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Dear Compatriots and Friends,

## MY APPEAL TO ALL NIGERIANS PARTICULARLY YOUNG NIGERIANS

Happy New Year! May all our national calamities disappear this year.

I am constrained to write this letter to all Nigerians especially young Nigerians, friends of Nigeria globally as well as our development partners because of the gravity, responsibility and implications of the collective decision Nigerians, both young and old, will be making within the next two months.

The last seven and a half years have no doubt been eventful and stressful years for many Nigerians. We have moved from frying pan to fire and from mountain top to the valley. Our leaders have done their best, but their best had turned out to be not the best for Nigeria and Nigerians at home and abroad. For most Nigerians, it was hell on earth.

Those of us who are alive should thank God for His mercies, brace ourselves for the remaining few months of this administration and pray and work very hard for an immediate better future – future of liberation, restoration and great hope and expectation.

We have had campaigners going up and down the country feeding us with what they mean and what they do not mean, what they understand and what they do not fully understand, what is possible and what is not possible, what is realistic and what is unrealistic, what is true and what is untrue. I believe that we need not be confused nor be gullible. Let us be cautious, not to be fooled again.

I have interacted with the major contestants and I find it interesting that, in one form or the other, each of them claims to want to do what I did during my Presidency and to take Nigeria back to where it was at the height of my Presidency and immediately after. I was pained that most of them do not realise that the Nigeria of today had been dragged down well below Nigeria of the beginning of my Presidency in June 1999. Although at that time, Nigeria was in very bad shape and was tottering on the verge of collapse and break-up. Even then, Nigeria was not faced with the level of pervasive and mind-numbing insecurity, rudderless leadership, buoyed by mismanagement of diversity and pervasive corruption, bad economic policies resulting in extremes of poverty and massive unemployment and galloping inflation.

For these reasons, I kept pointing out to them that the instruments used in 1999 to 2007 and methodology used will grossly be inadequate for the perilous situation we now find ourselves.

Without prejudice but with greatest respect to each individual with utmost regard for the best for Nigeria and all Nigerians and from my personal experience, all the major contestants claim to be my mentees. I will not deny such positions since I have worked with all of them directly and indirectly in government.

I have come to realise a number of factors in character, attributes and attitude that are necessary in the job of directing the affairs of Nigeria successfully and at a time like this. These characteristics or attributes are many but let us be mindful of some key ones together.

From interaction and experience, and as mentees as most of them claim, I will, without prejudice, fear or ill-will, make bold to say that there are four major factors to watch out for in a leader you will consider to hoist on yourself and on the rest of Nigerians in the coming election and they are what I call TVCP: Track record of ability and performance; Vision that is authentic, honest and realistic; Character and attributes of a lady and a gentleman who are children of God and obedient to God; and Physical and mental capability with soundness of mind as it is a very taxing and tasking assignment at the best of times and more so it is at the most difficult time that we are.

Let me say straight away that '*Emi Lokan*' (My turn) and 'I have paid my dues' are one and the same thing and are wrong attitude and mentality for the leadership of Nigeria now. They cannot form the new pedestal to reinvent and to invest in a new Nigeria based on an All-Nigeria Government for the liberation and restoration of Nigeria. Such a government must have representation from all sectors of our national life – public, private, civil society, professional, labour, employers, and the diaspora. The solution should be in 'we' and 'us' and not in 'me' and 'I'.

Mind you, I reiterate that no human being is an angel let alone a Messiah, but there are elements of these attributes and on comparative basis and by measure of what we know of, and what some of us have experienced from the front-runners, we must assess judiciously and choose wisely. If anybody claims he or she has anything to the contrary, it will be up to him or her to prove to us.

I pray not to be proved right again in the bad sense but rather to be proved right in the positive and glorious sense of Nigeria becoming what God had created it to be – a land of plenty and prosperity united for common purpose of inclusive society, common security, shared prosperity, equity, egalitarianism, justice, and equal stake in the Project Nigeria with leadership role of Nigeria for the black race and fair share of global division of labour.

