

**“Civis Nigerianus Sum” - I am a citizen of Nigeria.**

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**Delivered at Bloomberg Studios, London, United Kingdom.**

**Monday, 6 June 2016**

Since leaving office one year and one week ago, I have had the luxury of time to be able to reflect on the future of my great country, Nigeria.

So today is not about my personal memories or a litany of ‘what ifs’. No! Today I would like to share with you what I believe is the key learning from my experiences for the future of democracy not only in Nigeria but also across the entire continent of Africa.

I said before the last election that my political ambition was not worth the blood of one Nigerian.

I was true to my word when on March 16th, 2015, just after the election, when the results were still being collated by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), I called my opponent, General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) to concede, in order to avoid any conflict and ensure a peaceful transition of power.

This was without precedent in my country and I am proud that it achieved my goal of no conflict arising from the result of the election.

Some may think it is ironic that perhaps my proudest achievement was not winning the 2015 Presidential Election. By being the first elected Nigerian leader to willingly hand over power via the ballot box, to the opposition party, without contesting the election outcome, I proved to the ordinary man or woman in the country that I was his or her equal.

That his or her vote was equal to mine, and that democracy is the ‘Government by the will of the people’, and Nigeria, and indeed Africa is ripe for democracy.

It is my sincerest wish that democracy continues to be consolidated in the continent of Africa and it will even get better.

For it has always been my consistent desire to help consolidate peace and cultivate democracy in Nigeria and across the Continent.

In fact, it was the key foreign policy objective of my Administration when we were able to help broker peace and restore democracy in Niger, Mali, Guinea Bissau and Cote d’Ivoire.

- In Niger –The first challenge that confronted ECOWAS when I was Chairman in 2010 was the military intervention there. We were able to resolve it through sheer determination and prudent

consultations which paved the way for the country's return to constitutional rule and democracy.

- In Mali – As the Co-mediator of the effort to return the nation to democracy after a surprising military take-over, I was the only sitting President to visit Mali and meet all the stakeholders in the early and difficult times of the crisis.

I ensured that Nigeria played the leading role in all the negotiations coordinated by ECOWAS. Our efforts produced a political timetable for the holding of democratic elections. I was happy that our work led to the historic Peace and Reconciliation Agreement signed in Bamako on 15th May, 2015, which I was privileged to witness.

- In Guinea Bissau, a nation known for its long history of political crises. As leaders of ECOWAS then, we worked hard to bring about peace by building international consensus around a transition arrangement. This led to the full restoration of constitutional order in the country. After leading the negotiations that produced an interim government, Nigeria provided both financial and logistic support, making it possible for a successful election to hold. The process produced a democratic government that is currently running the country.
- In Cote d'Ivoire, in 2010, ECOWAS, under my leadership, demonstrated its commitment to enduring democracy, by standing firm behind the winner of the Presidential elections. The winner H.E. Alassane Ouattara, assumed his rightful place as President, and went ahead to provide quality leadership not only to his country, but also to ECOWAS as its Chairman.

As the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and a key actor in ECOWAS, we were also able to encourage peaceful elections in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Togo.

And today, the focus of my energies is to uphold democratic principles, promote peaceful political transitions and support citizen entrepreneurship and intra-Africa trade. These are precisely the objectives of the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation.

We will achieve this by working with African Governments, the private sector, civil society and other friends of Africa to galvanize action towards improving our societies and making a change in the lives of the ordinary people in our various countries.

We will work for good governance by promoting credible and transparent elections, as well as peaceful power transfers. I have no doubt that this is the basic requirement we need for strengthening our institutions and enthroning stability.

Our interest in youth and women entrepreneurship is driven by the urgent need to create jobs for Africa's teeming young population. To this end my Administration championed various initiatives and programmes, including the "Youth Enterprises with Innovation (YouWin), which encouraged young people to go into business, and the "Nagropreneur" programme, which encouraged them to go into mechanized agriculture.

Beyond job creation, Nigeria like other developing countries, faced the challenges of corruption, which is a stumbling block to the development of nations.

I think it is important to let you know my administration took many steps to curtail this scourge, in the areas of Finance, agriculture and petroleum.

To take just one example, we drastically reduced corruption in the agricultural sector with the help of a simple mobile phone.

