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**THEME: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF NATIONHOOD:
A BLUEPRINT FOR THE NEW NIGERIA**

Introduction: A Banner Without Stain

Citizens of our beloved great nation here present; Nigerians at home and in the diaspora joining us via various media platforms; friends of Nigeria across the African continent and the world; political leaders, policymakers and bureaucrats from the national and subnational levels of government; private sector stakeholders; the intelligentsia, opinion moulders and thought leaders from various institutions of knowledge; gentlemen of the press: When our nation attained independence on October 1, 1960, it was with fervent faith in the possibilities of a great nation that our founding fathers lowered the British flag and hoisted the Green-White-Green. Their dream of a great nation was etched in the lyrics of our founding national anthem, the second stanza of which states:

Our flag shall be a symbol
That truth and justice reign
In peace or battle honour'd,
And this we count as gain,
To hand on to our children
A banner without stain.

In the past week, we witnessed with great sorrow the desecration of our nationhood as Nigeria's armed forces stained the banner of our nationhood, the Nigerian flag, with the blood of our children, the Nigerian youth, to whom our founding fathers charged us to handover a banner without stain. It is, therefore, with a heavy heart over the current state of our nation, but with resilient hope in the possibilities of a New Nigeria, that I bring you this State of the Nation Broadcast originally intended to celebrate Nigeria's 60th Independence Anniversary. In this moment of despair and sobriety, I have titled my address 'The Building Blocks of Nationhood: A Blueprint for the New Nigeria' because this dark chapter of our history is not how Nigeria's story ends.

The Birth Pangs of Nationhood

All across the nation, there is a wave of people movement. It is a wave of citizen engagement championed by the so-called 'ordinary Nigerian' who has proven in extraordinary terms to be by no means ordinary. It began in Edo State with an awakened and resolute electorate defying the political establishment to make their voices heard and their votes count.¹ In the past couple of weeks, that wave

has been transformed into a tsunami of people movement led by our young people who have had enough of the horrendous brutality of the now-disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). I believe that this wave of people movement is the physical manifestation of the birth pangs heralding the New Nigeria.

As I observed the End SARS protests, I could not but conclude that we are witnessing the crescendo of an era and the beginning of another. Ten years ago, when we convened civil society organisations under the umbrella of Save Nigeria Group (SNG), our objective was not to be the voice of the people, but to restore the voices of the voiceless in a nation where social mobilisation had been frozen for too long at that time. Ten years later, the End SARS protest has assured me that a generation of Nigerians has arisen, armed with clear and unmistakable voices, refusing to dim their lights or turn down the volume of their requests, because we have entered the era of '*Soro Soke.*' I salute the courage of this unbreakable generation; I salute the resilience of every Nigerian youth, named and unnamed, who has stood up to be counted in this momentous era.

A Solemn Remembrance

We remember at this time the heartbreaking tales of extortion, torture, rape, and murder that drove our young people to the streets in the first place. We remember Linda Nkechi Igwetu who, in 2018, was reported to have been shot in a friend's car by SARS operatives the day before her passing out parade, after serving her nation as a member of the

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Abuja.² We remember Stella Ifeoma Abugu, another corps member, reported to have been raped and murdered while being unlawfully detained by SARS officials in Abuja.³ We remember Saliu Alli Haruna, a twenty-one-year-old student of Business Administration at Ambrose Alli University, Edo State, whose remains were found in a well after a reported raid in his hostel by SARS operatives.⁴ We remember Kazeem Tiya miyu, a promising Nigerian footballer who, based on eyewitness reports, was pushed out of a moving vehicle to his death by SARS operatives.⁵ We remember Femi Bello, an enterprising 300-level student of Kaduna State University, reported to have been arrested without charge and murdered extrajudicially in the custody of the Nigeria Police Force.⁶ We remember Tina Ezekwe, a seventeen-year-old secondary school girl who was killed by a police officer while assisting in her mother's shop.⁷ We cannot forget twenty-year-old Jimoh Isiaq who was reportedly killed by operatives of the Nigeria Police Force as they violently clamped down on peaceful protesters in Ogbomosho, and whose unfortunate death propelled Nigerians across the nation in their rejection of police brutality. Our hearts bleed at the memory of the peaceful protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate who were shot and killed on Tuesday, October 20, 2020, by the Armed Forces of the Nigerian state as they held up the Nigerian flag; young compatriots pledging allegiance to 'one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity' as they sang our national anthem in their final moments. Let us observe a moment of silence for these

Nigerians and many others, named and unnamed, who have been unjustly killed by agents of the Nigerian state. May their souls rest in peace and may God comfort their families.

