

contd. from pg. 1

The Oduahgate Scandal

personal and private entity.

“Many Nigerians express worries for the various allegations of corrupt practices and outright looting in the name of renovating our airports and the recent scandal of purchasing bullet proof cars without due process and also the allegation of refusal of landing permit to some international airlines who applied but were denied the permit because they did not give bribe to her.

“It is also on record that the National Assembly had conducted a public hearing which found her guilty but yet no sanction was taken against her due to her connection to the President.

“If buying the bullet proof cars is for her own security, then we don't understand why she doesn't pay more attention to the safety of millions of Nigerian passengers travelling within the country every year,” he said.

Rasfanjani demanded outright probe of the minister, saying this becomes necessary “in order to bring sanity, transparency, accountability, professionalism, and safety to our aviation industry which is now being characterized by corruption and impunity under the auspices of the Minister of Aviation.”

This, he said, will serve as a deterrent to other ministers and public officers who abuse the trust of their office.

The Airline Operators of Nigeria, AON, through its Assistant General Secretary, Muhammed Tukur, described the purchase of the bulletproof cars as unfortunate, saying it showed the high level of corruption in Nigeria.

“This shows how bad things have gone in this country; that the minister has admitted to receiving the cars from the NCAA reveals that they do not care for the people of this country.

“We can see that all these people and parastatals use their offices to siphon funds for anything they want. We think there is no other option but for her (Oduah) to resign her appointment as the aviation minister.

“Also, we call on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to thoroughly investigate the issue, because, some of us had foresight of these things, and we know that there are more coming up soon.”

The Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria, ATSSSAN, said the ‘necessary government

CACOL wants Oduah probed

Protesters on Wednesday stormed the Lagos Office of the Independent Corrupt Practice and Other Related Offences Commission, requesting that the embattled Minister of Aviation, Ms Stella Oduah, be tried and jailed if found guilty.

The protesters, who stormed the ICPC office around 10.15am, defied confrontation by armed policemen who shot thrice into the air and civil defence officers to gain entrance into the premises of the commission.

Chairman of the Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders, Mr. Debo Adeniran, who spoke on behalf of the protesters, said that many lives had been lost due to corruption in the aviation sector.

He said, “The purchase of the bulletproof cars is outrageous. It is the ICPC that should deal with anything that has to do with official corruption. Their reaction has been that they have not got a petition to act and that is why investigation has not begun. Now we have submitted a petition, we want them to act.

“If Oduah is found guilty after the probe, we want her to go to jail; we want anybody found culpable to be

agencies' should not hesitate to prosecute anyone found to have played a role in the purchase of the bulletproof cars.

“We have government agencies that can look into such issues as this such as the EFCC. So, these agencies should look into the matter, and if they find out that it is indeed true, they should take the appropriate action,” according to its national President, Ben Okewu.

Debo Adeniran, Executive Chairman, Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders, CACOL, noted that Oduah, in order to satisfy her ostentatious lifestyle, had by accepting the cars compromised the safety of Nigerians.

“When the minister asked NCAA to buy her bulletproof cars worth \$1.6m because of alleged threats to her life, where did she expect them to get the money?”

“She expected them to compromise standard of course. It is now clear that the frequent air accidents are products of corruption and incompetence in our aviation sector.”

It would be recalled that several of the air crashes that have occurred in recent times have been partly attributed to human error, occasioned by incompetence and lack of adequate technical know-how on the part of the aviation officials.

In June 2012, a Dana Air crashed in Lagos killing 163 people while the Associated Airlines crash of October 3, 2013, also in Lagos, claimed 15 lives.

A day after the Associated Airlines' crash, a Kabo Airlines' Boeing 747-400 plane carrying 512 pilgrims made an emergency landing at the Sokoto airport with deflated tires and damaged the airport's Instrument Landing System.

An IRS Airlines Fokker 100 plane carrying 99 passengers also made an emergency landing at the Kaduna airport last Sunday, after developing hydraulic problems mid-air.

Four days after the tragic crash involving Associated Airlines' Embraer 120 plane, Oduah had described air accidents as God's will that were inevitable.” She said notwithstanding this reality, the Federal Government

would continue to ensure that there were no accidents.

Interestingly, earlier before the bulletproof car scandal

prosecuted diligently, we want anybody found guilty to be adequately punished and until we get that we will not rest.

“It is saddening that the President who should set precedence for Nigerians to follow could be shielding the indicted and even include them in his entourage to Israel on holy pilgrimage. It is also not unlikely that Ms. Oduah is in the league of Mr. President's benefactors.

“Though the President has set up a panel to investigate the allegations, but it must be noted that most of the time when President Jonathan sets up his panels, they are to bury the issues rather than bending it to justice.”

The protesters, who presented a petition to the ICPC, prayed that investigations should be commenced into the activities of the minister; the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority; Nigerian Airspace Management Agency; Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria; and other relevant agencies under the Ministry of Aviation.

Chief Superintendent of ICPC in Lagos, Mr. Binga Shintema, who attended to the protesters, assured them that their petition would be acted on.

blew open, a body that calls itself the Patriots in a petition signed by one Rose Ibekaku had called for the immediate sack of the minister after accusing her of corruption, incompetence and negligence of duties.

Ibekaku in the letter to the Presidency accused Oduah of collecting N158 monthly from the accounts of aviation agencies like the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency, NAMA, NCAA, FAAN and other agencies under her.

Ibekaku, in the petition, alleged that the deductions had successfully crippled the operations of the agencies concerned to the extent that paying staff entitlements has recently become a herculean task. Oduah was also alleged to have a stake in Price Waters Coopers, PWC, which audited various aspects of four agencies at N250m each. However, the Secretary General of the National Union of Air Transport Employees, NUATE, Comrade Abdulkareem Motajo, said that what is happening in the sector now is not novel to the unions.

