

# Democracy *and the* Nigeria Populace

*What Dividends?*

Lecture delivered on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2002  
at the Faculty of Law Theatre  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

By

**Ambassador (Prof.) Jide Osuntokun**

*Visiting Professor of History  
University of Ibadan,  
Ibadan.*

'THE HOUSE'  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The vision of the founding father of 'The House' to be a foundation of Unity and Excellence has been the major force propelling the association to greater heights especially in this new millennium. The need to reposition the association for the challenges of this age is now a commitment that members are working hard to meet. This has manifested in the successful presentation of this year's Guest Lecture. May 'The House' continue to excel.

The executive committee of 'The House' 2001/2002 session ably led by Hon. Yusuf Omosun and the entire members worked hard to ensure the success of this year's House Week Programmes.

We are grateful to the Resident and non-Resident members of the association for their unflinching support both morally and financially for the association. Worthy of mention is Hon. (Dr.) Foluso Okumadewa; our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Guest Lecturer and all others we cannot mention here. You are all indeed honourable.

Appreciation also goes to the patrons of the association; Professor Ayodele Falase, Vice Chancellor, University of Ibadan The Dean Post Graduate School, Professor Idowu Olayinka and the former Dean Post Graduate School, Professor Kunle Fagbemi. We would particularly thank The Dean, Post Graduate School for the publication of this lecture.

Our sincere thanks go to the Guest lecturer, Ambassador (Professor) Jide Osuntokun for honouring 'The House' to give this year's lecture in spite of his very tight schedule. He is actually a big catch in every way imaginable.

Finally, we say a big thank you to all of you who have taken time out to listen to the presentation of this lecture. Without your individual and collective presence this lecture would have been unrealistic.

'The House' 2001/2002 session.

## **ABOUT "THE HOUSE"**

**(A socio-Philantropic Organisation)**  
**University of Ibadan**

"THE HOUSE, a socio-philanthropic organisation in the University of Ibadan is the only post-graduate students association in the University. It is a reputable association made up of a crop of highly intelligent and forward looking post-graduate students. Its membership is drawn from the University's male post-graduate students and as such its membership cuts across graduates of different nationalities.

THE HOUSE was founded by a group of post-graduate students who shared similar ideas and vision in Tafawa Balewa Post-graduate Hall. University of Ibadan in the 1980/81 academic session. But over the years the membership has grown wider than that small circle of Tafawa Balewa Hall residents. Today the House has two Professors, over one hundred PhDs and numerous Masters degree holders in various walks of life.

The objective of The House is to form a bond of friendship across nations and throughout the length and breadth of the country, in order to enhance a united Nigeria. THE HOUSE affords the opportunity for graduates from different Universities in and out of the country to think aloud as one and to present a united front through a common understanding in a micro community which is a reflection of the large society - Nigeria. Therefore, 'THE HOUSE' serves as a foundation of Unity and Excellence.

As part of her gesture towards enhancing national unity and development. 'THE HOUSE' in her 21 years of existence organises public lectures annually for both the university community and the larger society on contemporary national issues. Some of the past Guest Lectures include Alhaji Shehu Musa. Late Chief Bola Ige. Professor Eghosa Oshagae, Dr. Folusho Okunmadewa (world Bank Consultant on Poverty in Nigeria) and Dr. Tony Marinho of Educare Trust among others. There lectures are usually published and made available to the public. The philanthropic activities of the association include visits and donations of money and materials to the less privileged in the society annually.

The head of 'THE HOUSE' is the House Chief while members are addressed as honourables.



## **BIODATA OF PROFESSOR AKINJIDE OSUNTOKUN**

**P**rofessor Akinjide Osuntokun attended the famous Christ School, Ado-Ekiti (1956 – 1960). He was at Ibadan Grammar School for his Advanced Level studies (1961 to 1962). Thereafter, he proceeded to the University of Ibadan in 1963 and obtained a B.A. History in 1966, with Second Class Honours, Upper Division. For his postgraduate studies he was at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada (1967-68; 1969-70) and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Sorbonne University, Paris (1968-69). He earned a PhD of Dalhousie University in 1970.

He was a Tutor at the University of Ibadan (1966-67) and Dalhousie University (1969-70). He also served as Assistant Professor at the University of Western Ontario (1970-71). He was Lecturer at the University of West Indies (1971-72) and at University of Ibadan between (1972-74). He joined the academic staff of the University of Lagos in 1974. Through a dint of hard work and perseverance, he rose rapidly through the ranks, becoming a Senior Lecturer in 1976 and an Associate Professor in 1979. He attained the ultimate accolade of full Professor of History and Head of Department at the University of Maiduguri in 1982. He was Visiting Professor of History at the University of Lagos during the 1985/86 session. He was appointed Professor of History, University of Lagos, in 1986 and was Head of Department from 1986 to 1988 and from 1996 to 1999.

