

Nigeria National Conference and Its Impact on Unity and Diversity in Nigeria

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Abstract: The search for a viable, stable and justiciable polity in Nigeria has continued with the inauguration of a National Dialogue by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to a new course for the future of the nation. The Dialogue is at variance with unrelenting calls by opposition parties, social and human rights advocates, sectional/ethnic groups for a sovereign national conference to address the national question bordering on systemic contradictions, distortions, marginalization and structural violence. Nonetheless, the “imposed” National Dialogue has generated dilemmas for the opposition and the Nigerian public alike. The problematic, therefore, are: One, does the Dialogue has the capacity, competence and legitimacy to address the fundamental national questions including agitations for justiciable fiscal federalism, systemic imbalance, self determination, resource control, institutional decay, minority marginalization and power sharing? Two, can the Dialogue fundamentally re-invents and strengthens the nation's political future by consolidating the unity of the country or will it rather undermine it? Three and flowing from the latter concern. is the apprehension that considering the idiosyncratic nature, pedigree and seemingly emerging power configuration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan coupled with the sovereign limitations of the Dialogue, will the report of the conference be adopted by the National Assembly as a legal instrument capable of safeguarding unity in diversity in Nigeria in the face of confronting threats to unity and corporate existence of Nigeria? Four, will the report of the Dialogue not suffer uncertainty and become moribund like such previous exercises as the Oputa Panel on human rights abuses and the Nigeria Political Reform Conference of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration? Lastly and more germane, what are the fears of government in convoking a sovereign conference and allied 'to this, why the executive pronouncement that the issue of Nigeria unity shall be "a no go area"? The study is saddled with the challenge of addressing these problematic and in addition, examine the impact of the National conference/dialogue on unity in diversity in Nigeria.

Key words: National Conference: unity and diversity • Resource control: ethnicity • Systemic contradictions
• Structural violence

INTRODUCTION

Achieving a united and stable political system is still a serious challenge to the Nigerian state. As a divided society with multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, the task of nation - building and forging of a system perceived by the varied nationalities as justiciable has been difficult. The system has been confronted with complaints of insecurity emanating largely today from the clandestine machinations and terroristic insurgency of Boko Haram, marginalization, inequitable distribution of resources and power and official injustice. Consequently, various sub-nationalities, ethno religious groups, opposition parties and other fringe interests have since the inception of the

fledgling democracy in 1999 unrelentingly been calling for the convocation of a sovereign national conference (SNC) to address these sectional grievances.

Inadvertently, SNC has since the late 1980s become an emerging tradition of instituting political reforms and constitutional re-engineering, particularly in the emerging democracies of Africa and former communist Eastern Europe. The Nigerian state, since the annulment of June 12, presidential election presumably won by late Chief MKO Abiola, has been operating under sustained political strains and stresses and thereby necessitating unrelenting agitations for a sovereign national conference to address the lingering crises among the varied ethno-religious groups. President Olusegun

Obasanjo in a seeming response to these call inaugurated a National Political Reforms Conference (NPRC) as a way of addressing the lingering national questions. It is unfortunate however that the outcome of that reform conference failed to yield the desired dividends as anticipated by generality of the Nigerian populace, consequently the persistent and ever prevailing threats to peace and unity in different parts of the country

From the security challenges, kidnappings and abductions, oil bunkering and pipeline vandalizing activities of ethnic militants then spearheaded by the Niger Delta Militia groups operating in the creeks and several other manifestations of ethnic jingoism and chauvinism in various parts of the country; the situation has today turned into Boko Haram terrorism, which seemingly has destroyed more lives and property than the Nigeria civil war itself and today constitute the single most problematic to peace, unity and development of Nigeria. It is with recourse to the above and other recurring political, social, religious and allied contradictions inherent in the Nigeria project and the need to systemically resolve them that necessitated the political audacity of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in his broadcast to the Nation on her 53rd independence anniversary on October 1st 2013, to announce his administration's commitment to convene a National conference/dialogue to enable the Nigerian people renegotiate the Nigeria project without jeopardizing her unity.

