Our Creator neither makes mistakes nor does He do anything by accident. Mark’s life and time with us was ordained to be so. He served his purpose while on earth.

The reason we are gathered here today in his honour is to talk about our true purpose as citizens; for ourselves and for our dear country. To talk about our common desire for peace, for love and for unity in our land. Weather it was by the hand of Lugard, God in His wisdom created Nigeria and put us here. It was no mistake.

My dear friends, we began this glorious moment with applause and praise for Nigeria and a great statesman, Gen. Gowon. During his time leading this country through the civil war and half a decade thereafter, the paramount objective of his administration was captured in just two slogans; ‘To keep Nigeria one, is a task that must be done,’ and ‘Go on with on Nigeria’.

Given our current demography, the vast majority of Nigerians living today, over 67% of our current population were not even born at the time, and it is sad and unfortunate that this majority is being taught little or nothing about this important period in our nation’s history.

The negatives of corruption, bad leadership, insecurity, religious and ethnic bigotry have so dominated our narrative as a nation that we have accepted them as the new normal.

It is only natural that the positive things that we share suffer. Peaceful co-existence, tolerance, integrity in public service, credible elections and love, one for another, are no longer given prominence.

The good news at least, is that the task of keeping Nigeria one was done. This group of young men in their twenties and thirties salvaged Africa’s greatest hope and restored Nigeria’s unity as one nation, and if I may add, indivisible under God. But the true heroes were the millions on both sides of the war whose blood was sacrificed that we may be one nation.

However, we cannot afford to be oblivious of the challenges we continue to encounter and endure as a nation united in blood and ordered by God. Even with the hope and great expectations of the post civil war era, and the verve and dynamism encapsulated by Dora Akunyili’s era of ‘Great Country, Good people’, we are yet to find the perfect elixir for harmonious co-existence.

The Promise:

Our promise as a nation, what I call ‘**The Nigerian Promise’**, remains a distant dream for too many of our compatriots today. We are citizens, yet settlers in the same space we are supposed to protect and preserve as one. How we continue to function as indigenous citizens of Nigeria and yet cannot be indigenes within the same territorial space called Nigeria because I moved from point A to point B is truly the biggest oxymoron of all times. Yet we claim to be building one Nigeria.

I am neither an alarmist nor a pessimist. Far from it. I am and will remain a firm believer, self-assured of the eventual realisation of the Nigerian Promise.

The promise of a strong and united nation at peace with itself.

The promise of a nation whose commonwealth, human and material, are equitably and efficiently utilised to serve the best interest of all the people.

The promise of a nation whose citizens will serve her with dignity, pride and fairness.

The promise of a nation whose people will honour their heroes past and strife never to let their labour be in vain.

The promise of a nation whose leaders will inspire greater unity, dignity and limitless opportunity for her children.

The promise of a nation destined to give the African, where ever he or she may be on earth, a pride of place.

That is the Nigerian promise, and I believe we can make it happen in our own life time, if we so choose.

My dear friends, we do not need any convincing, but to say that all is well with the state of affairs in our country today will be delusional.

My assurance of the promise of a great Nigeria, however, is constantly heightened and re-enforced by such interactions with Nigerians like you who are gathered here today, and by the foresight and commitment of organisations like the Hayi Mark Godwin Foundation who have put together this truly unique and outstanding platform for us to discuss and share ideas about ourselves, our communities and our country. Even the venue, the Shehu Musa Yar A’dua Centre, speaks volumes in what sacrifices Nigerians are willing to make for the country to realise her greatness. I spent time in the same prison cell with the late Gen. Shehu Musa Yar A’dua and I can tell you our country lost another great hero too soon.

Rather than be overwhelmed by the seemingly endless killings and destruction occasioned by the current wave of fundamentalist extremism, or even the feverish political rhetoric that is only aggravating an already bad situation, we must focus now like never before on what unites us a people. We must think, pray and speak to one Nigeria, rather than speaking in **separate tongues**.

The questions we should be asking ourselves in this hall today, and across this country is;

Where did we go wrong and how can we reconcile our differences without resorting to such extreme violence and hatred that has become so pervasive?

We were not meant to be a Nation of few winners and too many losers, but a nation of ‘no victor, no vanquished.’

We were not meant to be a captive nation, at war with itself again, its people living in fear, despair, self-suspicious and abandoned, but one ‘great nation with many good people’ (sic).

We were not meant to be divided by tongues, tribes and beliefs, but a nation united in its diversity under one God.

What Happened?

These are the questions we will be debating and exchanging opinions as we talk to each other here today and in the days and months ahead.

History may have dictated the actions of men, but the manifest destiny of a nation, any nation, can only come about through the collective efforts of its citizens.

When citizens work in harmony towards set objectives and the common ideals which they all consider noble and just, they inspire one another. In a nutshell, this is what true PATRIOTISM is all about.

