Confab adopts recommendation for removal of immunity clause

June 13, 2014

**If accepted, president, governors and their deputies could be prosecuted for both criminal and civil offences while in office.**

The National Conference finally voted on Thursday to strip the president, state governors and their deputies of immunity from prosecution in criminal and civil cases.

The Conference delegates voted overwhelmingly for the removal of the clause from the nation’s constitution while considering the report of the Committee on Economy, Trade and Investment.

Section 308 of the 1999 Constitution provides that no civil or criminal proceedings shall be instituted or continued against the President, Vice President, Governor and Deputy Governor.

The Committee chaired by Bola Shagaya representing Women in Business, WINBIZ, and Fola Adeola, an Ogun State delegate had recommend that the Immunity Clause be removed if the offences attract criminal charges to encourage accountability by those managing the economy.

However, while voting on the recommendation, the delegates amended it to include all cases.

The Conference had earlier taken a similar position while considering amendments proposed to the report of the Committee on Public Service.

Before it voted on the issue, the Conference asked the Secretariat to remind it of the decision it took while voting on the report of the Public Service Committee.

During the sitting of the 20 Committees in May the Committee on Politics and Governance had also recommended the removal of the clause. The report is yet to be considered and voted on.

The Conference also adopted a recommendation that the Federal Government should pay the N1 million debt owed to local contractors as a way of encouraging them.

It however rejected an amendment which would have compelled government to award all contracts of less than N10 billion to local contractors in other to grow them.

The Conference also rejected a proposal that women should be appointed Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria and heads of all major finance agencies that provide loans to farmers, investors and contractors.

It also rejected an amendment which has sought to compel political parties to name women as their vice presidential and deputy governorship candidates

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/confab-adopts-recommendation-removal-immunity-clause/>

National Conference adopts true federalism for Nigeria

28 mins ago

**Confab resolves that states should create local government.**

The National Conference on Thursday accepted the recommendation of its Committee on Politics and Governance to return Nigeria to a true federal structure with the states as federating units.

The Conference also adopted another recommendation which will allow the states to create local governments as they deem necessary.

It also resolved that asset declaration form submitted by public office holders to the Code of Conduct Bureau, CCB, should be made accessible to the general public and the exercise should be before and after assumption of office.

The report of the Committee co-chaired by a former Information Minister, Jerry Gana, and a former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Olu Falae, was earlier debated before the amendments to its recommendation were taken and voted for.

The voting session was moderated by the Deputy Chairman of the Conference, Bolaji Akinyemi.

It could not vote on the establishment of structure, composition, finance and functions of local government councils preferring to do so when discussing the report of the Committee on Political Restructuring and Forms of Government.

The Conference, however, accepted a proposal that unelected chairmen of local governments (often referred to as Transition Committee Chairmen) or such unelected representatives at the local government areas should be sanctioned by withholding the statutory allocations pending the conduct of election into such local governments.

On anti-corruption and ethics in governance, it agreed to the recommendation that the Anti-Corruption Agencies, ACAs, notably the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission, ICPC, should take up any corruption case that is in the public domain without waiting for a petition.

They resolved that the refusal by anti-graft agencies to act on any corruption cases that they are not aware of would constitute an act of misconduct, criminal negligence or dereliction of duty that will attract appropriate sanctions.

The Conference therefore resolved that all ACAs should be empowered to invite anybody living above their means to explain their source of wealth, and if the agencies are not satisfied with explanations to the acquisition of such wealth, the person shall be charged to court.

“Upon conviction, the person shall forfeit the entire proceeds from corruption and be sentenced to half the prison term attached to the sum of the money or its equivalent,” it said.

The Conference voted in support of a proposal that a special account be opened and designated as Infrastructure Development Fund, IDF, into which all recovered proceeds of corruption shall be paid.

On cross-carpeting from one party to another, it resolved that such elected public office holders who defect before the expiration of their mandates without cogent reasons would lose their seats.

The Conference resolved that inducement of voters with money and materials on Election Day should be treated as a criminal offence and perpetrators severely punished.

The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, and the State Independent Electoral Commission, SIEC, are to fashion ways to ensure that physically challenged persons, especially lepers, are registered and actually vote in elections.

The Conference resolved that that minority groups that wish to exist as separate states and meet the criteria for state creation should be allowed to do so under the instrumentality of the relevant laws and procedures as part of their right to internal self determination.

It restated the unconditional rights and freedom of every and any other ethnic nationality that considers itself as unjustly subjected to real and perceived injustice and marginalisation to join their kith and kin through the instrumentality of relevant laws.

It accepted a recommendation for the establishment of a National Council of Traditional Rulers, NCTR, with three members from each state.

Confab say no more to foreign medical treatment for public officers, telecom masts In residential areas

June 19, 2014

**Conference also decided that the Federal Government should put into effective use, the National Policy on Women adopted in 2004 which was replaced with the National Gender Policy in 2006.**

The National Conference, in a bid to reduce the current negative impact of medical tourism on the image and integrity of Nigeria and her healthcare system, has set strict procedures that must be observed by public officers seeking medical treatment outside Nigeria.

The Conference on Wednesday said seeking medical treatment abroad has resulted in immense capital flight and drain on Nigeria’s economy resulting from medical tourism; it cited abuse of existing processes for screening of referrals for foreign medical treatment as one of the reasons.

Consequently, it resolved that henceforth, there should be restriction of government sponsorship of public officers for foreign medical care; and that unless for exceptional cases that require referral abroad, all public officers should mandatorily utilize local health facilities.

These exceptional cases, it said, must be screened by a medical board made up of appropriate medical and healthcare professionals.

In addition, the recommendations of the board should be subject to the approval of the Minister of Health who is the chief medical adviser to the Federal Government; except where such exceptional cases are serious emergencies, in which instant approval may be given.

Conference however expressed the need for improvement in the quality of healthcare services in Nigeria; a deliberate effort to refocus the attitude of healthcare workers to patients in Nigeria; and improved political commitment to health by political office holders.

These resolutions were arrived at after heated debates on the report of the Committee on the Social Sector presented by the Committee Chairman, Iyom Josephine Anenih, supported by the deputy chairman, Professor Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai, the former Minister of Education.

It was also resolved that free-healthcare be established for children aged 0-5 years; senior citizens from the age of 65 years; persons living with disability or the physically challenged persons; free maternal services and free school health programmes.

After another round of heated debate by the delegates, Conference resolved that government and owners of mission/private schools should dialogue to facilitate the handover of all mission and private schools to their original owners.

In returning the schools, it was agreed that owners must ensure that they are affordable and able to serve wider variety of the public as it were in the original concept of the mission schools.

It recommended that there should be regulation of fees charged by the schools; the schools should provide assistance to the local community through scholarships and other services; and that children from other denominations should not be marginalized in the admission process.

Conference agreed that staff of such schools should have the option of remaining with the institution or being absorbed into government service in the case of the return of the mission and private schools to their original owners.

Still on schools, it was unanimously decided that government should convert all Almajiri schools to normal schools and integrate Quranic education curriculum to absorb the millions of out of school children.

Government was also asked to provide free basic education with free uniforms, books and midday meals for all children from primary one to junior secondary three.

It was also resolved that government should build additional Almajiri Schools to bring them up to 400 as originally planned while a 10 year plan of sustained implementation should be put in place with a view to providing access to all children.

On pension, Conference said the 2004 Pension Act should be amended so that payment of pension to beneficiaries would continue throughout their lifetime instead of the current practice where payment is only made to people between 15 and 18 years post-retirement.

Delegates agreed on the urgent need to amend the 2004 Pension Act to include a provision to hold the pension commission responsible and also prescribe penalties.

It was accepted that salary reviews should be reflected in calculating benefits across the board, particularly in reference to long-time retirees; salary increases should automatically affect retirees in both the old and new pension systems.

To ensure full coverage of citizens, Conference said pension fund administrators and the national pension commission should be obliged to begin a comprehensive programme of registering the informal sector workers under the 2004 Pensions Act.

Conference also unanimously decided that a social security policy be put in practice to cater for the well being of the elderly in addition to the pension policy.

Proceedings at the Conference however came to a halt for about 15 minutes as female delegates and some male delegates took the floor to protest attempts by other delegates to vote against the application of the affirmative action demanding that 35% of elective offices at all levels be given reserved for women.

As soon as delegates voted to reduce the percentage from 35% to 30%, all the women in the hall including some men stood up, started singing and threatened a walk-out if the decision was not reversed.

When the hall was eventually called to order, some of the male delegates including former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Ghali Umar Na’Abba, spoke in favour of 35%. They stated that the matter was already an existing government policy.

At this point, it was unanimously decided that since the practice was already in existence and on-going, it should be allowed to remain. Instantly, some female delegates started asking for increase to 40%.

Conference also decided that the Federal Government should put into effective use, the National Policy on Women adopted in 2004 which was replaced with the National Gender Policy in 2006.

Government was also asked to draft for passage and implementation, a Bill on the Abolition of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in Nigeria to address the issue of discrimination and violence against women and maltreatment of widows.

Delegates adopted a recommendation that government should legislate to prohibit installation of telecommunication mast in residential neighbourhoods and to prohibit other practices that negatively impact on health including female genital mutilation.

**Credit:**[**newsbytesnow.com**](http://newsbytesnow.com/ngconfab-say-no-more-to-foreign-medical-treatment-for-public-officers-telecom-mast-in-residential-areas/)

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/confab-say-foreign-medical-treatment-public-officers-telecom-masts-residential-areas/>

Confab approves state police, National Border Force, others

16 hours ago

**Delegates rejected recommendation that 70 per cent of Federal police officers in any state should be indigenes of that state.**

The National Conference on Thursday approved the creation of state police, National Border Force and Coast Guard; among others, for improved security across the nation.

The decisions were taken during the adoption of the report of the Conference Committee on National Security, headed by a former Inspector General of Police, Gambo Jimeta.

It was during the presentation of the Committee’s report on Wednesday by its Vice Chairman, Albert Horsfall, that the Conference Chairman, Idris Kutigi, chased journalists of out of the plenary session.

The situation later degenerated to a stage where journalists accredited to cover the Conference proceedings, decided to boycott the day’s sitting.

When the Conference reconvened on Thursday morning, the delegates commenced voting in a bid to amend as well as adopt the recommendations of the Committee.