The study is, therefore, concerned with the challenge of examining the viability of the conference in providing acceptable and durable solutions to the enduring national problems, particularly considering the controversies surrounding its legal status and the doubts about the acceptance of its outcomes by opposition parties, varied interest groups, minorities and government itself. In addressing these concerns, the paper is structured into six sections. The first is the introduction and the second part examines the concept, typology and values of a national conference. The third section investigates the national problematic that engender agitations for a sovereign national conference. The fourth section deals with the national conference inaugurated by President Goodluck Jonathan with a stated agenda for the Presidential Advisory Committee. Section five examines the outcomes and the legitimacy crisis involving the national conference and its impacts for unity and diversity, stability and viability of the Nigerian project, while section six provides concluding remarks and also interrogates the reasons for the leadership's aversion for a sovereign national conference.

Concept, Typology and Value of National Conference:

Ordinarily, conference implies a formal assemblage of people for consultation and deliberations on specific issues, which could border on common interests. Such interests could be civil communal, national, global or professional. In such conferences, delegates or conferences air their views and opinions on the problematic at stake. Conference and convention are synonyms, implying the same intentions. Of major concern to this study is national conference. National conference denotes a formal congregation of interest groups, including sub nationalities and sectional representations in a polity. National conferences can be gingered by the imperatives of engineering a new constitution or as a way of forging common solutions to perceived national problems particularly in divided societies such as Nigeria, where insecurity, religious fanaticism, ethnic jingoism and other sectional cleavages have become constraints to the emergence of a sense of nationalism and national integration.

[1], specify two broad types of national conference, namely; national conference with limited autonomy and national conference with sovereign powers. The delegates devoid of finality in the decisions arrive at limited national conference. Such conference is also prone to executive interference, because in the first instance, government may have selected delegates, thereby; giving room for airing the views and opinions that are pro-government and consequently, the final report is subjected to official tinkering before approval. In another instance, the report may be absolutely jettisoned if decisions contained therein are not favourable to the establishment.

The second category of national conference is distinguished from the first by the affiliated concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty denotes supreme political and legal authority. In this wise, authoritative decision emanating from a sovereign authority is a supreme political order, which is not subject to any authority. It is, therefore, considered as an absolute authority enjoying a supreme order in a state [1].

Sovereignty, according to [1], has an inalienable, individualized and absolute character with an order that cannot be subjected to any other order or organ resulting from any established power. Consequently, a sovereign national conference has sovereign powers in its deliberations. It sets its own agenda and has the authority to take any decisions on the issues before it. Government manipulations in the conference's decisions are limited, because the delegates of such conference are not nominated by government but in most cases by the varied

interest groups of the civil society. The interest groups may include representatives of ethnic groups, political parties and associations, labour unions, students, farmers, women and religious groups and even that of government. The electorate can also elect the delegates. Such conference is commonly referred to as sovereign national conference (SNC).

The SNC and its decisions are superior to the executive and the legislature because of its sovereign status. The outcome of an SNC may herald a new political order. and sweep away all vestiges of the existing system. It can determine the power and survival (tenure) of the incumbent government. In a way, the ordinary national conference tends to sustain the *status quo ante* for its pro establishment status, while SNC is revolutionary and *anti-status quo ante*.

The value of national conference lies in its provision of avenues for national dialogue by the various shades of opinion in the polity over crisis issues. It avails the different contending cleavages the understanding of the national problematic, thereby making it possible for the need to forge a consensual and popular solution to the divided interests, including complaints of institutional violence by certain religious sects, ethnic groups such as the minorities, bordering on state injustice and marginalization, resource control and domestic insecurity cum terrorism. The national question can even be on how to resolve the nation's economic crisis. In totality, a national conference is often aimed at achieving national political and economic reforms, which are meant to provide for new ways of doing things and achieving good governance and national unity.

