



## **POLITICIANS WHO LIVE BY HATE SPEECH AND FAKE NEWS CANNOT LEGISLATE ON IT -- By Bishop Badejo**

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### **LAGOS, NIGERIA -**

The proposed hate speech bill waiting to be passed at the National House of Assembly, recommending death by hanging for anyone found guilty of hate speech, is an attack on Nigerians and what decency is left of the country by the very people supposedly elected to work for Nigeria's progress. Nigeria should not be proposing capital punishment at this period when other civilized country are abandoning it because life is inviolable. Capital punishment really just makes society more violent and does not really work as a deterrent. That Nigerian lawmakers would contemplate the death penalty for hate speech in a country where hate crimes like political assassination, violent political rhetoric, ethnic cleansing, kidnapping for ransom etc. have occurred for years without much response from government and security agencies is very distressing. The lawmakers should be fighting to decrease the harvest of death in parts of Nigeria. In any case human life is sacred and belongs only to the Creator to take.

One wonders at the enthusiasm and passion with which our lawmakers are pushing this bill. Could it be for self-preservation rather than national interest? To even suggest that the bill could be retroactive is evidence of how much Nigeria seems to retrogress while other countries progress. It is a vestige of past governments' strategy to victimize perceived enemies and muzzle free speech. The people know then and it is "déjà vu".

While it seems necessary to exercise some control over the menace of fake news as a few countries have done, I

believe that the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution should suffice to protect citizens and prosecute those who fall foul of the law. A draconian provision like the death penalty for hate speech would be an invitation to anarchy and chaos which will be provoked by an almost certain misapplication of such laws by government and overzealous security agents. The Nigerian government has poor credibility for even and fair application of the law. The country can ill afford a law as this one. The selective treatment of groups allegedly threatening Nigeria's sovereignty and the case of Omoyele Sowore, being detained after fulfilling bail conditions and despite a court ruling to release him hang on the government like an albatross and compromise the trust that this government greatly needs from the people in this democracy.

If this bill is passed, Nigeria might as well bid bye to press freedom. anyone who has power and has something to hide could invoke the law and conjure such punishment for perceived enemies. Nigeria might as forget the much-touted fight against corruption for the same reasons. Rather than pursue this obnoxious law let the government seek to redress past injustices, provide basic infrastructure, treat all groups and interest in the country fairly according to the rule of law, provide an enabling environment for jobs and be transparently accountable. Then it can watch Nigerians quickly change from being a pain in the neck to a proud, patriotic, productive, hardworking population. Was there not a period of better governance and social sanity when Nigerians were not so difficult to govern? There certainly was!