The battle to make fuel prices affordable and accessible at the National Conference; a post mortem, by Jaye Gaskiya

June 4, 2014

For the avoidance of doubt, the battle around so-called fuel subsidy, reignited by the recommendation of the committee on public finance of the National Conference 2014, is in reality a battle over several fundamental issues that define a particular terrain of the class struggle between the ruling and subordinate classes in our society.

Let us take the arguments of the proponents of removal of the subsidy one by one: First, they say the subsidy bill is burden on the Federation account and undermines the ability of the state to fund development because it takes up between 30 and 40% of the national budget.

This is absolutely true, but it explains nothing. The assertion fails to explain why the subsidy bill has grown exponentially from under N400bn in 2005 to about N600bn in 2010, and the scandalous bill of N2.5tn in 2011. Nor does it explain how after the experience of the January Uprising of 2012, that same bill dropped to about N1.3tn in 2012, and dipped below N1.2tn in 2013. Correspondingly it also fails to explain why the amount of imported refined fuel for daily consumption, skyrocked from less than 30 million litres per day in 2010 to 60 million litres per day in 2011, and then dropped to 40 million litres per day in 2012 and 38 million litres per day in 2013!

The reason for these gyrations in daily consumption rates and the consequent gyrations in the subsidy bill is simply because these figures are not scientifically determined figures, have no bearing with actual reality, but have just been arrived at through the corruption mediated interactionS between the managers of the sector, political office holders, and the oil cabal at the heart of the refined products importation regime.

Fraudulent and corrupt practices aided and abetted by officials of the state and its relevant MDAs, including such practices as round tripping, over invoicing, claiming subsidy for ghost products, and getting paid for demurrage that ought not to have been in the first place; all of these are at the heart of the corruption that has characterized the management of the subsidy regime.

The question to ask is how is it possible for all of these to be happening and to be known, and yet no one has been jailed, and no one has lost their jobs, and as well no monies have been refunded? The only logical conclusion that can be drawn is that this empire of sleaze enjoys state protection. If this is so, this then becomes a failure of the state and its institutions, and a failure of governance, and as such ought to be tackled as a battle against criminality, not as a war against the poor to make life more miserable for the more than 70% of our citizens who live in poverty, through astronomical, and incessant increases in the price of fuel and its consequent deleterious impact on inflation, cost of living, and unemployment situations in the country.

A second argument is that the subsidy does not benefit the poor, and that the super-rich benefit disproportionately. Part of the argument for this is that the product is sold at far higher than the subsidized price in many places across the country. The reasoning is that if subsidy is removed everyone will now pay the same price across the country. Again this is a fallacious argument. There is in existence a petroleum products equalization fund Act, that established an equalization fund, from which marketers benefit to cover logistics cost in order to ensure that the product is sold at the same price across the country. The scheme is funded through a surcharge on every litre of fuel or product bought. The problem is that although this surcharge has been dutifully collected, and marketers get the necessary bridging funds from this scheme, nevertheless they turn round to sell the products at more than the official price even after benefiting from the fund. This is clear cut case of criminality, which ought to be tackled and addressed as such. It is also another manifestation of the failure of the state and of governance; a collective failure of the ruling class in general.

Haven said this it is however important to state very clearly that the removal of the so-called subsidy will not lead to equalization of prices across the country; in fact the price in the rural and remote places will simply go up by the same factor that prices in the cities would have gone up. The problem is not with the subsidy, it is with the sharp practices of marketers and of officials who are supposed to enforce the law and regulate the sector, as well as with the inadequate nature of the infrastructure for distribution of the products.

Our argument has always been that governance failure and the complicity of the state with criminality and criminal breach of laws and the constitution are significant parts of the problems that require being addressed.

Now, let us turn to the question of why there is a subsidy in the first place. The subsidy exist because we import refined products [the only member state of OPEC to rely on importation of refined products to meet its domestic needs]; and also because the Naira is floated against the dollar which is the currency in which the refining and transportation is costed. Thus as long as we continue to import refined products, and the naira keeps depreciating against the dollar for so long will the price of the product continue to rise. So if subsidy is removed, the price of the product will keep rising in significant proportions almost every month. The consequence of such is that the product will become absolutely unaffordable, become priced out of reach of ordinary citizens, or the state will be forced to keep intervening to keep stabilize prices and prevent social unrest, and thus continue to incur new subsidy bills.

The reason why we rely on importation is because our refineries are comatose inspite of the tens of billions of dollars already spent on Turn Around Maintenances of the refineries, which turned nothing around other than the pockets and savings accounts of the fraudsters who have undermined the processes. So again corruption aided by state officials has deprived us of having the necessary domestic refining capacity that can put a definitive end to the necessity for importation, and therefore of subsidy.

The solution therefore lies not in the removal of subsidy, but in the creation of the enabling environment to ensure that we acquire adequate domestic refining capacity. This could entail both public and private sector investment in refineries.

And herein lies the huge problem, the most significant indication of the collective ineptitude of this treasury looting ruling class, and the most obvious manifestation of their preference of pillage of our wealth   over national interest.

Enter the National Conference and the recommendation of its committee on Public Finance for the total removal of oil subsidy without addressing the structural problems and criminality in the sector. With their recommendation, the battle line became drawn between the ruling and subordinate classes. The joint delegation of labour and civil society organisations and their allies entered the battle, and intervened with their motion.

The motion essentially contained the offer made to government, but which the government rejected at the height of the January Uprising.

The summary of the position, captured in the motion requires a period of 3 years during which conditions will be put in place to acquire adequate domestic refining capacity and hence end the necessity for importation; tackle the corruption and criminality in the sector, by prosecuting and jailing offenders and recovering stolen funds; and also ensuring that the equalization fund act is enforced and those found in breach punished. The motion also called for the deployment of appropriate and already existing and available technology to determining accurately the daily consumption needs for petroleum products.

This position and motion eventually became the basis of a second compromise motion, which was carried on condition that it included the prayers of the original motion.

Why was it important for the labour and civil society coalition at the National Conference to engage the ruling class in this battle? This is because of the essential character and significance of the product within the national economy. Given the epileptic state of public power supply, and the fact that almost 80% of power/energy required by households, businesses and industry in both formal and informal sector is self-generated; given that more than 90% of small and medium scale businesses and households depend on petrol powered generators to generate their own energy; and given the high poverty rate at 70% and unemployment rate at 30% in the population; it is of utmost economic, social and political importance and significance that the product should not only be available, but that it should also be affordable and accessible. The alternative will be economic collapse and chaos.

Finally there is the need to comment briefly on the last minute manourvers by certain elements which nearly prevented victory, and ultimately tried to undermine the significance of the victory so won. The so-called compromise motion sponsored by certain individuals at the last minute, which although was in reality a re-writing of the original motion by the labour-civil society platform, which tried to water down the pungency of the original demands and prayers, which sort to supplant the original motion, and which was thrust on delegates almost at the last minute, very nearly cost us the victory.

This is so because while this new motion carried a neutral title, it was sponsored by certain individuals, not part of the labour-civil society bloc, included the names of civil society delegates as sponsors, and also excluded the names of labour delegates as sponsors.

Two very critical things were wrong with this approach; first it is capable of undermining the trust between the labour and civil society partners in the bloc; and secondly it ceded the strategic positioning of the labour-civil society bloc, as the primary and core platform for defending the interests of the popular masses to those who can be described at best as fair weather friends.

For instance the new motion rather than the original motion has gone into the records as the primary motion; the role played by and the significance of the labour-civil society bloc, is subsumed as mere appendage to the last minute posturings of others. And just as with the June 12 struggle we now risk a situation where the history of this battle will be rewritten, and the leadership and central role played by the bloc will be subordinated to the mythical role of a few individuals of the ruling elites.

If there is one lesson taught and reinforced by this battle and victory, it is that even the ruling class and elements of the ruling elites recognize the power and pungency of the popular movement represented by this labour-civil society Bloc; that because of this recognition on their part, they will always seek to curtail, or co-opt our movement and platform, in order to deflect from its pungency and lay the basis for future historical distortions.

It is up to us to safe-guard our alliance, and to prevent ourselves from pandering to the camouflaged interests of elite forces.

For the avoidance of doubt, what changed the tide was the reasoned and articulated intervention of the Labour-Civil Society Bloc, articulated in the Original Motion titled; ‘Motion by Joint Labour and Civil Society Delegation and their Allies on Petroleum Subsidy Removal’. This motion was in circulation before the beginning of consideration of the report, it was well received, and it was in the popular domain more than 24 hours before the new motion which although paraphrased the original, nevertheless sought to supplant it.

To conclude, the battle over fuel prices; whether it should be affordable or not; whether it should be accessible or not; and the conditions under which we can achieve both affordability and accessibility; is a concrete manifestation of our decision and determination to engage the battle with the ruling class on the terrain of this National Conference.

If we were not there, they would have passed the recommendation and endorsed hiking of prices without tackling the social and economic malaise at its root.

 <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/battle-make-fuel-prices-affordable-accessible-national-conference-post-mortem-jaye-gaskiya/>

National Conference gives conditions for removal of fuel subsidy

June 4, 2014

**The Conference approved the enactment of Ill-Gotten Gains Act to check corruption**

The National Conference on Tuesday adopted a proposal asking the Federal Government to ensure that new refineries are built within three years and the existing ones repaired to operate in full capacity before the subsidy on petroleum products is removed.

The three years will be from the day the Conference Report is accepted by the government.

The Conference also voted for the enactment of an Act which will compel Nigerians who acquire property above their means to account for their source of wealth.

These are the some of the recommendations adopted at the end of debate on its Committee on Public Finance and Revenue. They are subject to the approval of President Goodluck Jonathan.

The debate on the report of the Committee chaired by a former governor of Kebbi State, Adamu Aliero, began on Monday with some of the delegates canvassing for the total removal of the subsidy on the petroleum products while others favoured gradual removal. Others rejected the removal outright.

