

Full Length Research Paper

The key challenges to peace in Nigeria

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Nigeria is faced by various devastating political and socio-economic conditions, with about 250 multicultural ethnic nationalities; Nigeria is plagued by religious, ethnic, communal and resource conflict. Large resources and benefits from oil wealth could not touch the lives of the people. Allegiances to ethnic groups come first before the Nigeria state. Resource control agitations in the Niger Delta have given birth to various militia groups. The rise of vigilante groups, separatist groups, and the Boko Haram (Western or non-Islamic education is a sin) threatens the hard earned democracy, growth and development and the coexistence of Nigeria as a nation. Unfortunately, democracy that seems to be a dream come true is fast turning a nightmare. The April 2007 polls that were characterized by irregularities marked the first handover of power between civilian governments which set the pace for future civil democratic transition to another. Many of the challenges faced by Nigeria today were analyzed in this paper with possible solutions that will awaken Nigeria to its position in Africa and avert the 1967 to 1970 civil war experience.

Key words: Conflict resolution, challenges to peace, socio-economic conditions, resource control.

INTRODUCTION

One may think that the biggest obstacle to African development is poverty, but like Onwudiwe (2005) argued, "the strategic danger to Africa's expected rebirth is the disintegration of Nigeria, the largest political concentration of African people in our continent," with a population of 150 million people, any major conflict is a disaster to the continent. Nigeria is also another point of concern, as "one of the potential areas of instability" according to Porter J. Goss, the former U.S. Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, in his address to the Congress (Jolayemi, 2005). His fear was that in southern Nigeria, the military were struggling to contain militia groups in the oil-producing area, the continued ethnic violence that frequently erupt throughout the country and the threat of Muslim population. But as the Nigerian government struggle with the various challenges that faces her, it has been emphasized that as a political and economic giant in Africa, its future can either be a shining example for the continent or a cautionary tale of what happens when great potential is sabotaged by poor governance, lack of leadership and pervasive corruption (International Crisis Group, 2006).

Brief political perspectives

Since Nigeria got independence in 1960 from the British, the military had ruled for approximately 30 years out of her 50 years of existence (see annex). Nigeria experienced her first military coup d'etat in 1966, six years after independence, since then the country had successive military intervention before it returned to the second republic in 1979, it collapsed in 1983 by another military intrusion in her political history, judged for incompetence and corruption on politicians, this saw Nigeria into another 16 years of dark military dictatorship. Again, Nigeria in May 29, 1999 returned to a democratic rule that is still on going. As the nation enthusiastically embraced this long awaited change in governance by electing President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999, a former military leader who willingly returned power to the civilian in 1979, regarded by many as a bridge across several of Nigeria's major fault lines, it was believed that the Obasanjo's administration would usher in many democratic dividends that will guarantee peace, human security, rights and development centered on the people.

However, “the country remains handicapped by political malpractice, deep economic contradictions, social inequality and a considerable potential for violence due to the politicisation of identity” (International Crisis Group, 2006a) characterized by religious, ethnic and communal conflicts, insecurity, organized crime, human rights violations among others. Between 1999 till date, Nigeria experienced critical events that undermined her coexistence. In November 1999, the introduction of Shari’a Law (Islamic civil and criminal code) met aggressive resistance that caused the religious crisis of February 2000. Two years later in November 2002, Nigeria witnessed another religious crisis motivated by the Miss World Pageant, which was incited by an article in a local Newspaper-THISDAY. Because Nigeria won the 2001 edition by Agbani Darego, it was a leverage to host the 2002 Miss World in Nigeria, but the timing coincided with the Muslim Ramadan festival and it met stiff opposition from the Islamic clerics. Questioning the Muslim groups that condemned the hosting of the Miss World pageant and arguing in favour of it, journalist Isioma Daniel wrote, “What would (the prophet) Mohammed think? In all honesty, he would probably have chosen a wife from among them (the contestants)” (CNN.Com/World, 2002). The massive public protest and riots that followed these two events caused lost of lives, many injuries and damaged properties worth millions in local currency. As if it was not enough, the Kurt Westergaard “Danish cartoon” (BBC News, 2006) protest of February 2006 will not be forgotten, 16 deaths left Nigeria as the highest casualty all over the world.

Nigeria is a secular state with a democratic constitution, 12 of the Nigerian 36 states in northern Nigeria namely; Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara applied the Shari’a Law into their criminal legislation. By statistics, Nigeria is quoted to be “Muslim 50%, Christian 40%, [and] indigenous beliefs 10%.” (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007) Shari’a specifies amputations of limbs and stoning to death as part of its punishment. Sani Yakubu Rodi was the first and to date, the only known person to be executed by hanging on January 3, 2002 after a Shari’a verdict, he did not appeal because the death sentence according to his family was God’s ruling and to appeal would mean defying God’s wishes (Human Rights Watch, 2004). In March 22 2002, a Shari’a Court sentenced Amina Lawal to death by stoning for committing adultery, the death sentence was upheld by the Upper Shari’a Court, but for the international intervention and pressure from human rights groups, further appeal saw the sentence overruled by the State Shari’a Court of Appeal due to insufficient evidence. But the likes of Buba Bello were unlucky, he got his right hand amputated for stealing a cow, and Lawali Inchi Tara suffered same amputation after he was found guilty of stealing bicycles (Human Rights Watch, 2004). This legal code has been in the Nigerian constitution since 1979; it

was included in the 1999 constitution, but it became political when the Governor of Zamfara State Ahmed Sani Yerima became the first to adopt the Shari’a legislation in October 27, 1999, and it came into force on January 27, 2000. Chapter VII of the 1999 Nigerian constitution recognizes and empowered Shari’a courts to handle proceedings involving questions of Islamic Personal Law, which the court is competent to decide (Constitution, 1999). It was limited in jurisdiction to oversee personal status law such as divorce, inheritance, and domestic disputes.