He served the University of Maiduguri in different capacities, including Member of Governing Council (1982-85), Dean of Arts, (1982-84) and Acting Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies (1984/85). He was also on the Governing Council of the Lagos State University from 1987 to 1989.

He was a Director of the Nigerian Universities Commission Office, Washington D.C. from 1979-82; Director, Nigerian Universities Commission Office, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 1978-79. He was member, Board of National Directorate of Employment, 1987-98; Member, Presidential Committee on the national Question, 1986-87.

The high point of his public service was his appointment as Ambassador Extra-ordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to Germany from 1991 to 1995.

His present preferments include Member, Presidential Advisory Council on International Relations (2000 till date); Member, Editorial Board of Comet Newspapers (1999 till date); President, Nigeria-Canada Chamber of Commerce

and Industry (1999 till date); Chairman, Environmental Protection Society of Nigeria (1993 to present).

Among several honours and distinctions, he is Member, Nigerian Academy of Letters (2002); Member, Commonwealth Expert Group on Democracy (2002), Member, Commonwealth Election Monitoring Group in Lesotho (2002); Editorial Adviser, Nigerian Journal of International Affairs (2001); Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Roll of Honours (2001); University of Lagos ASUU Merit Award (1999); Presidential Honour, Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Malabo (1990); General Editor for Spectrum Books on Nigerian Biographies; Associate Editor, Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria (1976-78); Member of Editorial Board, Lagos Notes and Records (1976-78); Isaac Walton Scholar, Dalhousie University (1967-70); Irving and Bonar Graduate Prize in History (1969); University of Ibadan Scholar (1966-67); President, University of Ibadan Historical Society (1966).

An erudite and prolific scholar and researcher, Ambassador Osuntokun has to his credit 6 books and 21 chapters in books. He has also published 18 journal articles and has edited or co-edited 11 books.

He has successfully supervised 8 doctoral theses at the University of Lagos. His current research topics include Federalism and Foreign Policy: comparison of the foreign policies of Federal states, namely Germany, United States of America, Canada, Australia and Nigeria; Diplomatic History: Theory and Practice of International Relations; Peace-keeping and Peace-enforcement in Africa; and Biographies as a tool of historical reconstruction.

He is a member of the Nigerian Society of International Affairs, and member, Historical Society of Nigeria.



# FOREWORD

## "THE HOUSE" 2002 LECTURE

It is a great privilege and honour for me to write the forward to the 2002 Lecture of "The House". The lecture was presented on Thursday, 22 August 2002, to a very large audience by our own Akinjide Osuntokun, Professor of History and former Ambassador, Extra-ordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to Germany. The lecture was most illuminating and one should not expect anything less, from such a distinguished and eminent scholar of repute.

The first part of the paper traced Nigeria's history from independence in 1960 till May 1999. The author has shown in this paper that Nigeria has always maintained that Africa is the cornerstone of her foreign policy. To this end, Nigeria was a major player in dismantling the racist regime in South Africa and replacing it with a democratic regime. Moreover, Nigeria committed a lot of human and financial resources towards liberation efforts in Namibia, as well as to peacekeeping and peace enforcement in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

However, during the military rule from 1983 to 1999, huge expenditure in military campaigns fuelled corruption in social life in Nigeria. This consequently had disastrous effects on socio-economic development of the country, with inflation and the collapse of the worth of the national currency. Moreover, there was abridgement of freedom. Newspaper houses were closed at will and at the slightest provocation. Draconian decrees were issued. There was large-scale unemployment.

The second part of the paper is an account of what has been happening return to civil rule in May 1999 till date. The theoretical basis for cases of ethnic conflicts was examined in details. The author maintains that there is need to re-evaluate the federal system in Nigeria, suggesting that the Republican constitution of 1963 should be the take-off point. The author also addressed the vexed issues of resource control and the hues and cries about marginalization from all the geopolitical zones of the country. In particular, the Niger Delta people need to be adequately compensated for the degradation of their environment. It shown that marginalization is no more than a political gimmick designed by those who want to attract more attention to themselves.

The shortcomings with the various governments at the local, state and federal levels have been highlighted. These include irregular payment of workers' salaries, closure of schools, incessant strike by workers, non-provision

of basic amenities like potable water, roads, power, etc.

