

TEXT OF SPEECH
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THEME: VICE, VIRTUE AND TIME: THE THREE
THINGS THAT NEVER STAND STILL

PROLOGUE

Fellow citizens of Nigeria and friends of our nation; members of the press, both local and international; I welcome you to our first State of the Nation Broadcast since the current administration assumed office on May 29, 2023.

The theme of today’s broadcast is: “Vice, Virtue and Time: The Three Things That Never Stand Still.” This theme draws inspiration from both the sacred Scripture and the words of two Englishmen: a cleric, Charles Caleb Colton, and a historian and politician, Edward Gibbon. In **Revelation 22:11-12**, we read the admonition of Jesus:

¹¹ “He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. ¹² “And behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every one according to his work.

As though echoing the words of Christ, Charles Caleb Colton wrote: “He that is good will infallibly become better and he that is bad will as certainly become worse; for vice, virtue, and time, are three things that never stand still.”¹ On his part, Edward Gibbon wrote: “All that is human must retrograde if it [does] not advance.”² Fellow Nigerians, time is far spent on our journey to nationhood and it is abundantly clear that instead of advancing forcefully in the right direction, we are regressing forcefully in a frantic race to the bottom; there is simply no middle ground. Please lend me your ears as I, by God’s grace, show the way out of our present national dilemma.

Salute to the Nigerian Citizen

I would like to begin this address by identifying with my fellow Nigerian citizens who are often unceremoniously described as “ordinary Nigerians” or “average Nigerians.” I salute the Nigerian citizen who has, for so long a time, borne the brunt of the capricious policies of political actors and the greed of a colluding elite. From a wrongly implemented naira redesign

policy to an impulsive fuel subsidy removal announcement, and from a drowning of purchasing power in an attempt to float the naira, to an unbearable increase in the cost of basic amenities, the past and recent months have been particularly excruciating for the Nigerian citizen.

I am talking about employees who have been forced to trek owing to the unaffordable spike in transportation costs; parents struggling to bridge the gap between their life savings and the cost of living; graduates whose chances of getting a job have become slimmer due to the impact of the economy on the labour market; I am talking about that trader whose meagre daily income has further diminished in value due to the dwindling value of the naira; that farmer who looks on in agony as his produce rots on the farm due to transportation challenges, inflation and insecurity; those children who will invariably be sent home in September due to outstanding fees.

I acknowledge you, fellow citizens of our nation, because you are the true heroes. The rulers that are immune to the pain that you have to go through daily are not the true reformers. You, the Nigerian citizens, who have borne the burden of an ill-planned and vaguely-led reform agenda, are the true reformers. You are the true reformers because of your adaptability; you are the true reformers because of the creative ways by which you adjust to

hardship, reform your personal and corporate economies, and navigate the increasingly difficult terrain. You, the so-called ordinary Nigerians, are the true reformers because, somehow, hoping against hope, you show up every single day in what would appear to be a federal republic of diminishing returns.

Therefore, my fellow Nigerian citizens, I make bold to say that there is nothing average about you; there is nothing ordinary about you; there is indeed nothing common about you; you are distinguished citizens of our nation and you deserve the best of the land. The purpose of government is not to serve cronies; it is not to pander to corrupt business interests; it is not to patronise a consumptive political class; it is not even to appease neo-colonial foreign powers: the purpose of government is to serve you, the Nigerian citizen. The focus of this address is thus simply how to ensure that the government serves you.

None of These Things Move Me

I am not unmindful that this address will be taken out of context by political propagandists within and outside of government. I am not unaware that my motivations will be questioned and my intentions maligned. It is expected that the minions and mudslingers in the corridors of power will pick a fight because they will misconstrue this as an attack on their paymasters. Some may come against me with threats because they will see

this address as an onslaught on the enterprises that they have built at the expense of the Nigerian people. My preemptive response to these attack dogs is simple: bring it on.

