

*The language of hunger is universal.*<sup>2</sup>

I must say it is a pleasure to be requested to deliver this speech. The rationale for declaring pleasure in this activity is not simply because I love public discuss but due to the present situation of things in our country which calls for a sober reflection among us in our different capacities as leaders, on one hand, and followers, on the other. It is a sad commentary on our affairs that the role of our generation as leaders in this country has been a terrible source of worry while our profession of faith in the survival of Nigeria has been a regular source of denigration from those who ought to emulate our ways of life for the betterment of tomorrow.

For this wonderful opportunity to once again steer the hornet's nest, may I express my appreciation to the organisers of today's event, the Old Boys Association of Methodist Boys High School, who in yesteryears were littluns<sup>3</sup> being compelled to attend school to acquire western education but today are proud leaders of our society with immense pride in the past but whose commitment to the survival of the coming

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<sup>1</sup> Presented by Dr. Muiz Adeyemi Banire, SAN, on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2015, at the National Reunion of Old Boys' Association of Methodist Grammar School.

<sup>2</sup> Nnimmo Bassey, Don't Play Politics with Hunger, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, 2011, page 8.

<sup>3</sup> Apology to William Golding in Lord of the Flies.

generations must be examined in the context of the prevalence of today's reality and the questions that tomorrow poses for us to answer.

However, before we venture into the full purport of my talk today, it might be desirable to indicate what I mean by a generation and what amounts to good governance?

According to The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language, a generation has been defined to mean "a whole body of persons thought of as being born about the same time; a period of time, about 25 or 30 years, roughly corresponding to the age of parents when their children are born". Based on the above and looking at the congregation here today, I honestly believe that majority of us can be situated to be within the same generation having fallen into the age difference not exceeding 25 - 30 years.

On the other hand, it seems that there cannot be such disputations as to what amounts to good governance. Alas! There are disputations. Good governance as a concept does not yield to easy definition as observed by Rachel Gisselquist in a 2012 article titled "What Does Good Governance Mean?" published on the website of the United Nations University.<sup>4</sup> However, by certain characteristics, we can determine what amounts to good governance. Thus, we have come to the following conclusions:

### **1. Accountability**

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://unu.edu/publications/articles/what-does-good-governance-mean.html> accessed at 4.38 pm on 18 November, 2015.

According to Good Governance Guide, “Accountability is a fundamental requirement of good governance.” Thus, every government “has an obligation to report, explain and be answerable for the consequences of decisions it has made on behalf of the community it represents.”<sup>5</sup>

Rather than the above, what we have been experiencing is deficit of accountability. Our leaders do not feel they are accountable to the mass of the people who elected them into office. We have rather been priding ourselves on impunity coupled with over-spilling arrogance that considers itself the master of the world rather than servant of the people. This failure of accountability has permeated our decision making process to the extent that looting state coffers does not commend any restriction to many people in governance. They do not feel there is any difference between state coffers and private pockets.

Failure of accountability begins when a state official fails to attend to his duties with speed required of public service but indulges in self-delusion believing that the public is at his mercy to pity than to serve. It is failure of accountability when we come late to work without any reasonable and honest excuse other than ascribing it to traffic problems. Our political space is dominated by non-accountability of public officers that our records before the international community spews of low consideration. Majority of such officers in public service today are men

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.goodgovernance.org.au/about-good-governance/what-is-good-governance/> accessed at 4.43 on 18 November, 2015.

and women of our generation which casts doubt on our sense of responsibility as people concerned about posterity.

Accountability and probity are the watchwords of an upright leader. State coffers cannot be an extension of the pocket of a leader who is ready to serve the people. Or how can one justify all these incidents of embezzlement and conversion of public funds? What happens to all the trillions of naira spent on power projects in Nigeria when we still wallow in darkness? What is the fate of a people when the executives at the local government level do not execute community projects anymore and the legislatures now run away from law-making and choose to be contractors? It is certain that such a swap of responsibilities can never do good to the masses as the two arms of government do not share the same responsibilities save as permitted by the Constitution, the organic law of the land.

