

**BEING TEXT OF THE ADDRESS BY PASTOR ‘TUNDE
BAKARE**

**ON THE STATE OF THE NIGERIAN YOUTH
AT THE CITADEL GLOBAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
(CGCC),**

**30, KUDIRAT ABIOLA WAY, OREGUN, IKEJA,
LAGOS, NIGERIA.**

ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2020

**THEME: ‘THE YOUTH OF A NATION ARE THE TRUSTEES
OF POSTERITY’ (BENJAMIN DISRAELI)**

Fellow citizens of our great nation, Gentlemen of the Press:

Today is the grand finale of the Diamond Jubilee Celebration of my darling wife, Pastor Mrs. ‘Layide Adetokunbo Bamidele Bakare, better known as The Authentic Mrs. B, and, of course, my 66th birthday. With your kind permission, I would, on this great occasion, like to address a very crucial issue of national importance, namely the need to channel the tremendous energy of the Nigerian youth towards building the Nigeria of our dreams, a nation of which generations yet unborn will be proud.

For this address, I have chosen as a theme the evergreen words of Benjamin Disraeli: ‘The youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity.’¹ This has become all the more necessary because of the

backlash being meted out on some of the young Nigerians who participated in the EndSARS protests.

Sixty-six years ago, in a land forged beneath ancient rocks, the city of Abeokuta, I was born into declining wealth by parents who had high hopes for my future. After my father died shortly before my third birthday, I was raised in abject poverty by a single mother who went through untold suffering and an enormous amount of self-sacrifice to give me an education and a sense of supreme confidence because she believed so greatly in my future. My mother, who I describe as the woman who saw the future,ⁱⁱ was a disciplinarian who groomed me into a respectful but audacious young man with big dreams. She infused into me an uncompromising sense of justice and an enormous dose of courage and confidence to back it up.

That sense of justice was what inspired me as a student of the University of Lagos (UNILAG) to join other students in the Ali Must Go protests against a military government whose draconian policies made living conditions difficult for students. That same sense of justice was what gave me the boldness as a student leader in the University of Lagos to stand face-to-face with the then military head of state, General Olusegun Obasanjo, in the company of the then Angolan president, Agostinho Neto, on November 11, 1978, and to declare within earshot of the Nigerian head of state that ‘This government possesses power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight’ (paraphrasing Martin Luther King Jnr).ⁱⁱⁱ I would later be told by an official of the State Security

Service (SSS), now Department of State Services (DSS), that it was that day in 1978 a file was opened with my name on it.

I must say that such a sense of justice was what I saw in action as young Nigerians rallied the nation last month in peaceful protests against police brutality. As I reminisced on the unfortunate incident of the shooting of unarmed protesters by Nigerian soldiers, I recalled with solemnity how I almost lost my life in the Ali Must Go protests as armed policemen fired live bullets into a crowd of students protesting peacefully. Unfortunately, the bullet that narrowly missed me gunned down the young man who was beside me, Akintunde Ojo, after whom a library in UNILAG was subsequently named. As I said in my address to the nation on October 25, 2020,^{iv} it is painful that the younger generation has had to face the same beasts we fought in my generation. This is why we cannot afford to keep sinful silence when the youth of our nation are being oppressed by a Nigerian state that is supposed to protect them.

As our nation returns to the drawing board in the wake of the EndSARS protests, I have observed with keen interest the policy actions and positions taken by national and subnational governments to address the broader issues of youth development in Nigeria, from the prompt disbandment of SARS, to the N75B Nigeria Youth Investment Fund (N-YIF) launched by the federal government, as well as the appointment of young Nigerians on panels of inquiry set up by various state governments. I commend these actions by the

federal and state governments. They have, to an extent, been forced to self-reflect and align with the times.

Truth be told, this season of our national life requires deep humility, sobriety and deliberate thinking through, both by the government and the governed, in order to ensure that our plans, policies and actions are weighed before they are implemented to avert the re-occurrence of our most recent crisis. In light of the foregoing, some of the actions recently taken by the government on the heels of the EndSARS protests may need to be reversed sooner rather than later in our collective best interest so that they do not trigger further protests.

Among such policy actions is the freezing of the accounts of young Nigerians who reportedly sponsored the protests.^v While I admit that, under our extant laws, banks may freeze an account upon an ex parte order granted to a law enforcement agency by a court of competent jurisdiction for the purpose of investigation, these provisions of our Law should not be used to intimidate Nigerian youth simply because they engaged in and promoted protests against the inactions of government. In addition, targeting and arresting citizens on trumped-up charges,^{vi} deploying court probes as a tool of intimidation,^{vii} and generally eroding our fragile peace, are deeply worrisome signs of regression.

To extend the olive branch to the youth in one breath, and to deprive the youth of the right to freedom of movement and property as enshrined in our constitution in another breath, will send confusing

signals to them and cast doubts in their minds regarding the sincerity of the government. The immediate reversal of these actions, therefore, will calm raw nerves and fast track peace in our land. And if there are serious or fundamental security breaches that necessitated the freezing of bank accounts and the confiscation of a passport,^{viii} these should be made known.