Inspiring one another through actions that promote our collective and inclusive growth

Leaders who draw strength from such people-inspired norms and ideals move on to become truly visionary and transformative in their actions. These attributes are in and of themselves the guarantors of peace, because they ensure equity in the distribution of resources, fairness in interpersonal relations, mutual respect and equality before the law.

Are we there yet, or do we really want to get there?

Over the last forty years, bar a few instances of light, we have been groping in the dark with leaders who ruled neither by the will of the people nor inspired by them. A direct consequence of this arbitrariness is the breach in trust and the disconnect between the rulers and the ruled. This applies to both military and civilian regimes.

That disconnect and breakdown of trust plays a significant role in the proliferation of conflicts in our land. The birth of armed and violent militancy in the Niger Delta was just as much a result of the decades of neglect and deprivation as it was of the petty minded, selfish and un-inspiring leadership of the elected officials of the region at the time.

Now Boko Haram, or Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’Awati Wal-Jihad as they would like us to call them, their ascendancy and monstrous brutality in the North east is exactly the same. The governors, legislators, (federal and state), emirs and politicians in the north east share a reasonable amount of responsibility for the escalation of this mayhem, just as the government at the centre.

The Peace we want:

Peace and Unity form the core of our most noble ideals. They are the fountains from which all patriotic zeal must flow. Our religions preach them. Our tribes and ethnic nationalities advocate them. True leaders and statesmen and women strife for them. Even our politicians, the good, the bad and the ugly mouth these words. Yet Peace is gradually eluding us, while the state of our unity as a nation can scarcely be described as excellent.

In search of Peace & Unity.

If peace is merely the absence of war, then we could truly say Nigeria found peace forty four years ago when the civil war ended. And because the two go together, we could as well say we have been leaving in a peaceful and united country for forty four straight years. The benefits of such a harmonious existence would have been palpable to all. But has it really been peace, or peace dictated by fear, which is a completely different thing. And unity is only because of the honey pot at the centre and nothing more.

How have we grown to become indigenous citizens only of our villages in a settler/indigene, rent collector crazed nation, rather than settlers and equal owners of a common destiny as citizens of one great, prosperous and proud country?

Sadly, we are a far cry from national harmony. Any talk of the peace dividend that followed the end of the civil war is long gone. Unity exists only in enclaves of ethnic and religious hegemonies and in our individual minds. When we hear talk of peace and unity today, it is all about domination. One powerful individual, clan, tribe, religion, state or federal authority holding all the levers of coercion and wealth, wanting to impose peace and unity on us all.

In very perfunctory ways we are called to sanctify that authority through well choreographed public shows called elections or religious worship. These charades, of course, are elaborately masqueraded to fill in all the gaps, creating the illusions of a perfectly functional democratic federation. So the peace dividends that our heroes sacrificed their lives for, is continuously being frittered away. Today, what accrues to politicians as ‘democracy dividends’ is certainly not aimed at building a united republic where people have equal access to the basic amenities of life. Instead, we can justifiably argue that it has become the means by which the political class advance their personal interest, financing and fanning the flames of conflict and division from the Creeks to the Sahara, east, west, north and south.

The insurgency in the Northeast, even with its extreme brutality, is only a symptom of a deeper malaise. It is simply the latest manifestation of the negative dividends that accrue from mal-governance, corruption, deceit and outright betrayal of the people’s trust.

Our collective wish and efforts, if we truly love Nigeria, is to make Boko Haram the last of such self-inflicted trauma on our national psyche. The HMGF and the initiators of the Abuja Peace Talk have just taken one little step in the right direct, but a major leap away from our loud complacency and buck passing.

**How do we get engaged?**

Dear friends, I was given the freedom to speak to us and share my ideas, opinions and experiences in furtherance of our conversation on peace and conflict resolution. I deliberately chose to take us far back because my own personal experience is so little. But at least we can still share the little I have. As some of you may be aware, I was involved in mediation talks between the government and the Boko Haram insurgents over the past few months.

While the release of the Chibok girls was at the heart of the negotiations, you would all agree with me that their release alone, would not necessarily restore peace. But it would signal a clear and definite path to finding a permanent end to the insurgency if we sustained the momentum and agreed on a permanent ceasefire.

We were unsuccessful in achieving either of these objectives, but I am glad that the government remained committed and engaged. If you ask me, I will say I consider our efforts partially successful because we have taken one major step closer to a peaceful resolution of the insurgency without having to rely on drones and helicopter gunships.

The military option alone will only prolong our suffering and expose our military men and women to greater, and often times unwarranted public scrutiny boding on ridicule.

Since the announcement on Friday Oct. 17th by the Chief of Defence Staff that a cease fire agreement had been reached with the insurgents, we remain cautiously optimistic. What I would really want us to discuss here is what informed my decision to push, lobby, beg, scream and plead for dialogue and a peaceful resolution of this crises. This is really the essence of all what I have been talking about from the beginning of my presentation, and why we must engage one another and address whatever differences exist between us before we allow them to fester into such devastating conflicts.