All the existing political parties lack ideological foci and they are mere agglomeration of disparate groups put together solely for the purpose of capturing power.

The author identified peace and the Global System of Mobile (GSM) Telecommunication as some of the greatest dividends of the present democratic dispensation. Moreover, private investors are, in the main, responsible for providing the GSM service. This is evidence that government's policy of privatization is the right thing to do. Since the return to civil rule, Nigeria has been accepted back into the international arena, in comparison to the pariah status it enjoyed under the military. The country is, once again, a big player on the African continent. Several leading world leaders have deemed it fit to pay state visits to Nigeria and there has been noticeable increase in technical assistance and aid to the country. Moreover, Nigeria is taking a leading role in the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The author concludes that perhaps the greatest dividend of democracy is noticeable in the air of freedom that pervades the country. The point is made that sixteen years of damage cannot possibly be reversed in three years. The author is of the strong conviction that democracy is the best form of government that human ingenuity has invented and that military rule is out of the question.

Professor Osuntokun has provided deep insights to some contemporary socio-political and economic issues in Nigeria. There is no doubt that everyone will find this paper most educative and illuminating.

**A. Idowu Olayinka**

Dean, Postgraduate School,  
University of Ibadan,  
Ibadan, Nigeria.

16 September 2002.



## PROLOGUE

*Distinguished ladies and gentlemen it is with great pleasure that I share with you my thoughts and views about democratic governance in Nigeria and its dividends since 1999.*

*When I was first approached to give this lecture, I told members of the executive of the House, the organizers of this lecture that I was too busy and that I would not be able to make time for the lecture. In actual fact I was on my way to Lesotho as one of a five-man election monitoring team put together by the commonwealth when I was approached. Since I returned, I have been involved in one committee or the other, notably the Task force on CHOGM 2003 which is charged with hosting commonwealth Heads of Government in their bi-annual conference in Abuja in 2003.*

*In spite of all this I have my students to teach and theses to supervise in both the Universities of Ibadan and Lagos. But the House executive will not take no for an answer and here we are.*

## **"DEMOCRACY AND THE NIGERIAN POPULACE, WHAT DIVIDENDS?"**

**M**r. Chairman, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, Nigeria was under military rule from 1983 to 1999 a period spanning almost sixteen years. This was a crucial period in world history. Two important developments, which have affected the course of human history, took place during this period. The Soviet Union disintegrated and was succeeded by fifteen unstable and fractious independent states. The bipolarity in international relations was replaced with a unipolar world of the American golden age. A previously secure world in which American power balanced that of the Soviet Union in what is usually referred to as balance of terror has now been replaced by an insecure world in which America is increasingly seen as the global gendarme, keeping peace or enforcing peace either singly or with a coalition of forces coming from different parts of the World. Regional powers such as Nigeria are also increasingly being called upon to assume larger responsibilities than previously bargained for in order to keep conflicts away from their borders. We are increasingly seeing the relationship between regionalism and world order.

In this scenario democratic governance has become an international credo, which under the American flag all nations are willy-nilly subscribing to. Francis Fukuyama is probably correct to suggest in his book, **the End of History and the Last Man** that liberalism has won the titanic struggle with communism and all other forms of totalitarianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is the only way we can broadly explain the triumph of liberalism in Southern Africa and particularly the

victory of liberalism over the oppressive racist apartheid regime in South Africa. This is not to derogate from the important militant roles played by the various military cadres of African Liberation supported by the front line states in Southern Africa of which Nigeria was a member because of her generous engagement in the struggle for the black man's liberation.

The triumph of liberalism in both the Soviet Union and South Africa created tragic heroes in Fredrick de Klerk and Mikhail Gorbachev. **Perestroika** and **glasnost** in the Soviet Union and South Africa created new realities, the consequences of which radically changed the world, as we knew it. Nigeria cannot claim to have played any role in shaping the course of events in the Soviet Union, but without being immodest Nigeria played a significant role along with others in facilitating the change from oppressive racist regime to a majoritarian democratic and non-racial regime in Southern Africa.

Our involvement in Namibia and South Africa was the crown of our long engagement in the decolonisation process in Southern Africa beginning with Zambia, but particularly in Zimbabwe where our influence and clout proved decisive.