The Vice Chairman of the Conference, Bolaji Akinyemi, who presided over the voting, read the recommendations and the concomitant amendments before putting the question to the delegates.

On a unanimous voice vote, delegates approved the establishment, funding and operation of state and community police based on state laws.

Another important decision taken was the adoption of the recommendation for the establishment of a National Border Patrol Force under the ministry of defence. However, an attempt to situate the new force under the Nigerian Immigrations Service, NIS, was stoutly rejected by majority of the delegates.

The Conference also rejected the recommendation that the proposed Border Patrol Force should maintain a single entry point into Nigeria.

After a brief disagreement, the Conference adopted the recommendation to ensure that federal police officers from Deputy Superintendent to the least rank should be indigenes of the state they are deployed to.  However, the delegates disagreed with the recommendation that 70 per cent of federal police officers in any state should be indigenes of that state.

There was a stalemate on the mode of operation and superiority between the federal police and the state police.

Ayo Adebanjo said the state police should be autonomous and should operate as a coordinate with the federal police. He argued that the state is a coordinate to the Federal Government.

On his part, Femi Falana noted that there were states with different police operations with commissioners of police manning them.

The Conference finally agreed that the police, whether operated by the state or the federal government, should be properly funded.

The Conference further adopted the recommendation to limit the number of vehicles on government convoys and to empower the Federal Road Safety Commission, FRSC, to set speed limits for convoys.

The recommendation for the creation of Security and Intelligence Services Oversight Commission was adopted after Mr. Akinyemi had taken a little time to explain why the commission was necessary.

The Conference also adopted the recommendation to re-organise the Defence Industry Company of Nigeria and creation of a Military Industrial Complex in the country.

The Conference, however, rejected the recommendation to bar the Nigerian Army from being drafted for electoral duties.

It rejected the recommendation that the NSCDC, the Nigerian Immigration Service, the NDLEA, and the Custom Service be represented in the States Security Council.

Sam Egwu suggested that the Conference should place the security votes of state governors under the control of the state security council, arguing that the situation where billions of naira was being approved as security vote without control was inimical to the proper utilisation of the funds.

The Conference adopted the recommendation that retired military personnel be trained and engaged in the fight against Boko Haram.

It, however, rejected the recommendation that the National Security Adviser establish a Homeland Security Force and the merger of the NSCDC and FRSC with the police.

It also adopted a recommendation for a life insurance to be created for all armed security personnel in the country but rejected the recommendation for the establishment the Police Complaints Authority.

The Conference adopted the recommendation that the office of the Chief of Defence Staff be incorporated in the Nigeria Constitution.

The Conference also adopted the recommendation that the Federal Government should compensate communities destroyed during internal security crisis.

Adebola Ogunsola and Atedo Peterside eventually moved for the adoption of the report of the Committee on National Security with the amendments made

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/confab-approves-state-police-national-border-force-others/>

**Confab: As North, South delegates resolve rift over resource control**

CLEMENT IDOKO writes on the resolution of the contentious issue of resource control that almost tore apart the delegate Committee on Devolution of Power and the recommendations of other committees at the ongoing National conference.

A landmark progress was made on Wednesday last week, as the stalemate over resource control, which pitched the Northern and Southern delegates on the Power Devolution Committee at the ongoing National Conference against each other. The logjam was resolved with the recommendation that states where minerals are domiciled should now be involved in their development and exploration.

Co-Chairman of the committee and former governor of Akwa Ibom State, Obong Victor Attah, who briefed newsmen after the long hours of meeting on Wednesday, said members unanimously resolved that the contentious item 39 be retained in the Exclusive Legislative List but with proviso for states’ involvement.

The delegates also prescribed the setting aside of a special grant by the Federal Government for development of mineral deposits in all the states.

The disagreement between the South and the North on the matter had got to a point where the co-chairmen of the committee, Attah and Ibrahim Coomassie, had to adjourned sittings to allow for more consultation on the matter.

However, after Wednesday’s deliberation which lasted for about three hours, the committee members reached a consensus on the controversial matter.

Former Deputy Senate President and a delegate at the conference, Senator Ibrahim Mantu, told Sunday Tribune that consensus was reached after days of rigorous debate and that the decision was arrived at in the interest of the nation. He said: “The good news is that we have been able to cross the hurdle that looks impossible in the last few days. We have now been able to reach a compromise as to where mineral resources should be whether they should be under the Exclusive or Concurrent Legislative List. We have unanimously agreed that mineral resources whether oil, coal, bitumen or gold should remain in the Exclusive Legislative List, which means that the Federal Government will take full control of the management of the resources. We have now put a proviso in our own recommendation to the effect that the state should be involved in the development, extraction or exploitation of these minerals, because at present, the states where these minerals come from are not having any say at all in exploitation of these minerals found in their states,” Mantu stated.

Elder statesman, Chief Ayo Adebanjo,  also confirmed that the logjam had been amicably resolved by the delegates.

This was also confirmed by a northern delegate from Jigawa, Mr. Barshir Dalhatu, who said that compromise was reached between the warring parties on the issue of resource control.

There had been an uneasy calm at the confab as the Committee on Devolution of Power was mired in controversy over the issue of resource control. The Southern delegates had taken the stance that their region had been acting the “father Christmas” and providing the needed resources for the development of the country, but had remained impoverished. The region stated that it wants to have a say on how the mineral resources, especially oil deposits in the region, are explored. But the Northern delegates had maintained that the South should forget the issue of resource control for now. The debate on this item, as contained in the 1999 Constitution, almost frustrated the work of the committee on devolution of power.

On Tuesday, members met in a closed session to debate the amendment to Item 39 on the Exclusive Legislative List of the 1999 Constitution.

However, for the third time, at the end of the three-hour deliberation, no decision could be reached as each side of the divide presented incompatible positions on the issue. As contained in the Exclusive Legislative List of the 1999 Constitution, Item 39 deals with the exclusive rights of the Federal Government to legislate on issues regarding mines and minerals, including oil fields, oil mining, geological surveys and natural gas.

While delegates from the North wanted the status quo maintained as contained in the current constitution, delegates from the South believed the item could still remain in the Exclusive Legislative List but with some modifications. Part of the modifications, according to them, is to enable state governments to have some level of involvements when legislations regarding mining of mineral resources deposited in their areas are being drafted. But this position was opposed by delegates from the North who believed that it would give an unequal advantage to the South since, according to them, not all the states in the North have natural minerals. The Committee had cut-short its break time on Tuesday from two hours to one hour to enable members to take a decision on the item which discussion started on Thursday last week.

Attah had told journalists at the end of the closed session that he was hopeful of a final decision on Wednesday, as a lot of progress had been made. Attah, in his argument for resource control said the South could not be held responsible for the predicament of the North if they chose to abandon what they had and fold their arms. Attah, was making veiled reference to the period of groundnuts pyramid when the North was enjoying 50 per cent derivation formula.

He said: “Let me deal with this concept of ‘belong’ or ‘ownership’. In the course of our discussions, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was quoted several times to establish the fact that, by law and constitution, all minerals, in, on, upon, under-wherever they are found, belong to the Federal Government. So, unless and until the constitution is changed, all minerals belong to the government of Nigeria. The discussions we had have charted a very clear course for us to follow to reach a consensus. But before we get there, let me illustrate what I want to say with the example of two oil-producing states. We know that oil is a wasting asset and can dry up. So here are two states, both producing oil and enjoying very high per capita income because they are both receiving derivations payments. Tomorrow, the oil wells in one state dry up while the other state is still pumping and continues to receive its derivation payments. How can we possibly accuse that state of impoverishing the other whose wells have dried up?

“If you do not hold onto, and further develop the things that gave you a high per capita income in the first place, or if you fail and or refuse to explore other avenues of income that are available to you, you cannot say that the development of a new source of income elsewhere is what has impoverished you. One of our committee member said something, he said ‘time will come’ he repeated it a few times. Let me say that the people of the Niger Delta are very conscious of this and indeed this has been their greatest fear. Time will come when the oil will dry up completely, then what will happen to the people of the Niger Delta. No farmland and no fishing in the polluted waters. But that is not the only fear.”

“The member who made the statement also told us how he was made to know that there is scandalous amount of very valuable solid mineral deposits all across the north. And it is true. We all know about rich deposits of limestone, high quality gold and even the presence of uranium. I personally am convinced that there is oil in the North. Also in the West, the tar sands have not been touched. I read an article once that said that the West is resisting the exploitation of these deposits because of the pollution that is likely to cause. So that is our second fear. That when the time comes, everybody will laugh at us, bid us goodbye and tell us that there is no more Nigeria and they will all go home to enjoy their own resources. These fears must be allayed and assurances must be given,” Attah said.

**Row over debate on legislative lists**
The South-West delegates have been vocal at the conference for proper devolution of power from the federal to states so as to properly empower them to bring about requisite development within the regions. Just as the Northern delegates are opposed to resource control, they also appear to not want devolution of power to the states. They were vehemently against the creation of state police and some other items which the Southern delegates wanted moved from the Exclusive List to Concurrent List. Thus, the proceedings at the Committee on Devolution of Powers were momentarily stalled on Tuesday last week, as some delegates disagreed with the decision of others to leave the Concurrent List untouched.

The committee  had a mandate to examine the  Legislative Lists  as contained in the 1999 Constitution with a view to determining such items that should be altered in furtherance of the goal of reducing the  perceived over-concentration of powers at the centre.  The committee had, on Monday, concluded deliberations on the Exclusive List, during which it retained Police Affairs in the List, contrary to the loud clamour that it should be moved to the Concurrent List to enable the states establish their own police services.

Trouble started on Tuesday when the committee screened and retained all the 30 items on the Concurrent List. They were on the verge of concluding the process when Chief Adeniyi Akintola, a delegate from Oyo State, raised a point of order and expressed dissatisfaction with the trend of the proceedings.  Akintola, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) said it was absurd that a committee which was meant to facilitate the devolution of powers had succeeded in making little or no changes.  According to Akintola, the decisions of the committee had made nonsense of the whole idea of power devolution. He threatened to mobilise his fellow delegates of South-West extraction to stage a walkout on the meeting and to refrain from endorsing the resolutions of the committee.

“Where is the power devolution? We said state police, you brought it in; INEC, you brought it in and you expect me to append my signature to it?

No Yoruba man will append his signature to anything done here. I can tell you that. I think the best option is to walk out, “Akintola said.