Rationale for the Agitations for Sovereign National Conference: The primary contradiction and perhaps the anomaly, of the Nigerian state is its colonial evolution. The nation did not emerge from the civil society and hence defied the conventional social contract theory of state origin as adumbrated by the trio of Thomas Hobbes, Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, whose point of consensus is the emergence of state through the basic agreement of the civil society to live under the same polity for the purpose of law and order [2].

Contrarily, the British imperialists imposed the Nigerian state. This implies that Nigeria as a political entity did not exist before colonial intrusion. The colonial origin of the Nigerian state has placed some dilemmas on the nation. According to [2], the colonial effect relates to the fragility of the state. Accordingly, he asserts that, "the

political fragility implies the weakness of the institutions of state to withstand and survive incidence of disequilibrium". In the same vein, [3] points out that the state has its peculiar and inegular characteristics. Postcolonial Nigeria, besides its alien origin, is characterized by multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic forces, arising from the arbitrary partitioning and aggregative territorialization of about 250 ethnic groups speaking about 400 languages, thereby depicting the nation as the world's linguistic crossroad.

Other hallmarks of the nation are inter-ethnic and inter-religious contestations. Inter-ethnic contestations over power-sharing and resource control have since independence been inflicting damaging injuries on peaceful co-existence, political stability and national integration. Contestations for political power led to the 1967 1970 civil war. Forty-four years after the civil war, irredentist tendencies have not waned. Instead, sub-nationalism and primordial sentiments have taken increased tempo. Some Igbos under the aegis of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) is still threatening secession. To demonstrate MASSOB's seriousness regarding its independence agenda, the Biafran currency has been put into circulation and is actually being spent in some parts of the country and the neighbouring states along the nation's borders [5], while the Biafran flag and anthem are already enplaced.

Other primordial groups, such as the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC), Egbesu Boys, Asari Boys, Ijaw Youth Congress and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP): Itsekiri Youths and the Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Force are equally canvassing for sectional autonomy and self governance. The emergence of these ethnic groups and today worsened by Boko Haram insurgency poses the latest danger to the Nigerian federalist, agenda as they employ violence and militancy against the state and its apparatuses.

Distributive contentions relating to resource sharing have gained more intensity since the emerging democracy. The oil producing states constantly agitate for the control of their oil resources as done in a true federal practice of which the United States, Canada and Russia have been easy references. As [3] observes, the distributive pressures have pitched the Nigerian federation and the constituent governments and segments against each other in a relentless struggle for the nation's abundant financial resources and distributive largesse.

The struggle for resource control has equally led to the emergence of subnationality groupings, which serve as vanguards for resource autonomy. The renewed politics of resource control and revenue sharing has heightened political strains and stresses among the constituent states.

Inter-religious contests and rivalry are fallouts of ethnic contestations, which have resulted in wanton destruction of lives and property. Ethno-religious conflicts have become an enduring feature of the polity. Complaints of institutional marginalization by the respective ethnic components have enacted pressures for the struggle for the creation of new states and localities. Creating new states and local governments over the years is yet to resolve the crisis of counter-accusations of ethnic marginality. Intra-state marginalization has equally become a feature of the component states as they also made up of ethnic and cultural diversities. Ethnic contestations, therefore, take place at all levels of governance, thus, the polity is being heated up and pressured at all times. Agitations for redress of ethnic marginality, resource control and power sharing are, therefore, provocative strategies meant to engender systemic distributive and social justice.

Colonial and post-colonial constitutional engineering and creation of new localities of administration and other modalities such as federal character and zoning are yet to abate complaints of structural imbalance, marginalization in power-sharing and resource distribution and social injustice. In essence, the state has failed to forge unity among the diverse ethnic groups and at the same time lacking in capacity to establish a regime of social justice, equitable distribution of resources and failure to arrest feelings of political marginality. In summary, incidences of religious and ethnic conflicts, emergence of ethnic militias, coup detats and other divisive and disruptive phenomena are attestations to the fragile character of the Nigerian State [2].