The Committee had recommended the immediate removal of subsidy saying that not only was it enriching a few Nigerians against the masses, it was a major drain on the nation’s lean resources.

The pattern of the debate continued on Tuesday until a motion was brought by the National Chairman of Labour Party, LP, Dan Nwanyanwu, and 23 others demanding that some conditions be met before subsidy was removed.

In the motion, Mr. Nwanyanwu gave the conditions as follows:

-That the Federal Government shall within five years build new refineries and repair existing ones to full capacity;

-That private sector entrepreneurs who have already been granted licences to build new refineries shall, within five years build such new refineries or automatically forfeit such licences to enable other participants who are ready and willing to build such refineries within a period of five years the opportunity to do so; and

-That upon fulfilment of the preceding conditions, the Federal Government shall be free to remove any existing subsidy from petroleum products.

However, a delegate from Zamfara State and former senator, Saidu Dansadau, proposed an amendment to the motion to provide for three years instead of five years demanded in the motion. The amendment was overwhelmingly carried when the Deputy Chairman of the Conference, Bolaji Akinyemi, who was moderating the session put it to vote.

The Conference also approved an amendment to the Committee’s Report that the Ill-Gotten Gains Act be enacted to check corruption in Nigeria.

The amendment was proposed on Monday by a representative of the Civil Society Organisations, Isaac Osuoka, who lamented that over 80 per cent of public funds had been looted by public officials and their collaborators.

He said the thieving officials no longer hide their loot going by the exotic cars they ride and the big mansions they build.

The amendment was overwhelmingly approved when it was put to vote by Mr. Akinyemi, who explained that if a man of low income built a N500 million mansion the Act would put a burden of proof on the person on how he got the money.

Among other recommendations and amendments passed are:

-There should be two Accountant Generals, one for the Federation and the other for the Federal Government who should be appointed subject to the approval of the Senate, for a single term of six years;

-That Section 85(3) should be deleted from the 1999 Constitution to enable the Auditor General of the Federation to audit or appoint external auditors to audit Federal Government accounts in statutory bodies;

-That due to the overbearing attitude of the Executive Arm of Government, the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission, RMAFC, should be placed on first-line charge;

-That Indiscriminate approval of tax waiver should be stopped;

–That government is not completely at liberty to borrow, but that a ceiling should be placed on how much government should borrow;

- That Debt Management Offices be established in each state of the Federation without further delay;

-That the Federal Government should source for funds to revamp the Ajaokuta Steel Company;

-That the current 1.68% charge from the Federation Account for the development of solid minerals nationwide be increased to 5% while government should commence immediate utilization of the fund for the purpose it is designated;

-That solid minerals and mines should be included in the Concurrent Legislative List;

-That 50% of accruals from Excess Crude Account should be taken to the Sovereign Wealth Fund while equivalent percentage of earnings from solid minerals should also be taken to the fund;

-That Agricultural Development Fund should be established and that 10 per cent of the money from the Excess Crude Account should be set aside for the fund;

Some of the recommendations and amendments rejected are:
-That salaries and allowances of political office holders be placed at par with that of senior civil servants through amendment of Section 70 of the 1999 Constitution;

-That the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2007 should be enshrined in the 1999 Constitution although it was resolved that its adherence be strictly followed;

-That henceforth, government agencies responsible for revenue generation and collection must comply with Section 162(3) of the 1999 Constitution which requires them to remit gross revenue in full to the Federation Account and resort to normal budget process of obtaining budget approval from the National Assembly to fund their operations;

-That all the sections of the enabling Acts of these departments and agencies of government that allow them to retain revenues and surplus to fund their operations be amended; and

-That licensed professionals be engaged as tax administrators or consultants.

Also rejected was the call for establishment of revenue courts for expeditious disposition of tax issues.
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The Chairman of the Conference, Idris Kutigi, announced that the debate on the report of the Committee on Public Service would commence on Wednesday.

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-gives-conditions-removal-fuel-subsidy/>

Fuel subsidy splits National Conference

June 3, 2014

The debate on the floor of the National Conference went into a frenzy on Monday following a recommendation by the Committee on Public Finance and Revenue that petrol subsidy be removed.

The Committee Chairman and former Kebbi State Governor, Adamu Aliero, had, while presenting a report to the Conference, kicked against the continued payment of subsidy on petrol.

In the controversial report, Mr. Aliero told his colleagues that the fuel subsidy had become a drain on the country’s scarce resources.

He noted that the government paid a total of N2.3 trillion as subsidy in 2012 and N1.3 trillion in 2013, adding that these accounted for 4.8 per cent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product, GDP.

“The subsidy regime encourages corruption; it is also a disincentive to investment in the downstream sector of the petroleum industry,” he said.

Mr. Aliero added that Nigeria had the lowest pump price of petrol compared with other sub-Saharan African countries.

Responding to the report, delegates representing labour and civil society groups called for a total rejection of the recommendation for the removal of fuel subsidy.

A paper jointly issued and circulated by the coalition reads in part, “The recommendation of the Public Finance Committee in Section 6(7) and on page 58 of its report with respect to total removal of fuel subsidy; be rejected in its entirety.

“The recommendation as it stands, if approved by Conference and implemented by government, is capable of inflaming passions and provoking another round of crisis comparable to if not of a greater dimension to the anti-fuel subsidy uprising of January 2012.

“As a matter of urgency, government should put in place appropriate tracing, tracking and metering technology to determine the accurate daily consumption rate for refined products. Government should put in place measures to ensure the acquisition of adequate domestic refining capacity within a two-year period.

“Government should demonstrate zero tolerance for corruption by bringing to book, past and present culprits involved in the gross mismanagement of fuel subsidy regime.”

While majority of South-South delegates, who spoke, supported the total removal of fuel subsidy, Northern delegates opposed the move vehemently.

Some of those who spoke from the South-South insisted that the subsidy regime does not benefit them since petrol was sold in that region at over N150 per litre.

A delegate from Cross River State, Orok Duke, spoke passionately on the fact that petrol subsidy only benefited people in the North and South-West Nigeria.

According to him, Nigerians from the Niger Delta region and particularly Cross River State do not benefit from the money spent on subsidy.

Mr. Duke said, “Not even in Calabar do we have people sell fuel at N97 per litre. We are living in denial. Let us be factual about this issue. There is nothing like subsidy where I come from.

“Cross Riverians are not benefiting from subsidy. It is beneficial to the South West and the North. Free importation of kerosene from NNPC, please. Let us do the right thing and allow anybody who wishes to import kerosene to do so and the market forces will take its due course and bring the price down.”

Sergeant Awuse, a delegate from Rivers State, also spoke strongly in support of Mr. Duke’s position.

He said, “If you say that Nigeria is benefiting from the subsidy, I think we must go back to the drawing board. As we speak, some people are in court for stealing subsidy funds. This shows that the subsidy is not benefitting the masses. We must look for the interest of the majority.”

But Ahmadu Ali, a North-Central delegate would not support outright removal of subsidy on grounds that it could upset the masses.

Mr. Ali had argued that if fuel subsidy is to be removed, it must be done in phases.

He said, “We have a situation where instructions from the President are not being obeyed by the NNPC. This is a major problem in the country.  As we speak, subsidy had been withdrawn from kerosene but the NNPC is still paying and nobody knows where they are getting the money.”

ABC Nwosu, a delegate from Anambra State, noted that apart from Canada, Nigeria has the largest deposit of bitumen in the world.

He recommended that a Venture Capital Fund be created to ensure that identified mineral resources were exploited and the funds brought into the national treasury.

Mike Ozekhome, a Federal Government delegate, opposed the recommendation for the removal of oil subsidy, adding that even when a litre of fuel was sold for 25 kobo, people were still calling for subsidy removal.

“Mr. Chairman,” he began, “the greatest irony of our time is when a farmer tries to measure a piece of yam he gives it to his family to eat. This is an attempt by the elite to continue to hold our poor by the jugular.”

Isa Aremu, one of the representatives of labour unions, while kicking against the calls for subsidy removal, drew Conference attention to the controversial pension law in Akwa Ibom State.

Mr. Aremu condemned the law in strong terms, saying that it would further impoverish the people of the state.

He, however, insisted that the remuneration and pension for former leaders should be regulated by the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission, RMAFC.

He said: “Just some days ago, the governor of Akwa Ibom State signed a law that would enable him to earn over N200 million as pension. In a state where the minimum wage is still N18, 000 per month, it is sad to see a situation where our governors are taking so much money at the expense of the citizenry. Mr. Chairman, what I am saying is that we should control what political office holders in the country receive.”

<http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/fuel-subsidy-splits-national-conference/>

Confab to debate finance committee report today

June 2, 2014

**The National Conference was suspended last week after the passing of the chairman’s wife.**

When the National Conference will resume plenary later today, it will consider the report of its committee on public finance and revenue, among other items.

Plenary was abruptly adjourned Wednesday following the death of Maryamu, wife of the conference chairman, Justice Idris Kutigi.

The report of the committee on public finance and revenue is expected to generate controversy because of its relevance to government’s revenue sources and spending.

Part of the responsibilities of the committee was to thoroughly examine and ascertain the adequacy of existing laws regarding the relationship between the three tiers of government and to recommend appropriate fiscal policy of the country.

The report, which was laid by the committee chair, Adamu Aliero and his deputy, Azzu Agboti was scheduled for deliberation on Wednesday but had to be carried forward due to the demise of the Kutigi’s wife.

Meanwhile, the conference has concluded debates and taken decisions on the reports of three committees.

These are the committee on environment; the committee on religion; and the committee on land tenure and national boundaries.

Although a few delegates offered dissenting voices, the conference adopted all its decisions through a consensus voice vote.

However, the conference failed to arrive at a consensus on two outstanding issues emanating from the committees on religion and the committee on land tenure and national boundaries.