In like manner, we also remember those unsung heroes of the Nigeria Police Force who, despite being part of an institution that has the worst reputation for corruption and ineptitude in the Nigerian public sector, serve with remarkable professionalism and bravery, sometimes doing so at the cost of their lives. In this regard, we remember Sergeant Chukwudi Iboko who, in 2017, was seen in a viral video bravely combating armed robbers at a bank in Owerri, Imo State, losing his life in the process.⁸ We remember Inspector Musa Sunday, ironically of the now-disbanded SARS, who, in 2016, was reported to have been buried alive by hoodlums, after he gallantly rescued a man who was being attacked by the said hoodlums while he was on duty in Oshoko, Ibeju-Lekki, Lagos.⁹ We remember Sergeant Sunday Idoko who was killed in Ilaro, Ogun State, while firmly resisting an attempt by hoodlums to snatch election results during the 2019 elections.¹⁰ Once again, let us observe a minute's silence for these and hundreds of other unsung heroes of the Nigeria Police Force who lose their lives yearly in the line of duty. May their souls rest in peace and may God comfort their families.

Ultimately, the Government is Liable

When a people elect their leaders, they hand over the responsibility to protect and defend them. The gun in the hand of the policeman is the

closest, most visible and most easily identifiable symbol of that handover of power and responsibility from the people to the government. The people do not have as much access to the president, governor or even the local government chairman or councillor as they do to the policeman on the street. In other words, as far as the responsibility of the government to guarantee the security and welfare of the people is concerned, the policeman on the street is the first ambassador of the government to the people. Any misuse of that power by the police, especially to repress and oppress any citizen, is ultimately an abuse of the power conferred by the people on their government. This is why the widespread protests against police brutality are justified. I acknowledge the efforts made by the government to address the protesters' demands, but the government must move from commitment to full compliance in the implementation of the 5-for-5 demands of the End SARS protesters and in overhauling our policing architecture. Above all, I strongly recommend that President Muhammadu Buhari should ensure that those who ordered armed soldiers to fire on innocent citizens are fished out and made to face the full weight of the law. The officers who carried out such wicked acts should also be prosecuted under international legal standards.

Unfortunately, the protests took a sad turn, from the attacks on protesters by thugs, to the infiltration of protests by hoodlums unleashing mayhem in cities and communities. According to Alan Bible:

No nation, no matter how enlightened, can endure criminal violence. If we cannot control it we are admitting to the world and to ourselves that our laws are no more than a facade that crumbles when the winds of crisis arise.¹¹

Furthermore, in the words of President Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ):

The poor suffer twice at the rioter's hands: First, when his destructive fury scars their neighbourhood; second, when the atmosphere of accommodation and consent is changed to one of hostility and resentment.¹²

Unfortunately, this is where peaceful protests hijacked by thugs and hoodlums have landed us. Be that as it may, governments at the federal and state levels have lent credence to the conclusion of protesters that the government itself was behind these smokescreen tactics to discredit the protests. By its actions and inactions, the government has burned the bridge of trust. It is my hope that this address will help rebuild that bridge and resolve the issues in the interest of the Nigerian nation.

Deconstructing SARS: Beyond Police Brutality

Any attempt to resolve the issues must go beyond the surface to excavate underlying factors. Our overarching challenge is systemic governance failure which, over the decades, has worsened the living conditions of Nigerians. As a result, although the Special Anti-Robbery Squad has been disbanded, the spirit of SARS continues to

prowl unchecked. Therefore, my fellow citizens, lend me your ears, as I unveil to you the true meaning of SARS and why we must End SARS.

For too long, the Nigerian people have been subjected to a less than desirable nation. For too long, the citizens of our country have been served insecurity, poverty and underdevelopment. For too long, our people have been denied access to the basic goods that make for a decent standard of living. We have been denied quality education, good healthcare, quality roads, access to electricity, and much more.