Adducing explanations for this failure, Cabral in [5], in his assessment of the problematic of nation-building in Africa generally, observes that: "the nature of the state we have to create in our country is a very good question for it is a fundamental one. The problem of the nature of the state created is perhaps the secret of the failure of African independence". Cabral is of the belief that African states have failed because of their colonial origin, which lacks taproot in the respective civil societies in the continent.

The failure of the state in addressing the varied contradictions often referred to as the national question, has continued to provoke the varied sectional interests and groups to continuously advance calls for a sovereign national conference, particularly since the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election assumed to have been won by MKO Abiola, a South - Westerner. However, the intensity of the pressure for a SNC became more heightened and louder when democratic governance was re-established on May 29, 1999. Variegated opinions had been advanced by all shades of interest advocating the convocation of an SNC. The consensus of opinion is the imperative for a new Nigeria that is more efficient economically, politically and administratively and which is restructured on sound, distinct and clear federal principles [6].

Emergence of a new system, which recognizes differences and diversity in unity and the same time subject controversial national issues such as constitutional reforms, restructuring of the federal management and creation of state police to people's debate and decisions [6]. It is also argued that debates on the future of Nigeria must be sovereign for reasons of hindsight arising from past constitutional re-engineering efforts by military regimes [7]. The utility of the public input during such constitutional debates and their outcomes were always lost in the lack of sovereignty of such for a as the ultimate sanction or approval/disapproval always rested in the military regimes. The reports were often tinkered with, manipulated to suit the power ambition of the regimes' leadership, rather than being used as potent avenues to address the national question.

President Godluck Jonathan and the National Conference: President Goodluck Jonathan has approved the membership and terms of reference of the Federal Government's Advisory Committee on National Dialogue/Conference. A terse statement in Abuja by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, named a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Prof. Ben Nwabueze, as one of the 13 members of the committee headed by Senator Femi Okurounmu. Others are Dr. Akilu Indabawa, Secretary; a former Nigerian Ambassador to the United States, Prof. George Obiozor; Senator Khairat Gwadabe; Senator Timothy Adudu, Col. Tony Nyiam (retd), Prof. Funke Adebayo, Dr. Mairo Amshi, Dr. Abubakar Sadiq, Alhaji Dauda Birma, Mallam Buhari Bello and Mr. Tony Uranta. The committee which was given

one month within which to conclude its assignment, was inaugurated by President Jonathan at the State House on October 7, 2013.

As a way of responding to the sustained advocacy for a sovereign national conference by civil and non-official groups and the opposition, President Goodluck Jonathan, inaugurated the Presidential Advisory committee on National Conference also referred to as the National Dialogue with the following terms of reference;

- To consult with all relevant stakeholders with a view to drawing up a feasible agenda for the proposed national dialogue/conference;
- To make recommendations to Government on structure and modalities for the proposed national dialogue/conference;
- To make recommendation to Government on how representation of various interest groups at the national dialogue/conference will be determined;
- To advise Government on a time frame for the national dialogue/conference;
- To advise Government on a Legal framework for the national dialogue/conference;
- To advise on legal procedures and options for integrating decisions and outcomes of the national dialogue/conference into the constitution and laws of the nation; and
- To advise Government on any other matter that may be related or incidental to the proposed national dialogue.

Mr. President, having set out the agenda limited the scope to the announced by setting "a no-go area" for the conference, which borders on the issue of unity and corporate existence of the country [8]. This clearly shows the primacy the President attaches to the unity, survival and existence of the country. Even though the Conference should ordinarily not be restrained from debating, sustaining or do away with such if they so consensually wish. These no-go areas are indeed vexatious issues, which have persistently been undermined by rivalries in ethnic relations, thus making the issue of continued unity and stability of the nation the greatest challenge facing Nigeria.