We achieved this by providing an e-wallet to farmers which grew the percentage of registered farmers receiving subsidy from 11% to 94%. And in the process we were also able to save billions of naira in fertiliser subsidies.

Through our Agricultural Transformation Agenda, we greatly boosted food production and saved almost a trillion naira on food imports.

This one initiative had the benefits of improving food security, creating more jobs and reducing inflation to its lowest levels in over 5 years.

Our ambition was to sanitize the corruption in petroleum subsidies by completely deregulating the sector. However, our efforts were frustrated by unhealthy political resistance.

Consolidating democracy and the effective war against graft should be the collective responsibility of all citizens. I would like to emphasize my ongoing commitment to good governance, effective stewardship and transparency.

For Nigeria to further develop and progress we need peace, freedom and unity.

These values need to be deeply, strongly and irreversibly entrenched in Nigeria for all time.

For this to happen, it is imperative that both the Executive and the Legislative arms of Government institute a Bill of Rights.

A Bill of Rights that will end discrimination and tribalism, and promote equality, enabling everyone to work towards the common goal for the development of the nation.

A Bill of Rights which like the British Magna Carta, some 800 years ago, enshrined the principle of habeas corpus so that no person is deprived of his liberty without a trial of his peers.

A Bill of Rights, like that introduced by America's Founding Fathers, which stated "the people shall not be deprived or abridged of their right to speak, to write, or to publish their sentiments; and the freedom of the press, as one of the great bulwarks of liberty, shall be inviolable."

There is a phrase from Cicero going back to Ancient Rome, "Civis Romanus sum." Meaning, "I am a Roman citizen."

But it meant much more than that.

It meant that every Roman was entitled to all of the rights and protections of a citizen in Rome. It didn't matter if you were rich or poor or even a prisoner, you were still a citizen of Rome and protected by the state.

Wouldn't it be good for us to aspire to a Nigeria where we too could apply that same principle "CivisNigerianussum"?

Each of us could say, "I am a citizen of Nigeria!"

We would be able to look beyond where each of us comes from, and look past our tribal origins.

We would be able to evaluate each other on our merits, rather than our religion, or region.

We would be free to think or do as we wished, as long as we observed the laws of the land, without fear that the land would withhold our rights under the law.

What would it mean to be able to declare "I am a Nigerian citizen"?

You would be judged on your own merits, not your tribe.

You would have access to education that can help you succeed on whatever path you choose.

You would be part of a proud culture, one that others want to invest in.

You would be safe in knowing that society judges you by your successes and failures, rather than your place of origin.

You would be equal before the law and your protection is enshrined in the laws of the country.

You would be an asset and a valued member of your country; one who is worth investing in; who can return that investment tenfold within your lifetime.

Ultimately, it means that you would be an ambassador for Nigeria, and you would be able to proudly go around this world and say, "I am a citizen of Nigeria."

Isn't it true that we are all citizens of a proud Nigeria?

Home to great civilizations, such as the NOK and Igbo Uku, which date back over 4,000 years, we are one of the oldest cultures in the world.

We are a civilization that had faced challenges, fought wars, and reformed our systems; we have always prevailed through difficult times.

We are a civilization that now stands at a crossroads a key time when we must make a decision to move forward or go back.

It is my belief, that

No matter what location,

No matter what faction,

No matter what tribe,

Each one of us can come together as citizens of the future Nigeria.

It was the American Green Party politician Ralph Nader who said, "There can be no daily democracy, without daily citizenship."

The first transformation... must be ... a shift in our mindset.

We have to make the decision to make the rights of our people our priority when making government and investment decisions.

Rather than spending money on resources that will run out, we should be investing it in people who are the key constant elements in the socio-economic transformation of society.

Nigeria is projected to have a population that will surpass that of the United States of America by the year 2050. But if we have not invested in our people, then we will not be ready to manage.

Our money must go towards providing education for all, because we know that once our citizens are educated, they have futures.

Those futures lead to safer cities, stable economies, and more businesses. When a young person does not have access to education, their future is jeopardized and statistics show that they may be prone to antisocial and criminal activities.

I am proud of the fact that my Administration established a Federal University in every one of the 12 States that did not previously have them. Now, for the first time in our country's history, every state has a university established by the Federal Government.

