

## Nigeria National Conference and Its Impact on Unity and Diversity in Nigeria

Udeuhele, Godwin Ikechukwu

Department of Political Science

Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

### Abstract

*The search for a viable, stable and justiciable polity in Nigeria has continued with the inauguration of a National Dialogue by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan to a new course for the future of the nation. The Dialogue is at variance with unrelenting calls by opposition parties, social and human rights advocates, sectional/ethnic groups for a sovereign national conference to address the national question bordering on systemic contradictions, distortions, marginalization and structural violence. Nonetheless, the “imposed” National Dialogue has generated dilemmas for the opposition and the Nigerian public alike. The problematic, therefore, are: One, does the Dialogue have the capacity, competence, and legitimacy to address the fundamental national questions including agitations for justiciable fiscal federalism, systemic imbalance, self-determination, resource control, institutional decay, minority marginalization and power sharing? Two, can the Dialogue fundamentally re-invent and strengthen the nation’s political, future by consolidating the unity of the country or will it rather undermine it? Three, and flowing from the latter concern, is the apprehension that considering the idiosyncratic nature, pedigree and seemingly emerging power configuration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan coupled with the sovereign limitations of the Dialogue will the report of the conference be adopted by the National Assembly as a legal instrument capable of safeguarding unity in diversity in Nigeria in the face of confronting threats to unity and corporate existence of Nigeria? Four, will the report of the Dialogue not suffer uncertainty and become moribund like such previous exercises as the Oputa Panel on human rights abuses and the Nigeria Political Reform Conference of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration? Lastly, and more germane, what are the fears of government in convoking a sovereign conference and allied to this, why the executive pronouncement that the issue of Nigeria unity shall be “a no go area”? The study is saddled with the challenge of addressing these problem, and in addition, examine the impact of the National conference/dialogue on unity in diversity in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** *National conference; contradictions; structural violence unity and diversity, resource control; ethnicity; systemic contradictions, structural violence*

## **Introduction**

Achieving a united and stable political system is still a serious challenge to the Nigerian state. As a divided society with multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, the task of nation – building and forging of a system perceived by the varied nationalities as justiciable has been difficult. The system has been confronted with complaints of insecurity emanating largely today from the clandestine machinations and terroristic insurgency of Boko Haram, marginalization, inequitable distribution of resources and power, and official injustice. Consequently, various sub-nationalities, ethno religious groups, opposition parties and other fringe interests have since the inception of the fledgling democracy in 1999 unrelentingly been calling for the convocation of a sovereign national conference(SNC) to address these sectional grievances.

Inadvertently, SNC has since the late 1980s become an emerging tradition of instituting political reforms and constitutional re-engineering, particularly in the emerging democracies of Africa and former communist Eastern Europe. The Nigerian state, since the annulment of June 12 presidential election presumably won by late Chief MKO Abiola, has been operating under sustained political strains and stresses, and thereby necessitating unrelenting agitations for a sovereign national conference to address the lingering crises among the varied ethno-religious groups. President Olusegun Obasanjo in a seeming response to these calls inaugurated a National Political Reforms Conference (NPRC) as a way of addressing the lingering national questions. It is unfortunate however that the outcome of that reform conference failed to yield the desired dividends as anticipated by generality of the Nigerian populace, hence the persistent and ever prevailing threats to peace and unity in different parts of the country.

From the security challenges, kidnappings and abductions, oil bunkering and pipeline vandalizing activities of ethnic militants then spearheaded by the Niger Delta Militia groups operating in the creeks; and several other manifestations, of ethnic jingoism and chauvinism in various parts of the country the situation has today turned into Boko Haram terrorism, which seemingly has destroyed more lives and property than the Nigerian civil war itself and today constitute the single most problematic to peace, unity and development of Nigeria. It is with recourse to the above and other recurring political, social, religious and allied contradictions inherent in the Nigeria project and the need to systemically resolve them that necessitated the political audacity of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in his broadcast to the Nation on her 53<sup>rd</sup> independence anniversary on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2013, to announce his administration's commitment to convene a National conference/dialogue to enable the Nigerian people to renegotiate the Nigeria project without jeopardizing her unity.

The study is, therefore, concerned with the challenge, of examining the viability of the conference in providing acceptable and durable solutions to the enduring national problems, particularly considering the controversies surrounding its legal status and the doubts about the acceptance of its outcomes by opposition parties, varied interest groups, minorities, and government itself. In addressing these concerns, the paper is structured into six sections. The first is the introduction, and the second part examines the concept, typology and values of a national conference. The third section objectively articulates the issues of national question that engender agitations for a (sovereign) national dialogue/conference and also interrogates reasons for the leadership's aversion for a sovereign national conference. The fourth section deals with the

national conference inaugurated by President Goodluck Jonathan with a stated agenda for the Presidential Advisory Committee. Section five examines the outcomes of the deliberations of the national conference and further assesses its impact on unity and diversity, stability and viability of the Nigerian project, while section six provides recommendations and the concluding remarks.

### **Concept, Typology and Values of National Conference**

Ordinarily, conference implies a formal assemblage of people for consultation and deliberations on specific issues<sup>^</sup> which could border on common interests. Such interests could be civil, communal, national, global or professional. In such conferences, delegates or conferees air their views and opinions on the problematic at stake. Conference and convention are synonyms, implying the same intentions. Of major concern to this study is national conference. National conference denotes a formal congregation of interest groups, including sub nationalities and sectional representations in a polity.

According to the Final Report of the Nigeria National Conference (2014:2);

*A National Conference is described as a formal platform for dialogue by constituent units of the nation convened by the national government of a country to discuss issues or problems that inhibit national progress or challenge national cohesion. A National Conference is expected to proffer appropriate solutions that will assist in moving the nation forward.*

The Report further outlines that, where the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference is unlikely; its proponents have advocated a Conference of Ethnic Nationalities particularly in an ethnically plural society. Representatives of the ethnic nationalities are convened on a common platform to discuss and make recommendations to Government about their common problems in order to achieve higher levels of mutual trust, understanding and integration in nation-building.

National conferences can be gingered by the imperatives of engineering a new constitution or as a way of forging common solutions to perceived national problems, particularly in divided societies such as Nigeria, where insecurity, religious fanaticism, ethnic jingoism and other sectional cleavages have become constraints to the emergence of a sense of nationalism and national integration.