However, the extension to criminal law has wide-ranging consequences, which has opened up complex political and religious debates (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Many believed that the introduction of Shari’a is a re-affirmation of religious identity, but this is also a constitutional issue; the possibility of challenging Shari’a means that the same constitution that upholds it is flawed. In fact, Esimai (2006) argued that the 1999 Nigerian constitution has supremacy over other laws, quoting from the constitution, “if any other law is inconsistent with the provision of this constitution, this constitution shall prevail, and that other law shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void” (p. 235). In line of this argument, the constitution is very clear on matters of religion; it states, “The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as a State Religion” (p. 235). The fact that it was difficult for the federal government to make pronouncement against it, made the people in the states where it is practiced unequal before the law, which many argued to be threat to peace and signifies that more conflicts will take place in the future, not minding that individual security starts from the rule of law and the ability of the state to protect her citizens.

It is the opinion of this author, that the Nigerian government should not sit on the fence, but make her position known on Shari’a Law in the constitution and answer the question ‘is it to be or not to be?’ should Nigeria run parallel legal systems in different states in one country? One based on the state justice system while the other derives its power on faith or are there possibilities to “harmonize” or run both “side by side,” are constitutional questions that calls for answer. Certain aspects of the Nigerian human rights condition still remains the same. The assessment of the United Nations (UN) fact-finding team led by Manfred Nowak, the Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel and Inhuman Treatment or Degrading Treatment of Punishment on Nigerian prisons and other detention centres across the country, condemned the penal authorities over tortures and other forms of inhuman treatment of detainees across the criminal justice administration system. Nowak found that there was lack of “respect for human rights and the right to human dignity, even in detention centres” (DAILY SUN, 2007), by the police which persist till date. They identified practices like “flogging with whips, beating with batons and machetes, shooting suspects in the foot,

threatening suspects with death, shooting with powder cartridges, suspension from the ceiling or metal rods in various positions, and denying suspects food, water and medical treatment" (DAILY SUN, 2007). They noted that it was a widespread practice in the police custody, prevalent in the Criminal Investigation Departments (CID).

We cannot rule out arbitrary arrests and detention, torture and extra-judicial killing in contrary to Chapter IV; 36:1 of the constitution (Constitution, 1999). The constitution allows for the provision of redress in the court of law by claiming damages and apology from the government. "Despite many complaints of torture and other abuse raised by prisoners and people under police custody, few Nigerian police or security officers have been prosecuted for these offences under any administration" (Civil Liberty Organisation, 1996). In November 1999, for unclear position of how 12 policemen were murdered in Odi, Bayelsa State in the oil rich Niger Delta in Nigeria, the military invaded the community and committed mass murder. The mission was to apprehend the suspected killers and to further prevent the breakdown of law and order, but before the two weeks deadline of the president's threat to declare a state of emergency expired, the culprits were not apprehended, soldiers from the Nigerian Army moved into Odi (Human Rights Watch, 1999), launched an all out war; indiscriminate shelling of Odi and the nearby communities, an action that has long been anticipated, only the timing was uncertain.

Similar incidence occurred in Choba community in Rivers State, where soldiers were deployed to disperse protesters outside the gates of Willbros Nigeria Limited, the subsidiary of an American pipeline construction company. Community members reported that the soldiers killed four people, and raped a large number of women (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Likewise in Benue State, central Nigeria in 2001 experienced another "sweet revenge" of military assault, described "as a well-planned military operation carried out in reprisal for the killing of 19 soldiers," (Isaacs, 2002) over 200 unarmed civilians were killed. Nevertheless, the government failed to condemn any of the attacks and violations while security apparatus wax stronger. In the 2005 World Report of the Human Rights Watch, it was remembered and put this way; "tackling impunity remains a key challenge for the government. No one has yet been brought to justice for the massacre of hundreds of people by the military in Odi, Bayelsa state, in 1999, and in Benue state, in 2001" (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

Insecurity of lives

While this paper acknowledges the struggle for political power within the ruling class, the security systems are largely undermined. The security crisis today is damaging

the country's international image. Nigeria wants foreign investors but lacks strong and strategic security in place for human protection. Nigeria is currently degenerating into a state of terror and fear, where everyone is afraid of its own shadow, the lapses in security calls for concern. Nigeria is losing more lives and prominent citizens even when the nation is not confronted with external aggression. Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed series of assassinations. On the 23rd of December, 2001, the former Attorney General of the Federation Chief Bola Ige was assassinated in his residence; the killers are still at large, yet to face the justice. On March 5, 2003, Marshall Harry - the national Vice Chairman for the South-South Zone one of the opposition party; All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) was murdered at home (Human Rights Watch, 2003), his house was a walking distance from the police headquarters, when the police were alerted at a nearby checkpoint that night, they said they had no fuel in their vehicle, so they could do nothing. Barnabas Igwe, the Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association Onitsha Branch and his wife were assassinated on September 1, 2002, Prophet Eddie Okeke was murdered in November 2000, Chief Ezeodumegwu G. Okonkwo a chairman of a local government was killed in February 2001, in 2006 Engr. Funsho Williams and Dr. Ayodeji Daramola suffered similar fate (Patrick, 2006). The two men were on the platform of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and governorship aspirants of Lagos and Ekiti State, respectively.

Others who had met their untimely death in the past were Kudirat Abiola, the wife of late Chief MKO Abiola, the presumed winner of the annulled June 12, 1993 Presidential Election, Chief Alfred Rewane, Mr. Godwin Agbroko the Chairman, Editorial Board of the THISDAY Newspapers among others. It is disheartening and painful, if security of lives and properties cannot be guaranteed in a democratic state. If gunmen could kill a well meaningful Nigerian like the Chief Law Officer and one time state Executive Governor (1979 to 1983) under the police protection and escorts, Nigerians may not be safe. So far, the puzzles behind these murders are yet to be solved, whether they are politically motivated or otherwise are left to the state to answer, but it is certain that Nigeria like many other African states see political office as the biggest business; therefore violence becomes an ideological apparatus and struggle to achieve political power. History they say repeats itself, resolving high profile assassinations by the Nigerian Police is quite unimpressive because the Police lacks the will and competence to investigate crime, apprehend culprits, and ensure justice which eventually erodes the public confidence for safety.

