

**CORRUPTION, INSECURITY & RECESSION: THE INTER -
RELATED TRIUMVIRATE PLAGUING NIGERIA. BEING A
LECTURE DELIVERED BY YUSUF ALI, SAN ^{xxx}: AT THE
ANNUAL GENERAL CONFERENCE OF MUSLIM LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA HELD ON 20TH MAY, 2017 AT
THE OLD SECRETARIAT MOSQUE HALL, ALAUSA, LAGOS.**

Courtesies

INTRODUCTION

- 1.0 It is my pleasure and honour to stand here among you to deliver this paper on such a sensitive topic and at such a strategic time in the history of our country. I am of the firm view that the choice of this topic is a timely one, in that it comes at a time when the nation's economy is at a cross-road as a result of mismanagement of our resources and needless crisis which have bedevilled our nation for almost a decade.
- 2.0 The present situation of our dear country Nigeria, is not a cause for celebration. The untold difficulties and hardships that have plagued the nation are affecting virtually every citizen; young and old, learned and unlettered, believers and nonbelievers alike.

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Nigeria is a country with potentials for greatness; a large population comprising of a dynamic workforce, a growing economy, natural resources, raw materials and oil deposits which make her the 13th largest producer of oil and gas and the 10th largest in oil reserves. Despite these indices for greatness, fifty-Seven years after independence, Nigeria is yet to find her feet among the comity of nations, as insurgency and economic recession continue to take its toll on the country and make life difficult and insecure for the ordinary citizen. Corruption is a major cause of conflicts and insecurity which continues to pose a challenge to development in the country. It has stunted our growth and progress.

1.3 Our gathering here is aimed at examining the problems of corruption, Insecurity and how the duo has led the country into recession. Today, our mission is not to merely wail and lament the pitiable state of affairs of our country. Rather, as believers who are privileged to be Lawyers, we are considering the identified causes of Nigerian problems, prevalent challenges and a practical way forward.

1.4 The noun 'Triumvirate' means a group or association of three. It is synonymous to the word 'Troika' which refers to a Russian carriage drawn by a team of three horses abreast or simply put, a party of three. In Nigeria as of date, the

issue of Corruption, Insecurity and Recession is not a new theme; it is chorused almost everywhere and its negative impact is felt intensely in the nooks and crannies of the nation. It is however important to note that Corruption, Insecurity and recession are closely related; they are intertwined and the existence of one leads to the thriving and blossoming of the other.

1.5 Corruption is the bedrock upon which other plagues rest firmly. The walls of defense and security was battered down by corrupt practices paving way for insecurity and the consequent result of the two led to economic meltdown and recession. I liken the triumvirate plaguing this country to a building; while corruption serves as a strong foundation, Insecurity is the visible building that is seen by all and Recession is like a roof that caps it all. Just like every normal building originates from the foundation, I trace the problem of this country to corruption.

2.0 CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

2.1 Corruption is the abuse or misuse of power or position of trust for personal or group benefit, monetary or otherwise. In philosophical, theological and moral discussions, the term corruption has been defined as spiritual or moral impurity or deviation from an ideal. In Islam, any action that flouts justice or rule of law in whatsoever form

amounts to corruption. Thus influence peddling nepotism, cronyism, tribalism, favoritism are all species of corruption.

2.2 Corruption is a global malaise which is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. It is a notorious fact that corruption is deeply rooted in many societies. Although, in the case of some more matured western democracies, it is usually more of a mere aberration rather than the norm and it is usually confined to the fringes of the system. Conversely, corruption, in most African and third world countries, of which Nigeria is perhaps the most notorious example, has its incidence as all pervading.

3.0 HISTORICAL GENESIS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

3.1 In indigenous Africa, of which continent Nigeria is the giant, the trait of generosity apparent in wide circulation of gifts amongst kinsmen is a common feature. In the peculiar case of Nigeria, the 'Kola Concept' was particularly common. The level or measure of acceptance a guest enjoys from his host is normally determinable by the number and size of the kolanuts presented by way of gifts to that guest. In a nutshell, our indigenous tradition is one that is big on free exchange of gifts to signify acceptance and cordiality.