If there are any wise ones among those surrounding the president, among the institutions of law and order, among the members of the National Assembly, among the power blocs that are sympathetic to the president, among the would-be cabinet members, or even among the stakeholders of the All Progressives Congress (APC), such wise ones would listen attentively and take this address as a wake-up call, laden with truths that could salvage a ship drifting in the gale of a socioeconomic and political Euroclydon. However, if those around the president choose to be reactionary rather than responsive, their anticipated attacks on my person will be shrugged off like water off a duck's back. In the words of Charles Caleb Colton, "Nothing more completely baffles one who is full of trick and duplicity himself, than straight-forward and simple integrity in another."³ Besides, in the words of the Apostle Paul, "None of these things move me."⁴ What moves me is the needless suffering that is normalised and perpetuated by bad governance and irresponsible public policy.

Leadership by Impulse

Amid the turbulent start to the administration of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, I have held my peace, hoping that wisdom would prevail even while the government was in its so-called honeymoon phase. When, in his inauguration address on May 29, 2023, President Tinubu announced that “fuel subsidy is gone”⁵ despite the cautious exclusion of that contentious subject from the inauguration speech by his advisers,⁶ it was clear that our nation had been unwittingly plunged into chaos by a very poor change management process.

Whatever the president’s true motivations were, it is clear that he put the cart before the horse. What is also clear is that the president was economical with the truth by giving Nigerians the impression that he was taking a courageous move to remove the fuel subsidy when the previous government had already taken that step. As Nigerians would later learn, subsidy payment had already been ended by the Buhari administration, and no subsidy was paid in 2023 even though there was provision for it on paper up to June 2023.⁷ What is again clear is that, in line with change management principles, the president should have handled more circumspectly the announcement of such an issue that borders on the livelihood of the Nigerian citizen. That would have spared Nigerians the reactionary scarcity and price hikes that immediately followed his announcement. Furthermore,

what is even clearer is that the president had been handed a month of grace by the previous administration; a month that should have been used to put in place cushioning effects before the official expiration of the subsidised economy.

It is noteworthy that, in his address to the nation on July 31, 2023, President Tinubu adjusted his tone and admitted that the past administration had indeed taken action on subsidy as there was no budgetary allocation for it from the end of June.⁸ It is also noteworthy that he admitted that there was a gap between the removal of the subsidy and the roll-out of palliatives. While I commend the president for coming clean on this issue, it is in the best interest of the nation for Mr President to consider intended and unintended consequences before committing to a course of action.

Let us now consider the cost of just one impulsive action to Nigerians in the past few months. Even as the president in his July 31 address celebrated the N1 trillion reportedly saved from subsidy removal, what he did not tell Nigerians is the cost of his approach to the Nigerian economy. According to the Nigerian Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (NASME), about 4 million Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the country have shut down in the two months since the subsidy removal was announced.⁹ This is even

as jobs have been lost and households have been thrown into disarray due to a poorly managed policy.

This same impulsive leadership style was evident when the president recently led the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to violate an ancient principle of diplomacy that is recognised even in the Holy Book: offer peace before declaring war.¹⁰ By placing military invasion on the table from the very start¹¹ before subsequently exploring diplomatic options with the coup plotters in the Republic of Niger,¹² President Tinubu once again put the cart before the horse, thus placing Nigeria and the subregion in a precarious situation. Truly, “those that are the loudest in their threats, are weakest in the execution of them.”¹³

For any foreign invasion to succeed in the long term, the support of the locals is essential. From the spillover effect of subsidy removal to the effect of sanctions, local support for Nigeria and her leaders among Nigeriens is at an all-time low. It is, therefore, counter-intuitive to engage in what could be a protracted conflict. This much the Tinubu-led ECOWAS ought to have learnt from the aftermath of America’s invasion of Iraq in 2003. While we condemn the spate of coup d’états in West Africa, we recognise that the situation calls for deep introspection on the part of African leaders and makes even

more urgent the case for good governance. The call upon Nigeria at this time is not so much to compel submission in the subregion through the force of might, but to command alignment through exemplary governance. The real question is whether President Tinubu is capable of providing such moral leadership even in the domestic context.