These included the resolution to remove the Land Use Act from the 1999 Constitution to make it easy for amendment and the resolution on whether to scrap the Pilgrims’ Welfare Boards.

According to the conference leadership, the two resolutions were placed in “bracket,” and will be revisited on a later date.

[**http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/confab-to-debate-finance-committee-report-today/**](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/confab-to-debate-finance-committee-report-today/)

National Conference in rowdy session over Land Use Act

May 23, 2014

**The conference resolved the disagreement on nomadic livelihood.**

The plenary session of the National Conference on Thursday turned rowdy as some delegates opposed a recommendation of one of its committees that the Land Use Tenure Act be expunged from the Constitution.

The delegates, mostly from the northern part of Nigeria, disagreed with the recommendation. They said it could rob them of their land. They demanded that the status quo should remain by allowing the federal government to control land matters.
However, the conference deferred decision on the matter till Monday when it would resume sitting.

The 24-member Committee on Land Tenure Matters and National Boundaries chaired by Abdullahi Mamman, a retired army general from the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, had proposed the removal of the Act from the Constitution.

It however said “the Constitution should contain new provisions guaranteeing – the right of all Nigerians to have access to and own land irrespective of ethnic, class or gender; the right of communities to have land protected from human activities that would hinder ore degrade the productivity of such land through the causing of pollution, flooding etc; and protection of ecologically sensitive areas and biodiversity generally, and maintenance of adequate tree cover for mitigating impacts of climate change.”

Although the debate on the report was taken during the morning session of the conference, delegates considered and voted on the seven recommendations on Land Tenure Matters during the afternoon session.

The pattern of debate showed the northern delegates opposing the removal of the Act from the Constitution while their southern colleagues supported the recommendation.

When the Deputy Chairman of the Conference, Bolaji Akinyemi, who moderated the voting process put the issue to vote, the delegates voted overwhelmingly in support of the recommendation that the Act should be expunged from the Constitution.

However, the voting had hardly ended when some northern delegates, including Buba Galadima from Yobe State and Junaid Mohammed from Kano State sprang from their seat demanding that they should be recognised to speak apparently in rejection of the result of the process.

However, their request to speak was greeted with shouts of no! no! no! from the delegates. Another delegate from Zamfara State, Saidu Dansadau, also stood up requesting to speak, but he received the same treatment from the delegates.

However, before Mr. Dansadau, a former senator, was forced to sit down, he said, “I need to be listened to, it is very important. This is a sentimental matter. We need to know what we are doing.”

The Conference chairman, Idris Kutigi, explained that the delegates were already in middle of debate and would not re-open a matter that had been voted on. Despite his explanation, Mr. Galadima still stood up and demanded that he be heard even as he called for division. At this point, the shout of no! no! no rented the air.

During the confusion, some delegates, including a representative of the Civil Society Organisations, CSOs, Jaye Gaskiya, kept shouting “We have voted! We have voted.”

Suspecting that the rowdiness would derail further discussion on the committee’s report, Mr. Kutigi ruled that discussion on the matter be deferred to enable the conference discuss the remaining recommendations. He also said suspending the matter would allow contending members discuss and negotiate on it.

“We shall put the issue in bracket and proceed to deal with other matters,” the former Chief Justice of Nigeria, said. “We are governed by rule here. If we don’t agree, we have to go by balloting. We will discuss it and later go to balloting. You can’t force one to go by your own order. We are all Nigerians. We should be able to talk to one another. We will go and negotiate and talk to each other.”

It was at this juncture that the conference proceeded with the consideration of the remaining recommendations of the committee and the amendments proposed during debate on the report.
While some of them were adopted, others were rejected outright.

Among the amendments accepted were the rights of landowners to adequate compensation in the event of acquisition of such land by the government for public purposes; as well as the establishment of a National Boundary Tribunal, NBT, to adjudicate on boundary disputes.

Another amendment proposed by Orok Duke that the Bakassi area and any other part of the Nigerian territory that was lost to other countries should be paid compensation in perpetuity was defeated.

Similarly, the amendment calling for the payment of compensation to Kaduna, Kogi, Niger and Nasarawa States from which the FCT was created was defeated as well as the one calling for the establishment of FCT-Niger Commission.

Meanwhile, the conference, in a motion sponsored by Mr. Gaskiya and 13 others, unanimously resolved the contentious issue of the establishment of grazing reserves and ranches for nomadic herdsmen as well as the responsibility for the funding of such reserves, which was deferred on Wednesday during the debate on the report of the Committee on Citizenship, Immigration and Other Related Matters.

The motion was read by a CSO delegate, Festus Okoye, and seconded by Bilikisu Aliyu from Zamfara State.

The conference resolved that an integrated development and livelihood modernisation programme should be designed and implemented to address the issue of settling nomadic herdsmen into settled communities based on established cattle ranches with fodder development technologies and including abattoirs, processors and other businesses along the livestock value chain.

It also agreed that the integrated development and modernisation programme should be funded by both the federal and state governments in states where such settlement are established.

The conference further resolved that the programme should be undertaken and wrapped up within a period of five to 10 years after which such settlements should have become self-sustaining with the full integration of the nomadic herdsmen community into modern Nigeria political economy.

[**http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-rowdy-session-land-use-act/**](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-rowdy-session-land-use-act/)

National Conference disowns delegate plotting tenure elongation for Jonathan

May 20, 2014

**The National Conference has disowned a South-South delegate, Okon Osung, who has in the past few days been plotting the elongation of the tenures of President Goodluck Jonathan and other political office holders in Nigeria by 18 months.**

In a statement on Tuesday, the Conference, through its Assistant Secretary, Media and Communications, Akpandem James, strongly disassociated itself from Mr. Osung and his campaign.

It insisted that tenure elongation was never part of the Conference terms of reference and was never discussed in any of its plenary or Committee sittings.

Mr. Osung, a former Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, [NUJ] in the then Cross River State had on Friday, called for the elongation of the tenure of Mr. Jonathan and others by 18 months.

The delegate, who addressed journalists in Abuja, had said, “At this crucial juncture in our national history, a Presidential or National Assembly declaration of a politico-administrative moratorium or cooling-off period before the conduct of the third Transitional Elections scheduled for February 2015 has become an imperative necessity.

“This calls for a postponement of the or deferment of the scheduled 2015 Elections by at least 18 months while retaining all the democratic institutions at all levels of governance and across the entire spectrum of the country’s political divide, without any bias to the statutory termination dates of such democratic institutions.”

But the leadership of the Conference said the views expressed by Mr. Osung were entirely personal and should not be interpreted as the position of the National Conference or any of its Committees.

The explanation, Mr. James, said, was necessary to forestall members of the public from viewing Mr. Osung’s campaign as one of the agenda of the Conference.

Part of the statement reads, “The views expressed by Mr. Osung regarding tenure extension for any elected official, based on any reasons cited by him, are entirely personal to him and must not be viewed or regarded to, in any way, have any anything whatsoever to do with the National Conference or any of its Committees.

“Such views were never expressed on the floor of the Conference, which did not sit in plenary, as at the time the views were made public. It was never heard, never debated or discussed in any manner whatsoever in any of the Committees whose reports are already with the management of the Conference.

“Both the leadership of the Conference and the other 491 members only read about them in the media just as members of the public did.”

The Conference also noted that Mr. Osung never submitted his controversial position to any of its 20 Committees.

It explained that neither Mr. Jonathan nor any of his aides contacted the leadership and or delegates to present the issue of tenure elongation as canvassed by Mr. Osung.

The statement continued, “None of the Committees either discussed or has made any recommendation or has even mentioned the issue of Presidential Declaration of a Moratorium in their reports as canvassed by delegate Osung in the media.

“We are, therefore, inclined to believe that Mr. Osung is acting on personal conviction or interest and is not, to the best of our knowledge, representative of any group participating in the National Conference.

“The only relationship Mr. Osung has with the National Conference is that he is one of the 492 delegates. Whatever views he is canvassing in this regard should be seen and regarded as purely his personal opinion which has absolutely nothing to do with the Conference.”

[**http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-disowns-delegate-plotting-tenure-elongation-jonathan/**](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-disowns-delegate-plotting-tenure-elongation-jonathan/)

Resource Control, others, for intense debate as Confab resumes plenary today

May 19, 2014

**20 Standing Committees to conclude report submission this weekend.**

 The National Conference will on Monday resume plenary sessions to consider the reports of its standing committees with the recommendations on resource control, derivation principle, immunity for presidents and governors, state creation and zoning policy likely to generate intense debate during the sessions.

Other issues likely to dominate discussions at the plenary are offshore/onshore dichotomy, state police, forms of government, tenure of office for the president and governors, revenue formula, unbundling of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, and the nation’s current security challenges.

The committees had in the previous three weeks deliberated on critical issues aimed at repositioning the country.

The Committees constituted by the leadership of the Conference on April 14 are Devolution of Powers; Political Restructuring and Forms of Government; National Security; Environment; Politics and Governance; Laws, Judiciary, Human Rights and Legal Reforms; Social Welfare; Transportation; Science, Technology and Development; Agriculture; Civil Society, Labour and Sports, Public Service; Electoral Matters; and Foreign Policy and Diaspora Matters.

Others are Land Tenure Matters and National Boundary; Economy, Trade and Investment; Energy; Religion; Public Finance and Revenue Generation; Citizenship, immigration and Related Matters.

The 492-member Confab began sitting on March 17 when it was inaugurated by President Goodluck Jonathan.

It spent about one month discussing the president’s inaugural address before dissolving into committees, which initially had two weeks to work, but were given extra two weeks after their meeting with the Conference Management comprising the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, the Secretary and the three assistant secretaries to rub minds on certain issues that facilitated their work.

A statement by the Assistant Secretary, Media and Communication, Akpandem James on Saturday said while some of the committees had already submitted signed copies of their reports with agreed-upon recommendations to the Conference Secretariat within the week for distribution to delegates, others were still busy with the collation of their final reports at the weekend.