- 3.2 However, many a times such gesture may be extended as inducement, for instance, to an 'Oba' or 'Obi' or 'Emir' to exercise a discretion in the giver's favour. But such situation was more of an aberration than the norm. Thus, corruption in this era was in its infancy. According to some writers, a view which I strongly subscribe to, corruption became deeply embedded and became a norm in the Nigerian society because of the historical accident of colonialism.
- 3.3 Colonialism has been regarded as the 'iniquitous system that distorts relationships, destroys or petrifies institutions and corrupts men, both colonizers and the colonized.' The right of the European colonizers to rule in Nigeria had no moral basis in our tradition, convention or myth. It was grounded purely on conquest by force of arms, or concession obtained by undue influence and corruption. This is why it is strongly believed that one of the greatest legacies the imperialists transferred to Nigeria at independence was corruption, since the imperialists could not have transferred a better title than they themselves possessed.
- 3.4 It has been asserted, and rightly so, that most Nigerians are so unused to waiting in line to do or attain things by merit because colonialism taught them all about usurpation of advantage and opportunities, independent of personal

merit and this was how the seed of corruption had been germinating and taking root. The white man that we respected so much was an illegitimately privileged person and was able to benefit from plentiful undemanding labour and servants and could easily obtain administrative positions.

3.5 So it is this system of inequity, injustice arising from domination, exploitation and unfair discrimination that Nigerians inherited at independence that baptized the issue of corruption and/or official corruption in Nigeria. It is important that, while the erstwhile colonialists saw reason to change their corrupt ways in their homeland, our leaders that succeeded them started to water and fertilize the tree of corruption.

3.6 The elites who took over the mantle of 'rulership' after the departure of the colonial overlords conceived themselves as inheritors not only of the Whiteman's arbitrary powers but also of his relation to the state and to his people. They therefore regarded the state as their personal estate into which they can deep their hands at will to satisfy their whims and desires. Hence the unbridled corruption rampant amongst public office-holders in Nigeria and indeed most of the other African countries so much so that *Karl Maier* commented thus: 'the state in Africa is the bastard child of imperialism.'

- 3.7 In addition, the militarization of the Nigerian society for so many years after independence is largely responsible for the militarization of human relations among Nigerians. This argument is rife among sociologists. It is within the militarization of common Nigerians during military rule, fear for authority rather than respect for authority, that we can understand the “big man” factor in Nigeria.
- 3.8 It is a natural expectation among Nigerians that the “big man” does not stand in line, the “big man” need not obey traffic rules, and the “big man” is often given preference in banks, restaurants, and airports among others. Hence the so called Nigerian “big man” that should have been the custodian of law, ends up as the chief law breaker.
- 3.9 Understanding the “big man” syndrome in Nigeria implies an understanding of the Nigerian society. The “big man” cannot be disobeyed. In the event there is a job opening, the big man initiates a call requesting his candidate of choice be hired not taking into consideration if he or she is qualified or not. The common phrase used in Nigeria for this is “connection”. The big man syndrome has destroyed due process in hiring, accountability and all forms of civility.
- 3.10 The big man syndrome expressed as connection has permeated every facet of Nigerian life. Admission into universities is determined more by connection than competition. Securing

meaningful employment is determined more by connection than merit; being promoted in the civil service is determined more by connection than due process; being considered to provide professional service is determined more by connection than professionalism; being considered a police officer to protect and maintain law and order is determined more by connection than the ability to deliver that service. It is within this culture of sycophancy and nepotism, that we can truly understand corruption in Nigeria.

4.0 EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION ON NATION'S DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 Corruption in Nigeria wears many kinds of unattractive and dirty clothes. The situation has made so many people feel a lot of pains as the money which would have been used to reduce poverty in the country are being channeled into the pockets of a small group of persons. What can we say about the \$2.1 billion arms deal which was meant to procure arms to fight the Boko Haram insurgency?
- 4.2 The magnitude of its cancerous effect in monetary terms, is simply colossal, running into billions of Dollars extending as it does, over the entire area of public expenditure, representing revenue that would otherwise have been used for the benefit of the nation. Nigeria and Nigerians have no doubt, suffered and are still suffering from embarrassment and economic ruins that corruption has caused them nationally and internationally.