Mr President, Kill Corruption, Not Nigerians

What is further clear concerning our domestic challenges is that, by imposing hardship on Nigerians without going after those corrupt individuals, corporations and government officials who have plundered Nigeria over the years in the name of subsidy, the president has picked the wrong fight. In his Monday, July 31, 2023 address to the nation, the president stated that the vast sum of money which “would have been better spent on public transportation, healthcare, schools, housing and even national security...was being funnelled into the deep pockets and lavish bank accounts of a select group of individuals.”¹⁴ The president further stated that the subsidy removal policy was to stop the squandering of monies on “smugglers and fraudsters.”¹⁵ This compels us to ask the following salient questions:

- i) Who are these select groups of individuals into whose deep pockets our national treasury has been funnelled?

ii) Who are these smugglers and fraudsters that have been defrauding our nation in the name of subsidy?

iii) Who are these nameless characters that have fed fat at the expense of the poor? Or are they all sacred cows?

Mr President, if you are truly on the side of the poor, if you are serious about the welfare of the people, if you truly want the poor to breathe, as you once said,¹⁶ then kill corruption, not Nigerians.

Fellow citizens, the rallying cry by which the Save Nigeria Group (SNG) galvanised Nigerians in January 2012 at Gani Fawehinmi Park, Ojota was “Kill Corruption, Not Nigerians!” This was our cry when we made it evident that our fight was not against the removal of the fuel subsidy but against the corruption in the system. This was our fight when, amid the threats to my life and family, right there at Ojota and live on national and international television, I called out by name those individual and corporate entities who had allegedly ravaged our nation.

Mr President, given the complexity of the Nigerian economy, we are not thoroughly convinced that your palliatives will be sufficient to cushion the effect of your policies on the Nigerian citizen. What we do know, however, is that, on May 29, 2023,

you swore an oath to “be faithful and bear true allegiance to the Federal Republic of Nigeria,” and to “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.”¹⁷ May I remind you, Mr President, that Chapter 2, Section 14(2)(b) of the Constitution states that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.”¹⁸ Therefore, in compliance with your oath of office, and in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, our demand on you, the current occupant of the Office of the President, is the same demand that we made 11 years ago: Mr President, Kill Corruption, Not Nigerians.

Some might say that you, Mr President, are too tainted to fight corruption because you were escorted into the presidency by a retinue of corruption allegations. Some might even describe you as transparently opaquely corrupt because, despite the indicators of state capture allegedly linked to you, no one has proved these allegations against you in any Nigerian court of competent jurisdiction. Some might argue that even the road you took to the presidency was itself paved with filth from the cesspool of corruption and that you are, therefore, incapable of mounting any genuine fight against corruption.

Mr President, while we admit that, as of today, our nation has transitioned from an administration that came to power on the

supposed wings of integrity and anti-corruption to one that cannot be described as such, the fact remains that you are today the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with enormous powers to fight against corruption in its hydra-headed forms.

Even if the allegations against you are valid, you can still have a Road to Damascus¹⁹ experience and decide today to stand on the side of probity and bring to book the vested interests that have built their wealth on the ruins of our nation. You can decide today to take the burden of reforms off the Nigerian people and go after the corporations and individuals who have plundered our nation. You can decide today to stand with the poor and take the fight to the plunderers.

Mr President, even though you have announced some palliatives, let me remind you that palliatives cannot address the root cause of the problem. In my recent exchange with Dr Joe Okei-Odumakin, a veteran of many progressive battles, she brought the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* definition of the word 'palliative' to my attention. It is "a medicine or medical treatment that reduces pain without curing its cause."²⁰ Therefore, we demand that you address the root cause of the problem. Take the yoke off the neck of the poor, go after the looters, recover the loot, and retool it to the benefit of Nigerians. In simple terms, Mr President, Kill Corruption, Not Nigerians.

Some may ask at this juncture: Who exactly are these plunderers that have been enabled over the years to launder our collective patrimony through a dubious subsidy regime? How much can we actually recover from them? My fellow citizens, tighten your seat belts as I take you back to certain alarming events that occurred in our nation's recent history; events that have elicited lingering questions.