During the Political Reforms Conference of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2005 there were fall-outs of government's deep involvement in the conference, which included some delegates, being representatives of government rather than of the people as they lack the people's mandate. The conference was, therefore, prone

to discuss issues reflecting the mind of government. It may be difficult to fault this opinion because of the fact that the president and the governors met regularly with the delegates to review on-goings in the conference [9]. Consequently, the conference was largely expected to reflect government interests rather than either the people or national interest. Besides, the delegates were paid a sitting allowance of N= 20,000 (US\$154) per day by government, in addition to non-pecuniary benefits such as the supply of all dailies and some magazines [6].

Two, government, as an interested party in the conference and its outcomes cannot but tinker with the report of the conference, which was submitted to the president who originated it, even without legislative authorization. This raised a number of relevant questions at that time: can the Conference reduce the powers and tenure of the president and governors who nominated and funded the delegates? Can the immunity clause be removed in line with popular demands to the detriment of the interests of President Obasanjo and the 36 state governors? Like all previously established constitutional engineering conferences since the Murtala/Obasanjo regime. The president was also expected to critically analyze the implications of the report for all concerned before his final endorsement.

The above raised issues formed and parcel of the failures of the Obasanjo political reform conference. There is thus no doubt that the conference was an effort in futility, a waste of resources and time. It is on this note that President Goodluck Jonathan is being urged by well meaning and patriotic Nigerian to ensure that this conference will not be another jamboree, a diversionary tactics and political gimmick. The current National Conference delegates should bear in mind that the future of Nigeria lays in their honesty and ability to come to the conference/dialogue table in openness to truth and reality and negotiate like equal partners in the Nigeria project.

The Conference's Outcomes and Legitimacy Crisis:

More worrisome, however, is the legitimacy crisis of the conference. The conference so far merely enjoys executive fiat, without recourse to any legislative enactment to legitimize its existence so far. Consequently, of what force will the outcome of the conference be assuming that the deliberations of the conference are tension-free and lacking in irreconcilable logjams. The conference is not authorized by the National Assembly and it has not approved its funding so far. This was the same legitimacy' crisis suffered by the Obasanjo political reform conference as witnessed by [10].

If the above situations should remain unresolved, the recommendations of the conference could, therefore, be seen as lacking in self-execution. The ground of its illegality will divest the conference of the powers, potency and competence to authoritatively resolve the national question. In its entirety, therefore, the conference is undemocratic without a force of law. Consequently, its decisions would be divested of a binding force. At best, therefore, its final recommendations can only serve a non-enforceable advisory power for the president on how to resolve the nation's contentious issues.

Furthermore and of greater concern is the acceptability of the conference's outcomes to all shades of opinion within (and outside) the country. The conference groans under a barrage of criticism from opposition political parties, some ethnic groups and notable political actors especially from All Progressives Congress (APC) extraction. The coming of these notable figures against government is described as a "granite coalition" [11].

Already, disagreements among the varied geopolitical groups over some contentious issues have polarized the nation further and deepened the existing inter-ethnic cleavages undermining the unity and stability of the nation.

The National Conference and its Impact on Unity and Diversity in Nigeria: Despite the fact that there is no formal breakup of the country, the nation is already disintegrating due to the refusal of the government to embrace national dialogue [6]. Soyinka said this while speaking on "The quest for justice, tolerance and non-violent change" at a presentation highlighting Dr Martin Luther King Jr. and the American civil rights movement, organized by the Public Affairs Section of the US Consulate General in Lagos. According to him, "the presidential system of government is totally unfitted to the governance of Nigerians. The legislators have become a bastion of corruption while the system operational in the country encourages corruption." Soyinka, who maintained his stance on Sovereign National Conference as panacea to salvaging Nigeria from total collapse said: "We can even remove the word sovereign; there is need for national dialogue because if we don't have a national dialogue, we will have monologues.