This threat provoked an instant angry reaction from another delegate, Senator Ibrahim Mantu, who asked Akintola to go home if he was no longer prepared to participate in the deliberations of the conference committee.  Mantu said there was no justification for any delegate to draw the committee back after it had taken a decision on an item. At this point, it became an open quarrel between Mantu and Akintola. But the co-chairmen of the committee, Attah and Coomassie tried to calm the frayed nerves. Attah reminded the delegates the committee had done a lot of things but still has a lot of things to do. He said it was unfortunate for any delegate to postulate that the committee has not achieved anything.

Attah allayed the fears of delegates who felt that not many alterations had been made on the Legislative Lists, arguing that both the state and Federal Governments could share responsibilities, particularly in areas where the state lacks the manpower or expertise.

**Campaign for reduction of 13 per cent derivation formula to 5 per cent**
While the controversy over resource control was raging, Northern delegates circulated a booklet to various committee members, a copy of which was obtained by Sunday Tribune in Abuja. The document recommended that onshore/offshore dichotomy should be applied and derivation should be reduced to five per cent for oil resources explored onshore. The document indicated that the Southern delegates should forget the issue of resource control for now. They argued that unless the 1999 constitution is amended to take way the ownership of mineral resources from the Federal Government, there could be nothing like total resource control by any Nigerian state.

According to them, agitation for resource control by state governments was a breach of the covenant of the federation, adding that the desire for resource control was like pulling out of the Nigerian federation, and that all regions in the country were equal stakeholders in the Nigerian oil.

Equally, the delegates vehemently rejected the cancellation of onshore/offshore oil dichotomy which they said gave away a national resource to only littoral states and called for a reversal of the system. The Northern delegates also called for the abolition of all institutions and programmes established to cater for the oil-producing states. According to them, the institutions included the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta and the Amnesty Programme for the Niger-Delta ex-militants.

The issues of resource control and the removal of the local government as the third tier of government from the concurrent list have so far proved contentious and set members against each other, especially in the Committee of Devolution of Power mandated to discuss the issues.

The booklet entitled: “Key issues before the Northern delegates to the 2014 National Conference” maintained that the North produces 80 per cent of the Nigerian population, leaving the South with 20 per cent, stressing that the Northern Nigeria was the back bone and strength of Nigeria. The North rejects the frequent assertions by the South on the population figures of the North and states clearly that the population growth attributed to the North over the years is extremely understated”.

However, Ms Ankio Briggs, a Federal Government delegate said: “If they like, they can call for zero derivation. If they are calling for a reduction from 13 per cent, which we are saying we want increased to 50 per cent, I would want to see where it is coming from. Let us all be sensible here.

If we remember, in the 2005 conference, the agreement was 18 per cent. It is documented and the demand was for 50 per cent derivation; immediately 25 per cent and subsequently increased every year until it reaches 50 per cent. That was what the South-South requested for at that time. And when it was refused, the South-South walked out. That was what we requested for and we rejected the 18 per cent. I don’t think any reasonable person is going to expect that we will take anything less than what we have requested for at that time or will accept anything less than even the 18 per cent that was offered in 2005. So, anybody who wants to be troublesome and is requesting reduction from 13 per cent to 5 per cent, will see the reaction of the people from whose land the oil is coming from.”

Professor Eddy Erhagbe, an Edo State delegate and a member of the Devolution of Power Committee, in his reaction said: “There is no doubt that there are different positions in terms of the percentage. The South-South and others who are directly benefiting are asking for an increase on the 13 per cent while those from the non-producing areas are asking for a reduction. These are two extreme positions but I believe that we are likely going to work for a compromise, as has been exhibited in other decisions this committee has already reached. I am very optimistic that at the very worse, we will retain the 13 per cent that is on the ground”.

**Local Government administration**
Members of the Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) had, on Monday, stormed the National Judicial Institute (NJI), venue of the National Conference, to protest the decision of the Committee on Political Restructuring and Forms of Government to scrap the Local Government Areas in the country. The confab committee, which continued its deliberations on Monday with focus on local government administration in the country, however, insisted that the list of LGs as contained in the First Schedule, Part 1 of the 1999 constitution, be removed.

According the committee, this should be transferred to the states to be covered by a law of the state Houses of Assembly, in a move to rejig the grassroots administration in the country.

The panel had, after its deliberation on the issue last week, recommended the removal of LGs as a third tier of government and gave express authority to the states executives to determine the number to operate in their states among others, even as it insisted that Nigeria would remain a federation with the existing 36 states structure as the units. But, making a presentation to the committee co-chaired by General Ike Nwachukwu and Hon. Mohammed Kumalia, the National Vice President of NULGE, Lucky Gospel Ewa, who led other members of the group, faulted the delegates on the position and expressed worry that the status of local governments was being threatened at the National Conference. Ewa argued that the local government, being the sphere of government closest to the people, is the harbinger of accelerated and sustainable socio-economic development, poverty alleviation and rural democratic mobilisation in any polity.

But the Northern delegates, speaking on the local government system, said: “The North recommends a multi-tier local government system that brings the people closer to the government and increases their level of involvement in governance. The North demands a new revenue sharing formula which seeks to empower the strata of government closer to the people than the centre, i.e. the states, and the local governments to be able to deliver on their governance responsibilities to the people. The formula is also to ensure a strong enough Federal Government for the security of the country, and give the country the stability of direction and focus on human and economic development.

On revenue sharing, it was suggested in the document that a vertical revenue sharing formula be adopted as follows: “Federal Government 26 per cent, states 39 per cent and local government 35 per cent. Also, we recommend a horizontal revenue sharing formula for the states and local government areas as follows: equality 35 per cent; population 30 per cent; population density 2 per cent; land mass 20 per cent; terrain 5 per cent; internal revenue generation effort 5 per cent and social development factor 3 per cent”.

**NLC, TUC and committee tango**
The leadership of Labour Unions represented at the National Conference, including the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), among others, led a protest delegation of the unions to the committee to kick against a recommendation to move labour matters from the exclusive legislative list to the concurrent legislative list.

Addressing the committee, the President of the NLC, Comrade Abdulwahid Omar, said the decision goes against the interest of Nigerian workers.

He pleaded with the committee to reconsider its decision on the labour issue and revert it to the exclusive legislative list, noting that “those who are behind this are doing it for their own narrow interests”. He said “we are worried when we heard that your committee has decided to migrate labour issues to the concurrent list from the exclusive legislative list. This is not the first time we have to speak on this. We had even made a presentation before the Senate when it decided to do the same thing your committee has done and after our presentation, the Senate reverted it”.

According to Comrade Omar, it will be counter-productive to dissipate much energy on issues of natural resource control without taking cognisance of the prime position which the human resource occupies. He warned that the move would militate against the minimum wage policy of government, noting that it was important for the country to sustain a federally-accepted remuneration system for the country, warning that delisting labour from the exclusive list would empower states to treat workers unfairly.

Aligning himself with the position presented by Comrade Omar, TUC president, Comrade Kaigama Bala Bobboi and the Chief Economic Adviser of the NLC, Dr Peter Oso-Esug, reminded that labour could be pushed over to states for reasons associated with fear of emasculating workers in the country. They argued that labour, being a vital factor of production, would be destroyed if moved to the concurrent legislative list.

In his comment, Attah thanked the union leaders for engaging the committee but said that the conference rules apply to the effect that “narrow delegate shall impute improper motive to any decision”. He disapproved the choice of words of Comrade Omar to the effect that “those behind this move are doing it for their narrow selfish reasons”. He expressed surprise also, that of all that is involved in labour issues, the unions chose to dwell on minimum wage only.

Obong Attah said the issue of minimum wage is not threatened by the decision, adding that matters of strike must also think of justice for the employer and not just for the workers. Senator Anthony Adefuye urged the labour unions to accept the reality of the work of the committee in good faith and work with it, noting that the decision will “prevent us from having national strikes”. He said the decision was made in good faith and in the interest of the country.

**Modified Presidential System**
 The Committee on Political Restructuring and Forms of Government of the ongoing National Conference has recommended a modified Presidential System of government for the country.  The committee, at its sitting late Wednesday, recommended that “there shall be unicameral legislature whose members shall be full-time. There shall be proportional representation to guarantee minorities and special interests.”

This followed extensive debate on the recommendations of an 11-member sub-committee chaired by AVM Mohammed Mukhtar. The sub-committee said that the need to evolve a novel system of government that would be beneficial to Nigerians has became apparent, considering the results of past and extant system the country has experienced and is still experiencing. After two adjournments, the committee agreed and recommended that there shall be a president that has one constituency, which is Nigeria.

 The proposed modified presidential system also provided that the president would run for the office on a joint ticket with a vice-president. It was also recommended that there shall be a vice-president that would be selected from the legislature by the president. The committee rejected automatic tickets for the president that would have two terms of four years. The second term is subject to election, the committee recommended.

Also, the president is to have full responsibility for his government, with full right to select his cabinet from among members of the legislature.

It was recommended that the president would select not more than 30 per cent from outside the legislature, which would take care of technocrats and other competences. The committee also recommended a novel feature of a quarterly questioning session for the president before the legislature. This, the committee said, was for the purposes of enhancing accountability, while the cabinet could take theirs as the need arises. The annual State of the Nation address by the president was also retained by the committee for the enhancement of transparency and accountability.

In the event that the office of the president becomes vacant, it was recommended that the vice-president be sworn in as Acting President within 90 days pending the election of a new president. The committee also adopted the principle rotation of political powers at the national and state levels and should be recognised by the constitution.

**Unicameral legislature**
The delegates opined that the current system encourages too much waste of government resources. The committee said its decision was based on the need to reduce the cost of the Senate to government, in addition to its inability to be thorough in some of its responsibilities such as the confirmation of president’s nominees for public offices.

The committee also recommended a tenure of office of four years for members of the legislature. Election to the legislature has no limit on number of terms a legislator can be re-elected, it was suggested. Furthermore, it was also recommended that election into the legislature should not be staggered to disallow vacuum at any point in time. The committee was, however, unable to conclude deliberation on the recommendation for the establishment of an agency that would be responsible for the screening prospective public officers.