He said the submission of the reports was in line with Order 12 (d-e) of the National Conference Procedure Rules 2014 which states that: “Each Committee shall submit to the Conference the report of its activities. The report of a Committee is the collection of all views expressed showing the consensus on decisions reached by seventy-per cent (70%) of majority of delegates present and voting.”

Mr. James said the modalities for consideration of the reports of the Committee would be made known at the resumption of plenary, and that it might include consideration of recommendations contained in each report clause-by-clause; and will on each item take a vote where there is no clear consensus.

The pattern of voting as contained in Order Eleven of the National Conference Procedure Rules 2014, he added would be adopted by the Conference Chairman, Idris Kutigi.

The Order states that: “All decisions of the Conference at Plenary and Committee stage shall be reached by consensus; or in the absence of that, the chairman shall, at his discretion adjourn proceedings to allow for further consultations.

“In the case of failure to reach a resolution on the matter by consensus, it shall be decided by a vote of seventy per cent (70%)majority of delegates present and voting.”

Mr. James explained that after the item-by-item consideration of the 20 reports, and in line with the Order 13 of the National Conference Procedure Rules 2014, a final report of the conference shall be drawn up and approved by the delegates.

The Order states that: There shall be a final report which shall be the accurate recording of all the decisions reached by the National Conference. The final report shall be signed by the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and the Secretary after approval by the Conference before presentation to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

“Should the final report lead to the drafting of issues of law and policy, the Conference shall in consultation with the six principal officers of the conference advise the government on the legal framework, legal procedures and options for integrating the decisions and outcomes of the National Conference into the Constitution and laws of the country.”

**Touchy recommendations**

Meanwhile, there are indications that some recommendations of the committees might generate intense debate during the plenary sessions of the Conference.

The Committee on Devolution of Powers co-chaired by Victor Attah, a former governor of Akwa Ibom State and Ibrahim Coomassie, a former Inspector General of Police, recommended that item 39, which deals with the exploration of mines, mineral, including oil fields, geological surveys and natural gas be retained on the Exclusive Legislative List of the Constitution.

It however added that the states in which the minerals and gas are found should be involved in the exploration of the minerals.

The recommendation went against the proposal by the South-South delegates that the issue should be taken to the Concurrent List.

The committee, which was the most-watched during the period, also retained the 13 percent derivation fund for the oil producing states against the demands of the South-South delegates that it should be upped by 37 percent and that of the northern delegates that it should be reduced by eight percent.

Although, Messrs. Attah and Coomassie said the retention of the derivation fund was unanimously reached, a member of the Committee, Ankio Briggs, debunked the claim and vowed to mobilize against it because it defeated the agenda of the zone.

Ms. Briggs, an indigene of Rivers State, said though she would not write a minority report, she would consult with other south-South delegates and the people back home to protest the resolution of the committee.

**Repeat of history**

During the 2005 conference, the issue of derivation almost aborted the assembly as the south-South delegates insisted that they wanted 50 percent.

The delegates from the oil-rich zone withdrew from the National Political Reform Conference, NPRC, on June 14, 2005 to protest the 17 percent approved as derivation fund by the Committee of Leaders, which sat a day before.

“As we had maintained throughout the Conference, the mandate of our leaders, youth and the entire people back home on the critical issue of derivation component of resource control was to stick to the irreducible minimum of 50% in line with the 1960 Independence Constitution and the 1963 Republican Constitution,” eight leaders of the zone in the defunct confab said in a letter to the Chairman of the NPRC, Niki Tobi.

“However, having regard to the need for unity, peace, stability and our solid resolve to continue to be our brothers’ keeper, we are compelled to accept in the interim 25% derivation with gradual increase to attain the 50% over a period of five years.”

The letter dated June 16, 2005 was signed by Edwin Clark (Chairman, Delta), Mike Akhigbe (Edo), Matthias Offoboche (Cross River), Albert horsfall (Rivers), Ime Essien Udom (Akwa Ibom), Kimse Okoko (Bayelsa), Gamaliel Onosode (Delta) and Nimi Briggs (Rivers).

Messrs. Clark, Horsfall and Okoko are currently attending the 2014 National Conference and are reportedly said to be insistent on pursing the previous agenda.

Although, two committees, namely Politics and Governance and National Security recommended the removal of immunity clause from the constitution, debate on the issue might be similarly intense.

This is because of the belief of some of the delegates who believed that stripping of the president, vice president, governors and their deputies of immunity from criminal and civil proceedings could cause them distractions.

Despite its rejection by the Committees on Political Restructuring and Forms of Government and National Security, the issue of the establishment of state police is still on the card of the South West delegates. The delegates from the zone have reportedly not given up on regionalism or making the six geo-political zones the federating units.

The debate on the request for the creation of 31 more states which also came before the Committee Political Restructuring and Forms of Government might also be heated.

Except the northern delegates under the aegis Arewa Consultative Forum, ACF, many other delegates, are rooting for more states, particularly for the South East zone, which currently has five states as against seven in the North West and six in the remaining four.

The four year double tenure for the president and governors as provided in the constitution was retained by the Political Restructuring and Forms of Government, sources said some delegates might push for tenure elongation for the occupants of the offices. The quest for tenure elongation for late Sani Abacha and former President Olusegun Obasanjo characterized the 1994/95 and 2005 Conferences and contributed in their near abortion.

[**http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/resource-control-others-intense-debate-confab-resumes-plenary-today/**](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/resource-control-others-intense-debate-confab-resumes-plenary-today/)

National Conference Committee recommends unbundling of INEC

May 15, 2014

**Nigeria could have a different parastatal which will be responsible for handling political party administration, monitoring, auditing and electoral offences.**
The National Conference Committee on Political Parties and Electoral Matters has recommended the unbundling of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC.

It also recommended that the commission be stripped of some of its powers.

The recommendations were part of the deliberations of the committee at its sitting, Wednesday, at the Nicon Luxury Hotel Abuja.

If the recommendations of the committee are approved during the plenary session of the confab, Nigeria could have a different parastatal which will be responsible for handling political party administration, monitoring, auditing and electoral offences.

INEC would then be responsible for the registration of political parties, conduct of elections, and delimitation of constituencies.

The committee also approved a proposal that all electoral offenders must be disqualified from contesting or holding any public office for a minimum of ten years.

Also the powers of the President to appoint the chairman of INEC also scaled through. Delegates expressed the view that the idea of setting up a committee to appoint chairman for the electoral body as advocated by some members will make no difference since the selection committee itself will be appointed by the President.

The committee, however, recommended that a period of two weeks must be reserved for members of the public to raise objection whenever a new INEC chairman is nominated by the President.

On independent candidates, the committee gave very stringent condition that any one that wants to contest election as independent candidate must be nominated by not less than five people from every electoral ward in any given constituency.

The committee also approved the removal of the residency clause in the Electoral Act to allow Nigerians in the Diaspora to vote.

It did not, however, specify whether INEC will be expected to go outside the country to register voters and conduct election or if those living abroad must come home to register, return to their base and come back again to cast their votes during elections.

Rejected proposals

The committee also rejected some of the proposals with respect to the INEC.

The proposal for constitutional review to allow INEC fix dates for election outside the constitutional provision and the right to disqualify candidates submitted by political parties were rejected.

After a robust debate, the proposal to de-register political parties by INEC was equally rejected by the committee on the ground that the bigger political parties might exploit that provision to shut other parties out of the political space.

The committee equally rejected the proposal for a three run-off election where no clear winner emerge in an election; rather, it recommended that only bye elections be conducted by INEC within 21 days interval after the first election. The winner is then expected to emerge by simple majority.

[**http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-committee-recommends-unbundling-inec/**](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-committee-recommends-unbundling-inec/)

Confab Committee to take decision on derivation, onshore/offshore Tuesday

May 12, 2014

**Committee sets up panel to resolve differences between northern and southern delegates**

The northern and southern delegates in the Committee on Devolution of Power of the National Conference again, on Monday, failed to agree on the issue of revenue sharing and derivation fund.

After several hours of a closed-door session, the Committee merely took contributions from its members, which would be discussed on Tuesday with a view to taking decisions on the issues.

While the northern delegates demanded the reduction of derivation fund to five per cent from 13 per cent and should be limited to only onshore, their southern counterparts, particularly from the South-South geo-political zone, asked for its upward review to 50 per cent.

The fund is paid to the nine oil producing states in the country in accordance with Section 162 (2) of the 1999 Constitution. The states are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Rivers, Imo and Ondo.

The northern delegates also called for the scrapping of interventionist institutions and agencies like the Ministry of Niger Delta, Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, Amnesty Programme for ex-militants and the c-Component of the SURE-P.

The co-chairman of the Committee, Victor Attah, told journalists after its session that it would announce its resolutions and conclusion on some of the issues on Tuesday.

“Every member of this committee has now made his or her contribution to the discussion on resource control, including the two co-chairmen,” Mr. Attah, a former governor of Akwa Ibom, said. “We have given ourselves assignment of what to go and look out for. By tomorrow, hopefully, we will reach a conclusion on those matters and we will be able to announce resolution and conclusion.”

A member of the Committee, Eddy Erhagbe, said during the stormy discussion there was a gradual move towards consensus on the retention of the 13 per cent as derivation fund to the oil and gas producing states.

He, however, said a committee was constituted to harmonise the contributions of the members and present reports to it.

“Everybody has now spoken on the issue of revenue sharing and on the matter of derivation. There were different positions by members of the committee but the two chairmen have summarised. The situation now is that we are most likely going to agree on a number of issues. The extremes have been narrowed down to a large extent,” Mr. Erhagbe said. “Some issues that have to do with the sharing formula have been agreed upon both the horizontal and the vertical and a small committee is going to make recommendations as to monies that will be put aside for development. But on the critical issue of resource control, as regards 13 per cent for now, there is gradual move towards consensus on it. It is expected that we are not going to go below where we are now but there could be the possibility of going up while other provisions will be made to make sure that other sections are taken care of.”