The primary duty of the National Conference is to address and find solutions to the key problems afflicting Nigeria since 1914 to date. The concern is to remove all obstacles which have prevented the country from establishing political justice, economic justice, social

justice, cultural justice, religious justice and to construct a new constitutional framework in terms of the system of government-structurally, politically, economically, socially, culturally and religiously. The beauty of a national dialogue lies in the fact that it will afford aggrieved Nigerians the elusive opportunity to ventilate their frustration and brainstorm on the way forward for our dear fatherland. But the question is: Is the government sincere with the national dialogue? This is the worry of every reasonable Nigerian. Their fear is hinged on the premise that government has never shown faith with people in past deals [12].

However, while many have agitated for a national dialogue, many others share different opinions on the issue of the national dialogue. Chairman of the Northern States Governor's Forum and governor, Niger State, Dr Muazu Babangida Aliyu has stated that the Northern part of the country was not opposed to the convocation of a national conference but said the North was against the setting up of a sovereign national conference. Speaking against the backdrop of renewed calls for the convocation of a sovereign national conference by some Nigerians, Governor Aliyu said such a demand would entail all elected politicians to vacate their positions and surrendering them to a committee that would be in charge of the sovereign national conference [12].

Governor Aliyu declared that, "those calling for sovereign national conference must understand its implication. You cannot have two sovereignties in one place. "If anybody says he is going to organize a sovereign national conference, all of us in government must resign our jobs and then transfer the sovereignty of the country to the committee that is going to discuss the sovereignty of the country". He continued that, "I will love a national conference that will look at our constitution and really give us justice, equity and fairness in our body politics and in our national life". Governor Aliyu insisted that the North is not afraid of the convocation of a national conference because it believes that it would move the country forward. "Many people are trying to make it look like the Northern States are afraid of conference, we are not, let us come and talk, let us come and look at our problems if it means restructuring the country let us come and do it but we must not be hoodwinked". "If people want to secede let them secede and then we see under which constitution they are seceding, let us not be intimidated, we cannot be intimidated because intimidation will not give us good policies, intimidation will not give us good nation, intimidation will not give us any progress," he concludes.

The Sovereign National Conference will give ethnic nationalities an opportunity to examine the questions that have made Nigeria such a disaster and come up with some answers such as the right of every nationality to have greater control over their resources.

According to [5] the publicity secretary of Afenifere Renewal Group and a delegate to the conference "this is a make or mar conference for Nigeria" (cited in [14]. [5] appeals to all delegates to understand the urgency of this period. Our country is falling apart. We need to put things right. Nobody should come to this conference with any sense of arrogance. We must not negotiate out of fear. We must come as equal partners to the Nigerian project and shed all our prejudices.

We should focus on how to build a country that works; a country where human life is not cheap as it is now. For now, Nigeria is not just in a state of war; we are at war. This is because if you look at the number of corpses we pack every day, it has surpassed that of Afghanistan and Iraq. In those countries, we hardly hear of 100 or 200 deaths in a day. We must find a lasting solution to the problems of this country. We should adopt an attitude of give and take, not my way or their way. An attitude of my way or their way will not solve the problems of this country. Let us come to the conference table as brothers and consider the interest of Nigeria.

Let us find ways and means of building a united and equitable country based on a foundation of justice. Odumakin referring to his position on the conference asserts; I came to this conference as a federalist. I would be pushing a federalist agenda. It is only a true federalism arrangement that can get this country out of the woods. We have travelled on the wrong path for a long time. There is no way you can run a country like Nigeria which has a multi-ethnic composition as a unitary state.

That is the problem we are having now. We need to de-amalgamate. Amalgamation means that you cobbled entities together without looking at the content or properties of what you are amalgamating. This time around, we must sit down as the nationalities of Nigeria to negotiate our unity; not towards disintegration but towards building a lasting country, [4] opines.

In his further statement, [6] states; "know countries that refused to discuss their unity. They have already disappeared But in a country like Ethiopia where the differences of the nationalities which make up that country were discussed, their unity was strengthened and they eventually adopted a constitution which endorsed the rights of the component nationalities to self-determination up to the point of secession. Yet, nobody

has attempted to use that clause in Ethiopia. It is better for us to discuss in an open manner without inhibitions. I would like to convince other delegates that the path to follow is the path of true federalism.