The brutal impunity of the gun-wielding policeman or SARS operative is the symbol of this bad governance experience. SARS is also the symbol of that politician who loots public funds to build a political war chest and spends it during elections buying votes, hiring thugs, intimidating voters and robbing the people of the power of choice. SARS is the symbol of the electoral officer who colludes with politicians to rob the people of their voice as expressed by the vote. SARS is the symbol of that appointed public official who, with a stroke of the pen, robs the people of funds that are allocated to education, healthcare, and other social infrastructure. SARS is the emblem on the *agbada* of the legislator who robs the people through budget padding, outrageous allowances, and unaccounted-for constituency projects. SARS is the symbol of the corrupt judge who compels Lady Justice to remove her blindfold to check whether the person in the dock is a poor phone thief or a wealthy pension thief so as to sell justice to the highest bidder. Together with the murderous

members of the police force who have robbed our young people of their lives with the trigger of a gun provided for them by the state, these pen-robbers who deploy the powers, privileges and provisions of their offices to rob the Nigerian people of our common patrimony are all operatives of SARS. They all belong to the State-Aided Robbery Squad (SARS). That is the true meaning of SARS: State-Aided Robbery Squad.

Fellow citizens, at the root of the issues that confront our nation is a foundational problem of nationhood that has persisted from one administration to another and provided a conducive environment for the State-Aided Robbery Squad (SARS). Until this foundational problem of nationhood is addressed, the call to End SARS will persist long after the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. No degree of brutal repression of protesters can quench the flame of protests in the hearts and minds of the Nigerian people. Your bullets may drive them off the streets, but your bullets cannot pierce their spirits or puncture their resilience. This speech is about how to disband the State-Aided Robbery Squad (SARS) and rebuild the foundations of our nation from the current undesirable state to the Nigeria of our dreams.

Apologies to a Generation

Before I proceed to unveil the building blocks of nationhood, permit me to address an issue that is heavy upon my heart, for we cannot proceed with laying the building blocks of a new nation without

addressing the issue of how older generations of Nigerians have failed our youth. By the older generations, I refer to the so-called 'Independence Generation,' those who were born before and immediately after the independence of Nigeria. I refer to the parents and grandparents of the millennial generation.

One can understand why the younger generation would so heavily indict preceding generations. At independence, we inherited a promising nation, but we are bequeathing a predatory nation to the young generation. We inherited a nation whose structural foundations were built on principles of true federalism, a nation in which the diverse groups had the freedom to determine their destinies, but we are bequeathing a unitary nation, federal only in name, in which subnational expressions are suppressed by an overbearing centre. We inherited a nation in which free and functional basic education, as well as affordable and quality tertiary education, guaranteed the path from penury to prominence, but we are bequeathing a nation whose educational system is lying-in-state. We inherited a nation where a young graduate was guaranteed immediate employment with housing and a car loan, but we have bequeathed a nation in which our youth are largely underemployed, unemployed or Yahoo-employed. We inherited a relatively secure nation characterised by a thriving nightlife and a peaceful village life, but we have bequeathed to the younger generation a society grappling with kidnapping, banditry, terrorism, and police brutality. We inherited a banner without stain,

but we have introduced a new colour to our green-white-green: blood red.

This is why there has been a definite generational spin to the protests. It is why we hear rallying cries like ‘You messed with the wrong generation.’ It is why young people are telling stories of how they went out to protest in spite of the warnings of their parents. It is why you hear the indicting lamentation: ‘If before I was born the generation that were there had fought for a great Nigeria, I won’t be here doing this.’¹³ It is why some protesters have asked why the likes of Prof. Soyinka, Tunde Bakare, Oby Ezekwesili, Pat Utomi, Femi Falana, the so-called ‘senior activists in Nigeria,’ are not on the streets.¹⁴

To citizens of the young generation who are disappointed in the older generation; to those young freedom fighters who believe that the generation of their fathers and mothers has failed them; to those young Nigerians who have stood up to oppression; permit me to stand in the gap to apologise on behalf of my generation and the older generation for the undesirable state of the nation you were born into. Permit me to apologise on behalf of your parents and grandparents for the kind of country you have grown up in. We salute your courage, and we applaud your resilience. We hear you, we share your pain, we share your story, we share your dreams for a better nation; and, although you may not realise it, we did our best to fight for you.

