



THE ADVOCACY BULLETIN

The Nigerian Physicians Advocacy Group



DEMOCRACY DAY 2021: GOOD GOVERNANCE, RESTRUCTURE, THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG?

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From #RevolutionNow to #EndSARS to #June12Protest to secessionist groups, there is this feeling that most Nigerians are at their wits' end. There is a heightened call for constitutional reform that would allow for a restructuring of the nation. On the other end, secessionist groups are ready to break away. In multiple recent national television appearances, President Muhammadu Buhari discussed state of affairs specifically, he addressed rising security concerns, the ill-effects of poverty and attempts by his administration to maintain safety while improving the economy. There is no doubt that the economic state of the country was worsened by lower oil prices coupled with devastation from the global COVID-19 pandemic. One may argue that the hardship from low economic productivity, recession, and the final blow by COVID-19 pandemic further enhanced anger towards the current administration that has shown significant inconsistency in leadership.

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So, what does it mean to restructure Nigeria? Will restructuring lead to good governance or vice versa? This was topic of discussion at a recent virtual event held by Unleash Nigeria, a political organization established in Nigeria whose mission is to support “competent, altruistic and detribalized leaders for Nigeria.” Below were my thoughts:

What does it mean to restructure Nigeria?

Restructuring of Nigeria means ensuring that Nigeria is functioning as a federalist system of government. A federalist system of government is one whose territory is controlled by 2 levels of government: a national/federal government that is responsible for larger territorial areas and a localized government that is responsible for smaller subdivisions such as states, local government areas and wards. Both levels of government have the power to make laws, and both have an element of independence from each other.

The Nigeria 1999 Constitution, as amended allows for different levels of government but:

- 1.) Favors centralization of power – most laws are made by the national assembly. The national assembly has the authority to annul laws made by state house assembly on many issues including security, electricity and basic public amenities (Chapter I Part 2, Section 4.1, 5 and 7).
- 2.) Does not make provision for gender equity- with the inclusion of Sharia Court of appeal (Chapter VII Part I.E and Part II.B; Chapter III Section 29.4b)

NPAGS STAND ON THE TWITTER BAN IN NIGERIA



We have watched keenly the action taken by the Federal Government of Nigeria concerning the ban of twitter in Nigeria and its concomitant effect on Nigerians.

While we believe that the action taken by the government was conducted in good faith, we believe that it may have been an overly intense measure considering the effect it will pose to Nigerians. Firstly, the Nigerian constitution protects citizens' right to freedom of expression.

and discrimination against Nigerian women married to non-Nigerian men (Chapter III Section 26.2a).

- 3.) Gives preference to one religious practice i.e., Islam (Chapter VII Part I.E and Part II.B; Chapter III Section 29.4b).

Why practice federalism?

Proponents argue that federalism helps foster state loyalties; makes governing easier because the state governments are closer to the people and better understand the needs; creates laboratories of democracy that allows testing of different policies before national implementation; leads to political stability; encourages pluralism; and ensures separation of power therefore preventing tyranny. A great example of a federalist nation is the United States of America.

Opponents of federalism argue that it prevents creation of a national policy, leads to lack of accountability, and leads to citizen ignorance. I beg to differ.

Will restructuring lead to good governance or vice versa?

Well, this is the chicken versus egg question. It takes visionary, patriotic leaders to create the environment that is conducive to all to prosper while ensuring fair and just rule of law. What is your take? Send your comments to: info@npagroup.org Check out: www.unleashnigeria.org



Furthermore, in modern day society, Twitter serves as a major channel for communication as well as a means for conducting business and services, making the platform an invaluable network. We also recognize that it serves as an avenue for disinformation. Therefore, we support measures that curtail the spread of misinformation and violence.

In view of rebuilding a greater Nigeria, we also heavily condemn violent actions that have led to the destruction of lives and property by ill meaning members of our society. We pray for the peace and progress of Nigeria and her people.

THE BUSINESS OF MEDICINE

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The recent spate of bad press about Nigerian doctors gives serious cause for concern. The use of social media portends huge problems for everyone. So many stories went viral on so many platforms, it left me dizzy and nauseous. I will not bore you with the sordid details. Suffice it to say that we are going through a cataclysmic change in the medical landscape in Nigeria and one only hopes doctors are cleansed in the process.

We are at ground zero!

Due to rise in unhealthy and careless practices by some medical personnel in Nigerian hospitals, patients now insist on their rights to quality of care and good outcomes. It is important for patients to know their rights and the recent patients' bill of rights is a step in the right direction. Medico-legal consequences should also be explored by aggrieved patients and relatives to bring erring practitioners and hospitals to book.

Dead or injured patients don't pay bills!

Of course, there are concerns about the possibility of increase in assaults on medical practitioners. This is particularly worrisome as many who are too aggrieved and unable to access social media or legal means for redress may take matters into their own hands. In this way even well-meaning and innocent healthcare practitioners may suffer. Some doctors and nurses have been verbally, mentally and physically assaulted and some have been killed by irate relatives.

There are many ways for the wary practitioner to practice in a sane environment. The customer is king and must be carried along at every step of the care process. Communication is vitally important in medicine. Patients and relatives must be regularly updated with the truth. Honesty and concern will often douse anxieties and avoid trouble for the practitioner.