Every leader must be accountable to his people. A leader that cannot render a valid account to the populace does not deserve to occupy the post of leadership. All monies embezzled by all past and present leaders must be accounted for. It is sheer recklessness and self-aggrandizement that make a king covet others entitlements. They have forgotten the injunction of God that “...to God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And God is Ever All-Sufficient as Disposer of affairs.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Surah 4, Al-Nisa, verse 132.

According to the Qur'an: "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be he rich or poor, Allah is a better protector to both than you. So follow not the lusts of your hearts, lest you avoid justice; and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do."<sup>7</sup>

## **2. Transparency and Rule of Law**

A fundamental factor that should be considered in governance is transparency. Today when private citizens lie on oath, it is an offence contrary to several provisions of the Criminal Code or Law depending on the circumstances in which it is committed whether it is lying on oath or perjury which attract different punishments. But where government lies to the people it is considered to be politics. A nation that prides itself on public deceit can never make necessary growth and it is the duty of the leaders to aspire to be as transparent as possible.

The process of decision making is required to be transparent. This calls into question compliance with due process. It is in Nigeria that we subvert due process as if we were born specifically for such purpose. Thus, "people should be able to follow and understand the decision-making process. This means that they will be able to clearly see how and why a decision was made - what information, advice and consultation"

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, verse 135.

government “considered, and which legislative requirements (when relevant) council followed.”<sup>8</sup>

When the government fails to follow rules laid down in procurement but decides to subvert the law, the populace is bedeviled with lots of politico-economic and social malaise such as characterized the previous regimes in which monies meant for procurement of arms to combat terrorism ended up in the hands of political sorcerers and spiritual consultants. Look at the number of young men and women that have been devoured by the lunacy of state cum spiritual delinquencies of book haram and the likes in the North-East, the useful men and women of another generation that been consumed by kidnappers, armed robbers and our decrepit roads. The list of casualties is endless ranging from human casualties to infrastructural casualties. It is a lamentable state of woe.

It is you, sitting here as a government official or your former school mates that are responsible for all these woes. How can we exonerate ourselves from all these social decrepitude and societal decay?

### **3. Absence of Democratic Participation**

In Nigeria today, our democratic sense is highly questionable. There can never be good governance where people that are to be governed deny themselves of the right of participation or are denied the right of participation. It is unfortunate among the elite that apathy for political

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

participation have made majority of us subjects of the less qualified who are brave enough to venture into politics. The consequence of failure to participate in the governance of your society that you will be governed by idiots and miscreants, according to a philosopher.

On the other hand, our leaders have made democracy an alien in the conduct of our affairs even at the level of political parties. It is instructive to note that failure to conduct primary elections as required by Sections 85 and 87 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) has resulted in the nullification of many elected members of All Progressives Congress. It shows absence of democracy in our system of politics which has deterred many from venturing into participation.

Elections in the past represented a mockery of what democracy means. It was just a validation of the viewpoint of those who tenaciously hold that there is nothing like democracy. It definitely was an aberration of all virtues of good governance when democratic ideals are thrown to the wind by certain individuals who see politics as a 'do-or-die' affair. It is unfortunate that among these miscreants are people of your generation who enjoyed the best in terms of education and good governance under icons like Chief Obafemi Awolowo.

Ladies and gentlemen, a situation where you, or many of your colleagues, participate in election rigging, violence and victimization of political opponents decries, what good governance stands for in terms of inclusiveness and participatory requirement. The blood of all those killed in the process remains on the hands of these evil perpetrators like

the spots on a leopard skin that cannot be washed off. Although, the Shakespearean Macbeth ascends the throne of Fife by force, he has to retain it by further bloodshed. But on realizing the evils of his adventure, he laments “*These my hands will rather, the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green sea red.*” One wonders if our leaders’ lamentations are not the hollow cries of Macbeth steeped in further evils.