Ironically, while we were championing the cause of democracy abroad, our citizens at home were denied the same. In fact many observers in the international system found it difficult to understand our dynamic foreign policy based on liberalism while we maintain an illiberal Caesarist regime at home. The great success of Nigeria's foreign policy was therefore vitiated by this contradiction; yet without Nigeria's voice and involvement the decolonisation of Africa would probably have been slower, because the whites and settlers in Southern Africa would not have given up power when they did. This is because no one ever voluntarily gives up power unless compelled to do so either by a superior power or a



countervailing force.

Nigeria has always taken seriously its leadership role in Africa. Right from independence in 1960, Our prime minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa made it clear that our independence was meaningless unless other dependent African territories became free also. Since then the kernel of our foreign policy is that as long as the humanity of a Blackman is denied, particularly on our native continent our humanity as Nigerians suffered the same derogation.

This thinking underpinned our consistent foreign policy throughout our history as a sovereign nation. It did not matter what kind of regime was in power, we had unanimity of action and ideas on our foreign policy. We were also prepared to make sacrifices for our action. This was why Nigeria has spent well over a billion United States dollars in supporting the liberation of Africa and in helping to consolidate African independence. Individual Nigerians also made direct contribution to the cause of liberation by financial donations either to the Namibian fund or the South African Fund. Nigeria can justifiably be proud of her contribution to the emergence of the new Africa.

As if independence and majority rule were just the beginning, Nigeria from 1990 onwards until now has had to shoulder the financial and military burden of peacekeeping and peace enforcement in West Africa, particularly in Liberia and later on in Sierra Leone. This was at a cost of eight billion dollars and thousands of lives of Nigerian soldiers. It is a moot question whether we achieved what we set out to achieve in our military involvement under the rubric of ECOMOG in peace keeping and peace enforcement not only in Liberia and Sierra Leone and recently in Guinea-Bissau as well. We did not succeed in Liberia as we would have wanted because Charles

Taylor the incumbent Liberian president literally shot himself to power on the blood of Nigerians. But Nigeria established a fact that it can project power outside her own territory. This is important for a putative regional power. Nigeria may not be loved in the West African sub region but it is feared. Our role has drawn the attention of the international community to our military muscle and it has also compelled a regional power like South Africa to assume significant military roles in her own sub region.

The effect of sixteen years of military rule in Nigeria and military campaign in West Africa has been largely negative. The huge expenditure in military campaigns has further fuelled corruption in Nigeria which was previously endemic. The corrosive effect of corruption pervaded all activities of government. Normal budgetary allocation from the Federal to the States had to be negotiated with political and bureaucratic functionaries for a fee. Even within the Federal government each ministry bribed its way through to secure release of its allocation from the accountant general's office. The officer class of the military was corrupted by being given crude oil allocation to sell and military governors and their assistants ran the states as personal fiefs. It was really a free for all kind of situation and since the head was corrupt the body politique was also corrupt. Since power came out of the barrel of the gun, all those who had guns wielded power. Whether it was the police, the armed robber or members of cults in the tertiary institutions, the common denominator was the use of force. All this had serious repercussions on socio-economic development of the country with unbridled corruption came inflation and the collapse of the Naira which in 1983 was at par with the British pound sterling and was one and half U.S. Dollars but by 1999 was about ninety Naira to the dollar.



The economic situation led to armed brigandage and unemployment and consequent social malaise such as prostitution. But perhaps the most obvious legacy of the military was the abridgement of freedom. The press was under the jackboot of military dictatorship. The government's laws could not be challenged in the courts and any Nigerian could be detained indefinitely under decree two in the national interest. Newspaper houses were shut and opened as those in power wished. These negative consequences of military rule reached its climax in the ascendancy to power of General Sanni Abacha whose rule was characterized by murder and mayhem and outright roguery and stealing of billions of dollars belonging to the people of Nigeria. Even after his demise the successor government of Abdulsalaami Abubakar was said to have spent money during its nine months rule as a drunken sailor awarding more contracts in nine months than the Abacha regime awarded in five years. Of course Abacha's own obsession was how to become one of the richest men in the world and was not bothered about improving the lot of the much-oppressed Nigerians. The economy during most of this time went into tailspin with installed capacity of our industries operating at between 20 and 30 percent. The country witnessed closure of manufacturing industries on a daily basis. Millions of people remained unemployed and those who had something to do were under employed.

In the meantime our tertiary institutions continued to turn out graduates many of whom were poorly trained because of poor laboratories and libraries in these tertiary colleges. It has been said that many of our graduates are unemployable. With the hordes of young unemployed educated and uneducated folks roaming around without any attempt to mobilize them for positive ventures, the security of the country was



undermined. The military response was the issuing of draconian decrees and execution, which have proved not to be the panacea to a fundamental problem. The unemployment in the country is largely due to absence of investment friendly infrastructure in the country.