<http://tribune.com.ng/confab/item/4481-confab-as-north-south-delegates-resolve-rift-over-resource-control/4481-confab-as-north-south-delegates-resolve-rift-over-resource-control>

[***Confab Considers 50 Percent Derivation, Devolution of Powers***](http://starconnectmedia.com/2014/04/25/confab-considers-50-percent-derivation-devolution-of-powers/)

[*25 Apr 2014*](http://starconnectmedia.com/2014/04/25/)

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[*0*](http://starconnectmedia.com/2014/04/25/confab-considers-50-percent-derivation-devolution-of-powers/#respond)

[*National conference recommendations*](http://starconnectmedia.com/tag/national-conference-recommendations/)

Members on the floor of the national conference

Members of the ongoing National Constitutional Conference have broken up into 20 standing committees to consider memoranda centred on devolution of powers among federating states, replacement of Ministry of Police Affairs with that of Home Land Security and setting up of National Guard to coordinates security forces so as to be able to tackle security issues confronting the nation.

The committees are also considering raising derivation contained in the constitution to 50 percent as a way of spurring the states into developing resources within their terrain for national development.

The 20 Standing Committees set up to deliberate on critical national issues and make recommendations have started collating reports of their sub-committees for final submission to the Conference in plenary. On Friday, the Committee on National Security headed by former Inspector General of Police, Muhammed Gambo Adamu Jimeta, spent hours in closed session deliberating a report submitted by Senator Bello Maitama Yusuf of the Sub-Committee on National Security.

Jimeta told journalists at the end of the close session that already, the report held a lot of promise as a good policy document on national security.
Deputy Chairman of the Committee and former Director General of the defunct Nigerian Security Organisation (NSO), Chief Albert Horsfall, described the report as a preliminary document that would enable the Committee come up with a blue-print which would in turn enable the security forces to perform better than they have done in the past.

He expressed confidence that the report if adopted, would guide the operational commanders in carrying out their assignment successfully.

Horsfall went down memory lane on critical security challenges and linked them up with the existing security practice and architecture; he pointed out that what is available today can be restructured to meet today’s present challenges.
He cited situations that brought about security changes all over the world; and using the September 9, 2011 attack on the United States as an instance, said that attack changed the structure and approach to national security worldwide.
The former DG stressed that security failure in Nigeria was as a result of improper coordination among the various security agencies; explaining that security issues arising from the local government, the state and the federal levels have not been properly coordinated among the security agencies.

He pointed out that unlike the envisaged chain of operation, everybody seems to be taking decisions without relating to the next level but that if properly handled, the flow of the chain could solve the community policing issue being discussed by the Committee.

It was learnt that serious recommendations aimed at strategically dealing with the country’s security problems were put forward by the Sub-Committee but such details and the position of the larger Committee after a closed session were not disclosed to the public.
However, highlights of the Sub-Committee recommendations touched on the need to set up a National Guard Force that should be responsible for border protection, internal conflict and special operations.

The Sub-Committee also recommended creation of the Ministry of Homeland Security Services to replace the existing Ministry of Police Services.
One recommendation that would lead to further debate was that of the serious need for community policing. Some members believe if accepted, it would pave the way for creation of state police.
It also recommended welfare and disciplinary commission which it said should be created to handle issues of motivation and discipline among personnel of security agencies.

A chain-link form of security operations from bottom to top and vice versa was recommended to enable everyone in a position to know to have access to required information that would ensure effective performance of security functions.
Bello was confident that if what they submitted would be accepted by the Committee and the Conference in plenary and eventually implemented by government, it would solve 90% of the security problems in Nigeria.
The Committee on National Security has 24 members and boasts of not less than 11 retired military personnel, nine of them retired generals; and three retired top police officers.

Some of them are retired Generals Zamani Lekwot; Alani Akinrinade; Muhammed Dan-Ali; Geofrey Ejiga; D. O. Idada Ikponmwen; Alex Mshelbwala; Paul Omu; Jeremiah Useni; Tony Nyiam; Joe Orji and Canice Ohadomere.
Besides the former IG, other retired police officers serving in the committee are retired Assistant Inspector General of Police, Bashir Albasu and the retired Commissioner of Police, Samuel Adetuyi.

The remaining ten members are former members of the National Assembly, former ministers, accomplished lawyers, former top security officers, among others.
The Committee on Political restructuring, after extensive deliberations, agreed that Nigeria shall retain a Federal system of government. They agreed that the core elements of the Federation shall be as follows:
1. There shall be a central government with States as the federating units
2. That Local Governments shall no longer be third tier of the Federation
3. That States that wish to, may create Local Governments, which shall be under the jurisdiction of the States
4. That the number, structure and form of Local Government shall be determined by the States

5. That any group of States may create a self-funding Zonal Commission to promote economic development, good governance equity, peace and security in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria
6. That without prejudice to States constituting the federating units, States that wish to merge may do so in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Provided that:

(a). A majority of two-thirds of all members in each of the Houses of Assembly of each of the States, in which such merger is proposed, support by resolution, the merger, and

(b). A referendum is conducted in each of the States proposing to merge with 75% of the eligible voters in each of those States approving of the merger, and each House of the National Assembly, by Resolution passed by a simple majority of membership of each of the Houses, approve of the merger.
The Committee is co-chaired by General Ike Nwachukwu and Honourable Mohammed Umara Kumalia.

In a Memorandum presented to the Committee on Law, judiciary and Human Rights and Legal reforms, Mr Femi Falana recalled that Sharia and Customary courts were not in the 1963 Constitution. He suggested that the courts be removed from the Constitution and should be legislated by State Governments. In reaction, a member referred to Section 6 of the 1999 Constitution and observed that the courts were listed as Courts of Record. He added that if Nigeria will allow full implementation of true Federalism, the Federating Units would eventually take over legislations on issues relating to Sharia and Customary Courts. However, after extensive deliberations, it was unanimously resolved that the status quo should remain.

The Committee on Agriculture during deliberations noted that subsidy policies were being muddled up thus making it difficult to implement. They also noted duplication of functions between the Federal and State Governments with more burden on the Federal Government while the states lack the ability to implement the policies.

On the issue of mechanised agriculture, some of the thematic issues raised include lack of trained manpower and mismanagement of funds voted for agriculture by government agencies. It was observed that land acquisition being solely vested in government may be dangerous as it raises issues of victimization and political witch-hunt. It also observed that cultural anomalies poses threat to land acquisition including some traditional systems in the south eastern part of Nigeria which do not allow women to inherit land.
The Committee again observed that biotechnology has a lot of protocol, the level of manipulation can do a lot of harm if not properly monitored.

A question was posed: to what extent is Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) acceptable? It noted in their discussion and note that the issue of cattle rustling is a major problem facing cattle breeding. It was noted that this also has serious security implications which need to be urgently tackled locally and within the sub region.
Issues under consideration in the Committee on Devolution of Power when it commenced sitting on Tuesday revolved around:

1. Whether members of the Committee agreed that Nigeria should remain united as a nation and whether there should be devolution of power (from the centre to the federating units in Nigeria).

2. Whether the committee Should first of all consider discussing the review of the Legislative list or start with resource control
3. Creation of sub-committees that would facilitate the work of members of the Committee.

4. Whether the committee should continue the discussion on resource control the next day or go ahead to open discussion on the review of the Legislative list.

5. Whether there was need for the committee to liaise with relevant committees of the conference whose work might have some relevance to the work of this committee.

The Committee then agreed that that Nigeria should remain united but that there should be devolution of power (from the centre to the federating units). Members decided to discuss resource control independent of the Legislative list. They agreed that each member of the Committee should be given an opportunity to discuss each thematic issue.

The committee agreed that there was a great need for some kind of Liaison or interface between the committee and any other committees of the conference deliberating on thematic issues that are closely related to that of the committee.

Most members of the Committee made contributions to the discourse on resource control. Some members were of the opinion that the 13% derivation formula as contained in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria be retained while some drew the attention to the fact that the Constitution states “not less than 13 %, and therefore suggested that it be increased to 50%.
Views were varied on the issue of resource control. While some members insisted that resources belong to the constituent states in which they are located; others claimed they belong to the Nigerian sovereign nation; while others believe that mineral resources belong to the communities in which they are found.

However, they pointed out that distinction should be made between the concepts of derivation and resource control. By Thursday, the Committee made marginal progress on the issues raised and hoped to discuss and resolve some of the contending areas when it resumes sitting on Monday.

<http://starconnectmedia.com/2014/04/25/confab-considers-50-percent-derivation-devolution-of-powers/>

Confab: Mixed reactions trail report of Land Tenure, Boundary Committee

**By Celestine Okafor  /***Politics Editor, Abuja*

**Debates,** applause and condemnation trailed the report of the Committee on Land Tenure Matters and National Boundaries on Thursday, as the National Conference sitting in Abuja opened discussions on the committee’s report.

While most of the delegates declared the various recommendations submitted by the committee as remarkable and daring, others said they were not implementable as they were drafted to favour certain classes of people or ethnic groups against the others.

High points of the committee’s recommendation was that the Land Use Act should be expunged from the constitution and replaced with new provisions that would guarantee the right of Nigerians to have access to land irrespective of ethnic origin.

Such removal, according to the committee, would also ensure the right of communities to have their land protected from human activities that would hinder or degrade the productivity of such land through such activities as pollution, flooding, among others.

The committee, headed by A. B. Mamman, with Oba Michael Adedeji as deputy, viewed the controversial Land Use Act as an attempt at codification of all laws in Nigeria pertaining to land administration.

It said before the Act came into effect, land belonged to specific owners or group of owners, families, or communities that could alienate, sell and dispose same without the requirement of obtaining any authorisation or ratification by the state government.

The committee noted that the original land tenure systems, in which the community exercised management and control powers, guaranteed that community members have access to land for farming, habitation and other economic activities.

Land ownership, it said, provided the foundation for agricultural and economic development of Nigeria and was supported by traditional land tenure systems.

With the introduction of the Land Use Act, stated the committee, land ownership became vested in the governor of a state and the local government within the area of the jurisdiction on which the land is situated.

<http://dailyindependentnig.com/2014/05/confab-mixed-reactions-trail-report-land-tenure-boundary-committee/>

**Confab committee proposes independent candidacy in polls**

JUNE 26, 2014 BY NAN [1 COMMENT](http://www.punchng.com/news/confab-committee-proposes-independent-candidacy-in-polls/#disqus_thread)

The National Conference Committee on Politics and Governance has recommended independent candidacy in the electoral system to expand the country’s political space.