Despite it not being the responsibility of the Federal Government to develop primary and secondary schools, we built hundreds of these schools across Nigeria.

Yet we need to build on these achievements by changing our mindset to investing in the resources above the ground, rather than below the ground.

Once we invest in our citizens, it will be our time to confidently enter the international stage. Each one of us will be able to go to any nation and proudly proclaim: I am a citizen of Nigeria."

When we have a good mindset, we must also strive for equality.

No investment in our people is going to pay off if we are unequal.

One area some of the international community disagreed with me, was that while I was in office, I signed into law a bill that discriminates against a segment of our population.

This private member bill was put forward in the context of polls that showed 98% of Nigerians did not think same sex marriage should be accepted by our society. This was the highest percentage of any country surveyed.

The bill was passed by 100% of my country's National Assembly. Therefore, as a democratic leader with deep respect for the Rule of Law, I had to put my seal of approval on it.

However, in the light of deepening debates for all Nigerians and other citizens of the world to be treated equally and without discrimination, and with the clear knowledge that the issue of sexual orientation is still evolving, the nation may, at the appropriate time, revisit the law.

When it comes to equality, we must all have the same rights as Nigerian citizens.

Former US Congressman Charles Rangel noticed the same thing when talking about America, he said "Full participation in government and society has been a basic right of the country symbolizing the full citizenship and equal protection of all."

Equality will promote meritocracy, growth and security. Tribalism, regionalism and religious intolerance should never be acceptable in Nigeria.

Within the Nigerian Federation, anyone, regardless of their home state should be treated equally and have full protection under Federal Law.

That is the only way that all Nigerians can be at home in any part of the country and proudly say "I am a Nigerian Citizen."

That is the only way we can eradicate tribalism, regionalism and religious intolerance before they destroy our beloved Nigeria.

The constitution recognizes anyone born in Nigeria by Nigerian parents as a citizen. We must go the next step and accept all Nigerians residing in any part of the country as equal citizens.

Our new Bill of Rights must therefore amend our constitution to criminalise discrimination of Nigerian citizens residing in any part of the country based on their place of origin.

Indigenes and residents must pay the same amount for school fees and social services all over the county.

I ask the same question that Eric P. Liu asks, "The next time someone uses denial of citizenship as a weapon or brandishes the special status conferred upon him by the accident of birth, ask him this: What have you done lately to earn it?"

Every Nigerian must feel at home in any part of Nigeria. It is the only way that each of us will be able to say, "Civis Nigerianus Sum."

As our country increases its equality, its cultural value will increase too.

When we increase the cultural value of Nigeria and show it to the world, not only will people spend their business dollars in our country, but their vacation dollars too.

You have to buy into the culture of a country before you decide to visit or invest.

It will become a self-fulfilling prophecy for our beloved nation.

As we invest in the equality of our people and strive to make ourselves more equal, the world will take notice.

As our image rises in the eyes of others, we will become even prouder of our national culture. This will repeat and repeat in a positive feedback loop where both parts feed each other and grow as a result.

Before I conclude, let me ask you this:

Which Nigeria do we as citizens want?

An equal or unequal Nigeria?

An educated or uneducated Nigeria?

One Nigeria or many Nigerias?

We all know the answers to these questions hence my call for a Bill of Rights, based on our shared vision for a future Nigeria which is...

A Nigeria where you are judged on your merits and not your origins;

A Nigeria where you can get the education you want and the future you choose;

A Nigeria whose government serves the people and is not above the law;

A Nigeria whose government invests in its resources above the ground and not just the resources below;

A place where we all work together, rather than allow ourselves to be divided by tribalism or prejudice;

Nothing better sums up this vision for Nigeria than our national anthem, which sounds as good in prose as it does in song:

“Arise, O compatriots

Nigeria's call obey

To serve our fatherland

With love and strength and faith

The labour of our heroes past

Shall never be in vain

To serve with heart and might

One nation bound in freedom

Peace and unity.”

I will leave you with this: I am a patriot.

I am so very proud of my country.

And I believe it is only right and proper for me, and every Nigerian to be able to proudly proclaim, in our villages, in our towns, in our cities, in our country and anywhere in the world:

“Civis Nigerianus Sum”

I AM A CITIZEN OF NIGERIA