We must decry autocracy and governmental terrorism. Thus, it is wrong to promote state terrorism as some of our leaders did in the condemnable days of Abacha when some leaders were shown on television and quoted in the print media as saying that Abacha was the best thing that could happen to Nigeria. The question is, since Abacha died, has Nigeria disintegrated? It bothers on hollow sycophancy for anybody to kowtow before a despotic leader in the name of obeying persons in the position of leadership. Have you forgotten your responsibility to your followers, the poor and the oppressed? It is your duty as a leader interested in good governance to protect and provide for the oppressed.

#### **4. Good Governance and Alleviation of Poverty**

According to Narendra Modi, ‘*good governance is putting people at the centre of the development process.*’<sup>9</sup> It is certain that collective

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/comment-g-sampath-on-modi-government-why-everyone-loves-good->



prosperity and good governance cannot be separated. A land struck with poverty and destitution cannot be said to be experiencing good governance. A people subjected to insecurity of lives and property cannot be said to be happy. A people wallowing in unemployment where leaders engage in sheer profligacy, self-aggrandisement and gross abuse of power cannot be said to be experiencing good governance. Human rights are definitely alien to such society and what is good about governance when it is devoid of human content?

Our land is one highly infested with poverty. The paramount question is whether our leaders too can boast of a belief in leadership by example. What example have they left for us? Examples of thuggery and stealing from public coffers? Examples of rigging and state assassination of political opponents and followers? Examples of victimization of the masses and complete impoverishment in order to secure their positions of overlords on the masses?

It is rather devastating to see our cities in complete squalor and lamentation by irresponsible governments that the government is poor. How on earth can a government glorify poverty by proclaiming simply that the State is poor without any tangible effort towards economic advancement? What then would happen to the citizens when the state claims that it is poor? Not in Nigeria should it be heard from a government that the government is poor when we are surrounded by all

means of attaining wealth and opulence. How much of our agricultural lands have we tapped into? How much of our resources have we made use of in transforming the lives of the people? Have you done anything meaningful for the people to be able to levy appropriate taxes on them? In a *rentier* state like ours, there is always poverty of taxable incomes and hence weakness and decay in infrastructure. There is prosperity among oil thieves who stash their loot abroad leaving the people in abject poverty and debilitating squalor.

Look at the situation under the previous government in which hundreds of thousand of barrels of oil were stolen per day without an accusing finger being pointed at anybody and no one was arrested as being responsible for this heinous crime. They turned oil smuggling on the high seas into petty examples of pick pocket that could not be easily detected as if barrels of oil were lighter than mere needles. Unfortunately, it is men and women of our generation that are responsible for these crimes against humanity and one wonders if we are guaranteeing any prosperous future for younger generations.

## **5. Justice**

There could only be peace and progress in a society where there is justice. Access to justice is a cornerstone of good governance. Access to justice in Nigeria is virtually nil as cases spend years in court without the rights of the parties being determined. No sane foreign investor would like to put his money where access to justice is zero. It is only crooks among foreign investors who understand how to subvert and

pervert justice that are interested in Nigeria since they know that public officials can be easily bribed and judges are available for hire.

It is men and women of your generation that occupy the judicial seats today who dispense on many occasions dispense injustice for motives other than those dictated by the rule of law. We must search ourselves. We must examine our conscience. When we lament that this country is in crisis, ask yourself: Am I not part of the cause of this crisis?

Trending among clients these days is the saying: why do you need to hire a lawyer when you can buy a judge? What is the status of a judge whose judgment can be bought like a book in a bookstore and the higher bidder among the parties wins the case?

#### CONCLUSION

It is our conclusion that there is the need to search ourselves so that our generation too will not end up being a wasted generation like the previous ones as described by the erudite Professor Wole Soyinka. It is certain that a society that neglects its future would permanently be haunted by its present inequities. Let us think very well and right the wrongs. We are the alumni of yesterday's inequities, let us not turn our children into alumni of today's inequalities.

Let us take interest in the children of the poor so that they don't become an albatross on the children of the rich and the children trained with millions of currencies would not be devoured by those neglected via mis-governance.

God bless you all. Thanks.