One ridiculous point that has been touted to justify unjustifiable appointments and selections is 'competence'. In truth and in reality, genuine competence

can be found in any region or section of Nigeria through track record and performance if only people will honestly and sincerely look hard for people with such attainment and attribute. Most of us in good conscience can testify to competence when we see any anywhere. What is masqueraded as 'competence' is self-interest and nepotism.

We have a unique opportunity to correct ourselves by ourselves for the good of ourselves. Those who are preaching division, segregation, separation, and want to use diversity for their own self and selfish interest are enemies of the nation, no matter what else they may disguisedly profess or proclaim.

### **The Challenge Is For Nigerian Youth:**

If we fall prey again, we will have ourselves to blame and no one can say how many more knocks Nigeria can take before it tips over. To be forewarned is to be fore-armed. Future is not emotion. I challenge the youth to arise. Let nobody pull wool over your eyes to divide you and/or segregate you to make you underlings. Nigerian youth, wherever they come from, North or South, East or West need education which is now denied to over 20 million children; Nigerian youth also need skills, empowerment, employment, reasonably good living conditions, welfare and well-being.

My dear young men and women, you must come together and bring about a truly meaningful change in your lives. If you fail, you have no one else to blame. Your present and future are in your hands to make or to mar. The future of Nigeria is in the same manner in your hands and literally so. If for any reason you fail to redeem yourself and your country, you will have lost the opportunity for good and you will have no one to blame but yourselves and posterity will not forgive you. Get up, get together, get going and get us to where we should be. And you, the youth, it is your time and your turn. '*Eyin Lokan*' (Your turn).

The power to change is in your hands. Your future, my future, the future of grandchildren and great grandchildren is in your hands. Politics and elections are numbers game. You have the numbers, get up, stand up and make your numbers count.

Let me say it again, loud and clear, Nigeria has no business with insecurity, poverty, insurgency, banditry, unemployment, hunger, debt, division and disunity. We are in these situations because advertently or inadvertently, our leaders have made the choices. They have done the best they could do. Let them take their rest deservedly or not and let them enjoy their retirement as Septuagenarians or older.

I became Head of State at 39 and at 42, I had retired into the farm. When it was considered necessary, I was drafted back into active political life after

twenty years of interregnum. I came back at 62 and by 70, I was on my way out. Others like General Gowon and Enahoro became national leaders at 33 and 27 respectively and General Gowon at the helms of leadership of Nigeria at the highest level. The vigour, energy, agility, dynamism and outreach that the job of leadership of Nigeria requires at the very top may not be provided as a septuagenarian or older. I know that from personal experience. And it is glaring out of our current experiences. Otherwise, we will be fed with, "The President says" and we will neither see nor hear him directly as we should. Yes, for some, age and physical and mental disposition are not in tandem. But where and when they are with obvious evidence, they must be taken into account for purpose of reality. And yet it is a job in our present situation where the team leader or captain of the team should be up and doing, outgoing inside and outside and speaking to the nation on almost daily basis visibly and as much as possible interactively and meeting his colleagues all over the world on behalf of Nigeria. Youth of Nigeria, your time has come, and it is now and please grasp it. If not now, it will be never. I appeal to you to turn the tide on its head and march forward chanting 'Awa Lokan' (Our turn) not with a sense of entitlement, but with a demonstrable ideological commitment to unity and transformation of Nigeria.

### **Leave The Past, Face The Future:**

Can we let the past go? I appeal to the young Nigerians to stop inheriting other people's prejudices and enemies. Make your own friends and stop inheriting your father's enemies.

Let's stop criminalizing and demonizing one another on the basis of the civil war on which we are all wrong. And let's praise and thank God for preserving the oneness of Nigeria. The Scripture says that if God would take account of all our wrongdoings, nobody would be able to stand before Him. While not suffering from amnesia, let us stop still fighting and reacting to the civil war in our hearts, minds, heads and our attitude acrimoniously. Let's stop living on our different wrongs or mistakes of the past: treasonable felony, Tiv riot and its handling, first military coup and its aftermath, second military coup, *araba*, pogrom and the civil war, all in the 1960s. And more recently OPC, Egbesu, MASSOB, IPOB, Boko Haram and banditry. No region can claim to be innocent or to be saintly. And no justification will suffice. In our respective individual or regional positions, we have done right and we have done wrong. It is therefore not right for any of us to be sanctimonious to see ourselves as saints and the rest as devils incarnate.