Corrupt Nigerians have even gone beyond demanding bribes from their fellow citizens, they are equally in the habit of extorting money from foreigners at various international border posts and in business transactions.

4.3 Corruption has virtually turned Nigeria into the land of starvation and a debtor nation in spite of the nation's enormous resources. Corruption and mismanagement swallow about 40 percent of Nigeria's \$20 billion annual oil income. Corruption disrupts the capital flow throughout entire developing nations. Tax income is generally far below what the government requires in order to carry out basic services.

4.4 The impact of corruption on Nigerians is enormous. Corruption has caused serious societal decay. Excessive accidents on our roads because contractors rather than fix the roads, take the shorter route of sharing contract sums with bureaucrats and the contracts never get executed. When executed at all, it is usually below the agreed threshold of standard. Hospitals have become death camps, educational system is collapsing as some professors now trade grades for money or the sale of handouts. The institutions of government are not left out. Virtually every institution of government is performing below capacity.

4.5 Criminal suspects are held in detention for far longer period without being charged because investigators do not have required tools to investigate crime. In the event they are

prosecuted, trial judges and magistrates, in most cases, are not on schedule, resulting to stock piling of cases, resulting to delayed justice, and in the event justice is meted out, the prisons are underfunded due to corruption as some officers will hold back budgetary allocations meant to feed prisoners.

5.0 How Corruption paved way for Prevalent Insecurity.

- 5.1 The increasing incidence of the twin evils of corruption and insecurity in Nigeria pose great challenges to governance and have thus, become issues of public concern. It is part of the responsibilities of government to provide safety and security for its citizenry. Chapter II of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, pertaining to the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in **Section 2(b)** specifically provides that **“the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.”** Similarly, section 15 (5) of the Constitution provides that **“the state shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power.”** Pursuant to this, successive administrations in Nigeria made concerted efforts to reform the security sector.
- 5.2 Before the inception of the Buhari Administration, it was thought that the Federal Government of Nigeria lacked the might to tackle insurgency. The nation never had it so bad that small and light arms were massively used illegally and bomb

explosions were and are still being witnessed frequently in our country.

5.3 It is widely believed that the security agencies in the country did not even want an end to the insurgency in the North-eastern part of the country because without the state of emergency, most of the top officers will have little to feed on. We are all witnesses to the ongoing probes into the huge amounts released to the security agencies to fight insurgencies in Nigeria. Security chiefs have used the opportunities to divert huge amounts meant to ensure national security. The level of our social depravity is better imagined.

5.4 It is bad enough, of course, that the Nigerian people are denied a better state of development and higher standard of living as a result of the institutionalized corruption in the country. Now they are denied the right to live in a country free of terror. Even the importation of equipment specifically procured to enable police to do better police work of fighting corruption is also marred in corruption.

5.5 It is widely believed that some of the recent terrorist attacks are actually the work of domestic political forces, either seeking to make a stronger case for more foreign anti-terrorism funding (some of which will presumably 'disappear' upon arrival).

- 5.6 The sophisticated ammunitions that are used by terrorists and insurgents in Nigeria are imported into the Country notwithstanding the fact that there are borders where these items ought to be checked and confiscated. Ammunitions are shipped into the country by terrorists yet blind eyes are turned to it either because someone somewhere has been bribed or is connected/ interested in the transaction.
- 5.7 Another instance that shows that corruption is the foundation of insecurity is the fact that terrorists are better equipped in terms of ammunition than our Law Enforcement agencies. A reasonable percentage of the national budget is always channeled towards Defence, yet these funds are circumvented and not actually used to fortify the Armed forces.
- 5.8 Lack of basic skills and technical knowhow due to corruption is another booster for national insecurity. Courses and programmes that are meant to train and keep Law enforcement agents updated are oftentimes planned on paper simply to receive funds but are not actually conducted. Another dimension of such corruption are those who will obtain leave to study or to undertake a training course whereas they are on a frolic of their own.
- 5.9 Lack of passion towards work and duty is another form of corruption that has helped insecurity to flourish In Nigeria. There is a perverse but common saying among public and civil

servants that Government work is not the one you do and sweat (i.e. it does not require commitment). High rate of indiscipline and insubordination among law enforcement agencies have contributed to high rate of insecurity in the Nation.