Omitoogun and Otite in Babawale (2003: 3) specify two broad types of national conference, namely;

- National conference with limited autonomy, and
- National conference with sovereign powers (SNC).

***National Conference with Limited Autonomy:*** The delegates are devoid of finality in the decisions arrived at limited national conference.

Such conference is also prone to executive interference, because in the first instance, government may have selected delegates, thereby; giving room for airing the views and opinions that are pro-government, and consequently, the final report is subjected to official tinkering before approval. In another instance, the report may be absolutely jettisoned if decisions contained therein are not favourable to the establishment.

### ***National Conference with Sovereign Powers:***

This category of national conference is distinguished from the first by the affiliated concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty denotes supreme political and legal authority. In this wise, authoritative decision emanating from a sovereign authority is a supreme political order, which is not subject to any authority. "It is, therefore, considered as an absolute authority enjoying a supreme order in a state" (Fassassi, 2005: 8).

Sovereignty, according to Fassassi (2005), has an inalienable, individualized and absolute character with an order that cannot be subjected to any other order or organ resulting from any established power. Consequently, a sovereign national conference has sovereign powers in its deliberations. It sets its own agenda and has the authority to take any decisions on the issues before it. Government manipulations in the conference's decisions are limited, because the delegates of such conference are not nominated by government but in most cases by the varied interest groups of the civil society. The interest groups may include representatives of ethnic groups, political parties and associations, labour unions, students, farmers, women and religious

groups, and even that of government. The electorate can also elect the delegates. Such conference is commonly referred to as sovereign national conference (SNC).

The SNC and its decisions are superior to the executive and the legislature because of its sovereign status. The outcome of an SNC may herald a new political order, and sweep away all vestiges of the existing system. It can determine the power and survival (tenure) of the incumbent government. In a way, the ordinary national conference tends to sustain the *status quo ante* for its pro establishment status, while SNC is revolutionary and *anti-status quo ante*.

The value of national conference lies in its provision of avenues for national dialogue by the various shades of opinion in the polity over crisis issues. It avails the different contending cleavages the understanding of the national problematic, thereby making it possible for the need to forge a consensual and popular solution to the divided interests, including complaints of institutional violence by certain religious sects, ethnic groups such as the minorities, bordering on state injustice and marginalization, resource control, and domestic insecurity cum terrorism. The national question can even be on how to resolve the nation's economic crisis. In totality, a national conference is often aimed at achieving national political and economic reforms, which are meant to provide for new ways of doing things and achieving good governance and national unity.

### **Issues of the National Question and Rationale for National Conference**

Fundamental to the national question in Nigeria is the control of the Nigerian state by the external arm of capital, authoritarian liberalism and primitive accumulation. However, the ordinary Nigerian may feel alienated by such high falutin terms as above indicated. There is need therefore to drive the point home by breaking them down in a more rationally comprehensible manner as implying the following systemic problematic as espoused in the Final Report of the National Conference (2014) that;

*The various sub-nationalities and ethno-religious groups and other interests have unrelentingly been calling for the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference to address the critical issues of political reforms, constitutional re-engineering, political restructuring and agitations for resource control. There have also been complaints of marginalization, neglect and injustice.*

Thus, when reference is made to the national question with recourse to Nigeria it is taken that the emphases are on the following issues: **Resource Control**, review of the *Federal Character*, consideration of *State Police*, approval of **Local Government Autonomy**, and fashioning of **Religious Freedom** among others. The above challenges are built against the backdrop of the primary contradiction, and perhaps the anomaly, of the Nigerian state, which is its colonial evolution. According to Kolawole (2004: 74-75), “the nation did not emerge from the civil society, and hence defied the conventional social contract theory of state origin as adumbrated by the trio of Thomas Hobbes, Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, whose point of consensus is the emergence of state through the basic agreement of the civil society to live under the same polity for the purpose of law and order”.

Contrarily, the British imperialists imposed the Nigerian state. This implies that Nigeria, as a political entity, did not exist before colonial intrusion. The colonial origin of the Nigerian state has placed some dilemmas on the nation. Consequently, Kolawole (2005: 7) submits that the colonial effect relates to the fragility of the state. Accordingly, he asserts that, “the political fragility implies the weakness of the institutions of state to withstand and survive incidence of disequilibrium”. In the same vein, Suberu (2001: 1) points out that;

*The state has its peculiar and irregular characteristics. Postcolonial Nigeria, besides its alien origin, is characterized by multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic forces, arising from the arbitrary partitioning and aggregative territorialization of about 250 ethnic groups speaking about 400 languages, thereby depicting the nation as the world's linguistic crossroad.*

Other hallmarks of the nation which are detrimental to national cohesion are further examined below:

### **Inter-ethnic Contestations**

Inter-ethnic contestations over power-sharing and resource control have since independence been inflicting damaging injuries on peaceful co-existence, political stability and national integration.

Contestations for political power led to the 1967 – 1970 civil war. Forty-four years after the civil war, irredentist tendencies have not waned. Instead, sub-nationalism and primordial sentiments have taken increased tempo. To buttress the above, Williams et al (2005: 45) state that; “some Igbos under the aegis of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) is still threatening secession”. To demonstrate MASSOB’s seriousness regarding its independence agenda, the Biafran currency has been put into circulation and is actually being spent in some parts of the country and the neighbouring states along the nation’s borders, while the Biafran flag and anthem are already employed.

Other primordial groups, such as the Oodua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), Egbesu Boys, Asari Boys, Ijaw Youth Congress, and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP); Itsekiri Youths and the Niger Delta Peoples’ Volunteer Force are equally canvassing for sectional autonomy and self governance. The emergence of these ethnic groups and today worsened by Boko Haram insurgency poses the latest danger to the Nigerian federalist agenda as they employ violence and militancy against the state and its apparatuses.

### **Fiscal federalism: revenue sharing, resource control and sharing formula**

Fiscal federalism deals with how revenues are generated and distributed among the federating units in a Federation. The present situation in which the Constitution empowers the Federal Government to keep custody and determine the terms and manner of the allocation of the funds that accrue to the Federation Account is generally regarded as a negation of the principles of fiscal federalism. This imbalance has been roundly criticized as fostering dysfunctional ties which have been adversely affecting the capacities of the federating states to function effectively.