[**http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/confab-committee-take-decision-derivation-onshoreoffshore-tuesday/**](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/confab-committee-take-decision-derivation-onshoreoffshore-tuesday/)

# National Conference committee rejects regional governments

April 24, 2014

**The committee, at its resumed sitting, deliberated on three different options of federalism.**

The National Conference Committee on Political Restructuring and Form of Government on Wednesday disapproved the option of regionalism as a form of government for the country.

The committee, at its resumed sitting, deliberated on three options of federalism to be adopted in order to meet the peculiarity of the country.

The options are: a central government with states as federating units; a central government with zones as federating units; and a central government with three regions as federating units.

The session became heated with regional and geo-political interests resurfacing in canvassing for or against each option.

While some delegates favoured a central government with either regions or zones as federating units, others favoured a central government with states as federating units.

Yinka Odumakin and Femi Okurounmu, representing South West argued that some states are not viable and the centre was too powerful as it was currently constituted.

They, therefore, called for the devolution of more powers to the federating units as zones or regions so as to make the centre less attractive.

They also said that zonal or regional governments would ensure socio-politico-economic integration in the zones and fast-track development as it was obtained in the first republic.

However, Siddique Abubakar, Mohammed Aruwa, Adamu Maina and Jeremiah Temlong, said the problem with Nigeria was not about states or regions.

They argued that every state in the country was viable but identified corruption as the major challenge that had not allowed states and local government areas to function effectively.

Former Governor of Enugu State, Sam Egwu, however, stressed the need for equity in whatever option was adopted, particularly, the creation of another state in South East.

Mr. Egwu argued that the country, as currently constituted, places the South East at a disadvantaged position and called for balance among the geo-political zones.

All members of the committee agreed that state creation should be accommodated in the constitution based on merit and viability.

They also agreed that there should be compromises for all the interests to give and take in a way that would be in the best interest of the country.

The Co-Chairman of the committee, Ike Nwachukwu, remarked that the tentative position of the committee was that “there should be a central government with states as federating units.

“States should create their own local governments; local governments should be removed from the constitution.

“For equitable sharing of resources, appointments should be rotated in states and at federal level.

“States that wish to merge as federating units may do so but the status of states as federating units remain,” Mr. Nwachukwu said before adjourning the session.

(NAN)

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[**http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-committee-rejects-regional-governments/**](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-committee-rejects-regional-governments/)

# National Conference Committee rejects state police

April 28, 2014

**The committee used a voice vote to arrive at a decision.**

The National Conference Committee on Devolution of Power on Monday blocked moves for the creation of state police.

During the debate on the creation of state police, some delegates who spoke said many states in the Federation already have security outfits that were akin to the police.

They also claimed that state governors were already funding the federal police through the provision of vehicles, equipment and funds.

A delegate from Akwa Ibom State and Professor of Law, Nsongurua Udombana, said worsening security situation in the country required a different approach to policing.

He argued that the creation of state police could help address some of the challenges faced by the Federal Police.

“Mr. Chairman, the creation of state police will make policing more effective at the local level and will allow states to address their peculiar security challenges.

“Mr. Chairman, the move will also allow states to share in the burden of police funding and will promote the spirit of true federalism in which the state and Federal police will complement each other,” he said.

A delegate from Ogun State, Ayo Adebanjo, said it was wrong for a country that prides itself as a federation to operate a central police.

He drew attention to what obtains in advanced democracies including United Kingdom and the United States, where policing is carried out at the center and by the components.

He said, “Mr. Chairman, we cannot concentrate police power in the center. It is “unfederal.” We cannot continue to say it’s a Nigerian factor. What evil will it do if we have a federal police and a state police too?

“We should not make this issue confrontational. The issue of Boko Haram could have been tackled if we had a local police. In the interest of national security, we should allow for state police.”

On the other hand, those who kicked against the move argued that the policy could result in abuses, especially by state governors.

They noted that even under the present arrangement where the police is under the Federal Government, state governors still use them against perceived opponents.

They drew attention to the creation of State Independent Electoral Commissions and how governors have hijacked the process to install their cronies in political offices.

One of the major opponents to the move, Jubril Aminu, said the country was not ripe for state police and argued that governors would use it to intimidate their opponents.

He said, “Mr. Chairman, let us not sit down here and approve the creation of state police. It will not work because governors will use the police under them to intimidate and chase out their perceived enemies and opponents.

“I suggest that the police should remain on the exclusive legislative list to forestall abuses by governors and political office holders. Nigeria is not ripe for state police.”

After an exhaustive debate, the Co-Chairman, Ibrahim Coomassie, who presided over the session, called for a vote. In a voice vote, majority of the delegates voted to stop the creation of state police.

[**http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-committee-rejects-state-police/**](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/national-conference/national-conference-committee-rejects-state-police/)

**National conference, 2014: Speaking to the presidential address**

on April 10, 2014   /   in [Is'haq Modibbo Kawu](http://www.vanguardngr.com/category/columns/ishaq-modibbo-kawu/) 12:29 am   /   [Comments](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/04/national-conference-2014-speaking-presidential-address/#disqus_thread)

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By Is’haq Modibbo Kawu

LAST Monday, it was my turn to  respond to President Goodluck Jonathan’s address at the opening ceremony of the National Conference, 2014. As was set out by the conference leadership, every delegate was expected to say something about Jonathan’s speech. The great handicap was that each one of us was assigned just three minutes for a statement. Not enough time to open full hearts about the Nigerian condition.

While many delegates spent time praising the speech, quite a significant number of delegates have also touched on some of the issues that necessitated the conference in the first place. Nigerians are obviously hurting, for a variety of often, disparate and conflicting, even adversarial reasons. I knew that three minutes won’t be enough to state all that occurred to me, but I chose to write out my thought, while I then summarised the script. What you read here is the script that I wrote as my thought, and which I spoke to Goodluck Jonathan’s speech of March 17th, 2014.

Nigeria matters. We are the only African country with all attributes to become a great power: size and population; arable land and water; oil and solid minerals; diverse tourist potentials and very resourceful people, with incredible self-assuredness. Yet, we face serious problems: a deformed political structure and an economy that has not worked, especially since the mid 1980s, with the implementation of imperialist Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) and neoliberal policies. They have led to de-industrialisation; and the transfer of public assets into the hands of private cronies, in controversial privatisation policies.

Consequently, we have managed to create one of the most unjust societies in the world today. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) says 115million Nigerians live in poverty and 64% of our urban population lives in slums. Yet, those who now control Nigeria’s wealth have spent over $6billion purchasing private jets.   Nigeria’s rich oligarchy consumes more champagne than their Russian counterparts. CRONY CAPITALISM is ruining our country. It is at the base of ethno-regional and religious rivalries, that many of the old people here assume to be the most important contradictions facing us. Extreme wealth lives side by side with mind-boggling poverty, deprivation and hopelessness. The World Bank recently said that two thirds of the extremely poor people of the world live in China, India, NIGERIA, Bangladesh and DR Congo! Since 1999, a new phenomenon emerged in Nigeria, where those who have ruled our states, after eight years, have become richer than the states they governed!

Today, Nigeria is a country of young people: 45% is under 15; 63% of the population is under the age of 25; while 75% is under 35. Instructively, those aged 65 and above, are only 3% of our population.   The young; urban and rural working people; women; and the physically challenged, and how we treat them, will determine Nigeria’s future.   23.9% of Nigerians are unemployed, but youth unemployment was at 54% by 2012, according to the National Baseline Youth Survey Report.   In May 2012, a former minister of Youth Development  announced that 67million young Nigerians were unemployed, while 80 percent of that number do  not have university degrees, and are almost unemployable. Alarmingly,  1.8 million graduates enter the job market annually.

The most central problems we face are ECONOMIC; how to re-industrialise to create jobs for millions of young people. We will not create those jobs if we do not critically interrogate the philosophy of governance. Nigeria’s bizarre form of capitalism is NOT working. Rev. Fr. George Ehusani of the Catholic Secretariat, did a study of ethno-religious crises in Nigeria, between 1999 and 2007, and showed that most of them occurred between 12noon and six pm. Those are the hours people would normally be at work. And most of those involved are young people. The preponderance of membership of Boko Haram is young Nigerians! Nigerians must be put to work!   Faulty as the 1999 Constitution might be, let us make JUSTICIABLE Chapter II, the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy. Many of the elite groups at this National Conference have retreated into ethnic, regional and religious identities; there is scare mongering and unbridled efforts at delegitimisation of our dear country, including ill-concealed secessionist agendas; but the Nigerian people don’t really hate themselves. Elite groups manipulate them into postures of hatred in their rivalries for power and privileges.

Nigeria matters

I will like to return to where I started from; Nigeria matters. Our country has responsibilities to its people and the African continent. One out of every 5 Africans is a Nigerian; 20% of Africa is Nigeria and 47% of West Africa is our dear country. But neoliberal capitalism will sink us into an abyss.   It has created a few billionaires, yes.   But the majority of our people are in despair all over Nigeria. We must build a caring and inclusive country, not the Hobbesian state of nature, where life is nasty, brutish and short, as we have today in Nigeria.

Finally, people have asked for “restructuring” of Nigeria. My suggestion is that we should return to the 12 states structure of General Yakubu Gowon, between 1967 and 1975. There were six states in the North and six in the South. That offers a balanced basis for real development. We should then significantly reduce the exclusive legislative list and devolve more resources and responsibilities to the states. In that setting, we can conveniently have well-organised state police forces and even local police forces too, while the Nigeria Police Force will be in charge of cross border and federal crimes. We can also remove the friction around what Southern Nigerian groups agitate for as ‘Resource Control’ by giving oil producing states 50% derivation on ON-SHORE oil while the entire country owns revenues accruing from offshore oil fields. A corollary of these developments is to bring the state back into the development process. The ‘religion’ like devotion to privatisation and market forces is doing far more damage to our country, than people have bothered to study.