5.10 An officer that is meant to be on night shift at work is at home snoring or at a brothel committing immorality. Indiscipline acts such as drinking and flirting while on duty also reduces the level of competence of some officers of these agencies. There are instances where people tried to contact police about armed robbery attacks and they will receive alarming responses such as “there is no fuel in our car”, “the officer that can drive is not around” and so on. When there is a call to duty, it is unfortunate that those that are expected to rise up are oftentimes found wanting.

5.11 Unemployment, under employment and exploitation are other corrupt practices that aid the increase of insecurity in the society. The frustrated masses are resulting to violence as a means of survival due to the hardship that surrounds them. Greater numbers of Nigerian youths have taken into militancy and internet fraud (yahoo Yahoo) as a result of poverty and unemployment. There is an increase in the rate of kidnapping for rituals or ransom due to the high rate of poverty in the nation. Wickedness is not the antidote for poverty but it is not every man that is so virtuous in life to die for his integrity.

6.0 PREVALENT INSECURITY

6.1 In plain terms, Insecurity refers to a lack of security, uncertainty, the state of being subject to danger; vulnerability. Insecurity is prevalent in present day Nigeria to the extent that everybody is now perceived as a suspect. Homes, Schools, Malls, Motor parks, vehicles, Mosques, places of worship are not save from the threats of insecurity.

6.2 It has been established earlier that corruption is the foundation for the prevalent insecurity challenge we are presently facing in Nigeria.

6.2.1 Dimensions of the prevalent Insecurity.

6.2.2 BOMB BLAST

6.2.3 Countless lives and millions of properties were destroyed by bomb blasts that were planted or borne by suicide bombers. The fear of bomb blast is still in the heart of many citizens till date and it makes it difficult for them to interact with some parts of Nigeria especially the North East.

Before our current debacle, bomb blasts were incidences Nigerians only watched on the television from foreign lands. But alas, our innocence was lost to the Boko Haram insurgency.

National Youth Service Corps is still facing the challenge of convincing Corp members to serve their father land in some states that have become notorious for insurgency.

6.3 KIDNAPPINGS

6.4 There is a high rate of kidnapping in various parts of Nigeria for various reasons. Kidnappers are kidnapping people and are demanding heavy ransom from their relatives. The fear of kidnappers has made it difficult if not impossible to ask or give help to a stranger. Members of staff of multi-national companies are also targets for kidnappers as heavy ransom will be demanded from their employers or family members. Government officials or their close relatives are also being targeted by kidnappers to torture, threaten, humiliate, embarrass or extort money from them and their relatives. Kidnapping has become anew profession from which millions are derived.

6.5 ASSASINATION

6.6 The use of hired killers, poisons and other unnatural means to terminate the lives of other human being is on the increase. Competition is no longer taken with the spirit of sportsmanship and opponents are perceived as enemies that must be eliminated by all means. We now know, from the confessions of some hired killers, that some Nigerians now practice the dastardly act as a profession from which they derive their livelihood.

6.7 ABDUCTION FOR RITUAL PURPOSES

6.8 The news of human rituals is on the increase. Charms and other fetish items are used to abduct people to kill them or use vital parts of their body for rituals. Lack of the fear of Allah made people to delve into rituals for power, money, affluence or vengeance at the price of the lives of fellow human. Such reports make it difficult for people to even exchange pleasantries with strangers, not to talk of lending a helping hand.

6.9 MILITANCY

This has become very common especially in the Niger Delta Region. The youths in the region see it as an avenue, not only to express their displeasure with the government, but have also adopted it as a thriving profession.