Fighting to ensure that you live in a nation where you can even air your views was what sentenced Prof. Wole Soyinka to twenty-two months in prison as a thirty-three-year-old man.¹⁵ Fighting to ensure that you inherit a nation where every Nigerian has access to justice was what subjected the late Chief Gani Fawehinmi to three decades of harassment, assassination threats and thirty-two episodes in detention.¹⁶ Fighting for equity, justice and dignity was what led to Ken Saro-Wiwa uttering his final words: ‘Lord, take my soul, but the struggle continues.’¹⁷ Fighting to ensure that every Nigerian is treated with respect was what deprived Dr. Joe Okei-Odumakin of the bliss of young womanhood and sent her to torturous detention cells no fewer than seventeen times.¹⁸ Fighting to bequeath to future generations a nation governed by ideas rather than the barrel of a gun was what subjected the likes of Prof. Pat Utomi, Dr. Oby Ezewesili and other members of Concerned Professionals to repression by a brutal military dictatorship. Fighting to ensure that the generation of their children would not be beaten, teargassed, arrested or shot at by the police or soldiers as they were, was what sent the likes of Olisa Agbakoba, Femi Falana, Shehu Sani, Yinka Odumakin, Chief Frank Kokori, the late Beko Ransome-Kuti, the late Chima Ubani, and many other pro-democracy activists to the torturous jail cells of a cruel military junta. As I have had to explain to my children, fighting to bequeath to them and their generation a better nation than the one I met, was what exposed me to the harassments, defamation of

character, arrests and threats to life that my children witnessed their dad being subjected to as they grew up in this country.

It is obvious that the fight of my generation and the older generation has not yielded the Nigeria that you, the youth of our nation, can be proud of. In 2002, at Grand Slam, an event that hosted a gathering of young Nigerians from across the six geopolitical zones in the country, I preached a message titled ‘Nigeria: A Land Filled with Crimes of Blood.’ It breaks my heart that, eighteen years later, this still holds true. The Nigerian landscape is filled to the brim with the blood of its citizens. By its brutal repression of unarmed protesters, the Nigerian state has blood on its hands. That agents of the Nigerian state would resort to using live ammunition to silence fellow citizens, fellow human beings, is heart-rending. Their blood will yet speak, as truly as there is a God. In this time of great despair, we are united in pain with all who have suffered, in grief with all the families who are hoarse with sorrow, and in a sense of shared loss with those whose hard-earned livelihoods have been damaged or burnt. May God console all who mourn in Nigeria, and give us beauty for our ashes. Amen.

We should be encouraged by the fact that every battle won is a step taken in the direction of a better nation. The fight is a progressive one, and every generation must contribute its victories. The battles won by the generation of your fathers and mothers has become the launchpad for you to fight and win this battle for the recognition and preservation of the dignity of the human being. But the fight is also a collaborative one. As some among the older generation observed the

protests with a sense of history repeating itself, it was obvious after a while that it was time to deploy a diversity of strategies. The laudable creative expressions of the protests were being threatened by descent into anarchy even if stage-managed as alleged.¹⁹ The protests had also begun to infringe on the rights of law-abiding Nigerians. It was clear that a change of strategy was required to avert loss of lives, to safeguard the credibility of the movement, and to strengthen the gains made. To this end, we reached out to the presidency and challenged the government to be empathetic to Nigerians and to address the demands of protesters. We also reached out to some prominent organisers of the protests to fashion a way out of the debacle. Unfortunately, our collective entreaties to some of the young arrowheads of the End SARS protests were ignored.

Our past experience with organising protests had shown that there comes a time when strategies are re-evaluated. In 2010, when we marched to the National Assembly to protest power hijack, after registering our demands, we left the complex early enough to avoid the counter-protesters who trailed us. Subsequently, when we marched to the Lagos State Secretariat, Alausa, we registered our demands, handed a letter to the governor, and left the arena. When we marched to Aso Rock some weeks later, we presented a letter to the Secretary to the Government of the Federation and left thereafter. Similar protests held across the globe. The cumulative effect of these protests forced the National Assembly to invoke the Doctrine of

Necessity by which President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan became acting president and later, president.

In 2012, when we needed to gather to protest against a patently corrupt fuel subsidy regime, we converged at the Gani Fawehinmi Park, a venue that was unobstructive to vehicular movement. Our rallying cry was ‘Kill Corruption, Not Nigerians!’ For five days, we brought the nation to a standstill through the massive gathering of Nigerians. However, when, by the fifth day of the protest, we caught wind that the Goodluck Jonathan government would deploy armed soldiers in the early hours of the morning to dismantle our installations and potentially engineer a bloodbath, we deliberated and decided that our desire to see change was not worth the blood of any Nigerian. At the risk of being misunderstood and maligned, we called off the protests and channelled our collective energy in a more sustainable direction.