According to him, NUATE had severally in the past written petitions to the Presidency, National Assembly and other agencies without any action taken by the government.

He insisted that Oduah should not be removed, but should be probed by the security agencies in the country, alleging that the industry has been ransacked by the minister. “What is happening is part of what we have been saying in recent time. What is going on today is unprecedented. A lot of things are happening.

“Somebody was talking about the diversion of N19.5bn intervention fund and somehow today, the security agencies are looking into that and the money has been traced to somewhere.

“My union has written a petition to the Senate President, Deputy Senate President, the Chairman, Senate Committee on Aviation over some of the ills happening in the sector till date and not even an acknowledgement was given and if this thing continues like this, you can be rest assured that the sector is not safe and the industry is going to be looted continuously like this.

“As we speak, none of the six parastatals has been able to send its staff for training and others. They owe months of such allowances and leave allowances have not been paid to staff. They are just going from hand to mouth to pay salaries. The minister is taking over N150m per month from each of the Chief Executive Officers and on what grounds we don't understand,” he said.

Adeniran however believes that “the chicken has now come home to roost. It is no longer surprising that the Minister could ascribe her incompetence to God.

“When she asked the NCAA to get her bulletproof cars worth \$1.6m (N255m) because of threats to her life, where did she expect them to get the money? She expected them to compromise standard of course! “It is now clear that the frequent air accidents are products of corruption and incompetence in our aviation sector.

“This is the NCAA that does not have enough funds to upgrade its equipment, send its employees for critical training and hire enough qualified hands.

“The truth remains that if NCAA is doing a proper job and not collecting bribes to satisfy the ostentatious lifestyle of Stella Oduah, they would have been able to avert some of these accidents. With proper safety regulations in place, the frequency of air crashes can be drastically reduced,” he said.

For now, no one is sure how the current dust will settle. Will it consume Oduah or will she come out unscathed? Time will tell.



Integrity Matters

Name, Nail, Shame and Shun Corrupt Leaders Anywhere, Everywhere

MONTHLY DIGEST OF COALITION AGAINST CORRUPT LEADERS (CACOL) OCTOBER 2013 VOL. 1 NO 5

The Oduahgate Scandal

These are clearly not the best of times for Stella Oduah, Nigeria's aviation minister and one of the kitchen cabinet members of President Goodluck Jonathan. Just smarting from the criticisms that trailed her ministry's handling of the fallout of the various air crashes in which several Nigerians have lost their lives; Oduah is presently embroiled in allegations bothering on corruption and profligacy. She is being alleged to have forced Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, (NCAA), one of the parastatals under her ministry to purchase two BMW armoured vehicles worth over the N225 million for her personal use.

An online news medium, SaharaReporters, had reported on Tuesday last week that the armoured vehicles were delivered to the minister in August.

The medium reported that documents in its possession showed that the transaction for the purchase of the two BMW cars started in June, but the request for the delivery and payment for them was fast-tracked between August 13 and 15, 2013. The transaction involved the NCAA, First Bank of Nigeria, and Coscharis Motors Limited and according to the report, the two black BMW 760 Li HSS vehicles with chassis numbers WBAHP41050DW68032 and WBAHP41010DW68044, were reportedly delivered to the NCAA on August 13, 2013. They were received by two store managers, F. Onoabagbe and Y. A. Amzat, who is also the agency's head of transport.”

When the lid was first blown off the alleged purchases, the ministry and officials of the NCAA attempted to discountenance the report but were forced to recant later when it dawned on them that all the facts relating to the transaction had been leaked to the press.

In what a source admitted to be a volte face, Special Assistant to the Minister on media, Joe Obi, later admitted that the cars in question were purchased for her principal but stressed that the security vehicles were procured for the “use of the office of the honorable minister in response to the clear and imminent threat to her personal security and life following the bold steps she took to reposition the sector.”

According to Obi, when Oduah came on board as the minister, she inherited a lot of baggage in terms of the concession and lease agreements in the sector, which were clearly not in the interest of the government and people of Nigeria. And so, she took bold steps and some of these agreements were reviewed while some were terminated, and these moves disturbed some entrenched interests in the sector, and within this period, she began to receive some imminent threats to her life; therefore, the need for the vehicles.

Obi however added that the vehicles were not “personal vehicles and were not procured in the name of the honorable minister; they are utility vehicles and are for the office of the minister, and if she leaves the office, she will not be taking the vehicles along with her.”

Interestingly, coming on the heels of what is being perceived as official profligacy is the report that most of the agencies under Oduah's ministry have virtually been living from hands to mouth and in most cases, unable to buy critical equipment and send its staff for important training.

The NCAA particularly has been under fire lately over a series of mishaps and near crashes involving planes being operated by domestic airlines that were certified for flight operations by its personnels. There have also been rumors that the NCAA does not have enough funds to upgrade its equipment, send its employees for critical training and hire enough qualified hands, while questions are also being raised by industry watchers on

the ability of the cash-strapped agency to procure such expensive vehicles.

Though the NCAA's Director- General, Captain Fola Akinkuotu, had consistently denied the claims of being cash-strapped, highly reliable industry sources told Business Courage at the weekend that some of the agency's personnel currently training in Manchester, United Kingdom, embarked on the training with their own funds. Besides, Akinkuotu himself is said to have been spending his personal funds for most of the travels.

Interestingly, aviation sources say the claim that the agencies under the ministry are indeed broke may be true after all.

A source close to the Ministry of Aviation told our correspondent that the controversial armoured vehicles may have been bought on credit. According to the source who preferred anonymity, First Bank of Nigeria Plc stood as a guarantor for the agency with Coscharis



Stella Oduah

Motors Limited.