A co-Chairman of the committee, Prof. Jerry Gana, made the recommendation while reading the committee’s report on Thursday in Abuja.

Gana said the absence of a provision for independent candidacy in the 1999 constitution had unnecessarily restricted the democratic space.

He said, “Every Nigerian, who meets the specified condition in the Electoral Act should be free to contest elections as an independent candidate.

“Accordingly, Section 221 of the 1999 constitution should be repealed and replaced as follows: ‘Every Nigerian, who meets the specified condition in the Electoral Act, should be free to contest any election as an independent candidate’.’’

On matters of party politics, Gana said the present party system was characterised by weak structures, lack of internal democracy and poor funding.

“The system is also characterised by the lack of accountability, absence of ideology and the overbearing role of godfathers,” he said.

To address the problem, Gana said the committee was proposing that the government should not fund any political party.

“Political parties should be funded through membership subscription, donations, sale of party cards, souvenirs and other fund raising activities,” the ex-minister of information said.

He added that the committee also proposed that as a requirement for registration by the Independent National Electoral Commission, a party must have a constitution stating clearly its ideology, policies and goals for the country.

Gana said the committee recommended that government should re-visit the salary structure of civil servants.

He said, “Pay civil servants well so that they can meet their basic obligations to address poverty and social insecurity problems. Government at all levels should reduce the cost of governance so as to have more money for capital development projects.’’

<http://www.punchng.com/news/confab-committee-proposes-independent-candidacy-in-polls/>

[M. NEWS Nigeria](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/) > [News](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/news/) > Confab adopts Diaspora voting, establishment of Commission

[**Confab adopts Diaspora voting, establishment of Commission**](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2014/06/25/confab-adopts-diaspora-voting-establishment-of-commission/)****

The National Conference on Tuesday adopted the report of its Committee on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora Matters for Diaspora voting and establishing of Nigerian-Diaspora Commission.

The committee’s report was presented by its Chairman, Prof. Ibrahim Gambari, a former UN Under-Secretary General.

The conference agreed that the constitution should be amended to enable law-abiding Nigerians resident abroad to be eligible to vote in Nigeria election.

It adopted the creation of the Nigerian-Diaspora Commission and that Nigerian International Passports should be valid for 10 years instead of the current five years.

It resolves that French Language be made compulsory in primary and secondary schools as a strategic foreign policy tool, while appointment of career and non-career diplomats should be 70 to 30 ratios.

The conference adopted the recommendation that Nigeria should continue to practice economic and citizens’ diplomacy as well as remain a non-aligned country to reaffirm its sovereignty.

It also adopted the recommendation that the Federal Government should come up with the policy of resettlement for Bakassi indigenes.

It also approved a recommendation that prisoners exchange between Nigeria and other countries should be on equal terms.

The conference adopted a recommendation that government should exercise caution on reduction of Nigeria’s missions abroad.

In adopting the above proposal, the committee noted that if Nigeria was to compete with South Africa and Egypt for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, it needed more missions to catch up with both countries.

The committee approved a recommendation that Nigeria should work toward the early introduction of a single currency in ECOWAS in order to promote trade and investment within the region.

NAN reports that the committee’s report was the 15th to be adopted by the conference.

<http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2014/06/25/confab-adopts-diaspora-voting-establishment-of-commission/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+PmNewsNigeriaFeed+%28PM+News+Nigeria%29>

# Confab in closed-door session over national security

**Twice**on Wednesday, the National Conference held closed-door sessions to discuss issues bordering on national security.

The first session, which started at about 9.30am, was meant to consider the report of the Conference Committee on National Security headed by a former Inspector General of Police, Muhammmed Gambo Jimeta, and former Director General of the National Intelligence Agency, Albert Horsfall.

As the Conference resumed in the afternoon to consider the recommendations contained in the report and some proposed amendments, information about plans by the Boko Haram to burn down 50 communities in Borno State was raised and discussed by the delegates.

As the discussion progressed, news of a bomb blast at a shopping complex in Abuja was received by the delegates. After deep discussions, the principal officers of the Conference agreed that a closed-door session to discuss the Boko Haram phenomenon would hold on Thursday morning.

However, the plan changed when Femi Falana, raised an objection to the arrangements and asked the Conference to reconsider its position and go into a close session immediately in view of the seriousness of the issues involved.

At this point, Chairman of the Conference and former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Idris Kutigi, mandated his deputy and former Minister of External Affairs, Bolaji Akinyemi, to cleared the gallery and proceeded with the closed-door session where delegates discussed freely on the Boko Haram insurgency.

The session started with a retired General who led the Conference through the strategies involved in the war against Boko Haram. He traced the history of the insurgency and dazed delegates with information on what should have been done at the beginning that were not done.

In addition to poor intelligence gathering, he said low morale among the soldiers from remuneration to kitting, to provision of ammunitions were responsible for failure in the war against Boko Haram.

He said in fighting war against a group that exists in splinters, a group whose membership exists principally in the imaginations, it would require extreme intelligence gathering and implementation without any attempt at politicking with facts.

<http://dailyindependentnig.com/2014/06/confab-closed-door-session-national-security/>

[P.M. NEWS Nigeria](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/) > [News](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/news/) > [National](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/news/national/) > Confab rejects reduction of voting age to 17

[**Confab rejects reduction of voting age to 17**](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2014/06/27/confab-rejects-reduction-of-voting-age-to-17/)

Published on June 27, 2014 by [pmnews](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/author/pmnews/)   ·   [No Comments](http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2014/06/27/confab-rejects-reduction-of-voting-age-to-17/#comments)

The National Conference on Thursday rejected the move to reduce voting age to 17 as well as inclusion of the principle of self determination in the Nigeria constitution was rejected.

It also voted against inducement of voters with money or materials on election day, adding that it should be portrayed as a criminal offence and perpetrators should be severely punished.

The conference also agreed that all unelected chairmen of local government councils often referred to as transition committee chairmen should be sanctioned by withholding their statutory allocations.

It added that such allocations should be withheld pending the conduct of elections into such local government areas.

The call to enact a law to presume all retired and current public office holders living beyond their legitimate earnings, guilty until they can prove their innocence was rejected.

The committee’s proposal for each state of the federation to be empowered by the constitution and to have their own constitution was however put on hold.

This was because the delegates could not arrive at a conclusion on the matter.

<http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2014/06/27/confab-rejects-reduction-of-voting-age-to-17/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+PmNewsNigeriaFeed+%28PM+News+Nigeria%29>

## [Nigerians in Diaspora Now Have Right to Vote - CONFAB](http://www.elombah.com/index.php/reports/23842-nigerians-in-diaspora-now-have-right-to-vote-confab)

Category: [REPORTS](http://www.elombah.com/index.php/reports)

Published on Wednesday, 25 June 2014 11:04

The National Conference has endorsed voting for Nigerians in diaspora for future elections in the country. This was

in a majority vote of 422 is to 280.

Delegates to the National Conference supported the idea in a clear voice vote there debunking the recommendation to deny that provision.

The conference considered the report of the Committee on Foreign Policy and Diaspora as well as inputs from delegates following which amendments were made and resolution reached empowering diaspora Nigerians to vote.

Nigerians living abroad have hailed the decision which was one of the key recommendations of the report of the Committee on Foreign Policy and Diaspora, considering it as a milestone in Nigeria law-making.

With this development Nigeria joins countries like Indonesia whose diasporans are empowered to vote while in the shores of other countries.

Another matter that drew the attention of Confab decision makers is the latest bombing of a public health college in Kano that killed 8 persons. The delegate representing the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Sani Zoro, grumbled that the Office of the President had displayed a gross sense of insensitivity in not condoling with the victims of the attack.

Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, Confab Deputy Chairman, however, watered down the observation as unsubstantial. He thereafter declared a moment of silence in honour of the victims evidently to ameliorate Mr Zoro.

Another report that caught attention of the delegates was that a total of 15,316 Nigerians are serving various jail terms, some even on death row, in some foreign countries.

The revelation was made by a South-East delegate, Mr Ihechukwu Madubuike, who made the disclosure while making his contribution to the debate on the report of the Committee on Foreign Policy and Diaspora Matters, at the plenary on Tuesday.

He also disclosed that 6,000 of those Nigerian citizens held in various countries are for drug related activities.

Most of the delegates, who spoke at the plenary took a swipe on the Federal Government for what they termed “defective foreign policies”, saying it was responsible for the poor and negative image accorded the nation broad.

The plenary therefore kick-started a motion towards prison swap that will see these Nigerians repatriated to serve out their sentences in home soil.

 <http://www.elombah.com/index.php/reports/23842-nigerians-in-diaspora-now-have-right-to-vote-confab>

The National Conference as a Terrain of Struggle, By Jaye Gaskia @jayegsakia

March 29, 2014

For better or for worse, whether we are conscious of it or not, the recently inaugurated National Conference is and has become a very hotly contested political process and institution, a theater of increasingly intense overt Class [Political] Struggle.

Why is this so? From its very beginning, social forces and social formations represented at the conference had begun to reach out, to announce the political demands of their platforms, to seek to build possible alliances, as well as to maneuver for domination of the conference.

Let us go through a series of hotly contested processes within the National conference to highlight the way and manner that this National Conference is fast becoming the main political arena of class struggle in the current period.

Each of the battles that have been waged have been won, lost or stalemated.  One of the very first battles was over the rules and procedures as a whole. Before the inauguration of the conference, a set of rules had been compiled, and printed out in booklet form, dated March 10th 2014. It did not read proposed draft rules; its title was very clearly put as the Rules of the National Conference. From this it was clear that a number of delegates were suspicious, and that it was possible to read into the printing & publication of the rules into booklets, a possible intent on the part of the government to present the published rules as a fait acompli; otherwise why was it not just typed out in A4 sheets, titled proposed draft rules, and presented to the delegates before being printed, published and dated? The first battle and victory was to get the rules to be subjected to the process of plenary deliberations and adoption.

Secondly there is also the major battle over how committees were to be constituted. Delegates fought for and won the right of delegates to not only play a determining role in the constitution of the conference committees, but also the right of committee members once constituted to elect their own presiding officers. This is a significant battle and victory in that it represented a successful process of reclaiming control over the National Conference proceedings by the delegates. Once we factor in the fact that the bulk of the work of the conference will be undertaken in the committees, the significance of this battle and victory becomes amplified. Why does this represent a process of reclaiming control over the conference? Because of the very fact that the convening authority is the FGN, and it had exercised that authority in appointing the presiding officers of the conference. There were speculations that the government and the appointed conference leadership had already prepared a list of committees and their presiding officers. The very obvious reluctance of the conference leadership to accept the decision of conference to have committees elect their presiding officers gave some credence to this speculation.