Corruption as a national cancer

Speaking at a colloquium in January 31, 2007 at the

University of Ibadan, Nigeria; the former Chairman for Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) deplored the state of corruption in Nigeria. "You do not need to be a smart social scientist to make the nexus between corruption and how it threatens the rule of law, the democratic principle, human rights, fairness and social justice as well as good governance" (Lawal and Omofoye, 2007). Described in the academic circles as cancer militating against Nigeria's development, corruption is deeply threatening the fabric of the Nigerian society. The Independence Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the EFCC established to fight graft (few of the best things done by the former President Obasanjo's administration) has been highly criticized by many politicians and academics for selective targets, tools in the hands of state officials to witch-hunt unfavored political opponents. But criticism may not solve the problem because this 'cancer' is real. It could be recalled that following a ruling by the Swiss Federal Supreme Court on February 7, 2005, the Switzerland government invited the World Bank to monitor the repatriation to Nigeria of "\$500 million" (Tohomdet and Donaldson, 2006) looted funds deposited in the Swiss accounts.

The struggle for the "national cake" resources from oil is fierce. Sabotaging the interest of the Nigerian state is not in short supply. The case of "bunkering" (a name coined from stealing crude oil into tankers by breaking pipelines) is a good example. Under the Nigerian federal constitution, all minerals - oil and gas belong to the government; any oil extraction outside this agreement with the Nigerian authority is a crime. In 2003, it was reported that illegal bunkering probably reached a maximum of 150,000 or 200,000 barrels per day (Human Rights Watch, 2003a). There were other claims that the theft of oil was greatly underreported, that it reached 650,000 bpd. "The loss to the Nigerian government from illegal oil bunkering amounts to figures in the order of U.S. \$750 million to \$1.5 billion annually at oil prices between nineteen to thirty dollars a barrel" (Human Rights Watch, 2003a). The Nigerian government was severely affected by this theft than the private multinational oil companies in the joint ventures. In terms of revenue losses, this is economic sabotage too many, oil experts have argued that Nigeria has the highest oil bunkers among the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). As a member of OPEC, Nigeria enjoys a daily quota of 2.4 million barrels per day. Therefore, oil theft is a serious challenge to Nigeria economic survival because 80% of total revenue receipts of government are from the oil sector (DAILY SUN, 2011). Indeed, unbridled oil theft are not surprising, also, it is not strange because some political leaders and elites have been fingered as conspirators with the bunkering cartels, but what is odd is the government acknowledgment of this illegal activities for years, regrettably, the government has not taken enough decisive action to curb

this criminality. The billions of dollars lost could be used to fund viable initiatives and infrastructure development.

The Nigerian situation is complex, the solution may not be far, but as a country with such complicated political ethnic landscape, what seems to amaze everyone is that Nigerians are not bereaved of ideas and knowledge which are abundant, but only lacks the simple leadership and political will to do the right things for the good of all. It is so appalling that the political class has learnt nothing from the problems that brought the ship of this nation to its current sorry state; however, no Nigerian irrespective of class or status should be excused from this blame. During the launching of the "Heart of Africa Project" in November 2006 in London, a programme designed by the Nigerian Government to project her image, phenomenal growth and uncommon potential as a first class destination for investment and tourism (Nigeria First, 2006), Hon. Baroness Valerie Amos, the Leader of the House of Lords pointed out 3 prominent issues confronting Nigeria in her opening remarks; the first is to ensure free and fair election in 2007, the second; to sustain and deepen the current [former President Obasanjo's] economic reforms programmes and thirdly, tackling the Niger Delta question (Adeniyi, 2006). In furtherance of the aforementioned project, the former Minister of Information and Communications, Professor Mrs. Dora Akunyeli in early 2009, launched a new "Rebranding" programme with a slogan "Nigeria: Good People, Great Nation".

Truly, the Nigeria April 2007 polls represented a watershed for Africa, because whatever happened would reverberate across the continent, getting it right means a giant stride to consolidating democracy in Africa (Adeniyi, 2006), in other words it "could mark either a solid step away from the military past into a democratic future, or a descent into national disintegration" (Esimai, 2006). However, the April polls were not credible and acceptable internationally, the process were not in consonance with the rule of law, and was not free and fair. Adjudged to be the worst election in the history of Nigeria, it was characterized by "widespread disregard to non-disclosure of secrecy in balloting, vandalization, stealing, snatching and stuffing of ballot boxes by political thugs for their candidates and party stalwarts and the alteration of results during collation process" (Iduh, 2007). In the case of Ondo State, South West Nigeria, fictitious names like Iron Mike Tyson and Mohammed Ali [of United States], Justice Idris Legbo Kutigi the Chief Justice of Nigeria, etc were found in the voters register. To a very large extent, what happened in Nigeria was selection and not election, but despite this political deficit, the Nigerian political gladiators and their supporters opted to use the judiciary system to seek justice and redress, unlike what happened in Kenya [December 2007 elections] and Zimbabwe [March and June 2008 elections] where stolen mandates resulted in massive political unrest. Nevertheless, Nigeria's subsequent general elections in



Figure 1. Niger Delta in map. Source: BBC, 2011.

2011, though was not perfect, but it was free and fair because people's votes counted.