Our change of strategies from the oppositional to the propositional gave us access to the Jonathan administration to influence policy changes in a range of areas. It also won us the trust of President Goodluck Jonathan such that, during the contentious 2015 elections, we were able to mediate between the contenders, and we worked to ensure that President Jonathan left office with his head held high as a democrat. As a result of our cordial relationship, President Jonathan wrote a tribute for my 60th birthday which I still cherish till today. Our proximity allowed us to protest to the president directly when the national interest demanded it. All the subsequent impact we made was

due to a timely decision to change strategies to avert bloodshed. This is why I am heartbroken by the current events.

Citizens of our great nation, to build the Nigeria of our dreams is a collaborative responsibility. We must not pitch one generation against another. Generational integration, rather than generational shift, should be our strategy of choice. As I have said in times past, the hindsight of the older generation must propel the foresight of the younger generation. The dreams of the fathers and mothers must be the backdrop of the visions of the sons and daughters. The wisdom of the elders must guide the knowledge of the youth as we build the Nigeria of our dreams. Where there are no patriarchs and matriarchs, there will be no offspring. Nation-building is a continuum; there must be a unity of purpose across generations and across regions.

Let us Unite to End SARS!

This unity of purpose means we choose to see the plight of the almajiris and their inability to access quality education, not as a Northern problem, but as a Nigerian problem. Because we are a nation of human connection, we choose to see the murder of seventeen-year-old Tina Ezekwe by a trigger-happy policeman in Lagos, not as a Southern problem, but as a Nigerian problem. That is why every heart, young or old, male or female, in the East, West, North and South of Nigeria, must beat with one rhythm. This is why every Nigerian voice must declare with one accord: ‘End SARS! End the State-Aided Robbery Squad!’

End the brutalisation and murder of the Nigerian people by reckless police operatives and soldiers. End SARS! End the oppression and subjugation of the Nigerian people by those who ought to protect and serve them. End SARS! End the diversion of funds earmarked for the provision of quality education and healthcare for our people. End SARS! End the inflation of contracts and give the Nigerian people quality roads and efficient transportation networks. End SARS! End the corruption that has denied our people access to steady electricity supply. End SARS! End political banditry and the looting of the treasury to build political war chests. End SARS! End vote-buying, electoral fraud and the killing of innocent Nigerians just to win elections. End SARS! End legislative brigandage, budget padding, backdoor allowances, and the siphoning of funds through perennially uncompleted constituency projects. End SARS! End judicial rascality and the merchandising of justice to the highest bidder. End SARS! End the State-Aided Robbery Squad. End SARS! End SARS!! End SARS!!! End SARS so the Nigerian people can have access to every resource required to actualise the Nigerian dream.

The Nigeria of Our Dreams

The Nigerian dream is the hope in the heart of every Nigerian who desires a better nation. It is the longing in the heart of that Nigerian girl child who seeks to be educated despite her parents' offer to marry her off because they cannot afford to send her to school. The Nigerian dream is the aspiration of that young graduate who decides to learn an honest vocation and to create jobs rather than succumb to the

frustrations of unemployment or resort to crime. The Nigerian dream is the drive that wakes that father who lives in Sango-Ota, and who must leave home before dawn at the risk of being robbed, just to beat the dense traffic to Lagos Island, where he labours to put food on the table for his family. The Nigerian dream is the hope behind the sacrifice of that Nigerian teacher who continues to prepare lesson notes, to teach schoolchildren in dilapidated classrooms, to administer and grade homework and tests, and to organise extra revision classes months after her last salary was paid. The Nigerian dream is what propels the Nigerian business owner who strives in difficult environments, with limited access to funds or electricity, to create solutions and deliver innovative services across sectors, from agriculture and finance to communication and entertainment. The Nigerian dream is the hope of every Nigerian who lost a job, or a business, or even a loved one, to the COVID-19 pandemic, but who has refused to stay down and is now re-energised and propelled by that tireless bounce back spirit that makes us Nigerians. The Nigerian dream is the fuel that has fanned the flames of those young Nigerians on the streets of Lagos, Abuja, Benin, Ibadan, Owerri, Jos, Makurdi and cities across the Nigerian landscape and the diaspora, as well as on various social media platforms, all chanting the rallying cry for freedom: End SARS!