The preamble to the 1999 Constitution which states that the people of Nigeria adopted that document is false. The constitution lied against itself and that is perjury. So, the constitution lied on oath. Nigerians were never involved in the making of that constitution. We knew how that constitution was imposed on the

nation. Former military Head of State, Gen. Sani Abacha organised a Constitutional Conference which produced a report. He set up another body which reviewed the report of the Constitutional Conference. This culminated in the 1999 constitution, a military promulgation.

When former President Olusegun Obasanjo came on board, he did his own review. As at the day Obasanjo was sworn in, in 1999, he had not even seen a clean copy of that constitution. Even after Obasanjo had been sworn in, they still secretly amended the constitution. The people of Nigeria were never involved. The constitution was promulgated into law through Decree 24 of 1999. To me, the 1999 constitution is a military decree. It is not an autochthonous constitution: It is only if we rise from this conference and produce a constitution which goes through a referendum, that the preamble could truly state that the people of Nigeria have adopted the document as a body of fundamental rules and regulations for the effective operation of the political system.

Concluding Remarks: The deep divisions, controversies that surround National Conference are reflections of the divided character of the Nigerian State. The potency of the conference to address and redress the divisive national issues is very weak considering the extreme and irreconcilable positions assumed on issues of resource control derivation and rotational presidency, among others. The conference, more than anything else, exacerbates primordial and sub-national loyalty, which have since independence denied the nation of the needed over-arching sense of loyalty and nationalism.

National loyalty is further undermined by the presentation of regional and sectional agendas in the conference. Agendas on the banners of South West (Yoruba) South East (Igbo), the North (Arewa), Middle Belt and South - South (Niger Delta) and from groups such as the women agenda were presented to the conference with different, incompatible demands. The sectional demands are merely championing primordial

sub-national interests, which have re-awakened and re-fuelled ethnic and sectional consciousness in the polity. Ironically, no group is projecting a non-regional/non-sectional, national agenda.

The Nigerian agenda/national interest is totally subsumed and hence the sharp sectional divides among the delegates on issues. The championing of regional agenda and the uncompromising, no retreat stand on some contentious issues show that the survival and unity of the nation occupy background space in the minds of the delegates. It equally manifests the nation's lack of tradition for bargaining, compromise, consensus and national strategy for managing and resolving crisis.

The exclusion of the external dimension of the nation's problematic in the Dialogue's agenda, weakens its capacity to address the nation's problems. The weak and distorted character of the Nigerian state is externally motivated by virtue of its colonization and imposition on the different ethnic groups, of the Nigerian state by the British colonialists, while the former constrained its development takeoff, the latter made nation building very difficult. Originally, the British colonialists never supported a united Nigeria. In fact, Britain contributed to the weak and fragile sovereignty the nation currently suffers as it had before independence promoted inter-regional tension, disharmony and marginality through election rigging and manipulation of census figures for northern Nigeria [13].

According to Harold Smith, a former colonial officer in Nigeria, the British colonialists deliberately, by design, skewed the political landscape in favour of the north. and at another time, had expected Nigeria to break up [14]. Besides, the alien origin of the Nigerian nation, external forces including the West and multinational corporations, promote underdevelopment and sabotage of the national economy. This they do by encouraging capital flight through corruption. It is noted that £220 billion have been stolen by Nigerian leaders between 1960 and 1999 [12]. The stolen wealth is kept in Western vaults. Attempts to repatriate loots from foreign banks are being frustrated by the West, particularly the Swiss government, which has refused to release the stolen wealth kept in its banks by the late General Sanni Abacha despite its Supreme Court's ruling authorizing the repatriation to the Nigerian government [15].