No country can develop without proper economic reforms. Nigeria is seriously faced with challenges of development, not only human but also social infrastructures – no nation can attain industrialization without power (electricity), good transport systems, health and pipe borne water facilities to mention a few. As at 2008, one is marveled to hear that Nigeria foreign reserve [over \$50 billion] exceeds that of the United Kingdom [\$47,040,000,000], Canada [\$35,060,000,000], Saudi Arabia [\$34,000,000,000] and South Africa [\$28,470,000,000]. However, Nigeria reserve strength has not reflected positively on the lives of her citizenry due to corrupt and bad administrations (Yusuf, 2008). Further analysis revealed that Nigerians "prefer living a third class citizen lives in countries with relatively low reserves and the present government has all it takes to deliver on its laps and everybody's expectation is that the reserves should reflect on our lives" (Yusuf, 2008). Fat reserves should translate into developmental projects. Many Nigerians were forced to self-exiles in these nations because they have what Nigeria does not have. There is no social system that could guarantee proper distribution of wealth and sustainable development. Nigeria is a former agriculture based economy, but now dominated by oil and natural gas, since the oil boom of the early 1970s; the massive oil wealth has not touched the lives of the masses, it was estimated in 2004 that more than "70.8% live below \$1 a day" (World Bank, 2004), in recent times it has been argued to be less than \$2. This is a failure of the state to develop alternatives and diversify the economy into other sectors like manufacturing to empower the people and lessen competition over the struggle of black gold (oil) which has become more of a curse than blessing.

Hardly is there any Nigerian leader in policy making position that has not travelled outside the shore of the African continent, in fact some have studied, vacationed and lived abroad, even some owned choice properties outside Nigeria shores. They see good roads in the United Kingdom, good social security system in the United States, good power supply in Canada, and quality lives in Europe – programmes for good livelihood are not in short supply in the West. Why are millions of Nigerians living in penury? Why is there want in the midst of plenty? Why have many suddenly turned to religious revivalism for consolation? – Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28 King James Version). The answers may not be far fetched; this is because in the developed countries mentioned earlier, resources are meant for the "common good" of all. But such will not be said of Nigeria where misguided state policies, gross abuse of office, privileges and misapplication of public funds at all tiers of government has impoverished Nigerians in the midst of plenty. The former Senate President Chief Kenechukwu Nnamani suggested that embezzlement, misapplication and misappropriation of public funds be seen as capital offences that attract severe punishments because such misbehaviours are the causes of poverty and misery in Nigeria (Omopidan, 2007).

Niger Delta and the agitation for resource control

Resource control, allocation of revenue, environmental degradation and the neglects of the people of the Niger Delta are some of the challenges in the region covering the "nine oil-producing states of Nigeria; Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States with a total land area of about 75,000 km² and 185 local government areas" (UNDP, 2006a) as shown in Figure 1. Statistics has shown that oil and gas have generated 40% of Nigeria's national GDP in past decades. Between 2000 and 2004, oil accounted for about 79.5% of total government revenues and about 97% of foreign exchange revenues, but progress and hope, much less prosperity remain elusive in this region (UNDP, 2006a). Decades of peaceful protest had given way to attacks, kidnapping and struggle for the emancipation of the region. History has shown that long military intervention in politics has legitimized the use of force and violence as instruments for social change and attainment of set goals and demands (Angaye, 2002). On the 19th of April 2006, in the city of Port Harcourt, River State, South-South Nigeria, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) (International Crisis Group, 2006) detonated a car bomb in the military barrack, killing two and injured six; this was the beginning of series of attacks that followed (Figure 2).

Poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment had increased the struggle for resource control in these



Figure 2. Niger Delta militants. Source: BBC, 2011.

states, accelerating the activities of youth gangs and numerous pressures groups. Access to large quantities of small arms and light weapons, and the persistence of widespread dissatisfaction with the federal and state governments in the Delta region were combination that created fertile recruiting ground for the likes of MEND and other militant organisations (International Crisis Group, 2006). In fact, the growing number of various movements and pressure groups includes; the Martyrs Brigade, the Niger Delta Liberation Army (NDLA), Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari (International Crisis Group, 2006), Coalition for Militant Action (COMA), Joint Revolution Council (JRC) which is a coalition of three militant groups namely; the Martyrs Brigade, MEND and NDPVF. Others are the Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF) led by Ateke Tom, the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), the Ijaws-based Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), the Urhobo Union, the Itsekiri General Assembly, Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Chikoko Movement and the popular Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). While some have served as pressure groups, others have taken the position of hard-line militant activities.

Can the activities of these militants be classified as terrorism? If the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Code of Federal Regulations (FBI, 2001) and the Department of State (United States Department of States, 2004) definitions of terrorism are applied to the current situation, the Niger Delta militants are likely to be classified in this sense - though they have different agenda to justify the reasons of their, but their operations

are similar to the definition of terrorism, in the sense that they issue threats, use the media, abduct, detain, make demands, carry out targets and claim responsibility attacks as shown in. These militants do not differentiate between armed adversaries and non-combatants, they fight the law enforcement agents of the state, detonate bombs with cell phones, wield big guns, always on mask - clandestine activities and access to finance. They display sophistication, professionalism and expertise in their operations. CNN correspondent Jeff Koinange visited the creeks to see the activities of the militants. He reported that "MEND in recent months has escalated its struggle, kidnapping expatriate oil workers at alarming rate (more than 30 in January [2007]), indiscriminately killing Nigerian military forces, and carrying out attacks on oil installations in the region that cut the flow of oil dramatically" (CNN.Com/World, 2007), well-calculated strategies to reduce foreign interests in the nation's oil and crumble Nigeria economy. They warned that all expatriates should leave Nigeria, not only the Niger Delta, but to leave the country because they wanted to take and destroy lives. "Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer. In 2005, it was the world's sixth largest exporter of oil, but the conflicts as mentioned earlier [in the Niger Delta] has cut distribution by an estimated 500,000 barrels per day, according to the U.S. Department of Energy" (CNN.Com/World, 2007). As the militants make good their threats, many countries warned their citizens to stay away from the Niger Delta. Threats of attack in the year 2006 contributed in increasing the oil price in the international market to \$70 in 2006 and \$140 in 2008 before the global financial meltdown.

In what seems to be a very bad reaction to February 8,

2007 CNN documentary broadcast on the Niger Delta, the federal government through the former Federal Minister of Information and Communications Mr. Frank Nweke Jnr., criticised CNN's Jeff Koinange. Asserting that there was evidence that some of the militants were actually supported and sponsored by some international interest, which made it distasteful and unethical and to make a show out of it is simply unacceptable (Abati, 2007). For the CNN refusal to tender unreserved apology for a report that the Minister said depicted the situation in the Niger Delta "unethical and subversive" (CNN.Com/World, 2007), way the Nigerian government withdrew her "Heart of Africa Project" advert from the CNN. But CNN may not be wrong after all, this is not new to them, they have broadcasted past conflicts in Nigeria.