A History of Criminal Impunity

11 years ago, on Friday, January 13, the fifth day of an unprecedented gathering of Nigerians at Gani Fawehinmi Park, Ojota, the Save Nigeria Group (SNG) brought to the attention of Nigerians the outcomes of an external audit carried out by two audit firms, KPMG and S. S. Afemikhe & Co.²¹ These firms had been contracted by the Federal Ministry of Finance to audit the petroleum sector. Their investigations revealed that the fuel subsidy regime was a smokescreen for corruption.

Among other findings, the audit exposed²² fraudulent deductions of up to six times higher than the authorised subsidy disbursements. It also revealed revenue leakages of about N800 billion from the upstream sector, and N1.2 trillion from the downstream sector, which included the fraudulent subsidy system. The key agencies in the petroleum sector, including the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), were

indicted. In addition, 80% of the questionable subsidy claims were traced to leading oil marketers whose company names were listed in the report and whose major shareholders are known to the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Following these findings, the Adhoc Committee on Fuel Subsidy in the House of Representatives made explosive findings²³ that were even more alarming and damning than the earlier audit reports. Permit me to restate some of these findings as they were cited in a publication by the Save Nigeria Group (SNG) titled “Kleptocracy Unlimited”:²⁴

1. The theft of N310 billion by NNPC on kerosene subsidy in spite of an official policy against paying subsidy on the product;
2. The theft by NNPC of N285 billion above the recommendation by the Petroleum Product Pricing and Regulatory Agency (PPPRA);
3. The payment of N999 million 128 times in 24 hours to some companies totalling N127.872 billion by the office of the Accountant-General of the Federation;
4. Unaccounted-for foreign exchange to the tune of \$402.6 million; and
5. The theft of N230 billion forensically traced to 72 companies.

Given these and other alarming findings, the committee recommended the refund of N1,067,040,456,171.31 (one trillion, sixty-seven billion, forty million, four hundred and fifty-six thousand, one hundred and seventy-one naira, thirty-one kobo) to the national treasury by the NNPC, the PPPRA and the indicted marketers. Furthermore, 18 companies²⁵ that failed to appear before the committee were recommended to the anti-corruption agencies for investigation to ensure the refund of N41,936,140,005.31 (forty-one billion, nine hundred and thirty-six million, one hundred and forty thousand, and five naira, thirty-one kobo).²⁶

Unfortunately, rather than the anti-corruption agencies prosecuting the indictees and recovering looted funds, what happened next put an abrupt end to what Nigerians had thought was a semblance of probity in the House of Representatives. As Nigerians may recall, the State Security Service (SSS), now called the Department of State Services (DSS), in collaboration with Mr Femi Otedola, chairman of one of the major indicted companies, Zenon Petroleum and Gas Ltd., masterminded a sting operation that allegedly exposed the corruptibility of the Chairman of the House Committee, Farouk Lawan, thereby impugning the credibility of the committee and silencing these investigations. Even when a follow-up committee set up by President Goodluck Jonathan and led by Mr Aigboje Aig-

Imoukhuede indicted 21 companies to the tune of N382 billion,²⁷ no concrete action was taken by the then government to do justice, prosecute offenders and recover the funds that rightly belong to the Nigerian treasury. Meanwhile, the subsidy regime was reinstated and Nigerians recovered from the shock.

Years later, in March 2017, under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, the House of Representatives instituted a fresh investigation into the opaque and secrecy-shrouded petroleum subsidy regime from 2012 to May 2016, especially the activities of the NNPC and the marketers.²⁸ This probe once again yielded no fruit. However, on June 29, 2022, the House of Representatives commissioned yet another investigation on subsidy payments on petroleum products, especially petrol, under the Buhari administration.²⁹ The House also investigated the state of refineries and found that Nigeria has spent N11.35 trillion so far maintaining moribund refineries.³⁰ This is even as subsidy allocations worth \$2.1 billion and N3.1 trillion have been reported “missing and unaccounted for between 2016 and 2019.”³¹

I expect that President Tinubu has been well-briefed on these investigations that were conducted over the years as well as the individuals, agencies and corporate entities indicted. I sincerely hope that the president is poised to take the needed action

because, whether he likes it or not, the honeymoon is over and Nigerians are asking questions. Nigerians are not asking whether these alarming cases of corruption occurred during his administration or not. Nigerians are not exonerating him and blaming the past presidents who failed to do justice on these issues. Nigerians are not patiently waiting for President Tinubu to get his act together through trial and error. Nigerians are asking why the poor have to suffer for the criminal activities of these individuals and companies.

