

**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE MAIDEN EDITION OF SOAPBOX,
ORGANISED BY THE INITIATIVE FOR DIALOGUE AND DEVELOPMENT (IDD), HELD AT
THE SHERATON HOTEL AND TOWERS, ABUJA ON THURSDAY, 28TH SEPTEMBER, 2017**

INTRODUCTION

The National Unveiling of Soapbox was successfully held at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja, on Thursday, 28th September, 2017, and the theme was, "Re-inventing our Nationhood".

OVERVIEW

The event had in attendance a number of Special Guests, Lead Speakers and Discussants drawn from the six geo-political zones of the country, as well as members of the public, including women, youth, student groups; professionals, artisans, traders, etc.

The event was chaired by H.E. General Dr Yakubu Gowon, GCFR, former Nigerian Head of State. The Special Guests of Honour were Dr. Christopher Kolade, CON, Prof Anya O Anya, OFR, Alhaji Balarabe Musa, CON (sent apology).

The Lead Speakers were Engr. Buba Galadima, Nze Ozichukwu Fidelis Chukwu, Ms Ankió Briggs, Prof Jerry Gana, CON, and Prof Adebayo Williams. The lead discussants were Comrade Ibuchukwu O Ezike, Prof. Dakas C. J. Dakas, and Dr. Bashir Yusuf Mundi.

PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Chairman of the event General Dr Yakubu Gowon called on Nigerians to move away from hate speech and discord and embrace peace and unity. He expressed confidence in the youth of Nigeria, emphasizing the strategic position the youth occupy in the future of Nigeria. The former Head of State disclosed that the Yakubu Gowon Centre recently organized an event centered on the youth at which politically exposed persons engaged in robust discussions under the theme, "The Youth Program for the 21st Century".

2. Professor Anya O. Anya in his presentation recalled his speech at the Obafemi Awolowo Institute in 1995 which had a similar theme as that of the IDD event, Reinventing Our Nationhood, insisting that the values he had identified then as indispensable for our nationhood have still not been realized by our nation. He said the emergence of militancy in the South South and the IPOB in the South East symbolize a nationwide youth rebellion. He noted however that rebellion could never be creative or productive. Prof. Anya noted that to proffer the right solutions to Nigeria's situation, we need to clearly understand the problems. He said that government's handling of the IPOB and its calls for a referendum on Biafra has made things worse. He said the reason democracy has failed Nigeria so far is due to poor leadership.

Professor Anya said as Nigerians, we must strive to put in place a leadership that has the spirit of discernment, promotes the culture of civility, promotes and projects unity of purpose, promotes integrity and wholesome values, a new crop of nation builders, devoid of politics, ethnicity, religious pretensions, and driven by knowledge and wisdom. He added that we must work towards the emergence of a responsible eldership nationwide.

He said when the elders start promoting the values of justice and fairness, and project empathy and compassion, then the younger ones would see role models to imitate, and then they may begin to believe in Nigeria and would no longer choose the path of rebellion.

3. Dr. Christopher Kolade observed that though we need peace, we cannot have peace without justice. He called on Nigerians to eschew hate speech in their communications with one another, adding that we must realize that none of us is a Nigerian by accident. He said we all need one another, and that God has made us Nigerians so that we can do something for Nigeria. Insisting that Nigeria is bigger than each of us and will still be here when we're all gone, Dr. Kolade charged every Nigerian to make an effort to contribute to the development of the country.

4. Observing that the youth make up the bulk of Nigeria's population, Professor Adebayo Williams called on young people to prepare themselves to take over the leadership of the country. He lamented the stifling of dialogue among Nigerians especially given the country's great diversity. He pointed out that Nigeria's first republic, which lasted from 1960 to 1966 and is widely recognized as the golden age of Nigeria's democracy, was only possible through political compromise among the nation's founding fathers, in which each of the leaders of the then 3 regions had to give up his own idea of an ideal system of government and embrace federalism. He noted that the leaders of the independence era were compelled by historical circumstances to appreciate differences arising from different political orientations and cultures, to forge a nation united in and by competitive diversities. Professor Williams said the country has never been as polarized as it is today, pointing out that religion, class consciousness and ethnicity are all factors in this polarization. He lamented that the fierce struggle in the country for dwindling resources has been compounded by elite mismanagement, the consequences of a mono cultural economy depending only on oil resources, our inability to compete in a knowledge economy because we have failed to advance education, as well as the ravages of globalization. He insisted that dialogue is the only way for feuding parties within the nation's political space to find common ground so that the nation can move forward. Professor Williams debunked the notion that is popularly held by Nigerian leaders, that

the country's unity is nonnegotiable. He said the unity of a diverse polity like Nigeria must constantly be renegotiated.

Professor Williams ended with the following specific recommendations:

- 1) President Buhari should seek consensus on restructuring and immediately send a bill to the National Assembly for the structural unbundling of an overburdened centre, through the removal of certain agreed items from the exclusive legislative list.
- 2) The federal government should initiate the process for the convening of a strategic national dialogue of the nation's leaders of thought that will deliberate on the appropriate structure and governance architecture for the country.
- 3) The presidency should convene a stakeholders consultative forum made up of youth organizations, students groups, civil society groups, and labour, to deliberate on the state of the nation and come up with recommendations on the kind of country they want.
- 4) Government should establish as a matter of urgency, a Commission for vertical and horizontal integration of Nigeria, which will take a holistic look at the class, ethnic, gender and religious divisions of the nation and come up with continuous ameliorative measures.