The laws have remained uncodified for a long time with the effect that foreign entrepreneurs always complain about absence of a proper legal regime necessary for foreign investment and industrialization of the country. To complicate our situation the physical infrastructure is largely lacking. Telephony rate is one of the lowest in the world. The roads are bad and pipe borne water has become something that happened in history! To cap it all electricity supply is at best fitful and grossly inadequate. Under the military there was little debate and in order to avoid falling a victim of Decree number 2 and indefinite detention most people kept quiet. Soldiers and their friends in government got fat in spite of the peoples misery.

This long preamble is necessary in order for us to know where we took off from in May 1999 and where we are today. One of the general criticisms levied against the present democratic regime is the recrudescence of ethnic conflicts all over Nigeria.

There is nothing new about ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, but what is new is the rampant and violent nature of these conflicts. These conflicts probably arise as a result of bottled up emotions and resentments against dominant and domineering neighbours who had under the military used their undue influence to cause harm to those now up in arms against their perceived enemies.

Unfortunately, some people are taking liberty for licence and democracy for freedom to take laws into one's hands. The

present democratic regime is handicapped by the rule of law. And even when under pressure as in Odi, Bayelsa State or Zaki Biam in Benue and acted with force everybody has been quick to condemn the government. Yet Law and order has to be maintained. Many intelligent observers have suggested that perhaps a renegotiation of our articles of association will be appropriate. The incumbent government, both at the executive and legislative branches are totally against any form of national conference whether sovereign or not on the grounds that the elected government is sovereign and that sovereignty cannot be divided. They argue that a sovereign national conference will lead to chaos and confusion. I personally believe the people are sovereign and that if the people want a national conference they should be allowed it and in fact the government should convoke one. Whether we have this conference under a sovereign rubric or not we must talk among ourselves. We need to re-evaluate our federal system. Many observers would like us to go back to pristine fiscal federalism as we used to have during the first Republic. I personally believe the Republican constitution of 1963 should be the take-off point when we have our national constitutional **Pow wow**. I do not know how we are going to resolve the resource control issue without a national conference.

I am in total support of resource control because I am convinced this is in tune with true federalism. Over time we have become lazy because of unearned income from crude oil and I will like Nigerians to go back to work again. My state does not have crude oil so my views are not based on any selfish hidden agenda. I just believe history is on the side of those who are advocating resource control. When cocoa, ground nuts and palm oil, hides and skins, rubber, timber and cotton were our primary produce we had no problem in



accepting revenue allocation based on derivation principle. Of course, I agree that God and not man put crude oil in the Delta, but the Niger Delta people need to be compensated for the damage done to their environment. Let other Nigerians in their different states bring into the distributable pool the produce of their sweat instead of everybody waiting for unearned income from oil. The Niger-Delta people would therefore be right to suggest that they have not seen many dividends from our nascent democracy. The setting up of the Nigeria's Niger Delta Commission (NNDC) to embark on infrastructural development is not a novel attempt but a rehash of previous failed policy of palliatives which are too little and too late.

This government has however put in a lot of effort in improving the infrastructure of the country. So much investment has gone into road construction all over the country, yet many people are rather impatient that much needs to be done. Nigerians must of course realize that sixteen years of damage cannot be reversed in three years. In fact it will take us twenty years of serious effort for Nigeria to be where we were in the 1970s'.

There has been considerable improvement in power generation and distribution. Nigeria's power need is of course not being met and our homes and industries continue to rely on generators of which Nigeria is the biggest market in the world. We must of course commend government and the private sector for putting in place some policies, which hopefully would soon facilitate the coming on stream of some gas, fired power stations. The problem facing Nigeria really is that every facet of our national life was so run down that there is crying need for improvement of virtually every sector. This government has done well in paying even if irregularly living



wages to public sector workers. This action has redounded on wages in the private sector as well. This has increased purchasing power, which in turn has led to higher rate of capacity utilization of our manufacturing industries. The reflation of the economy through higher wages has led to general inflation and erosion of the exchange rate of the Naira. If there can be higher productivity and production, the rate of exchange of the Naira will improve. What we need to do is to export more in order to strengthen the Naira. Our current monocultural economy is an invitation to economic instability directly linked to the rise and fluctuation in the oil market. The economy is still very weak and the policy of diversification must be hinged to adding value to our raw materials rather than exporting them in their crude primary form. Diversification of the economy need to go beyond LNG and should actually be dependent on agriculture, which is renewable unlike the wasting asset of hydrocarbons.