Distributive contentions relating to resource sharing have gained more intensity since the emerging democracy. The oil producing states constantly agitate for the control of their oil resources as done in a true federal practice of which the United States, Canada and Russia have been easy references. As Suberu (2001: 2) observed; “the distributive pressures have pitched the Nigerian federation and the constituent governments and segments against one other in a relentless struggle for the nation’s abundant financial resources and distributive largesse”. In the Nigerian context therefore, it is crystal clear that the struggle for resource control has equally led to the emergence of sub-nationality groupings, which serve as vanguards for resource autonomy. The renewed politics of resource control and revenue sharing as been witnessed today has heightened political strains and stresses among the constituent states.

More so, **Inter-religious Contests and Rivalry** are fallouts of ethnic contestations, which have resulted in wanton destruction of lives and property. Ethno-religious conflicts have become an enduring feature of the polity. According to the Final Report of the Nigeria National Conference (2014):

*Modern nation-states tend to be pluralistic in the widest possible sense. Whilst this diversity can be a source of strength, they have been known also to fuel mutual suspicion and constituted ready fodders for the embers of conflict. In drawing a parallel for Nigeria, it is recognized that the country has over 350 ethno-cultural groupings. This multi-*

*ethnicity has been compounded by pronounced religious differences, exploited usually for political considerations by avid political classes in contexts of extreme poverty and very low educational development among the mass of the populace. Whereas Nigeria is supposed to be a secular state," one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity", the prevalence of religiosity and its related nepotism at all levels, has effectively undermined the objectivity which secularity would have ordinarily imbued in national politics. In the light of the problems of insecurity and other ethno-political tendencies, a major facet of the challenge for national cohesion lies in the state's capacity to nip in the bud tendencies towards all forms of impunities by any persons or groups. Such persons and groups have taken undue advantage of the inadequate presence of government in places like our poorly manned borders, remote rural areas, etc. Their nefarious conducts such as cross-border banditry, terrorists' attacks, smuggling, illicit trans-border trafficking in drugs and human beings, etc. have severely undermined the authority and legitimacy of the Nigerian nation-state.*

There is a positive correlation between the prospects for the realization of the ideals of national cohesion and an enlightened, educated population. The latter have the capacity to undertake a well-reasoned, rational and effective engagement with the ethos of participatory democracy. An enlightened citizenry has all it takes to maintain the critical link between the declarative purpose of government and the requisite positive action needed for their realization.

### **Complaints of Institutional Marginalization**

Marginalization has remained a major hallmark of the Nigeria state. Consequently complaints of marginalization by the respective ethnic components have enacted pressures for the struggle for the creation of new states and localities. Creating new states and local governments over the years is yet to resolve the crisis of counter-accusations of ethnic marginality. Intra-state marginalization has equally become a feature of the component states as they are also made up of ethnic and cultural diversities. Ethnic contestations, therefore, take place at all levels of governance, thus, the polity is being heated up and pressured

at all times. Agitations for redress of ethnic marginality, resource control and power sharing are, therefore, provocative strategies meant to engender systemic distributive and social justice.

Kolawole (2004: 8) therefore convincingly argues that:

*Colonial and post-colonial constitutional engineering and creation of new localities of administration, and other modalities such as federal character and zoning are yet to abate complaints of structural imbalance, marginalization in power-sharing and resource distribution, and social injustice. In essence, the state has failed to forge unity among the diverse ethnic groups, and at the same time lacking in capacity to establish a regime of social justice, equitable distribution of resources and failure to arrest feelings of political marginality. In summary, incidences of religious and ethnic conflicts, emergence of ethnic militias, coup d'etat, and other divisive and disruptive phenomena are attestations to the fragile character of the Nigerian State.*

Adducing explanations for this failure, Cabral in Mimiko (1995: 183), in his assessment of the problem of nation-building in Africa generally, observes that:

“the natu’re of the state we have to create in our country is a very good question for it is a fundamental one. The problem of the nature of the state created is perhaps the secret of the failure of African independence”. Cabral is of the belief that African states have failed because of their colonial origin, which lacks taproot in the respective civil societies in the continent.

### **Devolution of powers**

The structural composition of Nigeria’s federal system has increasingly come under critical scrutiny in recent years. This has been accompanied in particular by agitations for a review of the legislative lists of the tiers of government with a view to reducing the legislative powers at the federal level and devolving same to the federating units. As conceived, the problem is that there is an over-concentration of power at the centre to the detriment of the federating units of the country. A skewed power arrangement in favour of the federal government has greatly resulted in bloated administrative machinery at the centre; with a disconnection between the centre and its developmental policies and the intended recipients at the grassroots. Furthermore, the huge attraction which the perquisites of office at the centre offer has exacerbated the problems of unconscionable socio-economic and political manipulations and corruption.

So far we have attempted to expose some of the predominant issues of the national question and it must be further stated that the failure of the state in addressing the varied contradictions often referred to as the national question, has continued to provoke the varied sectional interests and groups to continuously advance calls for a sovereign national conference, particularly since the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election assumed to have been won by MKO Abiola, a South – Westerner. However, the intensity of the pressure for a SNC became more heightened and louder when democratic governance was re-established on May 29, 1999. Variegated opinions had been advanced by all shades of interest advocating the convocation of an SNC. In Aluko’s (2005: 5) view, “the consensus of opinion is the imperative for a new Nigeria that is more efficient economically, politically and administratively, and which is restructured on sound, distinct and clear federal principles.

The reasoning therefore is that the National Conference will create a platform which will bring about the emergence of a new system, which recognizes differences and diversity in unity, and at the same time subject controversial national issues such as constitutional reforms, restructuring of the federal arrangement and creation of state police to people’s debate and decisions (Aluko, 2005). It is also argued by Nwosu (2000: 1) that “debates on the future of Nigeria must be sovereign for reasons of hindsight arising from past constitutional re-engineering efforts by military regimes”.

Past regimes especially those headed by the military have been grossly criticized for underutilizing outcome of previous national conferences. The utility of the public input during such constitutional debates and their outcomes were always lost in the lack of sovereignty of such fora as the ultimate sanction or approval/disapproval always rested in the military regimes.



The reports were often tinkered with, manipulated to suit the power ambition of the regimes' leadership, rather than being used as potent avenues to address the national question.