5. While commending the IDD for establishing Soapbox, Professor Jerry Gana noted that democracy is about holding discussions and sharing of ideas. He however lamented that Nigerians are good at generating ideas but bad at implementing them, citing as an example the numerous national conferences at which debates and discussions were held and resolutions reached, only for them to be abandoned by subsequent governments. Professor Gana spoke up strongly in favour of federalism and devolution of powers to the nation's federating units, especially in the areas of agriculture, education, power generation and the police. He said every state in Nigeria is capable of generating the resources it needs to develop, but that this is achievable only with good leadership.

6. Ms Ankio Briggs said that while dialogue is good and welcome, we must get to a point where we begin to implement the reports and products of our dialogue. Ms Briggs stated that Nigerians have the capacity for mutual love and understanding amongst themselves and that the current crisis in the country is the result of poor leadership. Speaking up for the youth of Nigeria, she said their seeming hopelessness today is not their fault but the fault of the leadership of the nation. She said there's no alternative to the restructuring of the country, as it is the only way to build a Nigeria that exists for the people and not for politicians alone.

7. In his presentation, Nze Ozichukwu Fidelis Chukwu called on Nigerians to learn to treat one another with love and respect. He called for a new approach to politics that reflects

the need for justice, warning that nothing morally wrong can be politically right. He harped on the need to address poverty and social exclusion, insisting that peace and progress will come only when all Nigerians have access to equal opportunity. According to him, the Nigerian dream can only evolve from unity of purpose among Nigerians.

8. Engr. Buba Galadima lamented the high level of disunity among Nigerians, saying there are more tribalists, religious fanatics and sectional actors in Nigeria than real Nigerians who love the country. He lampooned calls for state and local government police, saying that these would make the country worse. He said calls for the abolition of local governments were misguided, as LG's play a fundamental role in governance at the grassroots. Engr Galadima commended the IDD for establishing Soapbox, as according to him, dialogue is an avenue for Nigerians to share ideas and settle their grievances amicably.

9. Professor Dakas C. J. Dakas called on the IDD Unity Ambassadors to keep in touch with one another and not to take the opportunity offered by the IDD for granted. He decried the negative role religion has played in Nigeria's crisis of nationhood, saying that religion has brought disunity rather than unity. He harped on the need for accountability as a counterfoil to impunity in the nation's leadership. Calling for a moral rebirth, he said countries develop not by virtue of their wealth, but the wealth of their virtues.

10. Comrade Ibuchukwu O. Ezike noted the loud cries of marginalization in the country, saying that Nigerians are yet to understand and accept the nation's diversity. On the IPOB and other secessionist groups, Comrade Ezike argued that if the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference and other conferences before it had been duly implemented by government, such agitations would not have arisen.

11. Dr. Bashir Yusuf Mundi asserted that Nigeria's unity is negotiable, contrary to a recent statement by the country's current president, Muhammadu Buhari. Dr. Mundi said it is the absence of dialogue among Nigerians that has brought about so much political tension and violence in the country. He warned that it would only bring about more discord and violence in the country if government continues to prevent Nigerians from talking about their common problems.

12. On behalf of the Nurul-Islam Society of Nigeria, Mr. Murtala Oladimeji Salawu called on government to not only respect the rights of Nigerians to dialogue on national issues but also to pay attention to the resolutions of the current dialogue organized by the IDD. He lamented continued bad leadership in the country, saying that because of this, most Nigerians have not really enjoyed the benefits of democracy.

13. Other discussants representing students, women, youths, artisans, civil society organisations, etc. made contributions towards reinventing our nationhood, all calling for peace, justice, fairness, youth inclusion in governance and good governance in the country.

RESOLUTIONS

Participants resolved as follows:

1. The prevalence of hate speech and violent communication has created a lot of tension, with tendency to incite unrest and violence across the country. The National Orientation Agency should be encouraged to partner with IDD and other similar organisations to mount a more robust national campaign on the dangers of hate speech.
2. There is need to take urgent steps at various levels to reinvent the Nigerian state towards equity, fairness and justice to reflect the yearnings of the component units of the nation.
3. A value driven national rebirth is urgently needed, anchored on love of country, kith and kin.
4. The country's over dependence on oil and gas has hurt the wellbeing of the nation. Accordingly, there is need to create a new economy based on the country's rich endowment in human and natural resources.
5. The leadership recruitment system in the country should emphasize more of competence and capability and less of ethnicity and religion.
- 6 Leadership in the nation requires a new approach that reflects transparency, accountability and inclusiveness.
7. Government should address poverty, unemployment and social exclusion in the country, problems that have given rise to youth rebellion.
8. Dialogue and citizen engagement should be strongly encouraged among Nigerians of diverse background and appeals.



Dr. Ike Neliaku

Chairman, IDD