The Nigerian dream is that mental portrait of the Nigeria of our earnest hopes, the New Nigeria, a nation that is possible, a nation we must come together to create, a Nigeria where the right to life is

sacred and no one is brutalised or extrajudicially murdered; where no one goes to bed hungry and no child is left without access to quality education; where our homes, schools, streets, villages, highways and cities are safe and secure, and Nigerians can work, play or travel with their minds at rest, and go to bed with their hearts at peace; a Nigeria where our hospitals are life-saving institutions and every Nigerian has access to quality healthcare; where no youth is unemployed and our young men and women are job creators; where businesses thrive on innovation and made-in-Nigeria goods can compete anywhere in the world; where homes and businesses have access to uninterrupted power supply, and ideas are facilitated by functional infrastructure and cutting-edge technology; where no part of our nation – North, South, East or West – has a reason to feel marginalised, and where every Nigerian is proud to say, ‘I am a Nigerian;’ a Nigeria that is a model for Africa and a beacon of hope to the world – that is the Nigeria of our dreams; the Nigeria we must come together to build.

Nation-Building in a Time of Difficulty: Now is the Time

In the midst of public outrage over the brutal repression of protesters by the Nigerian government, with the nation in a state of emergency, it would appear that now is not the right time to talk about building the Nigeria of our dreams. However, I believe that the ultimate resolution of the current challenges we are confronted with as a nation lies in our ability to embrace a compelling picture of our desired future.

I am confident that this ground-zero state of our nation can become the foundational launchpad for the building of a great nation. As history shows us, great nations are built, not on beds of roses, but on the rocky grounds of adversity. That was the story of Israel, a model nation that was forged out of four centuries of slavery and four decades of wandering in a desolate wilderness; it was the story of the United States of America, a global power founded by immigrants who fled Europe to the New World and advanced westward against an intolerable wilderness. It was the story of Japan, a war-torn country which emerged from the devastation of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings to achieve one of the fastest economic recoveries of the 20th century; it was the story of Germany, devastated by two world wars but rising from the ruins of the Second World War to become the industrial model of the world; it was the story of Singapore, rejected by Malaysia and sandwiched between adversarial neighbours, yet rising to become a centre of global finance and the world's leading model of infrastructural development; it is the story of Dubai, a once sandy desert that has transformed the world's skylines and become one of the most visited cities in the world; it is the unfolding story of Rwanda, a landlocked country which emerged from a gruesome genocide to become Africa's pacesetter in innovation and economic growth. It is why I believe this is the best time to rebuild Nigeria.

The Pathway from Dream to Manifestation

The pathway from the present state of our nation to the Nigeria of our dreams is paved with transformational landmarks in four dimensions, namely: Culture, Structure, Infrastructure and Intra-Structure.

These are the four strong pillars around which the Citadel Global Community Church (CGCC) is built as a governmental, authoritative, powerful institution, generating solutions, influencing policy, and providing clarity; and these are the four building blocks from which a new nation can be forged.

1. Our National Culture

The first landmark in the journey from the status quo to the Nigeria of our dreams is the birth of a New Nigerian culture. The cultural dimension of nation-building is the value system or value superstructure upon which the nation must be built. It brings to focus what I call the 4 'IDs' of our nationhood, namely the Nigerian Identity, the Nigerian Idiosyncrasy, the Nigerian Idiocy, and the Nigerian Ideal.

To address the current issues plaguing our nation and to make meaningful progress towards the Nigeria of our dreams, we must resolve certain unanswered questions that border on the Nigerian Identity. Who is a Nigerian? What is the irreducible minimum standard of decency below which no Nigerian must fall? To find answers to this question, I recommend revisiting the Nigerian Charter for National Reconciliation and Integration²⁰ which was unanimously passed by delegates to the 2014 National Conference.

We must then deconstruct the Nigerian Idiosyncrasy – those modes of behaviour that have defined us over time for better or for worse – our exuberance, our ostentation, our love of pleasure, our aversion to risk, our resilient tolerance of adversity, our inclination to ethnic identities, and our religiosity that encourages us to ‘leave am for God.’ We must tell ourselves home truths as to how these modes of behaviour have contributed to our current state and how they could be geared towards unleashing our collective potential and building the Nigeria of our dreams.

