



# National Christian Elders Forum

*Motto: Watch & Pray that we may be one ...*

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12<sup>th</sup> July 2024

The President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces,  
The Senate President,  
The Speaker, House of Representatives,  
The Chief Justice of Nigeria,  
FCT, Abuja

Dear Sirs,

## **STATE OF THE NATION:**

### **IN THE MULTITUDE OF COUNSELLORS THERE IS SAFETY**

The National Christian Elders Forum, (NCEF), at its July 2024 meeting, reviewed the state of Nigeria and expressed concern about the condition of the people and the country. Undoubtedly, the current state of Nigeria calls for concern, as well as the contribution of all well-meaning citizens, to support the government in providing solutions to the myriads of problems confronting Nigeria. As part of its contribution to support the government, the Christian Elders resolved to provide counsel to the President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Chief Justice of the Federation.

NCEF identified four critical areas, amongst many others, that Government should focus attention on in a bid to halt the downward spiral of the country which, if not checked, may result in an implosion in the nearest future. The four critical areas identified by the Christian Elders are:

1. The imperative of a new Constitution for Nigeria
2. Credible fight against corruption
3. Independence of the Judiciary and restoration of judicial integrity
4. Averting the proposed national protest planned for August 2024

### **THE IMPERATIVE OF A NEW CONSTITUTION FOR NIGERIA**

At various times, and with varying degrees of intensity, many impartial and credible citizens have identified the 1999 Constitution (as amended) as a major impediment to the peace, progress, and prosperity of Nigeria. There have been series of calls, at different fora, for Nigeria to adopt a credible constitution that would be developed by the people. The authorship of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) has been a subject of controversy in the past 25 years.

The challenge facing government has been how to develop a new constitution. While many voices agree that Nigeria requires a new constitution, there is yet to be a consensus on how it should be done. Consequently, many proposals have come forth, one of which is the perennial amendment by the National Assembly. Unfortunately, that process has not provided the required solution after six amendment exercises by various legislative assemblies. In addition, the efforts of the National Assembly have been condemned that the responsibility of the Legislators is to make laws and not to give the country a constitution. The task of producing a constitution is the responsibility of the ethnic nationalities.

National Christian Elders Forum proposes that in view of the urgency to jump-start the economy and guarantee safety and prosperity for the citizens, government should adopt the draft Constitution of the 2014 National Conference. That document could be a starting point having been agreed upon by representatives of the various ethnic nationalities and participants from various sectors of the economy and the society.

The major flaw of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) is its preamble which claims “We the People ...” The point has been made repeatedly that “we the people” did not produce the 1999 Constitution (as amended). To ensure that “we the people” approve the next Constitution, government should subject the draft Constitution of the 2014 National Conference to a national referendum. Once it scales through the referendum, it becomes a valid constitution of “we the people”. The beauty about this proposal is that no part of Nigeria can object since all the component parts of the country were represented at the National Conference and they unanimously approved the draft constitution. All it requires is validation by the people at a referendum.

National Christian Elders Forum urges the Tinubu Administration to give serious consideration to this counsel to avert a crisis looming over the horizon. There is no time to waste in the task of rebooting the country. The people are almost being driven to desperation and despondency. When people start thinking they have nothing to lose, whether they live or die, the country is in a precarious situation.

The mere promise of the government that a new constitution is in the offing within a few months will calm a lot of frayed nerves in the country and restore hope and confidence in the people that Nigeria will not sink. Mr. President, the first task of government is to instil hope and confidence in the citizens that their country will float and prosper. Presently, very few Nigerians have such confidence. Government must restore hope in the people.

### **CREDIBLE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION**

Undeniably, the military created a culture of corruption in Nigeria. This culture was made worse by the political class which has erased any dividing line between the state treasury and their private purse. Almost every government in the past few years has made fight against corruption a major manifesto. Unfortunately, none of them have been able to make any meaningful impact in the fight against corruption.