In the absence of any security breaches, citizens' rights should never be trampled upon. In the words of Robert Green Ingersoll, 'I am the inferior of any man whose rights I trample under foot. Men are not superior by reason of the accidents of race or color. They are superior who have the best heart—the best brain...The superior man [...] stands erect by bending above the fallen. He rises by lifting others.'^{ix}

In this season, the government ought to lift the morale of the Nigerian youth by all means and in every way possible, with the clear understanding that 'the best security against revolution is in constant correction of abuses, and introduction of needed improvements. It is the neglect of *timely repair* that makes *rebuilding* necessary' (Richard Whately).^x

Furthermore, I have followed the conversation around the regulation of social media following the violence that accompanied the EndSARS protests. I recall that my statements in this regard during an interview on Arise TV^{xi} were misreported and misrepresented by those seeking occasion. Let me state, once again, that, although I have been a victim of misrepresentation and needless defamation of

character on social media, I remain an advocate of freedom of expression. However, while I stand for the responsible use of social media, I will never subscribe to any attempt to deprive Nigerian youth of a space and context in which they have found a sense of self. Over the course of various interactions, I have outlined eight segments of our national life that I describe as constituting Nigeria's political power blocs, each wielding significant influence in the outcome of politics and governance in Nigeria, namely: The Council of State and the Thirty-Six State Governors, Retired Generals, Traditional Institutions, Political Dynasties, The Private Sector (including the media), Religious Leaders, the Nigerian Labour Congress/Trade Union Congress (NLC/TUC), and Foreign Partners. My position has been that any individual or group that seeks to be reckoned with politically in Nigeria must not take any of these for granted. I would like to state at this juncture that there is a ninth power bloc that must not be taken for granted: it is the Nigerian Youth with the power of social media. Any political group that takes the social media savvy Nigerian youth for granted does so at its own risk or peril. This is why I strongly advice the power blocs, including the South West Governors who are calling for stricter regulation of social media,^{xii} to desist from doing so. Let me at this point remind you of the statements I made in this regard in my January 5, 2020, State of the Nation address:

...the fact that some persons have deployed this tool [social media] in ways that have been less than honourable does

not justify the attempted clampdown on freedom of speech by some legislators who major in minors. I, too, have been a target of social media vitriol. I have been misrepresented, maligned and falsely characterised by mischief-makers on social media, but I will not support the suppression of the most potent tool for citizen engagement in the 21st century through a misguided Social Media Bill.

Lest we forget, the 1985 locus classicus case of Arthur Nwankwo v The State already removed sedition from our laws and instead reiterated that a suit of defamation of character can be brought against those who abuse the right to freedom of expression. Rather than clamp down on expressiveness, which is the lifeblood of innovation, what we ought to do is pass laws that will further empower our teeming young population to not just be constructive users of social media platforms, but to be creators of homegrown solutions able to compete globally in a technology-driven world. To combat abuse, what we ought to do is provide incentives for the proper usage of this tool through reward systems that will encourage the honour code, promote responsible conversations, and discourage dishonourable use.

I, therefore, state without equivocation that these young Nigerians who have found their voices on social media are not the enemies of Nigeria. They are the hope of our

nation. They are simply expressing the character of our DNA and the virtues that gave us independence – virtues such as the audacity to assemble as communities, including online communities, and to voice their opposition to corruption and oppression. I assure you that if social media had been invented in the days of our founding fathers, they would have deployed the tool in resisting colonial rule and fighting for our independence, just as they effectively deployed conventional media such as newspapers to achieve these objectives...^{xiii}

I made this point earlier in the year and I reiterate this position. Every medium, from radio to television, to Twitter and WhatsApp, can potentially be abused in amplifying our basest instincts, but this in no way implies that these outlets should be repressed or clamped down on. I would never align myself with the violation of freedoms, including the freedom of speech. Progressive governments the world over continue to grapple with how to maintain a fine balance between upholding freedom of speech and curtailing the spread of misinformation, which can have dire consequences. I note, for instance, the creation of the ‘End SARS Fact Check’ handle on Twitter intended to checkmate the spread of fake news.^{xiv} A possible way to address this holistically – and I am open to other suggestions – is for the youth of Nigeria, with their track record of self-governance during the EndSARS protests, to spearhead conversations in conjunction with local and international civil society organisations,

with a view to adopting best practices elsewhere and innovating in the light of local realities, and ultimately working with such media platforms as Facebook and Twitter to flag dangerous content. This could minimise the concerns around government regulation or repression and places the power and responsibility squarely in the hands of the vast majority of end users, the Nigerian youth. The existence of this ‘honour code,’ which I alluded to in January of this year, may effectively foreclose the need for bills that infringe on freedoms and thus understandably generate suspicion and concern.