Why then is the nation's leadership fearful of a sovereign conference? Despite the popular demands for SNC, the leaders have aversion for it because of some known precedents across the globe. The Nigerian

leadership is quite aware of the adverse effects of SNC in some countries of Africa, notably; Benin Republic, Gabon, Chad, Mali, Togo, Niger, Madagascar and Zaire. One of the consequences was the removal of incumbent governments [16]. In other regions, such as Eastern Europe, SNC had led to national disintegration as the cases of former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. The survival of the present establishment and probably, that of the nation, therefore, poses a serious dilemma and constitutes a militating force against the convocation of SNC by the government, which fears either the known or unknown decisive consequences.

Until these contradictions are resolved, the desired national harmony and unity will not be achieved, while the agitations for a sovereign national conference would be persistently louder.

The end product of the DIALOGUE is with Nigerians for its openness of the DIALOGUE by allowing citizens to decide the country's destiny in this policymaking process. An average Nigerian, today (2013), bleeds from their leaders' failure to meet up with their responsibilities. National DIALOGUE would work when Nigerians are ready to make it work, ending deceits and the infinite complaints. Who partake and what areas Nigerians need to DIALOGUE should be the focal point.

Most Nigerians develop cynicism each time Nigerian Government decides to embark on any program, which is usually associated with personal gains for the actors. Unfortunately, the government has not proved itself worthy of trust on some of its programs; as it has failed the country on several occasions, deviated from its promises, regardless how obvious the benefits of such programs were to the populace. A National DIALOGUE is pertinent now (2013) considering Nigeria state of affairs.

According to the 2010, United Nation's Human Development Report released in Abuja in 2011, Nigeria's life expectancy at birth was at 48.4 years, a little rise from the 47.7 years recorded for the country in 2009. The 2010 report put Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) at 0.423, which ranked the country 142 out of 169 countries with comparable data. In some other reports from Direct Relief, *"Over half of Nigeria lacks sustainable access to safe water supplies and sanitation. Life expectancy is very low and Nigeria's il-rant mortality is high. A large percentage of women die in childbirth. Other key public health problems include HIV/AIDS, malaria and respiratory infections."* This type of anecdote has not been helping Nigeria and would not bring about any development either.

Why shouldn't Nigerians get to the roundtable to DIALOGUE? Some of other concerns that necessitated the Country to sit round the table and DIALOGUE are; *respect for Rule of Law; Epileptic unripe Democracy; and Religious intolerance.*

There have been issues which 'seem to be escalating and refusing to go away. Definitely the friction level in Nigeria is sufficient to call for a roundtable discussion among various groups within the country, to DIALOGUE on the future of the country, in all ramifications. No nation reaches menopause of its existence, not thinking of growth, which, unfortunately, seems to be where Nigeria is today.

Most Nigerians are running out of patience with the manner things are going in the country especially the level of insecurity. New York-based Human Rights Watch said (2013) about 3,600 deaths has been recorded since a radical sect, Boko Haram, began violent operations in the Northern Nigeria in 2009. Sadly, Nigeria has been ranked as the 148th, out of the 162 countries evaluated, on the reduction of violence and insecurity, between 2012 and 2013 by the Global Peace Index. This rating earns Nigeria the 14th fewer peaceful country around the world, in the rank of countries like Chad, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Pakistan, among other conflict ridden states. Nigeria ranked 117th out of 121 in 2007; 129th out of 140 in 2008; 129th out of 144 in 2009; 137th out of 149 in 2010; 142nd out of 153 in 2011; 146 out of 158 in 2012.

In essence it will be necessary for the Committee to summon all ethnic nationalities to the table of brotherhood to possibly fashion out a new constitution, as the current efforts at constitutional review, is a futile exercise that can never foster Nigerian nationhood. Nigerians need to deflate, or decentralize the paranoiac federal power and devolving same to federating units to make for a truly great nation for the pride of humanity. Nigerians must sit down and harmonize **Resource Control**, review the **Federal Character**, consider **State Police**, approve **Local Government Autonomy** and fashion **Religious Freedom** among others, in the new Document.

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