### **President Goodluck Jonathan and National Conference 2014**

President Goodluck Jonathan has approved the membership and terms of reference of the Federal Government's Advisory Committee on National Dialogue/ Conference. A terse statement in Abuja by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, named a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Prof. Ben Nwabueze, as one of the 13 members of the committee headed by Senator Femi Okurounmu. Others are Dr. Akilu Indabawa, Secretary; a former Nigerian Ambassador to the United States, Prof. George Obiozor; Senator Khairat Gwadabe; Senator Timothy Adudu, Col. Tony Nyiam (retd), Prof. Funke Adebayo, Dr. Mairo Amshi, Dr. Abubakar Sadiq, Alhaji Dauda Birma, Mallam Buhari Bello and Mr. Tony Uranta.

The committee which was given one month within which to conclude its assignment, was inaugurated by President Jonathan at the State House on October 7, 2013.

As a way of responding to the sustained advocacy for a sovereign national conference by civil and non-official groups and the opposition, President Goodluck Jonathan, inaugurated the Presidential Advisory committee on National Conference also referred to as the National Dialogue with the following terms of reference;

1. To consult with all relevant stakeholders with a view to drawing up a feasible agenda for the proposed national dialogue/conference;
2. To make recommendations to Government on structure and modalities for the proposed national dialogue/conference;
3. To make recommendations to Government on how representation of various interest groups at the national dialogue/conference will be determined;
4. To advise Government on a time frame for the national dialogue/conference;
5. To advise Government on a Legal framework for the national dialogue/conference;
6. To advise on legal procedures and options for integrating decisions and outcomes of the national dialogue/conference into the Constitution and laws of the nation; and
7. To advise Government on any other matter that may be related or incidental to the proposed national dialogue.

According to Onuorah et al (2014: 1), the issue of unity and corporate existence of the country was declared “a no-go area” for the conference. This clearly shows the primacy the President attaches to the unity, survival and existence of the country. Even though the Conference should ordinarily not be restrained from debating, sustaining or doing away with such if they so consensually wish. These no-go areas are indeed vexatious issues, which have persistently been undermined by rivalries in ethnic relations, thus making the issue of continued unity and stability of the nation the greatest challenge facing Nigeria.

It must be recalled that during the Political Reforms Conference of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2005 there were fall-outs of government’s deep involvement in the conference, which included one; delegates were representatives of government rather than of the people as they lacked the people’s mandate- The conference was, therefore, prone to discuss issues reflecting the mind of government. It may be difficult to fault this opinion because as O’Neil (2005a: 1) opined: “The president and the governors met regularly with the delegates to review on-goings in the conference”. Consequently, the conference was largely expected to reflect government interests rather than either the people or national interest. Besides, “the delegates were paid a sitting allowance of N= 20,000 (US\$154) per day by government, in addition to non-pecuniary benefits such as the supply of all dailies and some magazines” (Gbadamosi, 2005: 45).

Two, government, as an interested party in the conference and its outcomes, cannot but tinker with the report of the conference, which was submitted to the president who originated it, even without legislative authorization. This raised a number of relevant questions at that time; can the Conference reduce the powers and tenure of the president and governors who nominated and funded the delegates? Can the immunity clause be removed in line with popular demands to the detriment of the interests of President Obasanjo and the 36 state governors? Like all previously established constitutional engineering conferences since the Murtala/Obasanjo regime, the president was also expected to critically analyze the implications of “the report for all concerned before his final endorsement.

The issues raised above issues formed part and parcel of the failures of the Obasanjo political reform conference. There is thus no doubt that the conference was an effort in futility, a waste of resources and time. It is on this note that President Goodluck Jonathan is being urged by well meaning and patriotic Nigerian to ensure that this conference will not be another jamboree, a diversionary tactics and political gimmick. The current National Conference delegates should bear in mind that the future of Nigeria lies in their honesty and ability to come-to the conference/dialogue table in openness to truth and reality and negotiate like equal partners in the Nigeria project.

### **The Conference’s Deliberations Summary of Final Report**

In this section we shall basically draw extensively from the Final Report of the National Conference (2014) as the most authoritative source document on the outcome of the deliberations of the conference. The National Conference 2014 was convened by President Goodluck Jonathan, GCFR in response to the call by Nigerians to deliberate on the foregoing and

the many other challenges confronting the Nigerian nation-state. The Conference set up 20 Committees which addressed these and related matters and subsequently made

Recommendations for the deliberation of the Plenary of the entire Conference Delegates. In the final analysis, the prospect for Nigeria's socio-economic development and cohesion will, to a large extent, be dependent on whether Nigerians are able to seize this moment not only to make declaratory statements of purpose, but also to back same up with positive action.

General Debate included, but was not limited to

the following:

1. National Security and Defence;
2. Devolution of power from the central government to the federating units;
3. Political restructuring and a redefinition of the federating units;
4. Agriculture and Food Security;
5. Resource control and resource allocation;
6. Forms of government;
7. Deepening of democracy;
8. Party system and elections;
9. Accountability and transparency in government;
10. Poverty and wealth creation;
11. Economic development;
12. Religion and the state;
13. Public service;
14. Foreign Policy and Diaspora Matters;
15. Corruption and development;

16. Ethnic nationalities and minority question;
17. Civil society and the media;
18. Judiciary and law reform;
19. Transport, public works and Infrastructure -roads, aviation, waterways, etc.;
21. Social sector and social welfare;
22. Education and culture;
23. Citizenship;
24. Immigration Matters and Cross-Border crimes;
25. Energy crisis; and
26. Land holdings and Land tenure.

However in approaching the outcomes of the deliberations of the National Conference we shall restrict ourselves to those issues that border directly on unity and diversity of Nigeria.

### **Citizenship and Nationality/Residency/ Indigeneity/ Dual Citizenship**

Final Report of the National Conference (2014:109-110) presents Conference decision as

Follows; that:

As a means of promoting social citizenship, there is a need to make the provisions on socio-economic rights in Chapter II of the Constitution justiciable. This is derived from the fact that the lack of basic amenities and social mobility is at the root of the various communal strife; Ensure Chapter II, which contains all citizenship rights and obligations become (justiciable) enforceable;

Expand Section 42 (1) & (2) to place a duty on citizens to embrace national loyalty above

sectional or ethnic loyalties. Section 42 (2) should be amended to read thus:

“A person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion political opinion, social or economic status, disabilities or circumstances of birth.”