Apart from the two armoured vehicles, NCAA and the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria, FAAN, about four months ago purchased about 800 different brands of vehicles, including Hilux Pick-Up for their top personnel and even the minister.

It was gathered that FAAN, in the first phase, procured over 250 vehicles for managers ranging from assistant general managers, deputy general managers, general managers and directors. 2013 Toyota Corolla cars were purchased for assistant general managers, deputy general managers and general managers while Land Cruiser Prado were purchased for directors in the agency.

In the second phase, same brands of vehicles in their hundreds were also purchased by FAAN for its personnel, just as NCAA also procured same brands of vehicles for its staff on credit, believed to have been financed by First Bank.

Interestingly, the controversial bulletproof vehicles scandal has now turned the heat on Oduah, whose supervisory role in the ministry and the spate of air mishaps have continued to attract stringent criticisms.

Leader of the Anti-Corruption Network, ACN, Dino Melaye, said his organisation had conducted

investigation into the matter and found out that there was no threat to the minister's life as claimed by his media aide.

Melaye also said the vehicles could have been purchased for far less the amount they were purportedly procured. “There are two questions to ask – was the N225 million appropriated by the National Assembly? Does the purchase of the vehicles not negate the monetisation policy, which says that only the President, Vice president, Senate President, Speaker of the House of Representatives, their deputies and a few other public officials should have official cars? If she does not fall into this category, why did they purchase the vehicles for her?”

“They claim there was a threat to her life. There was no threat to Stella Oduah's life. Even if there was a threat, we have done our investigation and we discovered that those vehicles cost less than N100 million.

“You are spending N225 million at a time you claim there is no money for ASUU, at a time you cannot pay statutory allocations to states. Jonathan administration is the most corrupt administration in Nigeria,” he said.

Ezenwa Nwagwu, Convener of Say No Campaign, Nigeria, SNCN, asked the antigraft agencies to wade into the scandal immediately, insisting that the NCAA official(s), who authorised the release of the money, should be penalized.

“We have lost about 200 citizens to sheer incompetence and add salt to injury, we are being told that a cashstrapped agency under her had to cough out that amount of money to

provide armoured vehicles. In saner climes, she would have resigned. But here we are treated to half truths and excuses.

“What is important now is that an independent inquiry should be set up to look into the happenings in the aviation sector. We cannot be deceived by the so-called reforms. When you renovate 11 airports at the same time, the implication is that it is a honey-pot, after the petroleum sector.

“We must as a matter of urgency beam our searchlight on happenings in the sector. It is not enough to go round media houses. What Nigerian want now is an independent inquiry into the activities in the sector.

Nwagwu lamented that the Jonathan's administration kept treating corruption with kid gloves, especially by allegedly shielding Oduah and the Petroleum Resources Minister, Diezani Alison-Madueke.

“These are two ministers that can never do wrong in this government,” he said.

Aawal Musa Rasfanjani, Executive Director, Centre for Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre, CISLAC, expressed worry over the flagrant abuse of public office, corruption, impunity and constant disregard of public procurement law by some ministers and other public officers under the supervision of President

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The Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL) was established in August 2007 to exert pressures on anti-graft agencies to investigate and prosecute known corrupt leaders in Nigeria. CACOL also undertakes to sensitize Nigerians to *Name, Nail, Shame and Shun Corrupt Leaders Anywhere, Everywhere* to serve as deterrent that corruption does not pay. CACOL is primarily funded by affiliate and individual members but also seeks support from public-spirited individuals, corporate bodies and donor agencies. This DIGEST is supported by First Faculty Ventures - an organizational development consultancy firm. For further information contact: The Executive Chairman, CACOL, The Humanity Center, 610 Lagos-Abeokuta Expressway, Ijaye-Ojokoro, Lagos, Nigeria. E-mail: cacol@yahoo.com, www.cacol.thehumanitycentre.org. Phone: 01-4736534, 08037194969, 08023226276 Editor: Abimbola Adegoke

Jonathan Stirs Fresh Debate on Corruption

On October 5, President Goodluck Jonathan held another edition of the presidential media chat, where he responded to questions on pressing national issues, including insecurity, power, the 2015 elections and the cost of governance. But of all the issues addressed, the president's position that corruption in Nigeria was "tolerable" generated the most reactions from the public. He blamed the local media and the civil society for what he described as the exaggerated perception about corruption in the country.

Time and time again, corruption is generally described as one of the nation's major problems and the root cause of its stunted growth. The corruption perception index rating of the country by Transparency International has however lent credence to the growing belief that Nigeria is neck deep in corruption that has seeped into all strata of its political, economic and social life.

Particularly instructive, albeit worrisome, about the corruption perception of the country is the fact that it did not start with this administration. Indeed, some often posit that corruption in the country is as old as Nigeria itself. But the disturbing angle to this is that the much touted fight against graft has made little impact. Efforts by successive administrations to fight graft have been stalled by the endemic corruption in the system.

This much President Goodluck Jonathan acknowledged during his media chat. He however argued that the situation was not as bad as it was being portrayed, globally. For him, his government was already winning the war against corruption, and that the perception people have about corruption in Nigeria is exaggerated.

Jonathan argued that the global perception about Nigeria's corruption was influenced by continuous

Presidential Committee

Contd. from page 3

therefore left wondering as to what the content of the report by the committee could possibly be, when its existence and activities had all along been shrouded in controversy and mystery. All it has been doling out as information to Nigerians had been sheer deceit and blatant falsehood. From all available facts and the frightening dimension and pace at which these enemies of humanity have been waxing stronger by the day, it remains very controvertible the claims that this committee ever met with the leaders of the insurgents, talk less of engaging in any meaningful dialogue with them. Here again is another aspect of wastages in governance that President Goodluck Jonathan must address very fast.