There is still too high unemployment in spite of government effort to attract investment and with unemployment comes insecurity which effective policing cannot solve. There has been noticeable improvement in educational infrastructure particularly at the tertiary levels, but the facilities had been so degraded that it will take years and substantial commitment of funds to rehabilitate existing infrastructure and to expand and to build new ones. Secondary and primary levels of educational institutions still need much more attention than they are getting. The Universal Basic Education Programme still remains on the drawing board after three years of planning. Educational facilities at the primary and secondary levels are sub standard even by African Standards. In many parts of the North Children in primary schools are still learning under tree shade and still sitting on bare floor. Much more disturbing are

the hordes of school age children not in schools, particularly the Al – majiris, children in itinerant Koranic “schools” who are sent by their teachers (mallams) to beg for alms to keep body and soul together especially that of the mallam. There is a need for coordinated effort by the states, local governments and the federal government to solve this problem that has festered for a long time in this country.

One of our fundamental problems is political and psychological in nature. There is the feeling of marginalisation in some parts of the country. Incredibly almost all the six zones of the country feel marginalized. This gives one the impression that the government is actually sharing political appointments and developmental projects equitably. Those who used to monopolize the reins of power naturally are not used to equitable sharing and therefore feel a sense of loss of power while those empowered have not seen much of the dividends supposedly accruing from their new empowerment. But with facts and figures put out by government functionaries, it is becoming clear that these cries of marginalisation are political gimmick designed to attract more attention to those who would want such attention.

One of the problems this country faces is that we are not as united as we were at independence or in 1970. The constant miniaturation of states through unreasonable states creation has further divided the country. We need to go back to basics and take another look at the unwieldy 36 states structure of this country and 774 local governments. This country is simply over administered. The cost of administration is simply killing Nigeria and until we take a serious look and take appropriate structural measures our country will be bogged down with bureaucracy with little resources left for development. This is a constitutional matter and like all constitutional matters it will



take a lot of education to convince our people about the desirability for change.

I do not know whether the manifestation of cultural nationalism like Oduduwa people's congress, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, Egbesu and others can be said to be dividends of democracy. In all cases these associations are divisive and sometimes emphasize what divides us as a people than what unites us. But they probably underscore the fact that we are truly a federal republic rather than the disguised unitary system now prevailing in our country. We must also put these manifestations in global perspective. Although we sometimes think they are the consequences of our poverty, but they do not necessarily relate to our underdevelopment. It is a development on the same level with Serb, Croat, Montenegrin, Quebecois, Welsh, Scottish, Zulu, Hutu, Tutsi, Palestinian, Chenchu, Kurdish, Sikh, Flemish, Kosovar and other proto nationalist sentiments. It is left to us to learn from all these and try to harness the force of our ethnic nationalisms through appropriate structural measures so that they do not lead to the disintegration of the country.

It is in the same fashion that we must view what has been called the "political sharia". It is a moot question whether our Muslim compatriots in the North see the introduction of sharia as one of their own dividends of democracy. It seems to me that the sharia in the North is the response to militant nationalism of the variant of Oodua Peoples Congress. Furthermore those who introduced the sharia seem to have created a Frankenstein monster, which they may yet regret. This is because over time the mallams may challenge elected governors in the North for political supremacy. This is because sharia is Allah's way and should therefore be superior to man made government. Since the governors are not religious leaders,



they are in for a rough time in the nearest future. Yet no serious Muslim can quarrel with Muslims wanting to live a pious and Islamic life, but whether cutting off of hands of petty thieves and stoning to death of wayward girls are constitutional in a legally secular state will create fundamental problems of national unity. The Federal government has wisely, some will say cowardly, avoided getting involved in the sharia problem hoping that time will heal our polity and that the sharia exponents would burn their own fingers and return to a life of political rectitude sooner than later.