Again there has been a very hot contestation on the authority and mandate of the conference; and there have been angry defense of the existing constitutional order as well as angry assertion of the supremacy of the NASS and existing status quo over the National conference. These assertions have also been as hotly and angrily disputed, with an emergent notion of the autonomy of the conference by a few but increasing number of delegates. In this view the processes of the ongoing National Conference, depending on the eventual balance of forces and power within the conference, propelled by altered balance of power and forces outside the conference could lead to the emergence of a new constitutional order, even possibly the inauguration of a new social transformation process.

This very debate and contestation is very closely related and linked to the contestation over where sovereignty lies, with the state and its institutions; or with citizens. This sovereignty debate is reflected in the position around the call for or against a referendum as the mode of validating the outcome of the conference.

The contestations over supremacy and sovereignty will continue throughout the life of the conference and beyond; in particular with respect to what to do with the outcome of the conference when it has concluded.

Also related to the dispute and contest over the referendum is the contestation over whether the National Conference should be open to active participation of citizens through the submission of memos or not. Again forces in defense of the status quo came out opposed to participation of citizens through submission of memos. A Gain the forces of change on this matter won a clear victory with the overwhelming approval by conference to seek for memos from the public. The committees once constituted will continue to deliberate and receive memos simultaneously. Sections of the elite ruling class are scared and antagonistically opposed to any idea which they consider represent an opening for the intrusion of the masses into active political life in general, and active life of this very political national conference in particular.

We must add to these the contestation over press coverage. After long and again contested debates, conference expunged from the rules a clause which if retained would have meant effective gagging of the press. Furthermore a move to have some so-called executive sessions of conference plenary held behind closed doors and without media presence was also defeated.

Taken together, the debate on supremacy of the conference, on sovereignty, on referendum, on taking memos from citizens and on media presence and live press coverage go to the heart of the issue of popular participation in the conference, and popular ownership of the conference. S

And of course a major battle has crystalised around the basis for decision making in the conference; whether this should be on the basis of consensus or not is more or less now fully agreed. Conference delegates will try as much as possible to reach consensus on issues. But if the conference fails to reach consensus, as will happen with many fundamental issues, how is a binding decision to be reached? There are now two views being hotly contested, and over which the conference has stalemated during this week. These are whether decisions should be reached by a three-quarters majority as proposed in the rules; or by two-thirds as is being canvassed by a majority of delegates.

Although it is important and will be quite significant to aim for consensus on issues, but the very class character of interests forecloses the possibility of consensus in the class struggle every time or even many times.

A compromise of 70% maybe reached by the select committee now saddled with the responsibility of finding a way out of the impasse; and this may be agreed by the entire conference in plenary early next week.

Nevertheless, what is becoming clearer is that there is a broad range of interests within the conference across the political spectrum from the far right and ultra conservative forces, through the center to the far left. Furthermore these broad range of social forces are crystalising broadly into two emergent alliances engaged in a struggle over the present and future of Nigeria, and over the relationship between classes. One of the broad category is clearly engaged in a battle to conserve and preserve the status quo; while the other broad formation is engaged in a battle to transform, transcend and change, if not overcome the current status quo.

The very depth and intensity of this contestation by this emergent, fluid and dynamic broad alliances, which is at the moment not yet fully conscious of themselves; can be gauged by some of the unguarded utterances on the floor of the conference, the threats of walkouts, driven by panic and fear over the sudden and increasingly manifest realization that this conference is opening a Pandora box for the ruling elites; that it can go anywhere, and that it can lead to yet undetermined outcomes which will be very detrimental and unpalatable to the collective and factional interests of the thieving treasury looting ruling class.

It is because the National Conference as a contested Arena of political class struggle, because of the internal and external dynamic of the class struggle, that the National Conference retains its inherent character of a potential, that requires to be activated and realized.

It is in this sense that it is upto us to decide and determine whether this potential is worth activating and realizing through robust critical engagement with the content of the conference, with respect to the issues that will be hotly contested within the conference; or whether the focus should rather be a continued insistence that flies in the face of reality that this conference is a distraction, and therefore insist on continuing to engage with trivialities with respect to the form of the conference.

But whatever the choice we make individually and organizationally; let us be clear that it will amount to an engagement with the conference; with the fundamental difference being whether this engagement is with the fundamental issues or with trivialities; with the content of the conference or with its form.

On our path we have made a conscious decision to with; this conference’s potential is worth exploring, worth activating, worth realizing; and through a robust but critical, inside-outside, and during-after engagement with the issues and content of the conference as a process.

**Follow me on Twitter: @jayegsakia & @[DPSR]protesttopower; Interact with me on FaceBook: Jaye Gaskia & Take Back Nigeria**

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-terrain-struggle-jaye-gaskia-jayegsakia/>

Again, Resource Control divides National Conference Committee

April 28, 2014

**When it was obvious the committee would not be able to resolve the matter, Mr. Coomassie ruled that debate on it be suspended till the next sitting.**

The National Conference Committee on Devolution of Power has again failed to reach an agreement on resource control after a heated debate which lasted for more than an hour.

The debate largely say members of the committee split along north and south; with those from Northern Nigeria wanting the statusquo to remain and their counterparts from the South, wanting a change.

During the debate, Jack Tilley Gyado from Benue insisted that the issue should continue to be on the exclusive list but added that a mechanism be created to accommodate states.

While trying to calm delegates who were engaged in fierce disagreement over the issue, Mr. Tilley Gyado said, “We should return to the President’s speech in which he urged delegates to consider the unity of the country as paramount.”

A Southern delegate, Ankio Briggs, argued that mineral resources should be listed under the concurrent list to enable states to be involved in the extraction and management of the resources in their domains.

Ibrahim Mantu said the attitude of delegates did not reflect the high esteem Nigerians have for the Conference and urged them to show more patriotism and nationalism in dealing issues brought to their attention.

Jeremiah Useni called for the sitting to be adjourned to enable members meet, interact and agree on the position that would ultimately be presented when the committee reconvened.

Alternatively, he suggested that votes to be taken on the two motions before the committee.

When it was obvious the committee would not be able to resolve the matter, Mr. Coomassie ruled that debate on it be suspended till the next sitting.

Resource Control was expected to be a major issue for discussion at the conference. Many delegates, largely from the South, have insisted states producing resources such as oil get at least 50 per cent of the resource produced; a move largely opposed by Northern delegates.

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/resource-control-divides-national-conference-committee/>

Conference of Threats, Row and Deadlock, By Ibanga Isine

March 31, 2014

The National Conference will on Monday resume plenary sitting and will make spirited attempts to get the delegates resolve the stalemate over the voting procedure to be adopted by the Conference.

During the last two weeks of its sittings, the Conference had been dogged by disagreements bordering on mutual suspicion among delegates from the Northern and Southern parts of the country. While the North would want the country to sustain its current socio-political and national economic structures, the South has been pushing for wide-range reforms including resource control, true federalism and devolution of power.

Even when delegates are yet to resume debate in the agenda set by President Goodluck Jonathan while inaugurating the body, a palpable gang-up has begun to manifest between delegates from the two divides.

The issue in contention is the voting procedure to be adopted in reaching major decisions at the Conference. Based on the draft Conference Rules, decisions can only be taken by consensus but when this cannot be attained, a three-quarter of the delegates must vote for such a decision. Majority of delegates who contributed to the debate towards the amendment of the draft Rules spoke strongly in support of retaining the voting procedure as proposed by the Presidency.

They insist that if any change must be effected in the country, there was need for majority of Nigerians to accept such change. They also insist that only decisions reached through consensus and or supported by at least three-quarters of the delegates can get the support of all Nigerians.
But every delegate from the South, who spoke on the matter refused to buy the argument canvassed by their Northern counterparts. Mike Ozekhome, a Federal Government delegate from Edo State was the first to shot down the three-quarters voting procedure on the ground that it was bogus and unattainable.

In a debate reminiscent of the court room practice, Mr. Ozekohme used some of the gravest adjectives to describe the Rule in which 369 delegates out of 492 must vote in support of any decision to be taken at the Conference.

Mr. Ozekhome said, “My Lord, 75 per cent is bogus, it is ‘elephantide’ and very unattainable by every standard. I know a lot of issues will draw emotions and primordial sentiments in this hallowed chamber.

“When issues like state police, regionalism, devolution of power and others come up as they will; it will be difficult to get 75 percent to agree. The second problem is that we will be creating a tyrannical minority. It simply means that the minority could defeat a major decision and make it impossible for us to take any meaningful decision on any matter.”

Instead of retaining the bogus voting procedure, Mr. Ozokhome moved that a two-third majority vote that is used in global legislative practice, be adopted.

All the Southern delegates, who spoke on the issue, insisted that a two-third majority votes be used in taking decisions. Former Chairman of the People Democratic Party, PDP, Ahmadu Ali was one of the few prominent Northern figure who supported the use of two-third majority votes. Ali, who said he didn’t envy the position of the Conference Chairman, Idris Kutigi, argued that no meaningful decision will be taken if the three-quarter voting procedure is adopted.

At the time the Conference adjourned on Wednesday noon, the leadership was unable to push through a consensus on the matter. Kutigi had appointed 50-delegates representing groups and interests to form a consensus group. The group had been meeting and it seems a unified position has been adopted and will be presented during plenary on Monday.

From the grapevines, the consensus group is said to have adopted 70 percent voting formula for the Conference but Kutigi may still find it hard to get the disputing delegates to accept this. The level of success to be attained by the Conference is closely tied with the voting formula that delegates agree upon.

If Kutigi is able to push through and get the delegates to agree on a reasonable voting procedure to be adopted, then the work of the Conference is partly completed. Debates on issues like Resource Control, Devolution of Power, State Police, State Creation and True Federalism would likely result in verbal outbursts and some delegates may even resort to fisticuffs to express their views.