It is noteworthy that since the constitution of the committee by Mr. President, there has been nothing of significance that can be regarded as an achievement. In fact, every claim made by the committee chairman, Alhaji Turaki, right from its take-off had always proven to be false. It would be recalled that sometimes last July, Turaki announced that the committee had started speaking with the leaders of the Islamic sect and specifically mentioned one of the detained suspects, Kabiru Sokoto, only for the latter to openly deny ever speaking with anyone. Turaki again came up to inform Nigerians that the insurgents had agreed to a cease-fire to be observed throughout the Ramadan fasting period but we could easily recollect that the period in question recorded the worst and deadliest attacks against innocent people, especially from those northern states where emergency rule was still in force as well as the middle belt axis.

The situation, we all know, has since not abated, rather it has gone full blast. Today, it's obvious that we are already in a war situation as Boko Haram has constituted a security nightmare to all and sundry, the police and military not excluded. One is therefore left wondering as to what the content of the report by the committee could possibly be, when its existence and activities had all along been shrouded in controversy and mystery. All it has been doling out as information to Nigerians had been sheer deceit and blatant falsehood. From all available facts and the frightening dimension and pace at which these enemies of humanity have been waxing stronger by the day, it remains very controvertible the claims that this committee ever met with the leaders of the insurgents, talk less of engaging in any meaningful dialogue with them. Here again is another aspect of wastages in governance that President Goodluck Jonathan must address very fast.



Culled from ThisDay

reports by the Nigerian media and their civil society allies, adding that corruption in the country was still at a 'tolerable level' despite the myriad of corruption allegations against government officials.

This had immediately attracted reactions from some civil society groups which described the president's position as opposite the reality on the ground.

Reacting to the President's statement, the Executive Chairman, Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL), Debo Adeniran, maintained that Jonathan is not in touch with Nigerians and as such, does not know what problems confront them and why.

"I will not agree with him at all. It really shows that the president does not appreciate the enormity of the problem that is confronting Nigeria. He does not seem to understand why Nigeria has been speeding backwards instead of making progress; why factories are not working; why children are not in good schools; why infrastructure is not developing and the few we have are dilapidated.

"It means he has limited appreciation of the yearnings of Nigerian people. It means that he does not even understand the root cause of the general apathy of the people to governmental policies and programmes in Nigeria. It is unfortunate that we have a president who does not seem to be in close contact with the ruled. Even during the media chat, you will

discover that he left so many gaps unfilled - even directing the interviewers to some of his ministers. Which means that he does not know what is happening.

"He does not even know the man who designed the national flag. So he said the Minister of Information will take care of that. He does not know what is going on in the petroleum sector; he is referring to the ministers of petroleum resources and the finance minister and all that. He does not even know anything about corruption which is the root cause of all our problems in Nigeria!

"I have created a problem tree, with a tap root that is called corruption. So if the president was talking about infrastructure decay and the rest of them; if infrastructure is decaying what led to it? It does not mean we do not have enough money to repair our roads. We can even construct more. Somebody is spending N39billion on a less than 2km road in Lekki here whereas that could have taken care of a road from Ikorodu to Epe and back to Lekki. So it is because of the leakages in governmental handling of money that led to inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure around," he posited.

He therefore noted that the situation was hopeless if there were no efforts at making a systemic change. "There is no hope if we continue to have a president that does not have any link with the people - who depends on ministers who are profligate in their life affairs. So if we continue to have this kind of president, there is no light at the end of the tunnel at all. And that is why we are

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N3bn legislators' quarters: Edifice of corruption

ODDITY is one of the characteristics that define what news is. Anything strange is news. A strange thing is not expected to happen. It is against common sense. Not what normal human beings should do. The usual example in Communication Theory is "When a dog bites a man, it is not news. But when a man bites dog, it is big news." A normal man is not expected to bite. Not fellow men and certainly not dog. Yet, some "men" do bite dogs. Otherwise, there won't be news. In Nigeria, news, albeit oddities, walks on all fours across the national landscape. Oddities in fact reside in the Presidential Villa, in the hallow chambers of the National Assembly, in offices and in government houses. Daily, Nigerian leaders are biting their followers.

Another man-bite-man episode was the disclosure penultimate weekend by the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Bala Mohammed, that the Federal Capital Territory was building N3bn official quarters for Senate President David Mark; his deputy, Ike Ekweremadu; the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Aminu Tambuwal; and his deputy, Emeka Ihedioha.

Mohammed said the lawmakers had rejected the buildings, citing insecurity and delay as their reasons for doing so. But the National Assembly said, "no, the decision to abandon the project was solely that of the FCTDA."

While it is still to be decided between the FCT and the National Assembly who is the liar, what can be easily deduced is that government has again given the citizens a bite worth N3bn. And as usual, the news media are feasting on the news. Expectedly too, Nigerians are up in verbal arms.

We no go gree, we sing our time-tested chorus. And we will continue to sing till another profound bite comes. It will come very soon; one needs no prophet to see into the future for this kind of a thing under a government with a large capacity for profligacy. The Nigerian government, especially the President Goodluck Jonathan's, has proved to be a government of wastefulness. This government is throwing away national fortune while the citizens are entangled in a romance with hunger and poverty.

Examples? Here are a few in recent memory. Jonathan's

PRESIDENTIAL COMMITTEE ON AMNESTY FOR BOKO HARAM - WASTAGE OF THE COUNTRY'S RESOURCES

Upon its inauguration in June, 2013, the committee headed by Alhaji Turaki, was given three months to work and come up with a report containing d outcome and recommendations to be presented to the president for further action. The terms of reference included dialoguing with leaders of the Boko Haram sect with the aim of identifying their grounds of grievance and recommending effective measures at bringing about the much desired peace in the affected areas.