I have always tried to raise the issue of Boko Haram’s uniqueness and the fact that unlike other Islamic fundamentalist or terror groups across the Sahel and North Africa, including Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb let alone ISIS today, Boko Haram is 98.99% Nigerian in all its manifestations. Yes, they share certain ideological believes, receive some level of support in materiel, sympathy and shared experiences from these others and this cannot be ignored. But the bottom line is that Boko Haram now calls its own shots itself, and we do not have to look elsewhere for solutions but engage Boko Haram itself, weather with one Shekau or four *Shekaulings* at the top. ‘*De thing weh you dey fine for sokoto e dey for your shokoto,*’ as the song goes. From its sponsors to the fighters, they are all with and within us.

We must talk to one another as Nigerians, fight with one another as Nigerians if that is what we choose to do, or keep fighting and talking until we can fight and talk no more. This high talk of terror as an international phenomenon is good, timely and politically correct, but amounts to little if we do not get our own act together first, as far as Boko Haram is concerned. The international coalition to find the Chibok girls has not brought us any closer to them than the efforts and initiatives of the Jonathan administration acting alone, both by force with the military and through dialogue.

Talking about the administration, how can we ever be satisfied with the President’s efforts at restoring peace in the land, until we feel the peace in our hearts and in our communities.

While international cooperation, and in particular western counter terrorism expertise remain useful and critical to Nigeria in the generalised war on terror, there are peculiarities to the Boko Haram situation that make it incumbent on us to act differently. You can bomb Tora Bora, Bagdad or Kobani in the fight against the Taliban, Al Qaeda or ISIS. The terrorists are far away from your homes from where, yes, they plan and execute their cowardly attacks. And until very recently, they were predominantly a non-western mix of Jihadi diehards from across the Middle East, the Arabian penninsula, Southeast Asia, North and horn of Africa. Today it is even more complex as westerners are living Europe and the United states in droves to join ISIS.

In our case, Boko Haram is home with us. They are us. They are so close they are faster to us than the speed of an F. 15 fighter and can see us better than the sharpest spy camera on the belly of a drone.

If we decide that military force and air bombardments are the ways to advance our own war on terror, we could as well start levelling Sambisa forest from the air, then Maiduguri, Bama, Chibok, Damboa, Gwoza, Madagali. Who knows, The Chibok girls and the over 1500 other captives abducted by Boko Haram but of whom nothing was heard could all be rescued alive.

It may also interest you to know that where we make real successes in our work for peace you really do not get to hear about it. Another good example in a situation which could have had serious consequences and escalated and prolonged the Niger Delta militancy by adding fuel to the fire was on the Bakassi issue.

Few, if any of you here knew that if we had allowed the Bakassi Movement for Self Determination (BAMOSD) to advance in its armed resistance campaign in alliance with the various militant groups in the Niger Delta, it would have opened a new and bloody front at a time when the Militants were at the pick of their power. I was privileged to have won the trust of the leadership of the Bakassi Movement, and believe me, it took a lot in time, money, patience, risks of unbelievable proportions, to finally convince them to step back from armed resistance and limit their struggle to non-violent resistance and peaceful manifestations for the resolution of their plight. These were citizens who were being rendered stateless before our very own eyes, and therefore could justifiably defend their existence by any means necessary.

Today as we speak, the Bakassi people are still living in camps, and we do not know weather to call them refugees or IDPs. What have we done to reward a people who chose to pursue the path of peace and reconciliation rather than armed resistance and confrontation? We abandoned them to their faith.

From Bakassi in Cross River to Michika in Adamawa, it is the very same story. While Bakassi was being given away to Cameroon, a large swath of territory with thriving communities in Cameroon was being handed over to Nigeria in Michika local government area of Adamawa state. Nigeria signed the papers for their return but there was nobody to welcome them back. Now Boko Haram has taken control, and we fake surprise at their dexterity in Michika.

Let us begin to say NO to our collective indifference.

If we continue being silent and think our politicians can solve these problems, then we are in for a real shocker, because we must be preparing for more Boko Harams.

If there was one thing I learnt during my days in prison, it is the innate ability inside each of us to go past our biggest fears, and begin changing the world around us. Once I accepted my state, I moved past it.

Behind the bars in a prison cell, enclosed in a twelve foot tall barbed-wire rigged wall, I lifted my voice against the brutal murder of a common prisoner, Victor Mensoh, whose name I am sure you’ve never heard, and whose name I am sure you will never hear again. Victor was clobbered to death in my full view because he dared to talk to other prisoners of the circumstances under which Gen. Shehu Musa Yar A’dua was taken from Enugu Prison to Abakaliki where he met his death. Victor served the General and myself while in prison. His killers, prison officers, were later arrested and jailed.

How can we all serve Nigeria in her time of need while free?

I thank you and God bless.

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