The ideological aspiration intendment of Chapter II of the Constitution represents the basic law of citizens' rights and duties of the state. They should be given the necessary force of law to – for the first time – build national integration and cohesion;

Section 25 (a) should be amended to allow a Nigerian woman to enjoy the rights accrued all Nigerians either at her place of origin or that of her husband;

Amend or delete Section 6 (c) of the Constitution, which is a bar from access to the courts with respect to Chapter II as a necessary step towards Nigerian citizenship, based on residency;

Adopt and amend Item No. 26, Page 28 of the Report of the Presidential Committee on Review of Outstanding Issues from Recent Constitutional Conferences (the Justice Alfa Belgore Report), with a caveat to read: “On the matter of Indigeneship, the Committee recommends that the current Constitutional position should be maintained but that a new provision should be inserted into the Constitution to read:

“The right of any Nigerian citizen to be resident or domiciled in any part of Nigeria shall not be abridged. Such a resident shall enjoy all rights, privileges and facilities in the place of his/her choice, provided that such a person meets his/her basic civic obligations. A person born in a State or who marries an indigene of a State acquires automatic residence status in the State.”

**Minorities' Rights and their Fears:** In order to build a just, free, stable, equitable, peaceful and strong nation, it is recommended that all the executive and strategic positions in all the tiers of government rotate among all the Zones or States or ethnic nations making up Nigeria; Senatorial Districts or Local governments making up a State, or wards making up a local government. This shall ensure that all parties are equitably and justly treated.

### **Revenue Sharing (Vertical Allocation)**

Conference accordingly decided as follows:

That the sharing of the funds accruing to the Federation Account among the three tiers of government should be done in the following manner:

i. Federal Government- 42.5% ii. State Governments- 35% iii. Local Governments- 22.5% To replace the existing formulae of: i. Federal Government-52.68% ii. State Govern men ts-26.72% iii. Local Governments-20.60%

Conference agreed that Local Government Areas should be stripped of their status as the third tier of public administration. However, Conference did not make any specific decision to delete LGAs from the sharing formula.

### **Sharing Formula (Horizontal Allocation)**

Conference decided as follows:

1. That the percentages given to Population and Equality of States in the existing Sharing formula be reduced while that assigned to Social Development Factor be increased to a much higher percentage so as to ensure accelerated development of all parts of the country;

2. That three new principles listed hereunder be added to the existing sharing formula to enhance economic, infrastructural and human development in the country:

i. Inverse Primary School Enrolment ii. Federal Presence; and iii. Unemployment

3. That the “technical” aspects and details of revenue sharing formula shall be referred to the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission and the National Assembly for final determination. The proposed sharing formula by Conference is based on;

i. Diminished emphasis on principles of equality of states and population;

ii. Increased emphasis on Social Development Factor; and

iii. Internally Generated Revenue effort.

### **Resource Control**

Having critically examined the issues in contention, Conference in its Final Report (2014: 154-155) recognizes the need to:

1 Review the percentage of revenue allocation to States producing oil (and other resources);

2 Reconstruct and rehabilitate areas affected by problems of insurgency and internal conflicts; and

3 Diversify ‘the Nigerian economy by fast tracking the development of the solid minerals sector,

The Conference also notes that assigning percentages for the increase in derivation principle, and setting up Special Intervention Funds to address issues of reconstruction and rehabilitation of areas ravaged by insurgency and internal conflicts as well as solid minerals development, require some technical details and considerations; and

Conference therefore recommends that Government should set up a Technical Committee to determine the appropriate percentages on the three (3) issues and advise government accordingly.

## **National Security**

Conference decided that:

i. Security agencies should be strengthened, well equipped and better motivated to enhance their capacity to tackle the menace; ii. Government should do more to facilitate the creation of more jobs as this would open up opportunities for the army of unemployed persons and idle minds to be productively engaged and kept away from criminal tendencies and activities; and iii. Mass enlightenment of the populace to orientate them towards positive national endeavours and peaceful co-existence should be embarked upon (Final Report of the National Conference, 2014: 175).

### **The Nigeria Police Force: Centralized or Decentralized Police:**

Conference received several memoranda from individuals, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), and corporate organizations. Some of these memoranda advocated for centralized Police, while others argued for decentralized Police. Those who advocated for Centralized Police advanced the following arguments:

- a. State Police will lay the foundation for the eventual break-up of the country;
- b. The current crop of political leadership will misuse the organs of State Police to intimidate political opponents;
- c. Very few states in Nigeria can at the moment fund and maintain a Police Force;
- d. That even the developed countries of the world are moving towards Centralized Police; and
- e. There will be serious conflict in operational jurisdiction between the Federal and State Police.

(iii) On the other hand, those agitating for decentralized Police insist that given the current augmentation of fund to the Police by State Governments, States should be allowed to establish their own Police Service, which will complement the efforts of the NPF. Other arguments include:

- a. Personnel of State Police are likely to do better intelligence gathering and rapid response actions because they know the terrain, speak the local languages and even probably know the criminals;
- b. That the argument that Governors will abuse a State Police assumes that the Federal Government has more integrity than the State Government; this according to them is yet to be empirically proved, given the experiences of some States to the contrary;

c. That the on-going invasion of most States in the North Central by terrorists without apprehension by the NPF questions the integrity of the Force; and

d. The idea of State Police will enhance cooperation and partnership between Federal and State Governments to stem the tide of insecurity in the country.

Conference in its Final Report (2014: 255-256) therefore decided that:

a. There shall be a Federal Police with areas of jurisdiction covering the entire country and on clearly spelt out matters and offences;

b. For any state that requires it, there shall be a State Police at the State level, to be established, funded and controlled by the State,

## Political Restructuring and Forms of Government

### *I. Federalism*

Final Report of the National Conference (2014: 277-278) agreed that Federalism denotes a political arrangement in which a country is made up of component parts otherwise called Federating Units. Thus in a Federation, political powers are constitutionally shared between the central government and the federating units. These powers basically, represent the functions of each tier of the federation.

Conference also noted the inherent advantages of a federal system of government in a heterogeneous society such as ours. These include:

- the sustenance of unity in diversity;
- expanded opportunities for the various peoples, including minority groups, to participate in the governance of the country;
- minimizing the fears of domination and/or marginalization among minority groups.
- It and promotes development broad-based

Consequently, Conference unanimously resolved as follows:

1. Nigeria shall retain a Federal system of Government;

2. The core elements of the Federation shall be as follows:

i. A Federal (Central) Government with States as

the federating units; and



**ii. Without prejudice to States constituting the**

federating units,

States that wish to merge may do so in

accordance with the Constitution of the Federal

Republic of Nigeria (as amended).