It is of public knowledge that, since the committee began sitting, its impact was never felt in any form. The dreaded sect, rather than reduce in its murderous escapades, had not only been expanding in bounds and size, it's evidently fast becoming a regular army as it has become more equipped, more sophisticated and better organized in its dastardly activities. They, often in military camouflage, attack and kill members of the police force and the army at will, using high caliber military hardware. They have also progressed from just attacking and killing innocent people in their homes, places of worship and destroying their properties to blocking the highways, shooting, raping and slashing the throats of road users. Hardly had a day passed in the past six months without one gory report of brutal killing or the other.

The initial three months ended at the end of August and President Jonathan, upon request from the Turaki-led committee, approved an extension of two months which ended at the end of October, 2013. The committee reportedly presented its report last Tuesday to President Jonathan.

HOW FAR AND HOW WELL

It is noteworthy that since the constitution of the committee by Mr. President, there has been nothing of significance that can be regarded as an achievement. In fact, every claim made by the committee chairman, Alhaji Turaki, right from its take-off had always proven to be false. It would be recalled that sometimes last July, Turaki announced that the committee had started speaking with the leaders of the Islamic sect and specifically mentioned one of the detained suspects, Kabiru Sokoto, only for the latter to

Minister of Aviation, delectable Stella Oduah, recently procured for her pleasure two armoured cars at a princely N255m.

Oduah presides over, among others, four key agencies that are responsible for keeping air travels in the country safe, namely the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria; the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority; the Nigerian Airspace Management Authority; and the Accident Investigation and Prevention Bureau. The well-being of these agencies is reflected in the high number of air crashes in the country. Many of them are said to be crying for funds to train and retrain their personnel, to conduct effective monitoring and to buy required equipment.

To say the least, the news of the Oduah's cars is sickening but it fits the profile of the government. Jonathan has promised to probe the minister. All we are expecting is the names of members of the committee that will look into the Oduah's case. *I no fit laugh o.*

It took the intervention of the National Assembly to halt the construction of a N4bn house for the wife of the President, Patience, recently. Christened African First Ladies' Mission House, the unique function of the project would have been for Mrs. Jonathan to have a headquarters for her pleasure.

Such an edifice in Abuja, a nation's capital surrounded by squalid communities, can't definitely be too crass for a government that budgeted N2.2bn for the building



Jonathan

of bouquet halls for the President and his wife to entertain their guests in Aso Rock.

In a way, spending fortunes to domesticate revelry may not be a bad idea for the Aso Rock lords, given that bombers, kidnappers and armed robbers have taken over the streets. And the burdens of confronting criminals have proved too daunting for the government. So, let the criminals rule the outside while the President spends his N1.3bn budgeted for refreshment in the 2013 budget (though State House Permanent Secretary, Emmanuel Ogbile, told senators during budget defence last December that the amount was "grossly inadequate") clink glasses with his friends and associates in the Aso Rock bouquet halls while hapless citizens stay in the middle and bear the brunt.

The Mark and Tambuwal multi-billion naira houses are in fact a mere addition to the profligacy that has defined the Jonathan government. It is part of the reasons why the electorate have continued to question their judgment in voting for the President.

For God's sake, why build new houses for the National Assembly's principal officers? The ones built for their offices were recently sold to the occupiers at ridiculous prices under the government's shambolic monetisation policy. Tambuwal's predecessor, Dimeji Bankole, reportedly bought the palatial official residence he lived for a meagre N45m. The same building Bankole offered for rent to the incumbent Speaker at N40m per annum.

Again, why build new houses for Mark and co? The reasons are not far-fetched. It is to spite the citizens. It is to show them that that they are helpless. It is a sign that the government is odd. It is an indication that the government is wasteful. And it is a confirmation that the government is unrepentantly insensitive.

Amid these reckless spending, university gates have been closed since July 1 because the government said it could not meet the demands of the teachers. Resident doctors have been on strike since October 1 because the government owes them salaries and entitlements. The hospitals are worse than consulting clinics, apology to military coup plotters of old. The roads in most parts retain their old appellation, death traps. Planes are dropping from the skies. Bombs are flying on the streets. Undergraduates and graduates are turning to internet scammers, impersonators, robbers and prostitutes. And our politicians are still canvassing votes to renew their mandate to kill the future.

Culled from The Punch, October 22, 2013

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Setting agenda for national confab

With the inauguration of the Presidential Advisory Committee on the proposed national conference last Monday by President Goodluck Jonathan, the committee is set to draw the agenda for the conference and in doing this, it would need the inputs of Nigerians.

President Jonathan heeded the advice of many Nigerians who had earlier called on him not to restrict the Committee and the conference to certain areas of the national life. Speaking at the inauguration of the committee, President Jonathan gave the committee the freedom to choose names for itself and for the conference, while he also gave the committee free hands on areas to be discussed at the conference. Jonathan, who said he had deliberately used different terms to describe the committee and the conference because he wanted the committee to select its own nomenclature, admonished it to consult widely before sitting down to develop the framework that would guide and guard the proceedings of the discussions.

Also speaking, the chairman of the committee, Senator Femi Okurounmu said Jonathan's sincerity and commitment were "further buttressed by the fact that he has not established any so called 'no-go areas' for his committee, thus opening up for discourse, all aspects of our present constitution and national life."

He promised that the committee would not let down Nigerians, hoping that with the conclusion of the assignment and the national conference that would follow, "even those who were once skeptical and critical of the idea of a national conference will have become persuaded of its merits and benefits to our nation."

With this sound of optimism, Nigerians are willing to set agenda for the committee and in essence, for the national conference that will come up later.

First to respond to the setting up of agenda for the conference was the Awolowo Foundation which held an executive leadership seminar, in Lagos last week and noted that the proposed conference can contribute to the creation of a viable Nigerian polity.