We must also introduce a Development Planning regime to take control of the development process. Nigeria must deliberately overthrow the Washington Consensus and bring Nigeria’s working people, patriotic intellectuals, business people dedicated to patriotic endeavours and well-trained and patriotically bureaucrats, to drive the development process. At the moment, our economic process is driven by agents of imperialism; and they owe more allegiance to the Washington Institutions than to our country. Wasn’t one of them alleged to have made 60 Billion Naira from negotiating the cancellation of Nigerian debts under Obasanjo? Surely, those are not the types that should be piloting Nigeria’s economic process.

**Fulbe nomads: From negative profiling to ethnic cleansing**

THE killing of innocent Fulbe nomads near Keana, Nasarawa state last week, by Nigerian soldiers, was an almost predictable tragedy. The Nigerian state has been priming to kill Fulbe nomads, to satisfy the yearnings of groups of the Nigerian elite, from different parts of the country. This was the ambition of even the ruling circles in states like Benue and Plateau, at the heart of conflicts between nomadic groups and farming communities in recent years. In a place like Plateau state, urban-based political conflicts were deliberately taken to Fulbe nomads in the rural areas; and in many instances, Fulbe nomads’ cattle were rustled. Nomads fight back with a ferocity that surprises their adversaries. Farming groups have children in elite circles and they control a tendentious Nigerian media that has systematically, negatively profiled nomads over the years.

The Nigerian media has not covered itself in glory in reportage of conflicts between farmers and nomadic Fulbe communities. When I worked in DAILY TRUST, the profiling of Fulbe people was an issue we regularly debated and to its credit, DAILY TRUST improved its reportage. But that is not the position with most of the Southern Nigerian media. THE NATION newspaper, for example, always seemed to have a deliberate agenda to negatively profile the Fulbe in its reportage. It seems unable or unwilling to see the danger of its consistent profiling. Two Mondays ago, I spoke with Sam Omatseye, the Chairman of THE NATION’s Editorial Board about the reportage of the Fulbe. It just doesn’t change with THE NATION. So a few days after the massacre of innocent Fulbe nomads in Nasarawa which shocked people around the country, and ought to have made reportage more nuanced; on April 6, THE NATION ON SUNDAY reported on its page 5: “FULANI HERDSMEN KILL SIX, WOUND 14 IN TARABA”. That sounded definitive, until you read the first paragraph of the story: “Six people  lay dead yesterday in three Tiv and Jukun villages in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State following an attack THAT BORE SEMBLANCE WITH PREVIOUS ONES BY FULANI HERDSMEN” (capital mine!). There was no definitive report of an attack by Fulbe nomads, but just that what happened “BORE SEMBLANCE WITH PREVIOUS ONES BY FULBE NOMADS”, so THE NATION CONCLUDED Fulbe Nomads were responsible for the new atrocity! But that is irresponsible journalism! Journalism’s responsibility is to report the FACTS; journalism should NOT extrapolate a trend into reportage. But THE NATION did! Almost like it was pursuing an agenda against Fulbe nomads.

Genocide in Rwanda

This issue is very important, because the genocide in Rwanda, which happened 20 years ago this month, was preceded by a systematic profiling of the Tutsi; and the media, this time the radio, helped prepared the condition which facilitated the massacre of one million people! In the tragic killings in Benue, it is strange that up till this moment, not a single person has been arrested and brought for prosecution. This much was admitted by Gabriel Suswam, the Benue state governor, in the interview he gave to SUNDAY TRUST recently. It is equally instructive that Chief Paul Unongo also stated that people apprehended attacking some Tiv communities were discovered not to be Fulbe! But constantly, we read reports in newspapers of attacks by “Fulani nomads”. In the heightened hysteria against Fulbe nomads, even a governor suggested that the Federal Government should cleanse them from states in North Central Nigeria.

In that respect, the Niger State Government forcibly removed Fulbe nomads and deported them to Kaduna state a few weeks ago. The killings in Nasarawa portend serious danger for Fulbe nomads and the fact that Fulbe people were separated from other ethnic groups before being killed in cold blood by the Nigerian Army, is a new departure in the criminal behaviour by agents of the Nigerian state! I do not condone criminal acts carried out by Fulbe nomads or other groups and individuals, but it is unacceptable to profile an entire people as Nigerian elite groups, especially those in power and in the media, are doing to Fulbe nomads!

**http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/04/national-conference-2014-speaking-presidential-address/**

**National Conference: The contending agendas**

Submitted by James Uzondu on Mon, 03/10/2014 - 12:31

* [**Cover Story**](http://www.nigeriannewsworld.com/taxonomy/term/6)

**News Introduction:**

With President Goodluck Jonathan’s appointment of a former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Idris Kutigi, as the chairman of the National Conference, there is no doubting the fact that both skeptics and protagonists of will have to harmonise their hard lines on what they expect from the much debated and dreaded national confabulation by Nigerians for the sake of a united and virile Nigeria. - ith President Goodluck Jonathan’s appointment of a former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Idris Kutigi, as the chairman of the National Conference, there is no doubting the fact that both skeptics and protagonists of will have to harmonise their hard lines on what they expect from the much debated and dreaded national confabulation by Nigerians for the sake of a united and virile Nigeria. - By Dapo Olaosebikan, Jude Orji and Kenneth Azahan

ith President Goodluck Jonathan’s appointment of a former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Idris   Kutigi, as the chairman of the National Conference, there is no doubting the fact that both skeptics and protagonists of will have to harmonise their hard lines on what they expect from the much debated and dreaded national confabulation by Nigerians for the sake of a united and virile Nigeria
A statement   last week Monday by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Anyim Pius Anyim, named a former Minister of External Affairs, Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi, as the vice-chairman and the  wife of the Director-General of the Nigerian Institute for Advanced Legal Studies,  Dr. Valerie Azinge, as Secretary. The appointees were to resume duty the next day in Abuja.
The Federal Government had in releasing the modalities for nominations for the proposed National Conference, said the conference was expected to hold in the Federal Capital Territory that it is expected to last   three months. According to Anyim,   492 nominees will participate in the conference, which is to be held in the Federal Capital Territory.
Explaining the shape of things to expect from the conference, the SFG stated that where consensus was not achievable, “it shall be by 75 per cent majority.” Anyim said that after the three-month deliberations, the conference itself would advise the government on the legal framework,   procedures and options for integrating its decisions and outcomes into the 1999 Constitution. He had stated that the conference would discuss any subject matter, except the indivisibility and indissolubility of Nigeria as a nation.
He  had quoted the President as saying, “You will also recall that the President further stressed that, “sitting down to talk is one right step in calming down tensions and channeling our grievances, misgivings and suggestions into more positive use for the good of our country. The President stated as well that in any case, Nigerians are already talking about their national challenges through the print and electronic media.”
He observed that, “the only gap is that while these talks are sometimes weighty, they often lack direction.” Modalities for the conference as outlined by the SGF include 37 elder statesmen; one per state and the FCT, to be nominated by the President. The list also includes retired military and security personnel from each of the armed forces, the Police, the State Security Service and the Nigeria Intelligence Agency .
Others are traditional rulers (two per zone and one for the  FCT), retired civil servants; one from each of the geopolitical zones and  the FCT, representatives of labour (the NLC and  the TUC) whose nominations should reflect geopolitical and gender balance; and Organised Private Sector with two nominations from   NECA, MAN, NACCIMA and NESG. The conference would also feature Nigeria Youth Organisations with one nomination each from the National Youth Council of Nigeria, NANS and others.

The North Agenda- Unified front on Fiscal Federation, structure of government

The19 northern states in the country have jointly articulated no fewer than 30 points that would be presented at the forth coming national conference coming up soon. These common front finally adopted was top on the Agenda of the governors from the region in their two day meeting concluded in Kaduna.
Speaking in an interactive session on the National Conference with major stake holders at Government House Minna, Niger State recently, the state governor, Dr. Babangida Aliyu said, the northern governors took a bold step at their just concluded meeting in Kaduna on the points to be presented at the conference but assured that the points articulated will not in any way tamper with the unity and development of the country.
“In our last meeting, we took a principled and position to send our best and experienced people to the conference and this will include those who will be able to defend, discuss the issues without fear or favour but which will not tamper with the Unity and development of the country,” the governor remarked.
Top on the Agenda of the adopted points to be presented at the conference as reeled out by secretary to the state government, Alhaji Idris Ndako who is also secretary of the Northern  Governors Forum include Fiscal Federation, structure of government, issue of state police, labour matters especially on issues of wages salaries with emphasis on whether salaries should be uniform or based on the financial capability of each state, Electricity as a major weapon for economic growth especially on whether states should be allowed to generate power independently.
Other points articulated include, Tenure of president and the governor, Devolution of power, the traditional Institutions, immunity clause as it presently affects the governors and president, the Independence of the Legislative Arm and the Judiciary as well as who is to monitor the Judiciary, Gender and special group like the handicapped, Onshore and Offshore Dichotomy, Resource control.
Others are social security like health Housing, Electoral Law which include how elections should be conducted, system of government, that is upholding the present presidential system of government or not, general security, creation of more states and local governments and transformation of the Agricultural sector as the mainstay of the northern region. For effective representation and actualization of the North Agenda in the national conference, a committee was set up to go round the 19 states in order to mobilize and sensitize the people on the need to participate in the conference.
South-East Agenda-Presidency after Jonathan, more LGAs