Even as the government attempts an economic reform agenda, we must realise as a nation that no economy can thrive on criminal impunity. There can be no successful economic reforms without economic justice. Economic justice includes placing the cost of reforms on those who caused the problems in the first place, rather than on the people. Without economic justice, the attempts to sanitise the sector, including the Petroleum Industry Act, the abrupt subsidy removal, the exchange rate harmonisation policy, and the announcement of palliatives will all amount to papering over the cracks of a broken-down wall while the foundation is fast caving in.

Crime Fighters or Crime Facilitators?

A major question that we must ask at this point is: how have these sordid transactions taken place over a decade under the

watchful eyes of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)? How did these underhand dealings, which are a clear threat to our national security, continue for over a decade right under the nose of the State Security Service (SSS) or the Department of State Service (DSS) as they are now called? Why have these alarming reports come from probes carried out by the legislature and civil society organisations alone and not from the security and law enforcement agencies? Why did the DSS work with vested interests just to discredit the probe by the House Committee in 2012 rather than investigate the individuals and organisations indicted and prosecute those found culpable as recommended by that committee?

Recently, the actions of the DSS have raised concerns about professionalism and adherence to the rule of law. Instances such as the reported invasion of the premises of the EFCC³² and the handling of the case of the suspended Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Mr Godwin Emefiele, have sparked discussions regarding the need for due process and equitable application of justice. Considering the reported claims by the DSS that its actions were in line with “an order from above,”³³ the handling of the Emefiele case has sent a signal to the world that the current president’s disposition to the war against corruption is primarily motivated by a clampdown on perceived

political adversaries while various other enemies of Nigeria remain untouched.

Mr Godwin Emefiele may have made the wrong judgement calls in the management of Nigeria's monetary policy, but he must not be made a scapegoat. By the provisions of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Act, 2007, there is every possibility that the erstwhile Central Bank Governor did not act without presidential authorisation. If Emefiele is found liable for any crime, by all means, he should be prosecuted. However, considering the dynamics of the pre-election environment, and the then-candidate Bola Tinubu's public allegation³⁴ that the naira-redesign policy was targeted at him, the optic of the president targeting Emefiele for prosecution after winning the election and being sworn in as president could be interpreted as a form of vendetta far beneath such a distinguished office.

The same can be said of the detention of the suspended Chairman of the EFCC, Mr Abdurashheed Bawa. Mr Bawa was not only linked to the naira redesign policy,³⁵ he had also disclosed that the anti-graft agency would arrest and prosecute some outgoing governors after the expiration of their immunity on May 29, 2023.³⁶ Today, Bawa is being held in detention by the DSS while Bello Matawalle, a former governor that Bawa had been investigating, has been nominated by the president as a

minister. Once again, if Bawa is indicted in any criminal investigation, then the lawful thing to do is to prosecute him. To continue to hold him in detention in these circumstances raises significant concerns about the readiness of the Tinubu administration to fight corruption. This undemocratic disposition questions the pro-democracy antecedents of the president and indicates the consolidation of authoritarian tendencies.

I am reminded of the warning that I sounded to Nigerians in January 2023 in my address titled, “Bridging the Gap between Politics and Governance.” I warned then that the Politics of Entitlement, the “emi lo kan” type of politics, would breed an imperial presidency, one that “will slide towards dictatorship and will be intolerant of dissent.”³⁷

It is rather preposterous that the DSS has reduced itself to a pack of Napoleon’s dogs³⁸ let loose on perceived opponents of the president when, in this same country, a militant like Asari Dokubo is openly breeding an armed militia in open support of the president, doing so with impunity and without as much as a slap on the wrist from the security agencies. Our security agencies cannot look the other way in the face of the brazen violation of the constitution by non-state actors who declare allegiance to the president while being ever poised to clamp

down on the rights of the perceived opponents of the powers that be.