Tagged, 'The national conference: Roadmap to Nigeria's stability', the seminar was convened by the group's Executive Director, Dr Olatokunbo Dosumu and chaired by Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi. Also at the event were President, Guild of Editors, Mr. Femi Adesina; Prof. Ayandiji; Daniel Aina; Prof. Princewill Aiozie; Prof. Bolaji Aluko; Dr Chris Asoluka; Prof. Bukar Bukarambe; Mrs. Ayo Obe; Prof. Ayo Olukotun; Dr. Tunde Oseni; Prof. Akin Oyebode; Prof. Itse Sagay and Alhaji Yerima Shettima.



President Jonathan, Namadi Sambo, Okurounmu and other members of the committee after their inauguration in Abuja

The participants noted that the Senator Femi Okurounmu-led committee was skewed against the youth, who will have to live with the consequences of the decisions to be taken on the confab.

A communiqué signed by the participants recommended that there should be 400 delegates for the conference and that 90 per cent of the suggested 400 delegates to the conference should emerge through an election on non-partisan basis from the ward to the zonal levels and 10 per cent nominees of professional bodies, trade unions, civil society organisations, youth/ students, women and pan-Nigerian religious bodies.

They said the draft constitution that will be produced should be subjected to a national referendum not later than three months after the end of the conference. "There should be no 'no-go areas' in the course of this national discourse.

The fact that people are not restricted will enhance frankness of discussions as well as greater acceptability and respectability of the conference outcome.

"The conference should address true federalism as established by the founding fathers, with emphasis on granting the federating units room to develop competitively at their own pace.

"It should be channelled to build a more tolerant, egalitarian and prosperous modern state with a constitution that emphasises the protection of individual rights. "The present state structure should be reconfigured to more manageable and sustainable units.

"The outcome of the conference should address and lay appropriate emphasis on the needs and aspirations of the Nigerian people," participants at Awolowo Foundation lecture said.

Also speaking with Sunday Mirror on what should be the agenda of the conference, the Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders, CACOL, said that everything under the sun should be discussed at the conference. "Our position is that Nigerians did not directly participate in what happened at the 1957 conference and other constitutional conferences where all Nigerians had the right to participate in. Even

the Constituent Assembly that produced the past constitutions like that of 1979 what they put there were the views of the people at the conference and not that of ordinary Nigerians. It was selective.

"At this national conference, Nigerians should discuss what brings them together, what they want to do together and what they want to do separately. How they want to live and how they want to be governed. Do they prefer the unitary system of government, or federal system of government? Do they like parliamentary or presidential system of government? Whether they want to continue to bear the name given to them by Lord Lugard and his girlfriend or they want to bear another name.

"Even if we agree to stay together, how do we share the natural resources? What will accrue to the owner of the land? Who will benefit from the derivative? Is it the government of the area in which the land is found? What kind of royalty will be paid

by the explorers and will it be paid to the state or the Federal Government which has no land of its own? "There should be a restructuring of the political system and we should determine the basis of our union. We should painstakingly look at the issue that affect Nigerians and every unit that wants to stay on their own should be allowed. In essence, there should be opportunity for self-determination. "Nigeria is not united by language but by geographical expression.

This was also not by choice but through compulsion. And so if the various tribal groups want to integrate, it must be through consensus to live together. "Therefore, there should be no,

'No go areas' during the conference.

Our position is that if the conference is not sovereign, it is just going to be a mere talk-shop", CACOL said. Setting its own agenda for the national conference, the Pan-Yoruba socio-political organisation, Afenifere, urged that the conference should look at the issue of true federalism, parliamentary system of government and state police, among others.

Speaking through its National Publicity Secretary, Mr. Yinka Odumakin, Afenifere stated, "Processes will start across our region and we will collaborate with other regions that think like us so that we can harmonise our positions and ensure that this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, we do not miss it, to give this country a good constitution. So consultations have started.

"Our agenda is very clear. We believe through this conference, we should save Nigeria from crash-landing and give Nigeria a soft-landing. We can forge an agenda for us to live in peace and harmony and our own response to the issue is that all delegates to the conference must first answer the question: Do we still want to live together as a people? If the answer is yes, then on what terms?

"For us in Afenifere, ours should be on the basis of federalism and once we agree that Nigeria should be a true Federal Republic of Nigeria, then the next thing to do is to draft a constitution that will spell out whether we want to continue to live together in harmony.

"As we speak now, all universities in Nigeria are under lock and key. If we have the six existing structures as regions and they manage the universities in their regions, there is no way ASUU will go on strike in the six regions at the same time."

"Let everybody develop at their own pace and within their areas, let the federal be lean and the regions be strong. We also believe in Afenifere that this federal structure is too costly, it promotes a lot of corruption, we should go parliamentary. For us, federalism, parliamentary, state police, devolution of powers and derivation principles are the key issues that we believe that the national conference must

Adeniran against NASS' ratification of Confab

Undoubtedly, the decision of the President Goodluck Jonathan-led administration to accede to the agitation of Nigerians for a conference of ethnic nationalities where the people would discuss the fate of the country remains one of the most laudable decisions by the Federal Government in recent times. For long, informed analysts have canvassed for a sovereign national conference where the various ethnic nationalities that constitute the country would sit at a round table to re-negotiate the terms of the country's continued togetherness. The agitations are based mainly on the argument that the 1914 amalgamation of the country was carried out without consulting the people. Accordingly, they also argue that contrary to what obtains in developed countries where different entities agree to forge a union to further their mutually beneficial interests, the 1914 merger of the country was purely for the administrative convenience of the colonialists.

Many interest groups have therefore long been agitating for a conference where the people would have a chance to correct some of the perceived wrongs done by the colonial administration. Moreover, they also argue that the conference would provide the opportunity for the emergence of a true people's constitution.