Hospitals should be insured.

This should not be a problem for genuine and well trained healthcare practitioners who actually desire the best for their patients. After all, the most important person and the reason hospitals exist is the patient, who ensures that the bills are paid including the salaries of healthcare practitioners. Without the patient, the hospital might as well be a fancy white elephant with a stethoscope around its neck. The work of medical experts is to keep patients alive and in good health, as this will make them come back again for more and further patronage.

So, communicate!

Safe medical practice encompasses a lot. For example, patients, as a right, must be told the names and the dosage of their medications. Many have been prescribed the same drugs by different facilities and end up taking significant and harmful overdose. Do not hide the names of drugs from patients. Only poorly trained doctors and nurses will behave like this, demonstrating such a high level of insecurity and dimness.

Show concern!

The awareness of the public has been awakened and it will no longer be business as usual. Defensive medicine should be an important part of medical care. Go all out to ensure you prevent problems rather wait to treat. This was true many centuries ago and still ring true today. Treat the patient as you would a family member and all will be well.

Have empathy!

The LOBBY(IST)



NPAG at the Senate Committee Hearing on Constitutional Reform

Iyore James MD/MALD, FACS, USA

On Friday June 4th, 2021, through efforts by Hon Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Chairman/CEO of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM), Nigerians in the Diaspora were for the first time able to participate at the National Public hearing on review of the Nigeria 1999 constitution, as amended. The discussion was centered on revising the 1999 constitution to make provision for diaspora voting.

The hearing was attended by representatives of at least 10 diaspora groups across Africa, the Middle East, Europe, North America, and Australia. Dr. Iyore James represented NPAG and the broader health care professional group in the USA. During deliberations, emphasis was placed on the significance of the diaspora in the Nigeria economy and the benefits of diaspora voting on enhancing governance. Mr. Obed Monago, Chairman, NIDO Americas made the recommendation to consider the diaspora as its own voting block that will make a certain percentage of electoral block given economic productivity. While I strongly agreed with the need for diaspora voting, I highlighted the more pressing need to improve voter participation for all Nigerian citizens regardless of residence. In that regard, I shared the following recommendation with the Senate committee for consideration:

- Increase the number of polling units with installation of functional security cameras at all polling stations with particular emphasis in high-risk areas.
- Nationwide electronic voting and transmission of results to secure INEC portal. Paper ballots should only be used for recounting purposes.
- Voters should be allowed to vote in polling units closest to most recent official address and not only where PVC cards were obtained. Registered voters must be able to present PVC card and a second legal identification card.
- Allow early voting period at all polling units; for example, early voting could start 2-4 weeks prior to election day.
- Extend hours of voting on election day to include most hours of daylight for example, 7am until 6pm instead of 8am to 2pm as currently practiced.
- Ensure polling units are safe and secured from violent actors.

Proposed steps for voting when an eligible voting citizen is out of country including the diaspora:

- Citizen requests ballot from Nigerian consulate
- Sealed, secured Ballot sent to Nigerian citizen with unique ID number or code
- Completed ballot uploaded for electronic transmission to secure INEC portal
- The citizen mails completed original sealed certified ballot back to the consulate as back-up if paper recount is necessary.

NPAG's participation at the Senate meeting is one of the many ways we are working to enhance good governance in Nigeria, please support us:

<https://www.npagroup.org/membership/>

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On June 12th, 1993, military head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida, cancelled election results that gave victory to Moshood Kashimawo Abiola (a.k.a. MKO) citing election misconduct and fraud despite declaration of free and fair elections by independent international and local observers. MKO ran under the Social Democratic Party gaining victory over Bashir Tofa of the National Republican Convention. In honor of MKO, Muhammadu Buhari in 2018 changed Nigeria's democracy day from May 29th to June 12th.

Several activities marked June 12th, 2021 including the Presidential address by Muhammadu Buhari which highlighted ongoing security issues, poverty and his administration's commitment to alleviate the plight of Nigerians through constitutional and electoral reforms. There was the #June12Protest where many Nigerians across the nation took to the streets in peaceful protest against bad governance, corruption and worsening insecurity crisis. Secessionist groups also took to the streets as well as anti-Buhari protestors that were countered by pro-Buhari protestors. Even diaspora members belonging to the Biafran movement, Yoruba Nation and #RevolutionNow took the streets at the Nigeria

house in London, United Kingdom.

There were scholarly conferences; I was honored to be a panelist in the virtual event titled: A National Dialogue Series on "Good Governance or Restructuring... the chicken or the egg." As simply stated by the keynote speaker Professor Kingsley Moghalu, Nigeria has a leadership problem. This is not news you may say but somehow, poor leadership continues to emerge. There has been a long period of doing nothing but complain and "checking out." The time is now as more and more Nigerians are beginning to understand the significance of political participation. We must therefore be deliberate and not get tired advocating for processes that will allow for the election of credible, non-tribalistic members of society whose goal is to ensure a prosperous Nigeria. Election year 2023 will be 30 years since the date that gave birth to democracy day; how do you intend to make an influence? Contact us to learn more: info@npagroup.org

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