7.0 ECONOMIC RECESSION

7.1 Nigeria is experiencing a period of reduced economic activity. Inflation is prevalent; price of goods and services are skyrocketing, people are starving, small scale businesses are collapsing, companies are folding up as a result of corruption and insecurity that has been given place to procreate and prosper in the country.

7.2 Accumulated embezzlement of public funds, lack of transparency and accountability in the running of the affairs of the nation has

led the economy to a state of recession. Economic recession is a period of general economic decline and it is typically accompanied by a drop in the stock market, an increase in unemployment, and a decline in the housing market. In short, it leads to loss of amenities of life.

7.3 The recession we are in now is a crisis foretold. Charles Soludo, the former CBN Governor warned in 2012 and again in 2014 that the former administration was running the economy aground as a result of corruption. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo also in 2012 alerted Nigerians that pervasive corruption, failure to diversify from oil and inadequate protection of domestic industries would soon plunge Nigeria into deep poverty and recession. These and other warnings were never heeded by a fiscally reckless and corrupt regime.

7.4 In the year 2014, the then governor of Nigeria's Central Bank, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, now Emir of Kano, raised the allegation of the missing over \$40 Billion in a letter he wrote to the then president of Nigeria and leaked it to the press. As was reported by *Thisday* newspaper of 12 July 2014, Sanusi alleged that the NNPC had failed to remit about \$49.8 billion US dollars to the federation account over a 19 month period. However, in December, Sanusi said it was not \$49.8 billion but \$12 billion that was missing. The Nigerian Minister of Finance, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, said that Sanusi's claim of \$12 billion is also

false, disclosing that it was actually “\$10.8 billion that could not be accounted for.”

7.5 According to the National Bureau of Statistics, about 4.2 million jobs have been lost in the last one year (i.e between 2016 and 2017). The agency also puts the inflation rate to be 17.3% as at August 2016. External Reserves had crashed to \$22 Billion Dollars in September 2016 from above \$65 Billion Dollars in 2010, while the stock market is shrinking, the naira has plunged to a new low of N395 to the United States dollar on the parallel market. All these were caused as a result of lack of seamless cohesion in our fiscal policy and as a consequence of corruption.

8.0 THE INTER - RELATIONSHIP

8.1 The triumvirate of Corruption, Insecurity and Recession is intertwined; one is leading to another and to the next. It is a vicious circle that must be curbed in its entirety, if we want to bequeath a nation of prosperity to our children.

8.2 I have tried in this presentation to demonstrate how the three are intertwined. I am of the humble opinion that the best way to kill a tree is not by shredding its leaves or cutting its branches but by killing its root. Corruption has led to insecurity and insecurity with other corrupt practices gave birth to recession. Economic recession is also promoting other forms of corruption

which will continue if the endless circle is not attacked with commensurate effort.

9.0 CONCLUSION/ RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 According to John Campbell who served as US Ambassador to Nigeria (2004-2007) in his book *Nigeria Dancing on the Brink*, concluded that a democratic Nigeria free from corruption and characterized by the rule of law would promote economic development, encourage alleviation of poverty and address the people's alienation from their government. The Giant would have freed itself from its hobble and the dance would be moved back from the brink. Nigeria would become a nation rather than merely Awolowo's "geographic expression" and would shine as the beacon for African democracy.

9.2 The chief obstacles to dealing, capably, with the problems of poverty, corruption and insurgency are leadership crisis and institutional failures of the past. "When correction is in the hands of those who do wrongs", so once wrote the Elizabethan writer, William Shakespeare, "whom then do we turn to for correction?" Professor Chinua Achebe, the venerated writer of *Things Fall Apart*, once observed that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely of failure of leadership."

9.3 In summary, while one readily agrees with Professor Achebe, it is important that we add that institutions also matter. The social

values of Nigerians can still be redeemed if her leaders will make her institutions work. The family, the education sector, the legal system, the economy, and, of course, our political institutions (especially State and National Assemblies) are in dire need of reforms. It is when the institutions are in good shape that they will be able to give a face or phase of hope to all Nigerians.

Thanks for your patience and attention.

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