Provided that:

(a) A two-thirds majority of all members in each of the Houses of Assembly of each of the States, in which such merger is proposed, support by resolution, the merger;

(b) a Referendum is conducted in each of the States proposing to merge with 75% of the eligible voters in each of those States approving the merger;

(c) the National Assembly, by resolution passed by a simple majority of membership, approves of the merger; and

(d) States that decide to merge shall also reserve the right to demerge following the same procedure and processes for merger.

**State Creation**

The subject of State creation has remained a huge political issue in Nigeria. Conference examined the Reports of the 2005 National Political Reform Conference and the Report of the Presidential Committee on Review of Outstanding Issues from Recent Constitutional Conferences 2012 (the Belgore Report) and after wide consultations- and extensive deliberations and in the interest of equity, justice and fairness.

In addition, Conference Final Report (2014:

279-278) therefore resolved as follows:

(i) In the spirit of reconciliation, equity, fair play and justice, there shall be created an additional State for the South East Zone; and

(ii) That all other requests for State creation should be considered on merit.

Conference further approved the criteria for the creation of new States as follows:

(1) Any new State sought to be created must be viable. In considering viability, the following should be taken into consideration:

(a) Any new State should be economically viable;

(b) It should have human, natural and material resources;

(c) It should have a minimum land mass/water mass; and

(d) The viability of the existing State(s) should be taken into consideration as well, so as not to create a situation where new State(s) would leave the existing State(s) unviable.

(2) That State creation should be on the basis of parity between the geo-political zones to ensure equality of Zones;

(3) Additional States should be created in each of the six (6) geopolitical zones to bring the number of States in each zone to nine (9);

(4) That eighteen (18) more States be created as follows:

Apa State from the present Benue State; Edu State from Niger State; Kainji State from the present Kebbi State; Katagun State from the present Bauchi State; Savannah State from the present Borno State; Amana State from the present Adamawa State; Gurara State from the present Kaduna State; Ghari State from the present 'Kano State; Etititi State from the present South East Zone; Aba State from the present Abia State; Adada State from the present Enugu State; Njaba-Anim State from the present Anambra and Imo States; Anioma State from the present Delta State; Ogoja State from the present Cross River State; Ijebu State from the present Ogun State; New Oyo State from the present Oyo State;

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be amended to allow for less onerous process for creation of States.

### **Rotation of Powers**

Conference noted that Nigerians desire a nation in which every citizen can aspire to the highest office in the land without hindrance. Hence any arrangement that would erase the fear of marginalization of minority groups should be pursued with vigour. The Principle of Rotation of Powers will also reduce the desperation and tempo of agitation for creation of states. Conference noted the need to effectively provide for the active participation of women, the youth and the physically-challenged in the evolving political process. To give the principles of zoning and

rotation of public offices at all levels of government a legal backing, Conference Final Report (2014; 286-287) therefore agreed as follows:

1. The Electoral Act and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) should provide for:

(a) The Principle of Zoning and Rotation of elective offices at the Federal and State levels on the basis of excellence, equity, gender, justice; and

(b) The Office of President shall rotate between the North and the South and amongst the six (6) geo-political zones.

(i) The Office of the Governor shall rotate among the three (3) Senatorial Districts in that State.

(ii) The Office of Chairman of a Local Government Council shall rotate within the Local Government Area. The National Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) shall divide the Local Government into two or three equal parts as the case may be for the purpose of the rotation of Office of the Chairman.

### **Other Related Matters: The Nigerian Charter for National Reconciliation and Integration**

With a view to encouraging inclusiveness and the need to build a fully integrated nation, Conference further recommends the adoption of The Nigerian Charter for National Reconciliation and Integration. The Charter shall form the basis of Nigeria Union as a Nation and guarantee the national existence. This National Charter according to the Final Report of the National Conference (2014:290-297) have 20 articles but here we shall reproduce only a few to buttress our objective:

#### **Article 1**

We hereby firmly solemnly resolve to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God.

#### **Article 2**

We shall build a land of Freedom, Peace, and Justice and a home of Equity and Fair Play, where no one is oppressed and no one is discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity,

gender or religion and where constant and consistent dialogue is encouraged.

#### **Article 3**

We shall be a law abiding nation where the Rule of Law prevails, where Right is Might and the Law Impartial and Supreme.

#### **Article 4**

We shall be a God-fearing nation emphasizing the fear of God in our private and public endeavours.

#### **Article 5**

We shall freely express our ethnic, cultural and religious diversity with tolerance within the context of our corporate existence and alongside the pursuit of our national destiny.

#### **Article 6**

We shall respect, preserve, protect and defend the rights of every Nigerian irrespective of ethnic, gender or religious differences.

#### **Article 7**

We shall not discriminate against any Nigerian on the basis of indigeneship or place of origin.

(b) The right to self-determination by the States as federating units shall be extended to ethnic nationalities within the State.

(c) States shall have their respective Constitutions.

(d) There shall be a revenue sharing formula established by law in every State.

(e) The Federal Government should set up a new Commission to address the plight of Federal Capital Territory indigenes.

Having highlighted some of the above decisions of the Conference, which are akin to issues of national question, we shall proceed to examine the impact of the Conference on unity and diversity in Nigeria.

### **The National Conference and Its Impact on Unity and Diversity in Nigeria**

Despite the fact that there is no formal breakup of the country, the nation is already disintegrating due to the refusal of the government to embrace national dialogue (Soykika, 2012). Soyinka said this while speaking on the *quest for justice, tolerance and non-violent*

*change*; at a presentation highlighting Dr Martin Luther King jnr and the American civil rights movement, organized by the Public Affairs Section of the US Consulate General in Lagos. According to Soyinka (2012: 3), “the presidential system of government is totally unfitted to the governance of Nigerians. The legislators have become a bastion of corruption while the system operational in the country encourages corruption.” Soyinka, who maintained his stance on Sovereign National Conference as panacea to salvaging Nigeria from total collapse further asserts: “We can even remove the word sovereign; there ‘is need for national dialogue because if we don’t have a national dialogue, we will have monologues” (Soyinka, 2012: 3).