When Nigerians complain about their hopes and aspirations being frustrated even by their elected leaders, when they say availability of pipe-borne water is a rarity, an exception rather than the rule, when they notice that garbage is not being collected and that the environment is thoroughly abused or when they complain that salaries are not being paid regularly or that democratic dividends have not been realized they must lay the blame where they belong. The shortcomings do not belong in the province of the federal government alone, as critics tend to say. The local governments and the states with the exception of a few states have not performed well in spite of the trillions of Naira that have been shared among the three tiers of government. With the exception of Lagos, Osun, Kaduna, Kano, Delta and Rivers, most of the states have become irrelevant in terms of the development aspirations of our people. A man who is being owed eight months salaries as in Anambra or whose children have not gone to school because teachers have not been paid for more than a year or who cannot evacuate his agricultural produce to the market because of poor roads cannot be said to be enjoying the dividends of democracy. Peace is of course the greatest dividend of democratic rule and for various reasons peace has been a scarce commodity in

some parts of Nigeria. This is not because of democratic failure but because of cumulative problems, which over time have ripened to burst out during this period. In spite of all this the Nigerian project is alive and well and we have every right to be proud that our country is not Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Sierra-Leone, or Liberia. Whatever is wrong can be fixed and is being fixed and we have not degenerated into a state of nature.

One of the missing links in the Nigerian nascent democracy is the absence of well-organized political parties. This absence is not surprising because these so-called parties were quickly put together during the Abdul Salaami administration. All the parties lack ideological foci and they seem to be mere agglomeration of disparate groups put together for the purpose of capturing power no more no less. They lack mediatory abilities and intra party quarrels are so frequent that a majority party like the PDP is bogged down in infighting to the extent that party programmes are not being implemented and bills from the party in power are not being shepherded through the national assembly. Rather than being instruments of order, the parties have become cogs in the wheel of orderly governance and smooth legislation. They have added and compounded the attendant confusion plaguing this democratic regime. But over time water will find its own level and ideological soul mates will find themselves in new parties or refashioned and reorganized old parties. It is only a matter of time. Patience is needed for us to get to the political utopia of ordered governance.

These myriads of problems, economic, political, social and religious have tended to give the impression that nothing is working in Nigeria. The constant confrontation of the Executive and the Legislature at the center and in the states,



the lack of a budget eight months into the year, the constant accusations of corruption, the ineffectiveness of the anti-corruption commission to act on any single case so far, the regular threat of impeachment makes one to wonder whether our politicians have learnt any lesson from our difficult and unhappy past.

When one adds these problems to unemployment and general insecurity one is bound to look back with nostalgia to the peace, law and order of military rule. But this is not the solution to our problems. It was Voltaire who said he would rather be ruled by one lion than by one hundred rats. He further added that "for forms of governments let fools contend, whatever is best administered is best". But we have really gone pass this kind of thinking. Democracy is the best form of government that human ingenuity has invented. It is now a credo subscribed to by most rational people in the world. Our politicians would make mistakes and also in time learn from them and perfect their ways. Hence, military rule is out of the question. In any case we have suffered from the double jeopardy in the past of military dictatorship and under development. Further more the international community would not stand for it.

Our leaders must however make sure they avoid the present politics of brinkmanship. Nigeria is too important to the international community that if politicians cannot handle her affairs, the international community itself will encourage any form of strong government including the military to take over. This is why the inability of INEC to perform is worrying many people. I do not believe in the self-fulfilling prophecy of chaos next year, but INEC must be empowered to perform. We only have nine months left before the next elections, yet there is no revised electoral register yet and INEC is still



enmeshed in whether to use its facilities for the cursed I.D. project or not. It is sad that an I.D. project which is a global trend has caused so much problem in Nigeria, simply because a section of the country sees the project as an attempt to expose its demographic fraud of inflated population. If people are sincere and have nothing to hide they should use the I.D. project to confirm existing population claim, which contradicts the West African, and global norm where population diminishes as one approaches the desert. But in our case it actually increases!

One of the greatest achievements of the Obasanjo administration is what, for want of better term, can be called the GSM revolution. Among the three operational service providers, namely NITEL, ECONET, and MTN close to 1.2 million people have been connected. By the end of the year close to 2 million subscribers would be enjoying telecommunication. Unlike before when there were only 500,000 working telephones in the country provided by NITEL's fixed lines. The impact of what has happened in this sector has been phenomenal. Close to 25,000 jobs have been created and the country's teledensity has been considerably increased. If well harnessed the GSM can also lead to reduction of insecurity if the police are hooked to it and if private subscribers make intelligent use of their cell phones to alert the police whenever security is being breached. The recent licencing of a second national operator for both fixed telephones and GSM raises the tempo of the revolution. There has been complaints about astronomical cost of the service, but there is no doubt the subscribers are happy that at last there is an alternative to the grossly inefficient NITEL. If this GSM is not a democratic dividend I wonder what is. The more significant thing about all this is that private investors who have pumped close to

over one billion dollars into our economy are largely providing the service.