Nigerians should therefore, brace up to witness the good, the absurd and abhorrent in the coming weeks. The Conference will be a theatre of pleasant and unpleasant surprises. With threats of pulling out of Nigeria and joining his subjects in the Cameroon by a prominent leader like the Lamido of Adamawa, Aliyu Mustapha, there is no end to intrigues and power-play as combatants from the North and Southern Nigeria dig their trenches and prepare to take the soul of the country.

Very soon, voices will be heard from the creeks and other locations where Nigerians have formed rag-tag groups to fight the perceived enemies of their interest and regions. We only pray that the Conference does not end with an avoidable disaster. We pray and hope against hope.

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/conference-threats-row-deadlock-ibanga-isine/>

Committee on Public Service recommends part-time legislature

May 13, 2014

The Committee on Public Service yesterday said legislators at both State and Federal levels should be on part-time basis and their remunerations should be comparable to other arms of government.

The committee also recommended the amendment of the portion of the constitution that requires the president to appoint at least one minister from each state to read “not more than one minister from each state.”

By this, the number of ministers has therefore been reduced from 42 to 36.

It also recommended the full implementation of the Integrated Personnel Payroll System (IPPS) to include the military, paramilitary, judiciary and the legislature. On budget reform, the committee recommended that projects should have terminal dates and not be perpetually on the budget.
The Millennium Tower and the Lokoja-Abuja road which have been on-going for about 13 and 8 years respectively were cited as examples.
The Committee also wants the National Framework for monitoring and evaluating budget to be made more functional.

Also, the committee on Economy, Trade and Investment also met to fine-tune the reports of its various sub-committees as members expect the acting Governor of the Central Bank who is billed to interact with them tomorrow.

General Anthony Ukpo suggested that government should invest in areas that do not have immediate commercial interest value like the space program. He also suggested that government should strengthen regulation.

Meanwhile, most of the other Committees have already completed their job and are collating reports which would be submitted to the secretariat of the National Conference before the end of the week.

Source: [**Daily Trust**](http://dailytrust.info/news/23927-c-ttee-recommends-part-time-legislature)

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/committee-public-service-recommends-part-time-legislature/>

President Jonathan’s Remarks at the Inauguration of The National Conference

March 18, 2014

Read Mr. Jonathan’s full speech below:

1.          I am delighted to welcome you all to the inauguration of this historic National Conference which promises to be another significant landmark in our efforts to strengthen national unity and consolidate democratic governance in our beloved country.

2.          I also believe that this National Conference is coming at a very appropriate time. Having just celebrated the first centenary of our country, the most compelling task before us, as we move ahead and contemplate what our nation will be at the end of its second century, is to lay a much stronger foundation for faster development.
3.          This we can achieve by building a more inclusive national consensus on the structure and guiding principles of state that will guarantee our emergence as a more united, progressive and prosperous nation.

4.          In our history as a political entity, we have experienced highs and lows but have always forged ahead. To my mind, the fact that we have weathered   all storms and continued with the mission of evolving a truly national identity signifies that we are going in the right direction.

5.          The strongest nations in the world today also went through their own formative stages; some for decades and others for centuries. We must learn from them that nationhood will not happen overnight, especially given the circumstances of our birth as a nation.

6.          History also teaches that nation-building is a journey of dedication, commitment, diligence, perseverance and patriotic vision. To be successful, nation-builders must continually strive to evolve better and more inclusive societies in which every citizen is a proud and committed stakeholder.

7.          It was with this objective in mind that we set up the Presidential Advisory Committee (PAC) on the National Conference in October last year and charged its members with the responsibility of designing the framework and modalities for a productive National Conference.

8.          The Committee which submitted its Report in December, 2013, was able to reach out to all Nigerians and various interest groups, socio-political groupings, regional and religious elements, professionals, civil society, the organised private sector, labour, youth, women and others to ascertain their views on the initiative.

9.          The Presidential Advisory Committee established that there was indeed, a national consensus for this conference to be convened immediately, to meet the yearnings and aspirations of our people.

10.      The National Conference is therefore being convened to engage in intense introspection about the political and socio-economic challenges confronting our nation and to chart the best and most acceptable way for the resolution of such challenges in the collective interest of all the constituent parts of our fatherland.

11.      This coming together under one roof to confer and build a fresh national consensus for the amicable resolution of issues that still cause friction amongst our people must be seen as an essential part of the process of building a more united, stronger and progressive nation.

12.      We cannot continue to fold our arms and assume that things will straighten themselves out in due course, instead of taking practical steps to overcome impediments on our path to true nationhood, rapid development and national prosperity.

13.      For many years we have discussed and argued over various issues concerning our national existence and well-being. Much of this national discourse has been conducted through the mass media, both print and electronic. More recently, the advent of the age of ICT and social media has greatly enlarged the space for the discussion of our country’s future.

14.      Many more young and articulate  Nigerians who previously had little access to the traditional mass media have now joined the conversation, motivated by patriotic concern for good governance, peace, stability, justice, equity, fairness and the harmonious co-existence of the diverse groups that make up our great nation.

15.      Dear Compatriots, my administration is convening this National Conference today because we believe that we must assume responsibility for ensuring that the long-running national debate on the best way forward for our country is not in vain.

16.      It is our expectation that participants in this conference will patriotically articulate and synthesize our peoples’ thoughts, views and recommendations for a stronger, more united, peaceful and politically stable Nigeria, forge the broadest possible national consensus in support of those recommendations, and strive to ensure that they are given the legal and constitutional backing to shape the present and the future of our beloved fatherland.

17.      In inaugurating this national conference today, we are not unmindful of the argument of those who say that we do not need such a conference since we already have an elected Parliament and an elected Government in place.

18.      As cogent as that argument may sound, I have chosen to act on the sincere conviction that in the truly democratic nation we are striving to build, we must never ignore the loudly expressed views of the majority of ordinary Nigerians.

19.      I have heard that majority say, that we need to rebuild trust by involving them in the process of developing a guiding document of our national political relationships which is more acceptable to all sections of the country. I have heard our people say that we need to openly and frankly discuss our problems and seek acceptable solutions instead of allowing them to fester and remain sources of perennial conflict.

20.      I have also heard them say that, as the elected representatives of our people, we must never arrogate to ourselves all knowledge and wisdom regarding the development of our country.

21.      And I am in full agreement with our people. The power we hold is, without question, in trust for the people. Sovereignty belongs to the people. Their voices must be heard and factored into every decision we take on their behalf.

22.      This National Conference is a very important avenue for the voices of our people to be heard. Our people have yearnings and desires that need to be discussed. Their representatives at this conference are neither usurping the role of the National Assembly nor the Executive. They are complementing us in our march towards a greater and stronger union.

23.      Over the years, well-meaning Nigerians have drawn attention to inadequacies in our current constitution. Some have described it as a military-inspired document which does not take into full consideration the genuine desires and wishes of the people.

24.      The phrase in the preamble that says “we, the people,” has been variously criticised as being misleading because, according to the critics, the constitution was not written by the people.  There are also those who believe that the constitution is not our problem but the political will to faithfully implement it for the peace and progress of Nigeria.

25.      While opinions on the matter can be as diverse as rain showers, I believe that irrespective of our personal views on the issue, no one can deny the fact that every constitution is a living document that needs to be revised and improved upon from time to time. The United States, which is the model democracy in the eyes of many, has amended its constitution 27 times since it was first adopted in 1787.

26.      Some of our compatriots also believe that because we have held several conferences in the past, we do not need to hold another one. I do not share that view at all.

27.      A deeper look will reveal that the challenges we faced before each of the preceding national conferences were different. The challenges of 1956 are certainly not the challenges of 2014, and definitely not the challenges that the nation will face in years to come. It makes sense, therefore, that as the challenges before us evolve, we must be constant and proactive in our search for fresh solutions. We cannot continue to proffer yesterday’s solutions for today’s problems.

28.      This conference is open for us to table our thoughts and positions on issues, and make recommendations that will advance our togetherness. The issues range from form of government, structures of government, devolution of powers, revenue sharing, resource control, state and local government creation, boundary adjustment, state police and fiscal federalism, to local government elections, indigeneship, gender equality and children’s rights, amongst others.

29.      We must not approach these issues with suspicion and antagonism. Rather, we should be open-minded and work to achieve what is best for Nigeria. Even though you come to the Conference as nominees and representatives of different interest groups, I urge you all to make a more united, stronger, indivisible and prosperous Nigeria your preoccupation and reference point at this national gathering.  Whatever the pressures on you may be, I call upon you to put the best interest of Nigeria before all other sectional or group interests.

30.      Indeed, I am quite worried when I hear people say that some participants in this National Conversation are coming here to defend and promote ethnic or clannish agenda. It is very regrettable that there are persons who believe that we cannot undertake any collective task in our country without the hindrance of ethnic rivalry even after 100 years of nationhood.

31.      This conference gives us an opportunity to prove such persons wrong and I believe it will. As we start a new century of nationhood, we have an obligation to reshape and redirect our country for the benefit of our children. There should be no room for divisive cleavages and ethnic jingoism. There should be no room for selfish considerations that defeat the purpose of national progress. There should be room only for the national interest.

32.      In the 60s, our country was ranked along with some developing countries including India, Malaysia and South Korea. Today, those countries have moved far ahead of us in several areas. My expectation is that the outcome of this Conference will be a positive turning point for our country’s development. We must seize this opportunity to cement the cleavages and fault lines that tend to separate us.   We must re-launch our country.

33.      I know the task before you is onerous; but there must be only one winner, and there can only be one winner if we do everything right, and that winner must be Nigeria. I urge you therefore to focus strictly on the Nigerian Agenda.

34.      I expect that, as persons of integrity and honour, you will do nothing in this Conference that will undermine our efforts and desire to build a truly great nation.  I also expect that your discussions will be informed only by the noblest of instincts and persuasions.

35.      Our sole motivation for convening this conference is the patriotic desire for a better and greater nation. We are determined that things must be done in a way and manner that will positively advance that objective.

36.      While we recognise that groups and communities are the building blocks of our nation, we must also emphasise that we need one another to build the solid and prosperous country of our dreams.

37.      We cannot join hands together to build with a collective vision if we continue to harbour negative biases and prejudices against ourselves.

38.      Yesterday’s prejudices should die with yesterday. Today is a new day. This is the dawn of a new era. This is an opportunity to think anew. We must jettison the poisonous mind-sets of the past, which were built on unhealthy competition among our diverse groups and peoples.