The primary duty of the National Conference is to address and find solutions to the key problems

afflicting Nigeria since 1914 to date. The concern is to remove all obstacles which have prevented the country from establishing political justice, economic justice, social justice, cultural justice, religious justice and to construct a new constitutional framework in terms of the system of government-structurally, politically, economically, socially, culturally and religiously. The beauty of a national dialogue lies in the fact that it will afford aggrieved Nigerians the elusive opportunity to ventilate their frustration, and brainstorm on the way forward for our dear fatherland. But the question is: Is the government sincere with the national dialogue? This is the worry of every reasonable Nigerian. Their fear is hinged on the premise that government has never shown faith with people in past deals (*The Punch*, 2013, Nov. 11 p23).

However, while many have agitated for a national dialogue, many others share different opinions on the issue of the national dialogue. Chairman of the Northern States Governor’s Forum and governor, Niger State, Dr Muazu Babangida Aliyu has stated that the Northern part of the country was not opposed to the convocation of a national conference but said the North was against the setting up of a sovereign national conference. Speaking against the backdrop of renewed calls for the convocation of a sovereign national conference by some Nigerians, Governor Aliyu said such a demand would entail all elected politicians to vacate their positions and surrendering them to a committee that would be in charge of the sovereign national conference (*Punch Newspaper*, 2014, Oct. 22 p. 26).

Governor Aliyu further declared that, “those calling for sovereign national conference must understand its implication. You cannot have two sovereignty in one place. If anybody says he is going to organize a sovereign national conference, all of us in government must resign our jobs and then transfer the sovereignty of the country to the committee that is going to discuss the sovereignty of the country” (*Punch Newspaper*, 2014 Oct. 22 p.26). He continued in the following words, “I will love a national conference that will look at our constitution and really give us justice, equity and fairness in our body politics and in our national life” (p.26). Governor Aliyu insisted that the North is not afraid of the convocation of a national

Conference because it believes that it would move the country forward. In his words; “Many people are trying to make it look like the Northern States are afraid of conference, we are not, let us come and talk, let us come and look at our problems if it means restructuring the country let us come and do it but we must not be hoodwinked”. “If people want to secede let them secede and then we see under which constitution they are seceding, let us not be intimidated, we cannot

be intimidated because intimidation will not give us good policies, intimidation will not give us good nation, intimidation will not give us any progress”(p.27), he concludes.

The Sovereign National Conference has given ethnic nationalities an opportunity to examine the questions that have made Nigeria such a disaster and come up with some answers such as the right of every Nigerian reside and enjoy equal rights wherever he may find himself in Nigeria.

According to Yinka Odumakin the publicity secretary of Afenifere Renewal Group and a delegate to the conference “this is a make or mar conference for Nigeria” (cited in Ndiribe, 2014: 2). Odumakin appeals to all delegates to understand the urgency of this period. Our country is falling apart. We need to put things right. Nobody should come to this conference with any sense of arrogance. We must not negotiate out of fear. We must come as equal partners to the Nigerian project and shed all our prejudices’.

Furthermore, Odumakin in Ndiribe (2014: 3) succinctly asserts:

*We should focus on how to build a country that works; a country where human life is not cheap as it is now. For now, Nigeria is not just in a state of war; we are at war. This is because if you look at the number of corpses we pack every day; it has surpassed that of Afghanistan and Iraq. In those countries, we hardly hear of 100 or 200 deaths in a day. We must find a lasting solution to the problems of this country. We should adopt an attitude of give and take, not my way or their way. An attitude of my way or their way will not solve the problems of this country. Let us come to the conference table as brothers and consider the interest of Nigeria. Let us find ways and means of building a united and equitable country based on a foundation of justice.... I came to this conference as a federalist. I would be pushing a federalist agenda. It is only a true federalism arrangement that can get this country out of the woods. We have travelled on the wrong path for a long time. There is no way you can run a country like Nigeria which has a multi-ethnic composition as a unitary state.*

The reality portrayed in the above statement cannot be underestimated. That reality represents the problem we are having today in Nigeria. We need to de-amalgamate. Amalgamation means that you cobbled entities together without looking at the content or properties of what you are amalgamating. This time around, we must sit down as the nationalities of Nigeria to negotiate our unity; not towards disintegration but towards building a lasting country, Odumakin in Ndiribe (2014) opines.

In his further statement Odumakin in Nzeribe (2014:3) states:

*... Know countries that refused to discuss their unity. They have already disappeared....But in a country like Ethiopia where the differences of the nationalities which make up that country were discussed, their unity, was strengthened and they eventually adopted a constitution which endorsed the rights of the component nationalities to self-determination up to the point of secession. Yet, nobody has attempted to use that clause in*

*Ethiopia. It is better for us to discuss in an open manner without inhibitions. I would like to convince other delegates that the path to follow, is the path of true federalism.*

The preamble to the 1999 Constitution which states that the people of Nigeria adopted that document is false. The constitution lied against itself and that is perjury. So, the constitution lied on oath. Nigerians were never involved in the making of that constitution. We knew how that constitution was imposed on the nation. Former military Head of State, Gen. Sani Abacha

Organized a Constitutional Conference which produced a report. He set up another body which reviewed the report of the Constitutional Conference. This culminated in the 1999 constitution, a military promulgation.

When former President Olusegun Obasanjo came on board, he did his own review. As at the day Obasanjo was sworn in, in 1999, he had not even seen a clean copy of that constitution. Even after Obasanjo had been sworn in, they still secretly amended the constitution. The people of Nigeria were never involved. The constitution was promulgated into law through Decree 24 of 1999. To me, the 1999 constitution is a military decree. It is not an autochthonous constitution. It is only if we rise from this conference and produce a constitution which goes through a referendum, that the preamble could truly state that the people of Nigeria have adopted the document as a body of fundamental rules and regulations for the effective operation of the political system.

The 2014 National Conference is expected to lay much stronger foundation for faster development by building a more inclusive national consensus on the structure and guiding principles of state that will guarantee the emergence of a more united, progressive, just, peaceful and prosperous Nigeria.

### **Challenges of the Outcome of the Nigeria National Conference**

More worrisome, however, is the legitimacy crisis of the conference. The conference so far merely enjoys executive fiat courtesy of discretionary power of the President, without recourse to any legislative enactment to legitimize its existence so far. Consequently, of what force will the outcome of the conference be assuming that the deliberations of the conference are tension-free and lacking in irreconcilable logjams. The conference is not authorized by the National Assembly. Semenitari (2005: 27) cognizance of the above observed that “this was the -same legitimacy crisis- suffered by the – Obasanjo political reform conference”.