Let me remind those who constitutionally hold a monopoly on the use of force that they do so on behalf of the Nigerian people and not as agents of those in power. This reminder is especially pertinent as Nigerians become increasingly agitated due to the hardships imposed on them by the government. As citizen-led movements spring up in Nigeria, the democratic quotient of those in power will be tested. Such office holders must remember the warning that we sounded in December 2011, a few weeks before the protest in Ojota:

Let those relying on their ill-equipped, underpaid, and underfed police officers and political thugs remember the words of President J. F. Kennedy: “A society that cannot help the many who are poor, cannot save the few that are rich.”³⁹

Undeniably, the state of our nation calls for courage. However, as the story of Rehoboam, the fourth king of Israel, teaches us,⁴⁰ the kind of courage that adopts anti-people policies and oppresses the weak will only yield divisive outcomes. Therefore, Mr President, use your courage to lessen the burdens of our citizens and not to further oppress them. Use your courage to

unite the nation and not to further divide us. Use your courage to address historical grievances and not to further deepen wounds. Do justice, mount a genuine fight against corruption, rise above vendetta, foster reconciliation, and give every Nigerian — in the East, West, North, and South — a reason to believe in a united Nigeria.

A Return to Progressivism

At this juncture, I must also sound a warning to the ruling party, the APC. I was there when the APC was formed and the extent of my involvement is well-documented.⁴¹ As a stakeholder and, more importantly, as a nation-builder, I am obligated to state without equivocation that this is not the APC we envisaged.

The results of the last elections were a clear indication that Nigerians are fed up with what the APC has become. According to the results released by INEC, in the presidential elections, the APC had 15.4 million votes in 2015 and 15.2 million votes in 2019, but by the 2023 elections, the APC's support base had declined significantly to 8.8 million,⁴² with a loss of almost half of the traditional support base. If it were not for the divisions within the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the emergence of the Obidient movement of the Labour Party (LP) that split the traditional support base of the PDP, the APC would have convincingly lost the 2023 elections. Even now, the party's

victory as announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is being challenged in court.

When I consider the vision and founding spirit that birthed the APC, I cannot but conclude that the APC is losing the plot. The APC was established as a progressive party with clear motivations to establish true nationhood, eliminate corruption, oversee governance structure reforms, eradicate poverty, and facilitate economic growth. However, like its predecessor, the PDP, the APC has now become a platform for politicians who have neither conviction nor ideology and who hop from party to party seeking power at all costs. The suffering meted out to the Nigerian people as a result of anti-people policies is not what the APC once stood for.

The APC stood for progressivism. Progressivism is characterised by substantial public investments in social sectors such as education and healthcare, and it achieves inclusiveness and social mobility by deploying political power to provide an irreducible minimum standard of living for citizens; progressivism prioritises equity, justice and inclusiveness in access to opportunities. While it facilitates a private sector-led economy, its economic growth policies are hinged on empowering the people by redistributing opportunities on the bases of fairness and equity. Progressivism is not built on

trickle-down economics; instead, it is grassroots-oriented, invests in local opportunities, and builds the economy from the bottom up.

As progressivism eradicates currency arbitrage, it would not leave the currency to float without a guarantee of domestic production, the cushioning effect of social investments, and a readiness to intervene where necessary to strengthen the local currency. As progressivism eliminates a corruption-ridden subsidy regime, it would not hesitate to boost or underwrite access to factors of production such as energy, infrastructure, and human resource in an atmosphere of transparency and accountability. A progressive approach to the subsidy conundrum would have been characterised by a phased removal of subsidy, buffered by transparent investments in local refining capacity and social welfare, while the corrupt individuals and corporations that have bled the nation are compelled to return their loots. Whereas progressivism cooperates with the international community in compliance with international economic and trade law, it would not allow the economy to drift in the ocean of one-size-fits-all recommendations by neoliberal foreign interests.