It is on this premise that the Independence Day broadcast of President Jonathan has been acclaimed a laudable initiative.

In fact, President Jonathan also agrees that the country is plagued by problems arguing that, "Our administration has

taken cognizance of suggestions over the years by well-meaning Nigerians on the need for a national dialogue on the future of our beloved country. When there are issues that constantly stoke tension and bring about friction, it makes perfect sense for the interested parties to come together to discuss. In demonstration of my avowed belief in the positive power of dialogue in charting the way forward, I have decided to set up an advisory committee whose mandate is to establish the modalities for a national dialogue or conference..."

Nevertheless, his announcement that the outcome of the national dialogue would be forwarded to the National Assembly for ratification and incorporation into the constitution has set off another round of debate. According to the President, "It is only left for all of us who are Nigerians to impress it on our representatives in National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly because our state and federal parliaments must work together to ensure these are properly enshrined in our constitution so that as a nation we will hand over a country that is better than what we have met to our children." However, whatever the purpose, the decision to refer the outcome of the conference to the National Assembly has sparked another round of debate among civil society and rights groups.

For instance, the Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL) has faulted the decision. Debo Adeniran, Executive Chairman of the group argues that the purpose and necessity of the conference has already been defeated "if the outcome would be subjected to the whims and caprices of the National Assembly." He said, "Sending the

outcome of the Sovereign National Conference to the National Assembly for ratification defeats the purpose completely. The final decision should rest with the people. If the conference must hold, its outcome must be ratified by the Nigerian people through a referendum; anything short of this is no longer a conference of the people, but an imposition. Sending the outcome of the conference to the National Assembly to incorporate in the constitution amendment project would amount to a great waste of resources, time and effort and will make it just a conference.

"What Nigerians want is Sovereign National Conference. Other regimes had tried their hands on a conference. Nigerians are tired of having just a conference. We have had the Constituent Assembly in the days of Shagari, we had General Debate about the Economy under Babangida; we had the Constitutional Conference under Abacha. We had another Conference under Obasanjo; now that the outcome of this would be endorsed by the National Assembly, it would be another talk-shop because all the former conferences have not given us what we want."

Yinka Odumakin agrees, arguing that the National Assembly could tamper with the recommendations if it were sent to them for ratification. "Nigerians are talking about a sovereign national conference and not a constitutional conference. The role the National Assembly should play is to pass the enabling laws for the conference to go on, and after the sovereign national conference has met and produced a constitution, to repeal the existing constitution," he says.

Immunity clause and post tenure prosecution

When the Senate Committee on Constitution Review under the leadership of the Deputy Senate President, Ike Ekweremadu organized public hearing over the exercise of one of the aspects of the constitution that elicited the hottest debate is the immunity clause. The clause, which is number 308 in the 1999 constitution provides shield for the President, his vice as well as governors and their deputies against prosecution as long as they are in office. The outcry that followed the insistence of a section of the country to retain the controversial clause was borne out of the belief that it gives room for high level corruption and outright impunity. The Special Adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan on Political Matters, Dr. Ahmed Gulak believes that retention of the clause in the constitution would prevent "some unscrupulous persons, who are bent on getting at public officials out of sheer envy, from capitalizing on its removal to cause detractions in the system."

Toeing Gulak's line of thought is the Governor of Ondo State, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko who said that "public officials should not be distracted or exposed to frivolous litigations from unscrupulous elements that are out to get at them out of sheer envy and not vice constructive c r i m i n a l i t y c i s m "

While arguing against its removal, Mimiko warned against "any action that can cause distraction that would not allow those saddled with responsibility to lead the people," reminding that "the immunity clause is not new and not peculiar to Nigeria." The disdain of Nigerians for the clause was manifested in the memoranda collected by Ekeremadu's committee as an overwhelming majority that submitted papers called for an outright removal. And when the public hearing results were submitted to the House and it was glaring that its removal was supported by a majority of the population proponents of its removal were ecstatic, shouted hallelujah! The Executive Chairman of the Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL), Debo Adeniran described the decision to remove the offending Clause as good riddance. "It is the best thing that has happened to the country in recent times," Adeniran submitted adding that "whoever needs immunity to function is a criminal." However, some see the development as an avenue to fight corruption, while others expressed apprehension that it would not stop the monster because, according to them, corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten too deep in the country's fabric. The Social Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), is of the view that removal of the clause may not make any difference. Director of the organization, Adetokunbo Mumuni reminded that if only 76 public officials enjoy immunity of eight years, how come other public office holders without protection, who are found corrupt are not prosecuted? He also wondered why former heads of government, who were alleged to be corrupt were not prosecuted after leaving office. He said this has not been so because, according to him, they are associates of those in power. This must have informed, Adeniran's stand that the purported removal "is just a tricky ploy to cajole the populace to believe that the government is responsible, sensitive and responsive to the yearning and aspiration of the Nigerian people." In his view, the National Publicity Secretary of the Save Nigeria Group (SNG), Yinka Odumakin sees the removal as "removing the shield and cover protecting the beneficiaries of the clause."

A great percentage of the Human Rights and Civil Society organizations are however of the opinion that the removal of the immunity clause cannot check the spate of corruption in Nigeria, adding that even impunity is a bigger challenge to the country than corruption. Mumuni of SERAP, and Adeniran of CACOL are of the belief that emphasis should be on strengthening and thorough enforcement of the criminal law in the country, believing that Nigeria has enough potent criminal law in the statutory book to deal with all acts of impunity.

