



Features: ARE NIGERIANS ASKING FOR TOO MUCH?

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

I was at departure hall of the Chief Margaret Ekpo International Airport in Calabar. My flight to Abuja had been delayed for about two hours, no big deal. I had time then to begin to write this article. Great opportunity I would say. I had arrived at the check-in counter and was promptly attended to, not many passengers today. I wanted to move to the departure lounge but I was asked by the ground handling guy to follow him. He had my suitcase and that of a white lady, a fellow passenger. We got to the security screening point. I thought it was the usual 'wait let your luggage go through the security screening machine before you go', but I was wrong. I was met by the bulky FAAN staff who greeted me with great courtesy and politely told me that their screening machine broke down so I had to open my suitcase for MANUAL screening. What? At this age and time in the PEOPLE'S PARADISE (as Calabar is popularly called)? I remember that the famous annual Calabar Carnival just ended not long ago. This was in the month of January. How did they handle the many flights into Calabar, both local and international? To my embarrassment I opened my bag and displayed my personal effects. Thank God I did not take along with me the pack of crayfish I was offered. The odour would have been more embarrassing for a young man like me. The security check man kept apologizing for the embarrassment and I told him it was not his fault. He was only employed and the employer did not give him the necessary modern tools for this national assignment that has become an embarrassment.

This took me back to a conversation I had had about two hours earlier with my host in Calabar. Is Nigeria truly difficult to lead? Nigeria should occupy a prominent place in the politics of Africa. Gone are the days when we used to hear that "Africa is the centerpiece of Nigeria's foreign policy." We have lost the big brother status since we started mocking ourselves. We lost our pride when our leadership lost focus in planning. At the turn of the third millennium, it became clear that our educational infrastructures were no longer enough to give our children quality education. The universities, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics became grossly inadequate. The existing ones did not have enough accommodation for students, both bed space and lecture halls. Students lived in every corner of the town that was no longer safe for them. In the students' hostels, they lived like refugees as one person with accommodation slot would squat over five other students in a bed space made for one. Sleeping was difficult. No reading tables and so reading was not in the students' timetable. Survival was the issue. They had no books and even if they had books, they had no bookshelves to display them and not reading tables and chairs to use. Such a non-academic environment drove many of such students, boys and girls into life of drugs, prostitution, cultism and general debauchery. The expected casualty is what we see today, uneducated graduates on our streets. The second effect is that parents who could afford it took their wards and children to other African countries. Ghana became a big beneficiary. In fact, most of Ghana's universities had makeshift campuses to accommodate the educational refugees from Nigeria. Some ran shifts whereby some students go for lecture in the morning and second set later in the evening. Countries like Togo, Benin Republic, Kenya, even Liberia and Sierra Leone became our educationally displaced students' (EDS) camps. Our external displaced students paid their school tuition and accommodation in United States Dollars. I was informed in

Ghana in 2015 that some of hotel owners closed their hotels and turned them into hostel accommodations for the thousands of Nigerians running to Ghana to be educated. Building a hostel accommodation for Nigerian students was more lucrative than an average hotel business in Ghana. Republic of South Africa, Europe and the North America belong to the big league. Many of our people are today in Eastern Europe and South East Asia. Many Nigerian children are studying in China and some of them vowed never to return to Nigeria to work.

With our children scattered all over Africa, North America and other never thought of parts of the world, Nigeria lost her pride. This is more humiliating when it is known all over the world that Nigerian leaders, present and former, have embarrassing amounts of money in banks in these countries. They have their children living in luxury in these countries. They know that our former leaders and office holders merely came to 'work in Nigeria' but live in these countries. Since Mrs Dzeani Madueke, our former minister of works and later the famous minister of Petroleum left office in 2015, she has not stepped her foot in the Nigerian soil again. She lives in affluence in Europe with stories of her houses all over the United States. She is not a lone, many others live like that. Even those we see at home during election time come to work and relocate to their abode in abroad where their real homes are with their wives and children. They have family houses in Dubai, London, Atlanta, California, New York, Maryland, Virginia, Philadelphia, Milan in Italy, Paris, etc. They do not really care about the house in their villages. That one is only for election seasons where election money, food and souvenirs are shared to the poor electorates.

What does it really take to lead this country, to turn around the fortunes of Nigeria for Nigerians? Is Nigeria asking too much from their leaders? All we are asking for are basic amenities. We are not interested who leads us if what is necessary is provided.

If the roads are properly done such that we can ordinarily move from place to place unhindered. If the electricity can be done so that we retire to our homes with the full complements of power supply. If the school system can work such that the policy of government takes cognizance of the fact of our population growth and plan adequately for our children to be admitted and remain in school. If only governors do not run our states as fiefdoms but as our collective home where the workers are employed, promptly promoted and justly paid their monthly wages. If only government workers can concentrate on their work and deliver their services conscientiously. If only security agencies can realize that their job is to provide security for Nigerians against their enemies and not to provide security for the government against Nigerians. If only those responsible realize that repairing the refineries will reduce the prices of petroleum products and bring in more money to the economy. If only those who are responsible can think of Nigeria as a home and that Nigerians are their relations. If only we can vow to make our country great again. This is our wish list. It

wouldn't be necessary to expose my inner wears, panties and our women will not be displaying sanitary pads and bathing soaps at the full glare of everyone at our international airports in the name of manual security check because the one who is responsible for the security machine has taken the money and used it to send his children on summer break to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirate.

Are all these too much to ask for Nigerians? It is because these facilities were provided for the use of the citizens and for business in Dubai in the United Arab Emirate, that it was convenient for Abubakar Atiku and his campaign council to relocate to Dubai to strategize on how to take over power in Nigeria. It was because of the available medical facilities and personnel in London England that our president, Mohammadu Buhari spent greater parts of 2016 and 2017 in the United Kingdom, seeking medical attention. That was why Dame Patience Jonathan went underground in 2012 only for her to re-surface and confessed that she nearly died in a German hospital. I heard that she said that the about Thirty Five million Euros found in one of her accounts was for medical treatment abroad. That amount of money is enough to build a world class hospital in Otueke her husband place in Bayelsa state. But such money cannot be used for the poor electorates. The electorates are only entitled to political party branded umbrellas, T-shirts and faze cap.

We are not asking for too much. We are only asking that we should have good roads to move about freely in Nigeria. We are only asking for electricity like every other nation in the category of Nigeria has. We are asking for available, affordable and enough schools for the children of this country who will inherit our nation as we also inherited from those before us. We are asking for work so that we can be productive. Are we asking for too much? It is common sense that those who have been leading this country for a long time continue to plunder the country and take away, without remorse, the resources of the nation. I do not think we are asking for too much when we say, do not take away what belongs to all.

In all, I believe we are only passing through a phase. Those who will build our nation are not yet on the saddle. Unfortunately, when the history of our country is read in years to come, many of us will belong to the page of infamy.

By Rev. Fr. Ojaje Idoko

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