Chief Mbazuluike Amaechi, first Aviation Minister in the First Republic told the magazine that the South East geo-political zone (Ndi-Igbo) will storm the conference with a number of far reaching national issues. According to the elder statesman, Ohanaeze Ndi-Igbo is demanding a total reshaping of the country for true federalism through devolution of powers as a position taken by the entire Southern Nigeria people’s assembly.
The foremost surviving nationalist further stated that South East will want the current six-geo political zones to form federating units or regions with powers to determine the number of states and local government areas per a zone. Also, the zone is pushing that states get higher revenue allocations than centre because of enormous responsibilities it will get from the restructuring.
They also favour resource control where regions or geo-political zones pay royalties to the central government and retain their internally generated revenues for development.
Again, is the return to Parliamentary system of government from the current presidential system which is believed to be very expensive and breeds corruption. ‘’In Parliamentary model, one majority vote is needed to remove the Prime Minister. But in Presidential system, you need two-third majority to remove the President’’, said Amaechi. He noted that the change from Parliamentary to Presidential system was not made by the people but foisted on them by the military through unitary government.
Other issues include creation of at least one additional state in the South East which was agreed during the 2005 Political Conference to make the zone have equal number of six states like other zones. Currently, the zone has five states against six for others and seven for the North West. It also has the least number of local government areas compared to others.
Another issue that will feature is rotational presidency on the geo-political basis to give each zone or region a sense of belonging in the federation.
Investigations also revealed that a group in the zone is pushing for reparation over the destruction the people and land suffered during the 30-month Nigerian-Biafran war that killed several millions of people. This school of thought also believe that the issue of  ‘session’ should be re-visited and enshrined in the constitution to allow any region or zone to go its own at any given time when their interest is no longer protected.
On October 28, 2013, South-East advisory committee met to take the input of the Ndigbo to the planned National conference. However, ahead of the meeting the apex Igbo socio-cultural body, Ohanaeze Ndigbo had met to deliberate and articulate the demands  which would be  presented as the position of the zone   during the proposed national  conference. Its leadership is yet to harmonise the stand because the meeting was quite inconclusive.
But key among Ndigbo proposals include state creation in the zone, and additional local government councils, true federalism, restructuring of the polity, equal representation in the federal character, inclusion of tribe, religion in the national census, a southeasterner taking over from President Goodluck Jonathan, among others, our reporter gathered.  On Saturday, 19th October, 2013, the Ohanaeze held its expanded Imeobi  - (which is the highest decision making arm of the Ohanaeze) at its secretariat in Enugu.  Although, initially, a communiqué was supposed to have been issued immediately after the meeting, none came out. It was learnt that a call reportedly came from the governors in the zone urging the group to suspend the issuance of a statement. The reason was that the Ohanaeze leadership ought to meet with governors the following day, Sunday at the Government House, Enugu.
President General of Ohanaeze, Chief Garry Igarawey explained that the agenda   of the meeting centred on the current national conference. “We are going to have details to enable us articulate our views,” he told the audience. He added that the presidential advisory committee on the national conference would meet with Ohanaeze leadership on October 28. It will be recalled that at the expanded Imeobi the meeting, former President General of Ohanaeze, Dr Dozie Ikedife told the audience that the representatives of the Igbo during national dialogue, should ensure that the Federal Government would not “carve out a no-go area for Nigerians.”
“If the federal government is to continue as it is today, it should be federation of the willing; we should not toy with this opportunity,” Dr Ikedife said. The former Ohanaeze leader added: “Let government assure us that this is not going to be a jamboree. If government is not sure of what it’s doing, we should be told early enough so we will remain as we have been as a nation. We don’t want to go to the conference and crack our head for nothing.”
Professor Anya O. Anya, who, replaced the famous constitutional lawyer, Professor Ben Nwabueze, at the National Conference Advisory Committee set up by President Jonathan, attended the Imeobi meeting. He spoke about “state creation and what is now called new politics” in Nigeria. He stressed the need to select those to serve as “bridge builders” between Ndigbo and the committee members.
A prominent female politician, Chief (Mrs) Maria Okwor said one of the demands the Igbo should make during the national conference is to advocate the abrogation of the presidential system of government currently being operated in the country. “Nigeria should cancel the Presidential system of government because it’s not favouring us, and it’s also encouraging massive corruption in the system. The roads in the southeast are very bad,” she said.
Former Governor of Anambra State, Chief Chukwuemeka Ezeife said the federal government should not fund the national conference since the government might use funding to frustrate it. He said: “If federal government should fund it, then it should create budget for it, in which case it can also frustrate it by not implementing the budget it created for the national conference.”
Ezeife rather suggested that the funds for organizing the conference should be sourced from corporate organizations like banks, multinationals and private bodies. Also, Ezeife said Ohanaeze should set up a negotiating committee to discuss with Jonathan ahead of 2015 instead of supporting him sheepishly. “It’s during such negotiation that the Igbo will get something concrete rather than supporting his presidency sheepishly,” he said. However, Ohanaeze also set up a committee headed by Professor Ukwu I. Ukwu to articulate all views from different Igbo groups and individuals ahead of the Confab billed to commence this month.

The South-South Agenda-Resource Control, 50% derivation
Majority of the participants at the one-day South-south zonal conference on the National Dialogue held at the Cultural Centre in Calabar, capital of Cross River State recently have insisted that local communities and states where natural resources emanate should control their wealth by, at least, fifty per cent. Some of the ethnic nationalities, including Ijaw National Congress, Oro Ethnic Nationality from Akwa Ibom State, South-South Peoples Assembly, South-South Peoples Forum, Efik Eburutu Ethnic Nationality, amongst others. They were united in insisting that the confab should encourage the inclusion of resource control by the states. They argued that if this singular issue is resolved then the national atmosphere would be convivial. Governor Liyel Imoke, represented by his deputy, Mr Efiok Cobham stressed that: “On derivation, our position aligns with the that of the entire South-South states to the effect that the constitution be amended to read that a state on whose territory oil (or other natural resources) are extracted or found be entitled to not less 50% of the entire proceeds from the exploration and exploitation.”
Still on control of resource, he furthered: “Solid minerals should be exploited by states where such minerals are deposited.  Compensation should be paid on monthly basis for game reserves and forest conservation as the owners have lost their means of livelihood which is predominantly farming.” Another point of their emphasis was that the outcome of the conference should never be subjected to scrutiny and review of the National Assembly as proposed by President Jonathan on his 1st October address to the nation. The ethnic nationalities and other participants contended that the essence of the national discourse would be defeated because the main gist from the people would be removed by members of the National Assembly that are not attuned to such positions.
The Oporoza House of the Gbaramatu Kingdom which claimed to represent the Ijaw forces, arrow-headed by Ogoriba, Timi Kaiser-Wilhelm as chairman and Ambah Binaebi, secretary, insisted that “The suggestion that the decisions arrived at during the conference should go to the National Assembly for ratification is like suggesting that the judges of a community be appointed from among the ranks of convicted thieves.” In order that the outcome would not be challenged and seen to be lacking in law, the people proposed that there should be an Executive Bill to the National Assembly for them to enact enabling law to legitimately back up the National Dialogue.
Whereas many proposed that the actual conference should hold before the 2015 general elections in the country, many groups differently recommended that the duration of the dialogue should be between three to seven months to enable the committee have time to study the different proposals and present to government.
On representation at the Dialogue, Imoke said that his state is of the opinion that each ethnic nationality be represented at the conference by a delegate who is elected on a zero party basis.  He proposed that the conference should have two alternate chairmen from the north and South each and a secretary, all of whom should not be members of any political party. But the Obong of Calabar’s position was that, at least, 200 delegates should be democratically elected from the six geopolitical zones and from professional groups, including traditional institutions. Still from the Efik Eburutu Ethnic nationality, represented by Princess Henshaw, they recommended that the conference must look into the sheer domination of majority and bigger tribes in the country over smaller ethnic groups. She spoke further, “Our group is also proposing that the tenure of the president should only be five years and no second term.” While many proposed that the confab should discuss and adopt establishment of state police, others seriously argued against it. The Oporoza House, which spoke for Ijaw people, said “Ijaw will insist on an originating discourse with other ethnic blocs to freely negotiate the basis of any union in a manner that would result in a new charter of relationship.  In other words we agree with the position of Afenifere that the conference should answer a first question of whether we still want to continue in the union or not.  The Ijaws will insist in a process that will first distil constitutions of units that wish to federate before any conference to discuss the terms of federating them.”
Regarding this, the position of the Cross River State government was that “the over-reaching powers of the federal government should be curtailed and made more accountable to the federating units over the handling and management of the nation’s financial outlay.  Powers should therefore be devolved even as the Executive legislative list be reviewed in order to transfer certain matters to the Concurrent List.”
Many frowned at the present presidential system of government.  Cross River proposed Uni-cameral legislature while others were comfortable with parliamentary system.  Imoke explained that Unicameral will curtail the cost of governance.
Proposing a two party system for the country, Imoke recommended, too, that the national sharing formula should be: federal government should take 25%, states 45% and local government 35% as against the present. Senator Florence Ita-Giwa, supporting the position of the Cross River State government on compensation in perpetuity to Bakassi for the loss of the ancestral homeland, said there should be another deeper look at how it was ceded. She also said that the women in the country were no longer comfortable with the 35% affirmative action, but that nothing less than 50% should be allocated to them whether it is election or appointment.