39.      We need a new mind and a new spirit of oneness and national unity. The time has come to stop seeing Nigeria as a country of many groups and regions. We have been divinely brought together under one roof. We must begin to see ourselves as one community. We are joined together by similar hopes and dreams as well as similar problems and challenges. What affects one part of the community affects the other.

40.      An average Nigerian sees every part of the country as home. Let us seize the opportunity of this Conference to do more to further turn our diversity and plurality into unique national resources for strength and greatness.

41.      I have always affirmed that our ability to stay together despite our acknowledged differences, when other countries are finding it difficult to meet that challenge, is a powerful statement by Nigeria to the world on the virtues of tolerance and unity.

42.      It is a strong and compelling statement in a world much afflicted by strife and violence.  We must sustain it. We must not allow the antagonists of unity and togetherness to prevail. We must work ceaselessly to remain one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity, as our National Anthem says.

43.      Honourable Chairman and distinguished delegates, I urge you not to be under any illusions as you begin your assignment. The task that lies ahead of you is formidable. Over the coming weeks, you will be confronted with complex and emotive issues; strong views will be expressed by opposing sides and some disagreements will, in all likelihood, be intense.

44.      I sincerely believe, however, that we can overcome all obstacles to true national unity if we dig deep into the recesses of our national character and look up to God Almighty for wisdom, guidance and the generosity of spirit we need to ensure the success of this conference.
45.      Once again, I wish to express my appreciation to the Nigerian people who have, without hesitation, accepted dialogue as a means of resolving all differences and tensions that may exist in the country, and therefore, given their unequivocal support for this National Conference.

46.      Let me at this point thank the National Assembly for introducing the provision for a referendum in the proposed amendment of the Constitution. This should be relevant for this Conference if at the end of the deliberations, the need for a referendum arises. I therefore urge the National Assembly and the State Houses of Assembly to speed up the Constitutional amendment process especially with regard to the subject of referendum.

47.      I thank the Chairman, Senator Femi Okurounmu and members of the Presidential Advisory Committee for the arduous work they undertook to prepare for the Conference.  I also thank the Chairman of this National Conference, Justice Idris Legbo Kutigi, the principal officers and all the distinguished patriots and representatives of our people who have taken time off their busy personal schedules to serve the cause of national unity and progress at this conference.

48.      I am confident that we are embarking on a landmark journey that will make us stronger as a nation if we undertake it with all sense of purpose and sincerity. Let us do that which is selfless, purposeful and patriotic so that history will remember us for having served our nation well.

49.      In conclusion, I urge all officials and participants in the national conference to work extra hard to ensure that their deliberations are completed on schedule, well ahead of the schedule of events for the next general elections already announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

50.      Let me again repeat what I have been saying that Goodluck Jonathan has no personal agenda in convening this national conference.

51.      Ladies and Gentlemen, I now have the honour and privilege of declaring the National Conference open, for the good of our Nation and to the glory of God Almighty who has brought us together.

52.      I thank you all.

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-president-jonathans-remarks-inauguration-national-conference/>

Corruption, insecurity, religion and ethnic issues top debate

April 3, 2014

***“Nigeria as it is today requires a new architecture”.*** – Ray Ekpu

As the debate on President Goodluck Jonathan’s speech entered its third day on Wednesday, focus started shifting from issues raised in the speech to matters central to the National Conference and what to make of them.

Opinions and counter-opinions flowed as delegates deliberated on issues of corruption, security, economic development or the lack of it, religion, and ethnic nationality with focus on the minority and majority question.

While some of the speakers suggested that corrupt officers, especially those in public service, should face death sentence, others agreed that economic development with the practical consequence of job creation will check the issue of insecurity nationwide.

Former Secretary to Government of the Federation, Chief Olu Falae said Nigeria’s problem started when the military, in 1966, murdered regional government which had served as a tonic for development of zones across the country.

He also stated that abolition of Parliamentary system of government where power was with the entire cabinet and replacement with Presidential system where powers lie with an individual had caused serious political crises in the country.

Femi Falana, SAN, in a moving contribution, said the Conference, though not sovereign, has provided Nigerians with a window of opportunity “to find out why we are poor in the midst of plenty while a microscopic minority of the population is rich and smiling to the bank.”

He said corruption has endangered the corporate existence of Nigeria, and advocated political justice, social justice and environmental justice.

On the issue of ethnic minority and majority, Chief Edwin Clark pleaded with delegates to give it priority during committee discussions so that at the end of the Conference, existing controversies arising from it would become a thing of the past.

He said the natural solution to the problem remains the realization that no tribe is greater than the other, “no one is a first class citizen, and no one is a second class citizen. Everyone is qualified to rule this country.”

It was his view that in the absence of tolerance, the dream of nationhood would be difficult to achieve; “if you are a southerner and the other person is a northerner, if you cannot live together, then there will be no Nigeria.”

Dalhatu Bashir from Jigawa State noted that at creation, Nigeria came with a promise and it was that promise that moved the country in the right direction.

For instance, he said the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo man was born in Zungeru in northern Nigeria, grew up in Igboland but went ahead to win election in the heart of Yorubaland.

It was his view that if at the end, the outcome of the National Conference makes it possible for any Nigerian living anywhere in Nigeria to have equal rights of citizenship, then it would justify the reasons it was convened.

Describing the President’s speech as stimulating, comprehensive and forthright, Ibrahim Bunu said delegates should not fail to negotiate and should not negotiate out of fear since Nigeria belongs to everyone.

On security, Abubakar Chika Adamu from Niger State said, “Nigeria is at war with itself. Security remains our greatest challenge. We must stop playing politics with it. We here must do what we ought to do and leave the President to do what he has to do to solve this problem.

On corruption, he observed that Nigerians have moved from mere stealing to looting and have graduated from looting to mass looting. His suggestion was that a soft-landing should be created for those who stole public funds to return them without being prosecuted.

“We must be serious about fighting corruption,” said Magayi Dambatta; adding that for Nigeria to succeed in this, there was need to reorganize the anti-corruption agencies followed by diligent prosecution.

A representative of Nigerian youth, Ben Dontoye demanded legal backing to the adoption of capital punishment against corruption. He believed this would be the only way to drive fear into people who have taken to corrupt practices as a trade.

Former Inspector General of Police, Ibrahim Coomasie cited the absence of sincere leadership at different tiers of governance as one problem that Nigerians are worried about.

Added to this, he said, was the intolerable level of insecurity in the country. He suggested that agencies constitutionally charged with maintenance of security in the country should be restructured and funded.

Retired General Muhammed Mansur Dan Ali informed the Conference that out of the 36 states of Nigeria, 33, if not more have soldiers deployed to the streets.

He said the National Conference should recommend complete restructuring of the Armed Forces of Nigeria and other security agencies for effective performance of their duties.

Senator Seidu Dansadau made one appeal in his comment: that Jonathan should ensure that the recommendations of the Conference are implemented and not allowed to go the way of other recommendations in the past.

He said it was time for delegates to strip themselves naked, “not just to say that we believe in the indivisibility of Nigeria but to practically demonstrate it.”

His position was supported by Professor Godini Dara who insisted that the lofty ideas and recommendations expected at the end of the Conference must be implemented to free Nigeria from the grips of economic apartheid.

On corruption, he said there was need to establish ethical standards; and on the economy, Dara strongly urged the President to free Nigeria from what he called the witchcraft of the World Bank while industrialization should take the front seat both in budgeting and planning.

Both Illiya Danga and Burus Daleng remarked on the courageous decision of the President to go ahead with the Conference in spite of oppositions and wished that with the same courage, the President would implement the decisions of the Conference without fear or favour.

Sale Dauda from Bauchi State attributed insurgency in every part of the country to the failure of states and local government who he said were totally dependent on what the federal government would do instead rising to their responsibilities of providing leadership and governance.

He said in some parts of the country, it has become difficult and even impossible to buy a piece of land for the purpose of building a church for worship and that those responsible for such prohibition were the elite.

Francis Doukpolagha from Bayelsa State told the Conference that the failure of the Nigerian State stemmed from the fact that democracy has become government of the people by the people but not for the people.

Ignatius Kevin Edet lamented what he called inequality and imbalance in the creation of local government areas in the country and urged the Conference to use the opportunity of the dialogue to correct the anomaly.

He suggested the application of capital punishment as a check against corrupt practices by public office holders, a position enormously canvassed for by other speakers.

Correct census as a basis for revenue sharing and infrastructural development was suggested by Charles Edosomwan, SAN, from Edo State who also emphasized that “we need to put power in the strata of government that is close to the people.”

Veteran journalist, Ray Ekpu, said the President’s speech constituted a new thesis for the reconstruction of Nigeria and that Nigeria as it is today requires a new architecture.

Ekpu noted that Jonathan seemed like someone who does not want “this house to fall,” still he said the house called Nigeria was too rickety and weather-beaten to be left on the wish list of a permanent structures.

Ekpu said for a country that has had 14 different administrations in 53 years, “that is cyclical stability. There is no way a country can grow in this manner.”

For Chief Chris Eluemunoh from Anambra State, “the Igbos have no other country than Nigeria; therefore the unity of this country is paramount to us. This unity must be anchored on equity and justice.”

Dr Osahon Enabulele of the Nigerian Medical Association proposed a massive national health policy that would cater for the health needs of the rural dwellers.

In addition, the NMA chief suggested that “a time has come for us to look at the mental and medical fitness of our political leaders,” as a way of ensuring that they are fit and proper to occupy public offices.

Dr Silas Eneyo from Rivers State likened Nigeria to a building with collapsed pillars and advised: “Let us not pretend to be painting a building whose pillars are collapsing.”

It was his view that the pillars of any federation lie in its justice and equity system and that the Conference has provided the delegates opportunity to rebuild the house with sound ideas and recommendations.

Gary Enwo Igariwe said Nigeria has been bleeding for sometime, has gone on its knees and though it wants to stand, it was actually going down. He urged delegates to identify reasons for conflicts and address them.

He cautioned against selective solution, “when you solve a problem in a particular area and ignore the ones in another area, you have not done anything; you are merely relocating the problem.”

He said most of the problems can be easily resolved through restructuring of the country; advising that delegates should leave their ethnic standards and discuss Nigeria.

Professor Eddy Erhagbe told the delegates that for Nigeria to move ahead, the bottom-line remains good governance because “corruption is not regional, it is not ethnic; corruption is an elite conspiracy.”