**NIGERIA NEEDS NOW THE COURAGE TO**

**DISSOLVE PEACEFULLY**

PART TWO

In summary, as these words are being written in late February 2024, Nigeria’s economy has collapsed, Nigeria’s security has collapsed, Nigerians are living a life of wrenching poverty and hunger, a life of frightful insecurity and chaos. Important roads have dilapidated for years. Electricity supply has been fizzling out for years. For decades, businesses have been failing or fleeing to other countries. Nigeria’s unemployment rate has, for decades, been among the highest in the world. For decades, the quality of education has been falling seriously in all parts of Nigeria. For decades, thousands of educated Nigerian youths have been fleeing annually to countries around the world, and those of them who remain in Nigeria have been facing fearful poverty and deprivation and hopelessness, and the incidence of suicide has been increasing among them. Though Nigeria is one of the largest producers of petroleum in the world, the price of gasoline has been rising steadily in Nigeria for years; in the past nine months it has jumped, at N700 per litter, beyond the reach of most Nigerians.

Important holders of knowledge of the economy (such as a former Governor of the Nigerian Central Bank, C. Soludo, the new Minister of Finance, Wale Edun, the new National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu, and others) are telling the world that the Nigerian economy had collapsed before President Tinubu took over from President Buhari – that Tinubu inherited a ‘bankrupt country’. Therefore, the value of the Nigerian currency, the Naira, standing at 465 to the US Dollar by June 2023, now stands at 2,005 to the US Dollar and is still falling, causing inflation to skyrocket to 35.41% , and pushing the price of food staples beyond the reach of most citizens (for instance a bag of rice now at 80,000 Naira, up from 35,000 Naira in June 2023). Terrible hunger grips the lives of most Nigerians. Families are keeping their children away from schools because they cannot feed the children before sending them to school, and because they fear that the children might be kidnapped or killed on the way to or from school. A former Nigerian Senator, Senator Shehu Sani from the North, recently offered the information that 10,000 schools have closed down in the North because of the insecurity.

An international group (International Civil Society Organization) says that in the first eight months of the Tinubu presidency, the Fulani have killed 2,423 people and kidnapped 1,872. On the floor of the Nigerian National Assembly, legislators are bursting into tears as they recount the economic suffering and the drastic insecurity of the people of their constituencies, and many legislators are denouncing Nigeria’s presidential system and calling for its abolition. Many influential Nigerians are publicly advising ordinary Nigerians to buy guns for self-defense.

In all regions of Nigeria, huge numbers of hungry people are protesting in the streets, crying of hunger, condemning President Tinubu and calling for the dissolution of Nigeria. The students of Nigeria’s universities, Nigeria’s powerful labor unions, and others, are announcing imminent strikes and mass protests. The most eminent Fulani leaders and traditional rulers of the North, who never once raised a voice against Buhari’s sponsorship of Fulani and terrorist atrocities all over Nigeria for eight years, who never said a word against Buhari’s abominable reign of corruption, are now issuing public statements redolent with criticisms of Tinubu, and warnings and threats of imminent disaster and doom for the president, the government and the country. Many are threatening that a military take-over of the Nigerian government is imminent. Some Nigerian women are going stark naked on street protests, and some pundits are warning that, according to the cultures of many Nigerian peoples, protests by naked adult women in the streets can invite terrible consequences on Nigeria. Even small children in their elementary schools are adding their tiny but strident voices to the swelling storm of protests. Many respected elders in different parts of Nigeria are publicly and responsibly proposing that Nigeria should be dissolved now in the interest of all the peoples and citizens of Nigeria.

Spokespersons for the Yoruba people, the Igbo people, and now surprisingly the Hausa people - the three largest nationalities in Nigeria - want self-determination for their respective nations and peaceful separation from Nigeria. The Hausa used to be regarded as subservient to the Fulani, but now the Hausa people have woken up – and are therefore being killed and brutalized by the Fulani, and are creditably defending their homeland and people. The Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa together account for about 160 million in population, out of Nigeria’s total population of nearly 220 million.