If the above situations should remain unresolved, the recommendations of the conference could, therefore, be seen as lacking in self-execution. The ground of its illegality will divest the conference of the powers, and competence to authoritatively **resolve** the national question. *In its entirety, therefore, the conference is undemocratic without a force of law. Consequently, its decisions would be divested of a binding force. At best, therefore, its final recommendations can only serve a non-enforceable advisory power for the president on how to resolve the nation’s contentious issues.*

Furthermore, of greater concern is the acceptability of the conference's outcomes to all shades of opinion within (and outside) the country. The conference groans under a barrage of criticism from opposition political parties, some ethnic groups and notable political actors especially from All Progressives Congress (APC) extraction. The coming together of these notable figures against government is described as a "granite coalition" (Adedigba, 2005: 8).

Already, disagreements among the varied geopolitical groups over some contentious issues have polarized the nation further and deepened the existing inter-ethnic cleavages undermining the unity and stability of the nation. The exclusion of the external dimension of the nation's problem in the Dialogue's agenda, weakens its capacity to address the nation's problems. The weak and distorted character of the Nigerian state is externally motivated by virtue of its colonization, and imposition on the different ethnic groups, of the Nigerian state by the British colonialists, while the former constrained its development take-off, the latter made nation building very difficult. Originally, the British colonialists never supported a united Nigeria. In fact, according to Akinkuotu, (2005: 33) "Britain contributed to the weak and fragile sovereignty the nation currently suffers as it had before independence promoted inter-regional tension, disharmony and marginality through election rigging and manipulation of census figures for northern Nigeria".

According to Harold Smith, a former colonial officer in Nigeria cited in Oraotunde and Osifo-Whiskey (2005: 29) "the British colonialists deliberately, by design, skewed the political landscape in favour of the north, and at another time, had expected Nigeria to break up". Besides, the alien origin of the Nigerian nation, external forces including the West and multinational corporations, promote under-development, and sabotage of the national economy. This they do by encouraging capital flight through corruption. It is noted that, "£220 billion have been stolen by Nigerian leaders between 1960 and 1999" (*The Editor*, 2005: 72). The stolen wealth is kept in Western vaults. In a statement by Obasanjo (2005:1-2) "attempts to repatriate loots from foreign banks are being frustrated by the West, particularly the Swiss government, which has refused to release the stolen wealth kept in its banks by the late General Sanni Abacha despite its Supreme Court's ruling authorizing the repatriation to the Nigerian government".

Why then is the nation's leadership fearful of a sovereign conference? Despite the popular demands for SNC, the leaders have aversion for it because of some known precedents across the globe. The Nigerian leadership is quite aware of the adverse effects of SNC in some countries of Africa, notably; Benin Republic, Gabon, Chad, Mali, Togo, Niger, Madagascar and Zaire. One of the consequences was the removal of incumbent governments (Babawale, 2003: 4). In other regions, such as Eastern Europe, SNC had led to national disintegration as the cases of former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. The survival of the present establishment, and probably, that of the nation, therefore, poses a serious dilemma and constitutes a militating force against the convocation of SNC by the government, which fears either the known or unknown decisive consequences.

Until these contradictions are resolved, the desired national harmony and unity will not be achieved, while the agitations for a sovereign national conference would be persistently louder.

Recommendations



With due recourse to the issues raised and analyzed above, a number of recommendations are considered apt at this juncture as leeway for strengthening national cohesion in Nigeria :

> In laying out the challenges to national cohesion, it is important to recognize those which are associated with the youth population of Nigeria in the formulation and implementation of relevant youth development and empowerment programmes. In addition to deploying the appropriate policies and programmes on educational, employment, etc., other youth related policies such as sports development need to be even more rigorously pursued seeing that in Nigeria sports have emerged as a major national unifier and a veritable tool for the advancement of the spirit of healthy competitive rivalry.

In the pursuit of the goals of attaining national cohesion, Nigeria will need to continue its priority of commitment to welfare enhancing and pro growth economic policies with the view to reducing the incidence of poverty.

The associated increased transactional flows will impact positively on citizens' economic conditions, and galvanize even further the level of inter-group mobility and interaction. This is the process that, as a matter of deliberate public policy, must be actively cultivated and harnessed for national cohesion.

> To increase the level of human interaction and transactional flows as a strategy for national cohesion, it is important to escalate the pursuit of infrastructural development and to deploy these not only across the urban areas but the rural areas as well. This will serve to open up the entire country and ensure even greater levels of inclusive socio-economic development.

> Building a critical mass of nationalistic fervour around the 'Nigerian Project' is one important challenge to Nigeria's national cohesion. This essentially requires the creative development and communication of positive affirmative narratives in support of our national unity and development irrespective of our socio-cultural diversity.

### Concluding Remarks

The deep divisions, controversies that surround National Conference are reflections of the divided character of the Nigerian State. The potency of the conference to address and redress the divisive national issues is very weak considering the extreme and seemingly

irreconcilable positions assumed on issues of resource control, derivation, among others. The conference, more than anything else, exacerbates primordial and sub-national loyalty, which have since independence denied the nation of the needed over-arching sense of loyalty and nationalism.

National loyalty is further undermined by the presentation of regional and sectional agendas in the conference. Agendas on the banners of South West (Yoruba). South East (Igbo), the North

(Arew'a), Middle Belt and South – South (Niger Delta), and from groups such as the women agenda were presented to “the conference with different, incompatible demands. The sectional demands are merely championing primordial, sub-national interests, which have re-awakened and re-fuelled ethnic and sectional consciousness in the polity. Ironically, no group seem to project a non-regional/non-sectional, national agenda.

The Nigerian agenda/national interest is totally subsumed, and hence the sharp sectional divides among the delegates on issues. The championing of regional agenda and the uncompromising, and apparently no retreat stand on some contentious issues show that the survival and unity of the nation occupy background space in the minds of most delegates. It equally manifests the nation's lack of tradition for bargaining, compromise, consensus and national strategy for managing and resolving crisis.

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In the final analysis, however, contemporary socio-economic and political challenges to national development and cohesion make two interconnected demands on the Nigerian state and people: the need to set in motion and make an acceptable constitution, and, the imperative to establish the much needed structural and institutional mechanisms which would facilitate **the** urgent attainment of critical, people-centred economic growth and development.

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