Upon further reflection, we will discover that, by not positively harnessing our idiosyncrasy, we continue to court what I call the Nigerian Idiocy. This is what is at play when politicians corner the nation’s resources through the politics of banditry while citizens remain spectators, cheering looters on. It is what is at play when we defend the corrupt because they are our kinsmen and we sell our votes for a loaf of bread and a bag of rice. It is what is at play when our nation produces crude oil but imports refined petroleum at a higher cost, when we favour consumption over capacity-building, when we are more inclined to devouring over discovery, when we choose imitation over innovation, and when we embrace mediocrity over merit in the selection of leaders.

The antidote to the Nigerian Idiocy is the Nigerian Ideal. The Nigerian ideal is a quest; the quest to redefine ourselves by our most noble qualities and aspirations. It is the quest for a Nigeria where no citizen is subjected to living below an irreducible minimum standard

of decency. It is the quest for a new Nigerian culture, one in which the people are bound by common hopes and common dreams irrespective of ethnic and religious differences.

In the spirit of the New Nigerian culture, government must jettison the leadership model of the biblical Pharaoh²¹ and Rehoboam²² who ruined their nations through obstinacy. Leaders must begin to listen to the people and show empathy to their plight. We need leaders like Nehemiah who quelled a protest, not by the force of arms, but by the moral authority of exemplary, sacrificial leadership.²³ We need leaders like the late Nelson Mandela who converted institutions of division and oppression to symbols of unity and empathy. We need sensitive leaders who are not ashamed to shed tears with the wounded and who can tell the broken, ‘Your pain is my pain, and I will do everything in my power to lift your burden.’

The New Nigerian culture is what has ignited in the hearts and minds of our young people a new wave of patriotism, a rejection of the status quo and the demand for accountability among public servants. The New Nigerian culture is not defined by antagonism as an end in itself, or looting and pillaging as a solution, but is shaped by a willingness to take responsibility, to find new answers to old questions, to refuse to simply accept that this is the best we can do and be as a people. To this end, rather than destroy, we must build; rather than revel in attacks on tangible and intangible infrastructure, from buses and police stations to palaces and state-owned cyber assets, we must protect our common patrimony. Instead of accepting a

status quo that appears to leave us no choice but to go through the backdoor, we must build enduring edifices of open governance using such bricks as the Freedom of Information Act. Our conduct should at all times be moral, ethical and legal, moderated by the reality that there are no shortcuts in nation-building.

From protests to progress, we must now proceed to the next phase of citizen engagement. We must organise ourselves like the nation-builders who teamed up with Nehemiah to build the wall of the city. With one hand they built the wall, and with the other, they held a sword to defend themselves.²⁴ In like manner, when this battle is won, we must defend our gains. Some of us must join civil society groups to continue to hold government to account; some of us must become entrepreneurs creating jobs that will build our economy; some of us must become public servants, making and implementing policies that can facilitate and sustain growth; some of us must step into politics to ensure that the best of us lead the rest of us. Whichever path we take, every one of us must be ready at all times to defend our freedom so that never again will our people be subjected to such indignity.

2. Our National Structure

Upon the foundation of a New Nigerian culture, we must revisit conversations around the structure of Nigeria. The End SARS protests have once again brought to the fore the diversity of the challenges and aspirations of the Nigerian people across geopolitical zones. Let me at this juncture address those young people, particularly in the North,

who have taken a different position and called for reforms, rather than the outright disbandment of SARS.²⁵ I am referring to those who argue(d) that they need such tactical formations to combat their peculiar security challenges in the North. First of all, I say to these young Nigerians, you have the right to air your views, no matter how unpopular they may be. We hear you, too, because you are also Nigerians.

We do not desire a nation that is intolerant of seemingly contrarian opinions, nor a nation where one cap must fit all. Instead, we desire a nation where policy ideas are debated at the policy roundtable, where facts are separated from fiction, and where the best ideas are implemented for the benefit of all, bearing the realities and opportunities of each geopolitical zone in mind. We desire a nation where policy is based on evidence and where governance decisions are preceded by thorough strategic analysis.

It has become clear that an excessively centralised government cannot sustain a culture of responsive leadership and responsible citizenship. As Nigerians begin to exercise the powers of the Distinguished Office of the Citizen,²⁶ we must demand a government that is close enough to facilitate our welfare and strong enough to provide security. This is why I am confident that the current wave of people movement and individual responsibility will ultimately lead to the restructuring of our nation.