From Niger Delta militancy to Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria

Adesoji (2010) argued that Nigeria is bedevilled by ethno-religious conflicts with devastating human and material losses. In addition to that, the Boko Haram uprising of July 2009 was significant in the sense that it set a precedent and reinforced attempts by Islamic conservatives at imposing Islamic religious ideology on the Nigerian secular state. Furthermore, Adesoji asserts that "whereas the religious sensitivity of Nigerians provided fertile ground for the breeding of the Boko Haram sect, the sect's blossoming was also aided by the prevailing economic dislocation in the Nigerian society, the advent of party politics (and the associated desperation of politicians for political power)" (p. 95). Indeed Adesoji is right, because in Nigeria, there are ready made jobless youths without source of livelihood and income who are ready to be manipulated with a token for political and economic gains of their principals.

What is Boko Haram?

The Boko Haram sect is a militant Islamic group. Their agenda is to see that Shari'a Law is imposed in the Northern States of Nigeria. The term Boko Haram means that western education is a sin and western civilization is forbidden. The group started in 1995, led by Lawan Abubakar and later handed over to Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf. Until the death of Mohammed Yusuf on 30th of July, 2009, the sect had recruited about 500,000 members. Boko Haram is seen in some quarters as Nigeria Taliban because they operate and have all the features of Al-Qaeda – they target security outfits e.g. police stations and they are against the state interests. They stationed in Kanamma, Yobe State, Northern Nigeria and their base is called Afghanistan. Their major attacks and operation are in various parts of the Northern states like Bauchi State, Yobe state and especially in

Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state. They maim, kill and destroy and invade churches.

Boko Haram insurgency remains the latest and a very big threat to Nigeria peace and security. The dreadful sect is known for their bomb blasts and bows with poisoned arrows. Many innocent lives have been wasted as they made Nigeria ungovernable by launching a total 'jihad' on the Nigerian state. June 17, 2011 was a terrible date in Nigeria history as she witnessed the first suicide bombing attack at the Louis Edet House – Nigeria Police Headquarters at Abuja targeting Hafiz Ringim - the Inspector General of Police. Boko Haram had vowed that more bombs will be detonated in time to come in the major cities of Southern Nigeria, stating that they will not stop until Nigeria is Islamized. To address the menace of Boko Haram, Nigerian government should engage in dialogue with all stakeholders, it does not require the use of force since the situation is out of hand now. Furthermore, government should strengthen and restructure the security agencies where appropriate, especially in the area of intelligence gathering with necessary training both home and abroad. It is absurd that intelligence gathering in Nigeria is almost near zero while militants and criminal are having a field day. For instance, recent happening have proved that Boko Haram have more intelligence than the government security agencies.

Ethnic and communal conflicts: Vigilante and separatist groups

Niger Delta on the brink of breaking down and the Christian-Muslim conflicts were not the only crisis plaguing Nigeria, indeed Nigeria have had her own share of political, ethnic, and communal conflicts and they are still on going from time to time. It was estimated that one million Nigerians were displaced by internal conflicts between 1999 and 2004. Using Plateau State as an example, inter-communal clashes over political control, land, and competition over resources among others between February and May 2004 generated about 250,000 Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) (International Crisis Group, 2006), setting the pace, as Nigeria's most IDPs, since the return of civil rule which made the former President Olusegun Obasanjo to exercise his constitutional power by declaring a state of emergency in Plateau State.

Combinations of factors like shortcomings in the security sector, lack of democratic space and public discuss, increasing youths without education and jobs, access to arms, and the struggle to come out of the military past of the 1990s which destroyed the civil society in our democratic history contributed to the emergence of ethnic militias, community protection forces and separatist movements (International Crisis Group, 2006). The Fredrick Fasheun and Gani Adams O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) purports to defend the Yoruba

rights and struggle for political power, but also serves as ethnic militia, it is involved in vigilante activities in the South West. Over the years, they have been engaged in violent clashes with ethnic, rival groups and the police (Human Rights Watch, 2003a). The Movement for Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), led by Ralph Uwazuruike in the South Eastern Nigeria is a frontline movement for demanding the independent state of Biafra for self-determination; they are still nursing the grudges from the 1967 to 1970 Nigeria civil war. The Bakassi Boys in the same South East serves as vigilante group for policing while the Hisbah Guards led by Sheik Farouk Yahaya in the North, a group organized by the government of Shari'a states asserts the Muslims identity through the enforcement of Shari'a Law (International Crisis Group, 2006). A common factor that runs across these groups is lawlessness. They engage in arbitrary arrest, harassment, torture, and extra-judicial killings by taking laws into their own hands. Loyalty to ethnic nationalities and "God Fathers" comes first before the Nigerian state, no wonder the government's response was to crackdown on these groups. But in the face of political marginalization, lack of democratic dividends, insecurity, and absence of human development, cracking down on militias and trying their leaders for treason may not be the solution, if the Nigerian government fails to address the structural imbalances, the needs and agitations of these groups and the problems facing Nigeria today, otherwise it would be counter productive and these militias would become martyrs and recruit more followers.