The South-West Ageda-Regional autonomy, devolution of power
The maiden outing of the Presidential Advisory Committee on National Dialogue was in Akure the capital of Ondo State where the Chairman, Senator Femi Okunronmi declared that all ethnic nationalities in Nigeria would be adequately represented at the proposed confab. Okunronmu’s assurance that all ethnic nationalities would be treated as equal, irrespective of their population is a departure from the practice with similar exercise in the past where representations were based on nominations from the zones.
Okunronmu did not elaborate on how possible it would be to accommodate representations from the estimated over 300 ethnic nationalities of the country but simply said the committee would determine, among other things, the structure, duration and legal framework of the conference. Also speaking, Governor Olusegun Mimiko of Ondo expressed confidence that the planned National Conference would address the myriad of problems militating against the nation’s progress and commended President Jonathan for taking “this bold step toward reconstructing Nigeria.”
In its submission, Afenifere, a Yoruba socio-cultural group, called for a ‘national conference with sovereign powers’.  Chief Ayo Adebanjo, a chieftain of the group, who presented the group’s memorandum said: “Nigerians must sit down and discuss their union and agree on a federal constitution to guarantee stability, justice, peace, real unity and development borne out of autonomy for the constituent units.”  Insisting that only a referendum can alter any of the decisions reached at the conference, Afenifere suggested that 100 delegates should be elected from each of the six geo-political zones in the country and the remaining 100 delegates should represent special interest groups. It also suggested that the 100 delegates from each zone should be elected on the basis of 10 per cent representation for all established ethnic nationalities in the zones, saying: “The remaining 90 per cent should emerge from equal number of elected delegates from all senatorial districts representing the traditional ethno-geographical contents of the region.”
In its submission, the Arogbo Ijaw Community said that all nationalities in the country should be considered equal for the purpose of the conference, irrespective of their population. Chief Francis Williams, who represented the community advocated for a ‘sovereign National Conference’ where all decisions reached will have the force of law. He faulted the calls for the submission of decisions of the conference to the National Assembly, saying that the decisions should instead be subjected to a national referendum.
 “The National Assembly as presently constituted is part of the Nigerian fraud; it is part of the key issues to be addressed by the conference, therefore, the decisions of the conference cannot go to the National Assembly for ratification as sovereignty belongs to the Nigerian people,” Williams said.
In its submission, the Yoruba Unity Forum suggested a total of 400 delegates for the conference, saying this should be made up of 60 from each of the six geo-political zones and only 4 from the Federal Capital Territory.
According to the Forum no political party should be allowed to play any role in the election or selection of delegates to the conference and that the conference should be given nine months to carry out its assignment. The Pro-National Conference Organization (PRONACO) suggested a total of 600 delegates from the six geo-political zones, while Atayese, another pan-Yoruba organisation, asked that the conference be allowed to determine its agenda.
Two weeks ago, the South-West re-enacted its annual Assembly inaugurated in August 2012 in Ibadan, Oyo state capital. Although Governors Babatunde Fashola of Lagos State and his Osun State counterpart, Mr. Rauf Aregbesola, were absent from the Yoruba Assembly for 2014 National Conference held in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, penultimate Thursday, a coalition of leaders of thought, traditional and political leaders along with various Yoruba socio-cultural groups endorsed a unified agenda, which are to be canvassed on behalf of the Yoruba people at the forthcoming national conference. All the six governors of  South-West were invited to deliver goodwill messages at the assembly.
The host governor, Abiola Ajimobi, was present and other governors of the South-West states of Ekiti, Ogun and Ondo, who were absent, sent representatives to the conference. Governors Ibikunle Amosun of Ogun State was represented by the state Speaker, Mr. Suraj Adekunbi; Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti State was represented by Dr. Femi Akinola, and Dr. Olusegun Mimiko of Ondo State was represented by the state Commissioner for Environment and Natural Resources, Chief Sola Ebiseni. However, Fashola and Aregbesola did not send representatives or apology for their absence. A National Leader of the All Progressives Congress, Bola Tinubu, was also absent from the event, where some leaders of the party, including former governors of Ekiti and Ogun State, Chiefs Niyi Adebayo and Segun Osoba, respectively, were present.Tinubu’s name was not specifically stated on the list of invited leaders in Yorubaland.
The Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Lamidi Adeyemi, was also absent and did not send a representative to the conference. However, the Ooni of Ife, Oba Okunade Sijuade, and the Olubadan of Ibadan, Oba Samuel Odulana, were absent but were represented at the event. The Yoruba Assembly, a coalition of thoughts and socio-cultural groups in Yoruba land has announced that it will demand regional autonomy at the forthcoming 2014 National Conference. The Assembly arrived at this decision after a grand Summit held on Thursday in Ibadan, Oyo State where it also called for an ideal resource management system. General Alani Akinrinade, Vice Chairman of the group while reading out the summary of the 15 issues on the Yoruba Agenda to be presented at the National Conference said, “When the conference holds from March 10, 2014, the Yoruba people will make a proposal for a new Nigeria, consisting of a central union/Federal Government and six regional governments based on the current six geo-political zones, including all other Yoruba outside the imposed artificial boundaries; that is to say, in Edo, Delta, Kogi and Kwara states; and operating federal and regional constitutions, respectively.” He said that the Yoruba would call for regional autonomy for the South-West within a united Nigerian federation. “The regional constitution will allocate functions to the three tiers of government in the Yoruba federation or region. States will be responsible for the creation of local government councils. However, any ethnic group or groups within a state wishing to align with any other state or to belong to a new region shall be allowed to do so if confirmed in a plebiscite by the affected people,” Akinrinade said.
He added that the conference offered an opportunity for the ethnic group to actualise its agenda. The Yoruba agenda as read by Akinrinade is also seeking to bring to an end the presidential system of government in the country and ensure the return to the parliamentary system, and the right to self determination by each region, including the right to secede. The group also deliberated on the status of Lagos State recognising it as the commercial nerve center of Nigeria while proposing a budgetary provision that ensures that Lagos is part of the first line charge on the Federation Account. The Yoruba agenda also called for a taxation system that ensures that each region controls a substantial part of its resources while taxes are paid to the federal government. Speaking on the agenda, Femi Okurounmu, Chairman, Presidential Advisory Committee on the National Conference appealed for unity among the Yoruba, warning that no state in the region must present a separate agenda. “We have a Yoruba Agenda already and if any state presents a separate agenda, we will lose our unity,” Okurounmu said.

<http://www.nigeriannewsworld.com/content/national-conference-contending-agendas>

The National Confabulation: My Peripheral View  Posted: 8:11 am, Mar 29, 2014 by Hilary Tamuno Right from the day the idea of the national conference came to light, nigerians, both at home and in the diaspora, have inundated the media the with a barrage of ideas, information, disagreements, accusations and counter-accusations. It has since then caused a chequered, rather than unified national arrangement. Well, the original intent of the confab is to increase national cohesion in the face of political, social and religious crisis across the country and I am quite positive it would, in the end, achieve nothing less. In truth, president Goodluck Jonathan should be commended for two major reasons: first,  initiating or buying the idea of organising a national conference at this turbulent time of crisis and insurgency; secondly, withstanding all sorts of pressure, especially from the opposition, to kill the idea while it was still at the budding stage. That the discussion has set sail is an expression of steadfast and unwavering will on the part of the president. The Chairman, Presidential advisory committee on national dialogue, Sen. Femi Okurounmu, had earlier stated and reiterated in Calabar Friday that the essence of the National Conference is to prevent the government from imposing anything on the people by hearing fairly from all parties that make up the entire nation. This, to me, is also the intent of Mr. president who is widely considered as liberal. But in opposition, Nobel Laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka stated in a south-south economic summit that nigerians should drop the lingering national conference and replace it with regional groupings, which would, rather than summon it, begin to “act the national conference” by taking their destinies in their hands. The APC also have never seen anything good in the National Conference since it assailed their ears. One of their leaders, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari has considered it a national waste. It isn’t a surprise to me or ‘you’ anyway that this statement emanated from an APC chieftain. After all, in their eyes, PDP is never right. And vice-versa too. This goes a long way to explain the disparate views of nigerians on national issues. Not only that, the cross-cultural, political and religious differences have overtime given rise to high level intolerance. For instance, much as I entirely agree with Okorounmu, I do not agree with the view of Professor Soyinka as regards regional groupings. This is simply because one or more of these groups may not be acting in favour of national cohesion as is envisaged by the national conference. A few days ago, a delegate from Adamawa state, Aliyu Mustapha, made a very unpatriotic, impudent and intrepid  statement when he threatened that the northern elders would pull out of the conference if some ‘so called elderstatemen’ are not called to order. His argument was that some of the delegates had come with their personal agenda, one  of which he failed to mention to Nigerians. I would have loved to know one of such delegates or agendum anyway. Mustapha, who happens to be the Lamido of Adamawa, had these uncouth words to say to the Chairman of the conference, Hon. Justice Idris Legbo Kutigi: “I am not afraid of discussing the disintegration of Nigeria. My kingdom in Adamawa extends to Cameroun so if the country falls apart, we can move over to the other side.” It gladdened my heart when Mustapha was shouted down by other delegates. In fact, anything less would have been a failure on their part. Now, for these words to fall out of the mouth of a man with such a revered title is quite shameful and embarrassing. That tells you how divisive nigerians can be. And who told him that Cameroun will be ready to accept him as one of their citizens, let alone his flock. Nigerians should learn to be more diplomatic and cohesive when it comes to issues of national unity. The first week of the conference has been quite interesting, intriguing and engaging. As soon as the discussion began, a long argument ensued between the Chairman and the delegates at to the issue of voting and consensus on any matter that arose. While the Chairman made it very clear that all rulings will be based on 75% majority, a few of the delegates including renowned lawyer, Mike Ozekhome; Professor of Law, Auwalu Yadudu; and elder statesman, Chief Adebanjo begged to differ, stating that the Nigerian constitution stipulates that two thirds majority and not three quarters should be employed in any matter arising. That is outlandish to want three quarters majority to carry the vote. Kutigi, having seemingly bowed partially to the pressure on the voting system, called for a recess just an hour into the debate. The second issue of debate just before the recess was that of election of chairman and deputy of various committees. While the Confab leadership dictated that chairmen and deputies will be appointed by principal officers, the delegates argued that they would rather have the chairmen and deputies elected by members of the committees. I strongly agree with the position by the delegates. As for some of the delegates who rejected their full remuneration and others who said they will collect theirs and give to charity, I reserve my comments for now. Probably in next weeks edition, I’d have something to say about that. Until then, I hope Mr Chairman and other delegates to the Conference will have a more fruitful deliberation as the discussion continues next week Monday. Kanu Franklin, Abuja Kanufranklin@yahoo.com
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