This proves that government's policy of privatization, which is neither new nor unique, is the right thing to do. Government should only provide friendly environment for investment in the service industries, government should not be involved at all. Government should sell all its shares in Hotels, insurance, telephones, electricity and potable water, aviation, banking, post and telegraphs, etc.

In advanced countries of the world, the service industrial sector is usually the fastest growing sector. In Europe and America, it has eclipsed manufacturing and now contributes up to 35% of GDP. Nigeria should shed all the unproductive public sector parastatals to private investors in order to increase productivity and to generate more employment.

This regime in spite of all the unfair criticisms has soldiered on and it is only a confident and sure-footed leadership that can do this. As can be expected there are sincere critics of privatization who feel it is wrong to sell public properties and national heirlooms to private entrepreneurs. The government must guard against the rumours that buyers of government companies are high-ranking members of the government, their fronts, cronies or family members. If this were so, then the whole thing would lack legitimacy and will not endure. Privatisation without injection of foreign money and technology would be antithetical to government's declared intentions. The "green backs" are of course the same in foreign or local hands, it certainly would not matter if Nigeria's looted monies are brought back via privatization.

The dividends of democracy are most noticeable in the acceptance back into the international arena where before now we were treated as a pariah nation. Our citizens were humiliated



at every entry point into foreign countries and even our diplomatic passport was disregarded against all international conventions. Our current president Olusegun Obasanjo is a world leader belonging to the eminent persons group in the commonwealth. He had run unsuccessfully but coming second, in the race for United Nations secretary generalship. He was also at a time patron of Transparency International an anti-corruption outfit domiciled in Berlin Germany. Before he was elected president he was in jail and had received much international sympathy and goodwill. Since coming to power again, he has used this tremendous goodwill to the advantage and profit of Nigeria.

Our country has been fully re-integrated into the international community. Nigeria is regularly consulted for her views. We have become a big player once again on the African continent. The British and Canadian Prime Ministers, French and previous American and Chinese Presidents have visited Nigeria.

There has been noticeable increase in technical assistance and aid to Nigeria. Our military in particular has received large military missions from the United States for training of our soldiers for peacekeeping and peace enforcement in our region. Official aid to the security, educational, health and environmental sectors have come from the Japanese, British, Americans, Canadians, French, Germans and Chinese.

Although we have not received the quantum of foreign investments that we would have wanted. Yet there has been phenomenal investment in the oil and gas sectors. Unfortunately this does not translate into employment because this sector though capital intensive does not lead to labour requirements. We need to attract more investments to generate employment for our teeming youthful population. But this can



only be done when we provide investment friendly environment and infrastructure.

Our president has traveled far and wide in search of help for the economy and also for debt forgiveness. He has not achieved his goals, but it has been worth trying. The consensus of opinion now is that he should stay at home to provide leadership in tackling our domestic problems. He would be wise to listen to this public opinion rather than dismissing it as being an un-informed opinion.

Nigeria has also been involved in the New African Partnership for Development (NEPAD), which attempts to design a programme of integrated continental development of Africa. Obasanjo is working with Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in what is called the African renaissance. Our president has also been at the forefront of a revamped Africa Union, replacing the old Organization of African Unity. NEPAD is predicated on massive foreign investment and assistance to the tune of annual investment of 60 billion dollars. The recent commitment of 6 billion dollars by the G-8 countries in Canada while committing 20 billion to Russia for safe decommissioning of her nuclear arsenal illustrates the lukewarmness of the developed world to African aspirations. If NEPAD is to succeed Africa would have to rely on its bootstrap. It will have to cut out corruption, ensure good governance, put an end to ethnic fratricidal conflicts, improve her educational institutions and mobilize her people and her resources. In other words Africa would have to rely on herself.

Finally, the dividends of democracy are most noticeable in the air of freedom that pervades the country. The press is free. The president is abused sometimes unfairly and insultingly without any fear of retribution. Those of us who were

incarcerated in Abacha's gulag appreciate what it means to lose one's freedom. The value of freedom is intrinsic and unquantifiable. This is perhaps the greatest dividend of our democracy. Whatever shortcomings this regime has, and it has many, will be taken care of as time goes on and because Nigerians would not allow it rest. We have a voice, which cannot be muffled. But in our criticism of this regime we should not be negative and destructive. It does not take effort to destroy but to build is difficult. This regime has to rebuild what it took sixteen years to destroy. It cannot do this in three years. The task of governance cannot be fully realized within an administration and not even within a lifetime. This is how we must view the activities of this government. With time all will be well. While Nigeria still has a lot of mileage ahead of her, it is taking the first step after all the Chinese have a saying that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. I thank you.

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