Remembering the 1967 to 1970 civil war experiences, no doubt, again Nigeria is sitting on a keg of gunpowder, a time bomb waiting to explode. A major crisis in Nigeria will produce mass refugee across Africa. It would amount to strong disaster and great burden for the United Nations and the rest of the international community, considering the humanitarian and logistical challenges it would pose if Nigeria should break down. The Sudanese humanitarian crisis is a lesson to learn from. Now is the time for intervention, prevention is better than cure. Already the Nigerian presence is felt all over Africa. One out of every six Africans is a Nigerian. In situation of civil war, where would Nigerians go? Liberia and Sierra Leone came out of war not too long ago, the 1994 Rwandan genocide is still fresh in our memories, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is still swimming in troubled water, the situation in Guinea remains alarming, in fact it is at risk of becoming the next West Africa's failed state and chaos could spread beyond its borders. Nigerians are not too friendly with Cameroonians following the October 10, 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) Hague landmark verdict that ceded the Nigerian oil rich Bakassi Peninsula to the Cameroon and was finally handed over to the Cameroon authority on the 14 of August, 2008. Niger Republic is too poor a desert, Central African Republic (CAR) is passing through turbulence times, Sudan is a

"no-go area" – South Sudan just got independence and might have to face internal adjustment as a new state. The Ugandan government forces and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) are still struggling for supremacy, Ghana may not want us, and small Togo may be too tiny for Nigerian refugees.

For Nigeria, having done so well in international peacekeeping and Nigeria's strategic position for Africa peace and security, it would be irony, if the aforementioned countries in reverse, turn out to host future peace talks and ceasefire agreements for Nigeria. Given the fragility and the impending danger dangling on the Nigerian state, this author is drawing the attention of the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and the United Kingdom government not to be quiet and absent, but react urgently to the general situation in Nigeria. This is likened to a voice calling in the 'wilderness', it is hoped that someone will listen to this author.

Peace methods and solutions

The approaches to meeting these challenges are most promising and important, if all the stakeholders can embrace peace by looking at the issues that are militating against Nigeria's coexistence. The first step to peace process would be a good democratic system that would attain the goals of peace and security focused on the citizens. Building reliable democratic process to accommodate all political affiliations would be a welcome development for Nigeria because of the diverse ethnic, religious and multicultural interests. For such process to be acceptable and for the people to have confidence in the political system, the system must give room for elections to be transparent, open, fair play, encourage equal participation, and accountability to the citizens. Participation by women should be encouraged, avenue should be created to allow women more access to positions and political power at all levels of government, this will ensure gender balance and equal participation, because they are wife's, mothers and their vital contribution to the family income and national development have roles to play in peace building, in this wise, leadership should not be an all men affair.

Leadership comes with accountability; the greatest national challenge facing this Heart of Africa and the most populous black nation on earth is leadership. Nigeria lacks quality leadership that is yet to transform economic wealth and distribution of state resources meaningfully into the lives of the governed. Until leadership is accepted as service to the nation and mankind and not the opportunity for personal wealth or enrichment, until Nigeria experience leadership that makes citizenry central to development and first in the affairs of the nation state, Nigeria shall remain in the same spot while the people live in penury for many

generations to come. It is pertinent to note that a nation is respected when it is built on the rule of law and order. In a country where power means everything in the public arena and there are unconstitutional checks of balance of power between the Executives, the Legislatives, and the Judiciary, the rule of law will be undermined and the confidence in both the constitution and the judiciary that is the last hope of the common man will be eroded. The hijack of democracy and the unconstitutional impeachment saga in the President Obasanjo's administration by the same lawmakers who took the oath of office to protect the same constitution was uncalled for. This display of lack of respect for the electorate and brazen lawlessness should not be repeated in this new administration. Impeachments in Oyo, Plateau, and Anambra States respectively was ruled to be unconstitutional and declared null and void by the competent court of law. Impeachment in its context is good for checks and balance in any democracy, but using impeachment as tool of blackmail is unacceptable.

The former Chief Justice of Nigeria Modibbo Alfa Belgore in his valedictory speech emphasised that "where we borrowed some elements of our constitutional practice, they have tried impeachment for not more than four times in over two hundred years. It now appears impeachment is daily lying on our breakfast table" (Supreme Court of Nigeria, 2007). To avoid mayhem, we should retrace back our steps he advised. This legal luminary once showed dismay on "how the Presidency [under the Obasanjo's administration] picks and chooses which rulings of the court that is convenient for it to obey" (Abati, 2006) as it is to be recalled that the Obasanjo's administration once ignored the Supreme Court ruling in the case of Lagos State and overruled the Court of Appeal in the Anambra State case. Disregarding decisions of a sacred institution as the judiciary is dangerous for the future of Nigeria. It is a clear invitation to anarchy and the beginning of the end of the institution, which serves as the pillar of Nigeria young democracy. Taking lives is cheap in Nigeria; there is state of insecurity, the basic function of any government is to guarantee the security of human lives and the welfare of her people. The lapses and void in the security sector were exploited for creating vigilante groups that purportedly claimed they came into existence to protect the people. The Nigerian Police should be reformed for effectiveness. The police should be trained to take up their constitutional roles of combating crime, control and quell internal conflicts and urban violence (not the military whose role is to defend any external aggression against the state). Police officers should enjoy good salaries and conditions of service and well equipped with arms and logistics, many at times they have complained that the arms in the possession of the robbers and hoodlums are more sophisticated to what they have in the event of confrontation.

Rueben Abati put it this way "the robbers are better

equipped. No policeman wants to die for Nigeria. Why should he or she be a martyr? The average policeman earns less than N10, 000 [about \$78 in 2006] per month [before the salary increment]. If he dies on duty, his family may not be paid his entitlements until after much agony" (Abati, 2006). In many instances, armed robbers have reportedly invaded police stations, looted the armoury and release suspects in the police cells (Ogunseye, 2007). An average law enforcement agent should be psychologically and morally motivated, undergo training periodically and have the assurance that in the case of any eventuality, those left behind would have the opportunity to see him as a fallen hero that sacrificed his life for national duty. While hard work should be rewarded, laziness should be discouraged, a proper reform is the type that will check the bureaucratic system in the force and eradicate bribery and corruption. It is high time for the police command to draw programmes on how to combat proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the hands of miscreants. It is not too late for the Nigerian state to create avenue for reconciliation involving religious, ethnic and community leaders as witnessed in the past, but this time it should be more assertive in addressing the issues of ethnic and religious identity. Nigerians should be able to lay claim and gain access to economic and socio-political benefits in any parts of the country. Addressing the "indigeneity" clause and adopting full residency rights to Nigerians will be a right step in the right direction, the 1999 Constitution was amended from the 1979 Constitution, Section 147 regarding the appointment of Federal Ministers implied that the notion of the clause can hardly be expunged from the constitution (Citizen's Forum for Constitutional Reform Nigeria, 2002). Section 147 (3) reads in part "...provided that in giving effect to the provisions aforesaid, the President shall appoint at least one Minister from each State, who shall be an indigene of such State" (Constitution, 1999). This is referring to the Federal Character Principle (meaning a representation of various states in the federal cabinets and government agencies) has limited existing opportunities to those defined as "indigenes." This is deprivation because "Categories such as "indigenes", "settlers", and "natives" are social and political constructions of the Nigerian ruling or power elite in their search for legitimacy within the local community/state and their quest for access to power and resources" (Ibrahim, 2006).