Naturally, most people on the protest trail today see President Tinubu as the cause of all their economic woes; but they are mostly wrong. The collapse of the Nigerian economy today is the end outcome of six decades of perpetual and truculent twisting, distortion, corruption and degradation of Nigeria’s economic and political life. The pathetic incompetence and brutal corruption of the recent eight years under President Buhari finally completed the killing of the Nigerian economy.

President Tinubu believes he can heal the Nigerian economy. But, in spite of his confidence, his chances of success in that venture are, realistically - and sadly- close to zero. Healing is for the sick, not for the dead.

And even if President Tinubu, by dint of resoluteness, and with the help of the capable assistants whom he has called up, succeeds in healing Nigeria’s economy to an extent, Nigeria’s economy will certainly return to its downward trajectory after him. The forces pushing Nigeria downwards cannot push in any other direction than downwards. There is no other country in the world about whom Nigeria’s kind of story can be told – the story of a country that earned for many years some of the largest revenues in the world from petroleum (or any other resource), and that yet ended up as the number one home of ‘extreme poverty’ in the world. Trying to lift up Nigeria sustainably is a futile venture.

After publicly admitting that some of Nigeria’s economic problems defy solution, President Tinubu took courageous action by inviting all the State Governors to work with him, and he and they together began to consider some economic relief measures, the establishment of State Police, and even a ‘restructuring’ agenda. But among most Nigerians, these actions are regarded as too little too late – and even as measures being hurriedly promoted by the politicians to enable them to hold on to their positions in Nigerian politics and their stakes in the Nigerian corruption system. Restructuring, though many prominent citizens have been saying much about it, cannot stop the Fulani from spreading out to kill, destroy and kidnap in any part of Nigeria, since they will still be Nigerian citizens. State Police is a good step, but its establishment requires a prolonged process of constitutional amendment. Altogether, the stark truth about Nigeria today is that Nigeria has come to an end.

The man who bears the ultimate responsibility for the next steps for Nigeria beyond this point is President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. He can choose to go maneuvering, wheeling and dealing, on and on, until Nigeria explodes in rivers of blood. That is what the most powerful leader of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, did in 1989 -90 when Yugoslavia as one country had obviously come to an end. Milosevic determined to continue to keep Yugoslavia together at all costs and by all means, and he did so until massive rivers of blood flowed and countless thousands of people perished, until the truth finally asserted itself that Yugoslavia needed to dissolve, until Yugoslavia dissolved into eight different countries – until Milosevic himself ended up before an International Criminal Tribunal charged with serious crimes against humanity, and until he died a lonely and wretched death in the tribunal’s prison custody. But, in contrast, President Tinubu can do as Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the Soviet Union 1985-91, did in 1990 when the great Soviet Union had obviously come to an end. Gorbachev humbly surrendered to the truth that the end had come for the Soviet Union, and he was therefore able to shepherd his country into a peaceful dissolution, thereby preempting a massive and devastating war that would probably have consumed millions of lives.

While considering his options, President Tinubu needs to be aware of the following important fact – that separation of a people from a country of diverse peoples, or the dissolution of a country of diverse peoples into new smaller countries, if accomplished peacefully, is not a tragedy at all. He needs to browse the histories of some of the countries that separated peacefully, and he will find stories of subsequent prosperity in all cases – Belgium which separated from Holland in 1830; Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Iceland which separated at different times over a long time; the Republic of Ireland which separated from Britain in 1921; Singapore which separated from Malaysia in 1965; the 14 countries which arose from the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991; the Czech and Slovak Republics which separated in 1993; and East Timor which separated from Indonesia in 2002.

President Tinubu also needs to note that countries which separate violently tend to be dogged by violence afterwards – as in the case of Pakistan which separated in a storm of violence from India in 1947; South Sudan which separated after years of violence from Sudan in 2011; and some of the eight countries that resulted from the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia.