The establishment of EFCC was a good idea until it became a tool to fight political opponents by the party in power. We regret to observe that the current administration is towing this line. The

eight years of the Buhari administration ranks as the most corrupt government ever witnessed in Nigeria. What has been the scorecard of the EFCC under the Tinubu administration in arresting and prosecuting the corrupt public officials? So far, most of the arrests made by the EFCC give the impression of media trial and playing to the gallery. It is the prosecution of corrupt persons that confirm credible fight against corruption.

An area of increasing concern is the corruption in the Civil Service and amongst public officials. If corruption is not tackled effectively at this level, no government can claim to succeed in fighting corruption. The most corrupt entities in Nigeria are the government officials.

Most Civil Servants conduct their duties as if they are doing the people a favour. It is fast becoming the norm that unless they are financially induced, they will not lift a finger to do any work for which they are employed and paid salaries. The Civil Servants no longer hide their greed neither are they ashamed about it. On the contrary, they have developed an entitlement mentality that indicates they truly believe they deserve to be bribed before they can do their work.

An effective fight against corruption in Nigeria must start from the Civil Service and the National Assembly. Legislators that allocate to themselves humongous salary, and allowances, for representing people who daily live in penury and poverty is the height of corruption.

National Christian Elders Forum advocates an independent EFCC that would be free from any political restraint in the discharge of its duties. The appointment of the officials of the EFCC should equally be free from any political influence. Since politicians are portraying themselves as the sponsors and beneficiaries of corruption in the land, they should not be involved in the appointment of officers of the EFCC.

If the government is sincere in its fight against corruption, it must develop a structure that would guarantee independence of the EFCC. This can easily be done if there is the political will to eradicate corruption in Nigeria.

### **INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY AND RESTORATION OF JUDICIAL INTEGRITY**

The unfortunate incursion of partisan politicking has robbed the judiciary of its integrity and credibility. The consequence is that in Nigeria today, justice goes to the highest bidder. The late Bob Marley sang that “everyone is crying out for peace, no one is crying out for justice”.

Once a society is denied justice, lawlessness and impunity will reign supreme. The law of the jungle, in which predators dominate, will rule the society. Under such a system, citizens become preys while power brokers prowl as predators. Whenever people have no access to justice and fairness, the tendency is for them to take the law into their own hands which ultimately results in the springing up of warlords, each promising protection. The Government is usually the first victim of such a situation as it would lose control of security.

This unfortunate situation is already developing in the North East and North West areas of the country. The prevalence of non-state actors in those regions is clearing the ground on which anarchy will sprout and grow.

An effective, professional and impartial judiciary is required to maintain the peace and stability of the country. Sadly, the Nigerian Judiciary is presently mired in too many controversies to play such stabilizing role in the country. We shall briefly examine two of such controversies.

One, Prof. Chidi Odinkalu, former Chairman of Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission, lamented what he referred to as "family and friends division of the Judiciary." According to Prof. Odinkalu, appointment of judges, justices, as well as that of officials at the National Judicial Commission is increasingly based on nepotism and political patronage. He alleged that mistresses, spouses, children, and relatives are given undue advantage in various appointments.

Politicians have also been accused of using their offices to intrude into judicial appointments. Since he who pays the piper dictates the tune, it can be expected that judgments that will proceed from the courts may no longer serve the interest of justice but that of the godfathers.

Two, the National Bureau of Statistics, in its July 2024 report titled "Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends" stated that Nigerians paid N721 billion as bribe to public officials in 2023. The report analysed the pattern of corruption in the different arms of government. It is very disturbing that according to the official report of the National Bureau of Statistics, bribery collected by judges and magistrates rose from 19% in 2019 to 50% in 2023. These are official government figures. The report is a distressing indictment on the judiciary which is yet to recover from allegations of wrongdoing during the 2023 elections.

Consequently, government must call politicians to order to desist from infiltrating the judiciary with inordinate political ambitions. In addition to that, the independence of the judiciary must be guaranteed. The recommendations of the 2014 National Conference on steps to reform the judiciary should be implemented. Any country that cannot guarantee justice in its courts is one step away from anarchy.