In the past, many have called on the government to convene a "Sovereign National Conference", a term that connotes that Nigeria should discuss how to coexist as a people and live together as a nation. But after much pressure, the President Obasanjo's administration responded by inaugurating what seems like the Sovereign National Conference in another form. In February 21, 2005, the federal government convened a National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) with 400 representatives of various ethnic and interest groups to

make recommendations for constitutional review that will reassess and redefine Nigeria political future and strengthen the bond of Nigeria's unity. It was a welcome development and a landmark in the history of Nigeria; however, the conference could not do the magic. 705 memorandums were received across the country and the participants came up with 185 recommendations. The conference ended in controversy basically over two key issues, which are "allocation of revenue from the Federation Account and the tenures of the president and state governors [beyond the constitutional approved 2 Terms in office]" (International Crisis Group, 2006). The subsequent efforts by some members of the Joint Constitution Review Committee (JCRC) of the federal legislature to smuggle the elongation of the president tenure into their recommended amendments met a total defeat of the whole bill in the National Assembly on May 16, 2006 which caused a severe downturn in the "3rd Term" ambition of former President and leaving Nigeria with a constitutional defect and a failure in the purpose of the whole project.

The strength of Nigeria lies in her rich multicultural diversity of about 250 ethnic nationalities, even so, many ethnic minorities are crying of economic and political marginalization and social inequalities. Aside from the three major ethnic nationalities namely the Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo's, and the Yoruba's, no other minority groups have attained the position of Head of States or President in Nigeria, which seems to be the exclusive rights of the former. Not until May, 2010 when a minority from the Ijaw extraction of the Niger Delta in person of Goodluck Jonathan became the President of Nigeria after the death of President Shehu Musa Yar'Adua. However, Gesiye Angaye argued that the "accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, discrimination, marginalisation, nepotism and bigotry are common. It is difficult to know who is marginalising who in Nigeria because all ethnic groups, from the big Hausa, Yoruba and Igbos to the small Ogonis, Ikwere, Igalas, etc. are complaining of marginalization" (Angaye, 2002)." But the fact that many communal conflicts in the minority areas are caused partly by land, boundary, and chieftaincy disputes mainly by domination and oppression, frustration-aggression-displacement, divide-and rule tactics, inequalities in the distribution of power, wealth and status, and the domination by bigger groups and their collaborators within the smaller groups, have frustrated the minorities who seem to reduce their built-up tensions by fighting among themselves rather than unite and face the real oppressors (Angaye, 2002). Nigeria get unified as one only when participating in international sports festivals like the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) championship, African Cup of Nations, the Olympics, etc. By that moment, grudges of political, religious and ethnic animosity are forgotten. The national policy think tanks should recognize that sports are tools

for national unity, national development and key for reviving Nigeria's international image.

While it is encouraged to create other empowerments for the youths, this avenue should be exploited by the government to develop and maintain sports infrastructures around the country to get the youths occupied, re-channel their energy away from violence and keep the best talented sports men and women in the country, but unfortunately poor remunerations, neglects and decay of facilities had led few to take up nationalities of some developed countries where the pastures are greener. In summary, Nigeria should have clear-cut policies on sports and develop framework for implementing these policies and programmes. Education is the bedrock of any society that wants to leap into future greatness; this is because education breeds enlightened citizenry with bright ideas and initiatives to develop the country, run the future government and create self-empowerment. Such empowerment could increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the country and create a multiplier effect in the Nigerian economy. Knowledge and empowerment will save the youths from various social vices and unnecessary manipulations by the politicians for conflicts and to settle bitter political animosity as a result of joblessness.

The frequent crisis between Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU) and the federal government cannot foster the type of development we want. It is no longer a new thing that every year, Nigeria witnesses various industrial actions at different sectors. For instance, in the educational sector, industrial actions are carried out over non-payment of salaries and arrears, lack of infrastructures and under funding of academic institutions. The decline of the entire educational system is a representation of societal and systemic rot in Nigeria. It is unfortunate that no Nigerian University was found worthy to be ranked among the 2010 QS World University Rankings (QS TOP UNIVERSITIES, 2010), for the best 600 Universities in the world. However, to return the Nigerian institutions into global reckoning, it is not too late for the government to inject more and reasonable resources into the educational system, for quality and functional education— provide facilities, fund research and award scholarships in other to safe the bright future of the Nigerian young men and women. It is commendable that the crisis in the Niger Delta has reached a political solution by granting amnesty to the militants in the sense that peaceful settlement means greater oil security for the common good of all. As this region produces the oil wealth that serves as the engine of the Nigerian economy, the issues confronting the Niger Delta region have attracted national and international concern.

Hence, the federal government should pursue further peace and consolidate reached agreements without renegeing. Also, empowering the youths with good means of livelihood will avoid likely come back to criminality and militancy. No matter the circumstances, the Nigerian

state owes it as duty to map out feasible strategies and agenda for peace as shown in. This region needs urgent development, but there cannot be any meaningful development without peace. Working on stronger social institutions and infrastructures and the development of existing capacity of local groups will go a long way to create trust and confidence in the Nigerian government. It is encouraged that the Nigerian state should strengthen the existing Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), a commission set up for the development of the oil producing areas. Furthermore, the government should take up the former President Obasanjo's administration proposed "Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan" (DAILY SUN, 2007) estimated to gulp about N6.5 trillion (about \$50 billion).