Just let us agree to move forward together in mutual forgiveness, one accord, inclusive society, equality and equity. Together and without bias and discrimination, fear or favour, we can have Nigeria of one nation in diversity, in truth and in practice. Let us honour, cherish, respect and even celebrate our diversity which is the basis of our potential greatness and strength. If we will



only continue to harp on wrongs done by each of us individually or collectively, we will never be able to stand together. If we will continue with wide brush to paint a national or sub-national group as bad and never to be trusted with leadership because of past error or mistakes that some of them were responsible for and treat their offspring as inheritors, it will amount to great injustice that will surely lead to no peace, no security and no stability for development and progress.

First, no group is faultless; second, for the greatness of the whole, we need one another as constituents of the whole; third, we cannot be talking and working for Africa's integration and for Nigeria's disintegration at the same time. Why for instance should I be stigmatized or despised because of my place of origin, place of birth or where I come from? Where I was born, by whom I was born and when I was born were not choices made by me. They were choices and prerogatives of God. Any antagonism against me on that basis is unfair and is tantamount to fighting against God, the Creator. Such derogatory attitude and mindset do not build any human institution let alone a nation. While not forgetting the past, let us put the past behind us for it not to continue to mar our present and our future and that of the coming generation. We must rise above primordial animalistic instincts and behaviour. Yes, we are human and higher than animals in the wild. Let us develop national ethos and national characteristics that can take us collectively to the promised.

My dear young men and women, let me assure you that there are only two tribes of people in Nigeria a tribe of good people and a tribe of bad people. You are either a good Nigerian of Igbo extraction, Kanuri extraction, etc, or a bad Nigerian of Yoruba extraction, Ijaw extraction etc.

I will at this juncture want to commend the politicians as they have generally been reasonably civil in their campaigns without making politics as a call to war against opponents. Genuine and fair competition conveys greater legitimacy in any political rivalry or competition. A situation where people in authority and power assume such positions through foul and despicable means and continue to espouse and act in ways that only engender conflict or war by subverting legitimacy of power and authority does not augur well for the polity and as such, the moral foundation of the government and the society will be terribly weakened.

May God help, save, protect and sustain Nigeria for all Nigerians, for Africa and for the human race. We can only continue to play politics of ethnicity, religion, region and money bags at the peril of our country and to self-destruction. We need selfless, courageous, honest, patriotic, in short, outstanding leadership with character and fear of God beyond what we have had in recent past.

None of the contestants is a saint but when one compares their character, antecedent, their understanding, knowledge, discipline and vitality that they can bring to bear and the great efforts required to stay focused on the job particularly looking at where the country is today and with the experience on the job that I personally had, Peter Obi as a mentee has an edge. Others like all of us have what they can contribute to the new dispensation to liberation, restoration and salvaging of Nigeria collectively. One other important point to make about Peter is that he is a needle with thread attached to it from North and South and he may not get lost. In other words, he has people who can pull his ears, if and when necessary. Needless to say that he has a young and able running mate with clean track record of achievement both in public and private life.


In conclusion, I want to bring to our remembrance part of the great speech that Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa made on October 7, 1960, on the occasion of Nigeria being admitted as the 99<sup>th</sup> member of the United Nations:

"Cooperation is for each man to be true to his religious belief and to reaffirm the basic principles of his particular creed. It may be that, when we hear the world crying out for peace, we may receive the inspiration to deal with these intractable problems and be able to really devote all our resources to the advancement of mankind by applying those eternal truths which will inevitably persist long after we ourselves are utterly forgotten".

The Tafawa Balewas are gone. But the eternal truths inevitably remain and persist that cooperation, friendship, justice, equity, love and fear of God which are hallmarks of the three religions practised in this country are the basis of our full and fulfilled lives and living as Nigerians. In faith as Nigerians, we must pray and relate with God as it depends on Him and at the same time, in faith also we must work as it depends on us. Then we will win.

May God continue to help us individually and collectively.

Yours ever,

  
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