#### **AVERTING THE PROPOSED NATIONAL PROTEST PLANNED FOR AUGUST 2024**

Recently, a faceless group in the country is calling people to a nationwide protest from 1<sup>st</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> August 2024. While the group rightly lists several demands that would enhance good governance, the protest itself should be viewed with seriousness. For one, the unknown organizers wish to replicate the protest that took place recently in Kenya.

However, the situation in Kenya is different from that of Nigeria. There are too many aggrieved groups in Nigeria for anyone to toy with the idea of national protest. It is either the country would implode, or the protesters would be massacred by over enthusiastic security forces. The memory of the ENDSARS bloodshed is still fresh in our memories. As Elders, we do not support any action that might lead to loss of lives, and destruction of national assets and individual properties.

Under the circumstances, we advocate that government must change its approach to governance and restore hope and confidence in the people. The recent statement of President Tinubu during a live broadcast that "the cost of fuel has gone up, food and other prices have followed it, households and businesses are struggling, things seem anxious and uncertain. I understand the hardship you face. I wish there were other ways but there is none", is unstatesmanlike and an admission of failure. The leader of a country should not admit to the citizens that there is nothing that he can do. In the face of hopelessness, the leader must keep exuding hope and confidence.

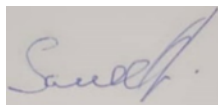
To avert the looming crisis, National Christian Elders Forum would counsel the Tinubu administration to announce the introduction of a new constitution and begin preparations for a national referendum to adopt the draft constitution of the 2014 National Conference. This would give new direction to the country and renew hope that the constituent parts of Nigeria will start working. A step in this direction will neutralize every agitation and anarchists will have no basis to rally people to public protest that might end up in destruction of lives and properties.

Nigerians are resilient and hardworking, unfortunately, the 1999 Constitution (as amended) has stifled and strangled the constituent units from working. The consequence is a nation sitting on top of enormous productive resources but unable to work without obtaining permit from Abuja. The central government must devolve power and functions to the federating units so that the country will make progress. If the central government insists on maintaining its stranglehold on the country via the 1999 Constitution (as amended), it might unwittingly have signed up for a revolt by the populace.

## CONCLUSION

Mr. President, and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House of Assembly, and the Chief Justice of Nigeria, we urge you to remember that power is transient. The positions you occupy today were held by different people yesterday, most of whom now regretfully, wish they had done things differently. Fortunately, you can still do things right. We cannot continue to run Nigeria the way previous governments did and expect a better country. Mr. President, the streets are not smiling.

May God grant you grace to take the right decisions.



Dr Samuel Danjuma Gani, CON,  
Chairman  
22<sup>nd</sup> July 2024

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Dr. Samuel Danjuma Gani, CON, Chairman, Dr. Saleh Hussaini, Vice Chairman (North), Elder Shyngle Wigwe, Vice Chairman (South), Mrs. Osaretin Demuren, Hon. Treasurer, Prof. Joseph Otubu, Dr. (Mrs) Kate Okparaeke, Dr. Ayo Abifarin, Gen. Zamani Lekwot (rtd), Hon. Justice James Ogebe, JSC (rtd), Elder Moses Ihonde, Hon. Justice Kalajine Anigbogu (rtd), Elder Nathaniel Okoro, Mr. Solomon Asemota, SAN, Elder Matthew Owojaiye, DIG P. L. Dabup, Sir John W. Bagu, Dame Priscilla Kuye, Prof. (Mrs) Deborah Enilo Ajakaiye, HRM Oba Dokun Thompson, Dr. Taiwo Idemudia (Diaspora), Elder Minso Gadzama, Apostle Bulus Musa Kewa, Admiral Peter Adeniyi (Rtd), Hon. Justice Goddy Anunihu (Rtd.), Chief Sir Ferdinand Anikwe PhD, KSJI, Pastor Bosun Emmanuel (Secretary)