

EDITORIAL COMMENT

NIGERIA: WHY NOT FIGHT CORRUPTION LIKE THE ‘EBOLA WAR’?

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On the 20th of October, 2014, Nigeria was declared Ebola free with fanfare and pageantry. The entire world literally stood still in commendation for Nigeria for managing and caging Ebola. This overwhelming credit was one in a million as Nigeria came to the realization that the world, apart from castigating her for the negatives, can as well commend her for the positives. The experience shows that indeed, Nigeria is blessed with human and natural resources, which, if effectively harnessed, can transform her into a true African giant.

Sincerely, the Nigeria’s Ebola success simply revealed patriotism at its highest level; unity of purpose -devoid of ethnicity, politics, religion, gender, class and other senseless parochial sentiments; love for country; and citizens desire to fight for the common good of all. Even the government responded on time. Media organizations were at their best. Jingles about Ebola on its mode of transmission, incubation period, symptoms, and the ultimate consequence –death, rammed the air waves in different languages and at every available air-time. Discussions about Ebola raged on the streets, at motor parks, churches, mosques, cafeterias, banks and other places where people gather together. Awareness was high and everyone was overwhelmingly involved; apparently due to the palpable fear of an imminent Ebola death sentence.

The master stroke however, was the preventive strategies adopted by all relevant government agencies. School resumption was indefinitely postponed until the situation at hand comes under control. All secondary index-case’ infected persons and contacts were summarily quarantined, while inter-state movement of dead bodies was banned except a certified death certificate accompanies it for verification. Hand washing also became a ritual.

Meanwhile, all Nigeria border guards were put on red alert as screenings at all entry points were strengthened. Quarantine centers were rapidly established in the various zones of Nigeria. Banks staff began wearing hand gloves as customers were provided with hand washing facilities and mandated to comply. The Catholic Church in Nigeria quickly

stopped their routine hand shake during Holy Mass and directed that Holy Communion be distributed on the left palm as against the previous pattern of handing communion into the mouth.

Even when controversies concerning school resumption dates became the basis for arguments, concerted efforts were made to rapidly resolve it. In the scenario, the National Union of Teachers was upbeat to protect their teachers and pupils from Ebola as they threatened to go on strike, if the government insists on the proposed school resumption date without ensuring that adequate preventive measures were put in place. Many other organizations, especially the Parents Teachers Association, also kicked against the government’s move, until a stake holders meeting was held between government and interest groups to resolve all contending issues. Above all, everyone remained resolute and unanimous, that Ebola must be kicked out of Nigeria at all cost and there is no compromising whatsoever.

Unfortunately, Nigeria faces other challenges requiring measures akin to that used against Ebola. Among them is corruption, which has brought the country to her knees. Unlike corruption, Ebola was a ‘monster’ feared by all -rich or poor; strong or weak. In that regard, individuals festering high level corruption, especially in government circles, assume that they are safe from the monstrous consequences of corruption. They must realize however, that one of the ultimate consequences of corruption is poverty and of course, poverty breeds hunger -lack of food. In fact, the desire to satisfy hunger makes one eat any thing that could pass as food; including the prohibited bats and monkeys implicated in the transmission of Ebola virus.

Our leaders should know that an indifference to fighting corruption is akin to incubating Ebola amongst disadvantaged Nigerians. They must realize that if corruption does not affect them directly, Ebola may one day visit them to pass its judgment –sure death! Therefore, like Ebola, corruption must be dealt with using these magic wands: -genuine patriotic zeal; unity of purpose; love for country; and citizen’s general desire to fight for the common good of all.