If the APC hopes to survive as a political party in a political landscape that is becoming highly competitive, it must revisit its

foundations and reinvent itself into a new party that is an **Alternative, Parallel, and Contrast (APC)** to what the current party has become. While the president has tried to stabilise a rocking boat by announcing some interventions, let it be known that we cannot build a strong economy on reactionary and shifting policies. The president and his team must return to the drawing board to drive a coordinated economic programme based on the original progressive ideology of the APC.

A Recovery-Oriented Anti-Corruption War

In addition, the president, through the security agencies, with the facilitation of the National Security Adviser, must lead a recovery-oriented war against corruption. The primary aim of such an anti-corruption war should be to revisit the cumulative allegations of fraudulent transactions worth trillions of naira, as highlighted by the various committees that have investigated the subsidy regime between 2007 and 2023. Such an anti-corruption war should also expose those who have paralysed our refineries over the years and turned our moribund refineries into cash cows. All monies confirmed to have been fraudulently received by corporate and individual actors in the subsidy regime as well as the delusive Turn Around Maintenance of refineries should be returned to the Nigerian treasury. Such monies should be deployed to further cushion the effects of subsidy removal on the poor, revamp the local refineries, invest in alternative energy,

finance infrastructure delivery in partnership with the private sector, and deliver good governance to the Nigerian people.

Reducing the Size of Government

Finally, a government that is asking the poor to tighten their belts cannot afford a bloated waistline. A reduction in the size of government will ultimately translate to a reduction in the cost of governance. By nominating 48 ministers, the president is about to set a record⁴³ for the highest number of ministers since 1999. This is not the kind of record expected of a supposed reform-minded government. In a world of cutting-edge nations, in which governance is becoming lean and agile, what does the president need 48 ministers or a cabinet of close to 70 persons⁴⁴ for other than the distribution of patronage? It is hypocritical for a government that has subjected Nigerians to untold hardship by adopting neoliberal policy prescriptions to then turn around and expand the size of government, thereby violating a core aspect of the same neoliberal principles. That, Mr President, does not constitute genuine reforms; it is governance by political convenience. Truth be told, certain ministerial appointments, and that of the current APC Chairman by consensus, illustrate the error that proceeds from the ruler as stated by the preacher in **Ecclesiastes 10:5-7**:

⁵ There is an evil I have seen under the sun, as an error proceeding from the ruler:

⁶ Folly is set in great dignity, while the rich sit in a lowly place.

⁷ I have seen servants on horses, while princes walk on the ground like servants.

It does appear by these appointments that there is a reward for bad behaviour and mediocrity in our polity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it was William E. Borah who once said:

The marvel of all history is the patience with which men and women submit to burdens unnecessarily laid upon them by their governments.⁴⁵

Once again, I salute you, my fellow Nigerian citizens for your resourcefulness, steadfastness, and doggedness amid the present difficulties. However, our resilience must not become docility. As we say in our local parlance, “time is going,” and if we fail to make progress in the direction of “forward ever,” we have automatically chosen “backward ever.” As citizens, we must continue to place a demand for good governance on our leaders, including our representatives in the various legislative

assemblies. Our representatives must at this moment in the history of our nation take a stand for truth, for probity, for transparency, for accountability, and for justice. While events in our recent history do not give us sufficient confidence in the ability of the National Assembly to hold the executive to account, we, as the electorate, must remind the lawmakers that they represent us, not special interests, and that we hold the power of the vote, including the power of recall. Finally, I am reminded that “liberty will not descend to a people, a people must raise themselves to liberty, it is a blessing that must be earned before it can be enjoyed.”⁴⁶

I remain confident that Nigeria will overcome the present challenges and that there will be a New Nigeria; a Nigeria that works for every Nigerian.

Thank you for listening; God bless you, and God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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- ¹ Colton, Charles Caleb. *Lacon: Or Many Things in Few Words Addressed to Those Who Think*. New York: C. P. Fessenden, 1832. See page 210.
- ² Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. New York: J & J Harper, 1826. See page 415. (“Do” is used in place of “does” in the original.)
- ³ Colton, Charles Caleb. *Lacon: Or Many Things in Few Words Addressed to Those Who Think*. New York: Charles Wells, 1836. See page 404.
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