Poverty is violence and structural violence kills faster than bullets, it is not the objective of this paper to recommend sharing formula for oil derivation, but it is pertinent to note that the people of the Niger Delta deserve access to justice and equitable distribution of resources beneath their own feet – as the goose that lays the golden eggs. In the face of the international community, the region has suffered longstanding exclusion from the mainstream of Nigeria's socio-economic and political activities. The majority of the people in the Delta live on the margins. Policy for the Niger Delta should include vocational skills, education, industrialization, improved agriculture, health and public utilities (DAILY SUN, 2007). Solving environmental problems is essential, at the same time, the federal government should strengthen anti-corruption laws and keep an eye on the leadership of this region (the State Governors and the Local Government Chairmen), "It is no good news that the region in question received a total sum of N3.07 trillion [about \$24.5 billion] from the Federation Account from [1999 to 2000] yet, there is not much to show for this enormous amount" (DAILY SUN, 2007). Despite the influx of revenue, resources hardly reach the grass roots.

Conflict handling styles

Conflict often erupts when two or more groups of individuals have different beliefs, identity, and interests see each other as threat to their identified individual or group existence. Kriesberg (1998) accepts that "conflict exists when two or more persons or groups manifest belief that they have incompatible objectives." Otite and Albert (1999) citing Coser (1956) asserts that conflict is "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals." In the same vain Stagner (1969), analyses conflict as parties mobilizing energy to obtain goal(s)...each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to the goal(s) while Stedman (1991) sees conflict as "tugs and pulls of

different identities, the differential distributions of resources, and access to power, and competing definitions of what is right, fair, and just." What runs through all the definitions are; struggle, differential values, identities, incompatibility of parties, interest and goals, etc that threatens individuals, groups, or sovereign states today.

Nevertheless, conflict is not totally evil when it is functional, that is when it reflects the differences in various human opinions and activities that exist in any free society. Conflict is inevitable for human interaction and could lead to constructive development, but conflict does not necessary need to be violent. In the Nigeria situation, all forms of conflict – political, religious, resources, ethnic and communal are becoming increasingly violent. What are the Nigerian systems of conflict regulations and handling styles? Osaghae (2002) attributed escalation of violent conflict to many factors which are not limited to violent strategies of conflict regulation, especially the use of military by the state to quell conflict which he regarded as the "by-products of the prolonged military rule in Nigeria, of the subsequent weakening or collapse of legal-constitutional means of conflict regulation." Things have to change; this paper strongly discourage the usual government "fire brigade" approach as conflict handling style by quickly packaging machinery to quench existing conflict.

Good leadership and governance characterized by honesty, trust, transparency, and confidence building are basic necessities and fundamentals to handle conflict resolution in Nigeria. Adopting conflict prevention (preventive diplomacy) methods will show a great sense of care, concern and higher responsibility on the part of the Nigerian government, in the sense that it is a social detection and early intervention in crisis management, this is because it focuses on the root causes of conflict and promote early involvement which can de-escalate conflict and hasten the restoration of peace. No wonder, Boutros-Ghali (2000) analyzed that concerning "peace and security, as in medicine, prevention is self-evidently better than cure," he emphasized that it saves lives and money, untold hardship and human suffering.

CONCLUSION

Having said all this, it primarily lies within the purview of the Nigerian state, to create systematic and institutionalised methods that will detect early warning signs for pre-emptive actions and design effective conflict prevention and peace building strategies through operational structures and personnel for monitoring conflicts and transform the existing conflict(s). It is the author's opinion that in the search for lasting peace in Nigeria; academics, religious leaders, traditional rulers, women groups, local and international Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), social critics and activists, trade associations,

civil societies, various youth leaders, students bodies, and multinationals companies of particular interests in corporate social responsibility, etc should be involved in conflict prevention and peace building, this will ensure enduring and sustainable peace. Two points are vital here; the first is making peace with Boko Haram and secondly strengthening the peace in the Niger Delta.

For President Goodluck Jonathan's administration to promote peace, stability and national integration; national interest should over-ride personal or group interests, larger efforts should be put in place to strengthen vehicles of social control and social institutions namely; family, law, religion and the political system. Nigerian leaders should promote economic progress that eradicates the crippling mass poverty and unemployment, provide security for lives and properties, and guarantee food security. The plan to review the constitution by the National Assembly is a welcome development. Many thanks, to the former President Shehu Musa Yar'Adua for creating the Ministry of Niger Delta. However, it does not end there, since President Goodluck Jonathan if from the Niger Delta; he should use the opportunity to ensure a lasting dialogue in the region with a strategic development plan. This will ensure greater prosperity and guarantee oil security for Nigeria, while the Nigerian economic team should work tirelessly for the Vision 2020 to make Nigeria one of the 20 leading economies in the world. There are lessons to be learnt from Singapore that got independence in 1965 and moved from a third world country to a first world. Today, Malaysia is taking a giant leap from what is known as third world economy into advanced economy. So far Nigerians are still waiting for this government to deliver on their political promises. In every sense, government policies should be anchored on practicable vision, purpose and direction but Nigeria is a difference case scenario. There is no doubt that the judiciary has lived up to its expectations in Nigeria through non-interference, but more needs to be done for quick delivery of justice system.

Finally, Nigerians owe the state the allegiance of discharging their duties and responsibilities, while the state should reciprocate with the guarantee of all rights and privileges. Recognizing the differences in identities and exploiting the dynamic rich multicultural nature of the various ethno-religious groups, will no doubt enhance coexistence and encourage unity in diversity in Nigeria. It is not enough for the state to make pronouncements, but mechanisms mentioned earlier should be in place for facilitation and proper national dialogue through peace by peaceful means.

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ANNEX

NIGERIA
Political Map



Annex. Map of Nigeria. Source: Map of World 2011.