What can a peacefully negotiated departure of any nation that seeks to separate from Nigeria, or a peacefully negotiated dissolution of Nigeria, give to humanity? Nigeria’s peoples are now trapped in a Nigerian space that is churning in an abominable curse of utter darkness, unspeakable poverty, hunger, hatred, hostility, mass murders, fear and death. The hatred and hostility are so deep that, even now, some people in Northern Nigeria, in the midst of the killings and kidnapping all over Nigeria, and in the midst of the mass cries of hunger, are blockading the northern entry to the Jebba Bridge on the River Niger and turning back food trucks, in order to stop even the small amount of food that is coming to Southern Nigeria (especially to Southwestern Nigeria), avowedly in order to “starve out” whole peoples in Southern Nigeria. A peacefully negotiated parting of ways from this home of horrors can reduce or even eliminate fear, hatred and hostility, and can ultimately result in mutual respect, peaceful borders, friendly and mutually helpful neighbors, general progress, prosperity and happiness, for all.

In the end, the choice belongs to President Tinubu. He stands to earn historic honor and fame (like Gorbachev) or historic condemnation, dishonor and infamy (like Milosevic). His official assistants are doing nothing wrong by advising him to hold on and keep trying; it is understandable that they see that as their loyal duty to him. But it is he that must take his decision. He must know that, whatever way he decides, he cannot now stop the truth from having its way in the Nigerian situation. Nigeria has reached the point of breaking up. Whether in peace or in rivers of blood, Nigeria will break up. President Tinubu cannot prevent that; it is only how Nigeria breaks up that he can influence. We who are President Tinubu’s brothers and sisters, we who love President Tinubu, must wish him, in this mightily tough situation, the best of guidance - and the best outcome – in his own interest, and in the interest of all the peoples and humans now reeling in abominable deprivation, starvation, hopelessness, hatred, hostility, and insecurity and chaos, in Nigeria.

The first and most urgent step that most Nigerians would wish from President Tinubu now is that he should carry out, immediately, his plan to allow and empower every state to establish its own Forest Guard outfit, federally authorized and properly trained and armed. This will enable farming to begin to revive everywhere, and it will begin to alleviate hunger. It will also reduce fear and hatred.

But this step touches only the surface of the deep and complex problems of Nigeria. It cannot eliminate the urge in some peoples to attack, kill, kidnap, brutalize and subjugate other peoples, or to seek to seize other peoples’ homelands, or to take actions aimed at “starving out” other peoples. It cannot drive away the foreign terrorists that have been attracted to Nigeria in recent years and that have established firm roots in parts of Northern Nigeria, and it cannot eliminate the homegrown terrorist groups. It cannot eliminate the fact that all of these organized terrorist groups have support from some foreign countries; and it cannot wish away the fact that all of these terrorist groups are poised to use maximum force to turn all of Nigeria into an Islamic country and to use Nigeria as the base for conquering West Africa as an Islamic state. It does not address the very potent fears of the peoples of the Nigerian Middle Belt and South about the intensifying dangers of religious extremism and jihadism that have established roots, and are growing, in the Sahel and in the Nigerian North.

These are huge and complex challenges that can only be addressed by allowing each nation to go on and find its own security and prosperity in a new country of its own. It is a situation demanding peaceful negotiations. Yoruba people seeking this kind of negotiation between Nigeria and the Yoruba Nation sent to President Buhari in 2022 a petition asking for such a negotiation, and they are waiting for the Nigerian Federal Government to initiate the negotiation process.

But, we repeat, the decision in this final step belongs to President Tinubu, and we wish him the best of guidance – in his own interest, in the interest of all Nigerian peoples, in the interest of all men and women and children who now belong to Nigeria, in the best interest of humanity.

It is time to disengage from Nigeria. The Nigerian experiment has not worked, is not working, and cannot work. Let us wind it up peacefully. Let our President shepherd us through the process of winding it up peacefully. We have seen enough of blood, and enough of human vileness, in Nigeria. Let us not keep seeing more and more. In particular, let us not wait until we are all engulfed in the all-consuming Armageddon that now seems to be rolling towards us in the clouds ahead of us.

I will end here with this little story. In one Yoruba Self-determination youth meeting recently, a boy stood up and said, “Of course, we can defend our land. Of course, we shall defend our land and soon chase the Fulani away. But our most important need is to separate out nation from the destructive country called Nigeria. If President Tinubu helps to get us peacefully out of Nigeria, we will erect a statue of him in our city of Lagos or Ibadan as a statement of our gratitude to him forever. And if our other politicians, our Obas and our other eminent citizens will also help in this, we shall show gratitude to them too in countless ways”. What more can anybody add to that!