In addition, I call on Nigeria’s youth to begin to channel their enormous energy into an organised movement for a New Nigeria, using every resource at their disposal, including and especially social media. Six years ago, on the occasion of my sixtieth birthday, while articulating the Nigeria of my dreams, I said then that the Nigerian dream ‘lives on in the hand-held devices of young Nigerians on social media who keep on the front burner of public consciousness those issues that affect the Nigerian people in the hope that one day a movement for positive change will be ignited.’^{xv} Dear youth of our nation, I announce to you that that day has come. I, therefore, urge all our young leaders from across the length and breadth of our nation, North, South, East and West, to join hands with the progressive forces in our polity for a New Nigeria, the dream nation that it is your destiny and birthright to breathe to life. I described the possibilities in my last State of the Nation broadcast:

...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...^{xvi}

I believe that now is the time to build this dream nation, and that one of the first steps towards this is the wholesale acknowledgement of every level of government that suffocating the spirit, creativity and liberty of Nigerian youth is both counterintuitive and counterproductive.

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

Pastor ‘Tunde Bakare

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ⁱGrenville Kleiser, *Dictionary of Proverbs*. New Delhi, India: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2005. See page 282.

ⁱⁱThis is the partial title of a book I wrote in my mother’s honour upon her passing in 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱHedin, Benjamin. “Martin Luther King Jr.’s Searing AntiWar Speech Fifty Years Later.” *New Yorker*. April 4, 2017. Accessed November 10, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/martin-luther-king-jr-s-searing-antiwar-speech-fifty-years-later>

^{iv}Bakare, ‘Tunde. “The Building Blocks of Nationhood: A Blueprint For The New Nigeria.” *Tunde Bakare*. October 25, 2020. Accessed November 10, 2020. <http://tundebakare.com/the-building-blocks-of-nationhood-a-blueprint-for-the-new-nigeria/>

^vOdutola, Abiola. “CBN receives order to freeze bank accounts of 20 #EndSARS sponsors.” *Nairametrics*. November 6, 2020. Accessed November 10, 2020. <https://nairametrics.com/2020/11/06/cbn-receives-order-to-freeze-bank-accounts-of-20-endsars-sponsors/#:~:text=CBN%20receives%20order%20to%20freeze%20bank%20accounts%20of%2020%20%23EndSARS%20sponsors,-1%20week%20ago&text=The%20Central%20Bank%20of%20Nigeria,the%20%23EndSARS%20protests%20till%20January.>

^{vi}See, for instance, the case of Eromosele Adene: Adams, Tosin. “#EndSARS protester, Eromosele, allegedly arrested in Lagos.” *The Guardian*. November 10, 2020. Accessed November 10, 2020. <https://guardian.ng/news/endsars-protester-eromosele-allegedly-arrested-in-lagos/>

^{vii}Akinkuotu, Eniola. “#EndSARS: Court orders probe of Sam Adeyemi, Davido, Tuface, others.” *Punch*. November 14, 2020. Accessed November 14, 2020. <https://punchng.com/endsars-court-orders-probe-of-sam-adeyemi-davido-tuface-others/>

^{viii}Olasupo, Abisola. “#EndSARS Legal Aide Modupe Odele retrieves passport, free to travel.” *The Guardian*. November 9, 2020. Accessed November 10, 2020.

^{ix}*The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll: Volume 11*, Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Outlook Verlag GmbH, 2018. See page 39:

<https://bit.ly/3pvial3>

^x*Thoughts and Apophthegms from the Writings of Archbishop Whately*, Philadelphia, USA: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1856. See page 71:

<https://bit.ly/3kroJKU>

^{xi}*Arise News*. “‘Now is the time for President Buhari to leave a legacy’ – Pastor Tunde Bakare.” *YouTube Video*, 39:53. November 2, 2020. Accessed November 4, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkawyHcsfv8>

^{xii}Oyero, Kayode. “South-West govts, monarchs back regulation of social media.” *Punch*. November 9, 2020. Accessed November 11, 2020. <https://punchng.com/south-west-govts-monarchs-back-regulation-of-social-media/>

^{xiii}Bakare, ‘Tunde. “Unveiling The True Enemies of Nigeria.” *Tunde Bakare*. January 5, 2020. Accessed November 10, 2020.

<http://tundebakare.com/unveiling-true-enemies-nigeria/>

^{xiv}See <https://twitter.com/EndSARSFctCheck>

^{xv}Bakare, ‘Tunde. “The Nigeria Of My Dreams.” *Tunde Bakare*. November 16, 2014. Accessed November 10, 2020.

<http://tundebakare.com/the-nigeria-of-my-dreams/>

^{xvi}Bakare, ‘Tunde. “The Building Blocks of Nationhood: A Blueprint For The New Nigeria.” *Tunde Bakare*. October 25, 2020. Accessed November 10, 2020. <http://tundebakare.com/the-building-blocks-of-nationhood-a-blueprint-for-the-new-nigeria/>