The Secretary-General of a pan Yoruba socio-cultural, economic and political pressure organization, Razaq Olokoba regretted that "lack of political will to enforce all the relevant criminal laws in our legal books is the bane of our society. He is of the view that until some past leaders are made to face full length of the law to answer questions on their past misdeeds, "impunity and corruption would persist in our society. Olokoba asked the authorities to check records of some bigger democracies to see how they have dealt with their former corrupt leaders. If the constitution review exercise would be implemented, about 85 new clauses may be part of amendment to the 1999 constitution. And if the immunity clause aspect is implemented, beneficiaries of the clause would vacate office if convicted of any criminal offence.

If one takes up Olokoba's challenge on foreign Heads of Government that were prosecuted and even jailed, almost a dozen would be found the world over. Mentioning a couple of them would suffice. A former Argentinian president, Reynaldo Bignone was sentenced in 2010 for crime against humanity. A former Costa Rican president, Rafael Calderon in 2009 was sentenced to five years imprisonment for corruption while in office. A Taiwan leader, Chen Shin-Bian in 2009 was jailed for corruption, while his Pakistan counterpart, Pervez Musharraf was also sent to detention in 2007 for an offence against a senior judge. Also, the Peruvian former President, Alberto Fujimori, former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, Mongolian President, Nambaryn Enkhkabayar, Egypt former President Hosni Mubarak and Israeli former leader, Moshe Katsav, and many other past leaders across the world were also made to face the wrath of the law for various offences committed while in office. The civil society groups in Nigeria that expressed apprehension about the potency of immunity removal to fight corruption and impunity hinge their stand on the fact that the non prosecution of past allegedly corrupt leaders. CACOL boss, Adeniran, who has made endless trips to the office of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), to call for probe of some past leaders who were alleged to have corruptly enriched themselves but to no avail said, until scapegoats are made of some of past corrupt leaders, others would be emboldened to continue in their corrupt ways of life. He finds it disheartening that some people who are supposed to be in jail are serving in advisory capacity to the nation their past actions and inactions had wrecked. The poser now therefore is, can we get someone with political will to implement and enforce our numerous criminal law with a view to bring to book, those who render the country prostrate? Would it continue to be the case of "whose hands are clean to cast the first stone?"

LAGOS OPEN PARLIAMENT UPDATE

PHOTO SPEAKS

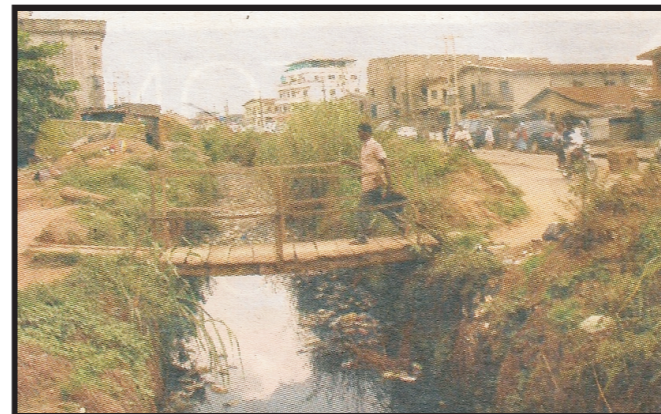
PHOTO SPEAKS



A section of Meiran Ile-iwe Road



A section of Ipaja-Ayobo Road



A drainage channel under construction at Oke-Koto, Agege



Another section of Ipaja-Ayobo Road



Flooded Olajuwon Street, Tejuosho in Lagos, after a downpour



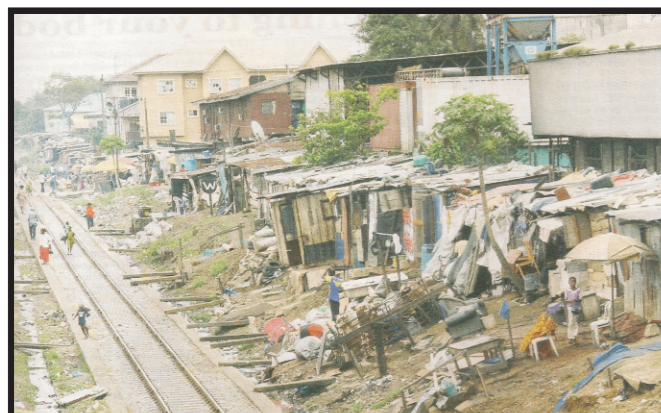
Abandoned Old Ota Road in Agbado Oke-Odo LCDA Lagos



Flooded Baale Street at Orile-Iganmu after a downpour in Lagos



A resident draining a flooded Badaru Street, Ibeju-Lekki, Lagos



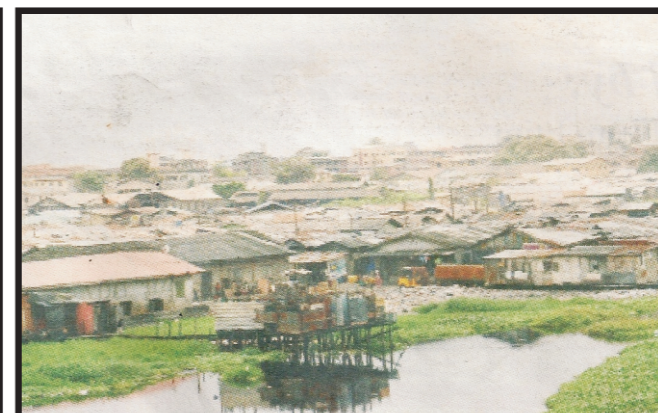
Shanties along Railway at Costain, Iganmu, Lagos



A Canal at Ishola Street, Yaba in Lagos



Imam Raimi Street, Makoko, Lagos



A makeshift toilet on the lagoon at Apongbon in Lagos



A flooded Street in Lagos



Abandoned Ajara Farms Settlement Road in Badagry



A flooded Street in Lagos



Infrastructure decay, insecurity at Dolphin estate, Lagos