3. Our National Infrastructure

As ‘We the people’ begin to take responsibility to shape the New Nigerian culture, the government must facilitate the right kind of infrastructure that can channel that culture into productive ventures. Our cities and communities must host affordable and decent housing units, functional education and health facilities, industrial facilities, sports and recreation facilities, all linked by efficient multimodal transportation networks and broadband technology, protected by intelligent security architecture, and powered by sustainable energy solutions. Such state-of-the-art infrastructure will facilitate the development of our young people, the incubation and growth of enterprise, and the drastic reduction in crime rates.

Within the construct of our national security infrastructure, let me use this opportunity to reiterate my call for a new approach to youth development in the context of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). This has become all the more necessary with the recent brutalisation of the Nigerian youth by the police force and the military. The NYSC provides an opportunity to achieve capacity building for economic development, to beef up our national security and defence infrastructure, as well as build the bridge of trust between the people and the armed forces. At this juncture, I reiterate my recommendation that NYSC becomes an optional two-year programme with the first year spent on military training for our young people and the second year spent on agro-entrepreneurship. In addition, I recommend that a minimum of an Ordinary National Diploma (OND) obtained from a recognised polytechnic, or two years

in a recognised university with a cumulative grade point average not lower than a second-class lower division, be among the prerequisites for admission into the police colleges.¹ This will compel an upgrade of the police college to a degree-awarding tertiary institution affiliated with a Nigerian university, transform the Nigeria Police Force into a Nigeria Police Service, and further build the bridge between Nigerians and the Police.

4. Our National Intra-Structure

The intra-structure question is what, for years, has been referred to as the National Question. It is the quest for how best to coexist as a nation irrespective of our differences and diversities. The intra-structure question has remained unanswered since the era of our founding fathers, and it explains the various conflicts that define our nation, including inter-ethnic, interreligious, partisan, and, especially now, intergenerational conflicts. It explains the ethnic colouration wrongly applied to the destruction of lives and property in Lagos State, the South West, and other parts of the country by hoodlums who hijacked the End SARS protests.

Resolving the intra-structure question calls for a national redemption experience and an appropriate institutional framework. A national redemption experience is modelled in **Revelation 5:8-10 (NKJV)**:

¹An earlier version of this document misstated 'police colleges' as 'Nigeria Police Academy,' which is already a degree-awarding institution. This error is sincerely regretted.

⁸Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have **redeemed** us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

¹⁰And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth.” (Emphasis mine)

A national redemption experience entails forsaking a primordial attachment to ethnicity and tribalism and pledging allegiance to a higher national identity. An appropriate institutional framework for such an experience would be the Presidential Commission for National Reconciliation, Reintegration and Rebirth which I have called for on various occasions.²⁷ This Commission must be charged with the mandate to address intra-structural issues, reconcile sectional interests, rebuild trust in the Nigerian State, and birth a truly integrated Nigeria. Furthermore, this Commission can serve as a Truth and Reconciliation Commission where citizens can publicly narrate their ordeals with agents of the Nigerian State and find healing, compensation, justice, and reconciliation. Above all, this

commission can design and implement a Strategic Agenda for the Restructuring of our Federal System. By so doing, we can convert the current ugly narrative from a State-Aided Robbery Squad (SARS) to a Strategic Agenda for a Restructured State (SARS).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I appeal to the Nigerian youth whose patriotic spirits have been brutalised and traumatised by a repressive Nigerian state. I appeal to them not to lose hope in Nigeria. I encourage them to keep hope alive because the Nigeria of their dreams, the New Nigeria, is within reach. I appeal to the older generation to speak up at this point in defence of our hard-earned freedom. This is not the nation our founding fathers lived and died for. This is not the nation we fought for in the trenches of pro-democracy movements. This is not the nation we hope to bequeath to our children. We will build this nation, not upon the altar of the blood of our young people, but on their visions and aspirations. I am confident that we can end the brutalisation of our people, put an end to the State-Aided Robbery Squad, and begin the process of nation-building. It is time to turn the stumbling blocks of our past into stepping stones to our future. Let us, therefore, arise to build a great nation, that all who have died in the quest for a new nation will not have died in vain, and that the Nigerian dream will become the Nigerian reality.

Nigeria will be saved! Nigeria will be changed!! Nigeria will be great in our lifetime!!! Amen.

Thank you, God bless you, God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria,
and God bless the continent of Africa.

Pastor ‘Tunde Bakare

Serving Overseer, The Citadel Global Community Church (CGCC);
Convener, Save Nigeria Group.

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