

**Nigeria: Boko Haram - OBJ Blames Jonathan
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Warri — Former President Olusegun Obasanjo, yesterday, blamed the incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan for allowing the Islamic sect, Boko Haram, to grow into a monster that is now uncontrollable by his failure to act on a report submitted to the government.

The former president who spoke at a lecture delivered by Professor Bolaji Akinyemi to mark the 40th anniversary of Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor's call to ministry at the Word of Life Bible Church, Warri in Delta State, also tasked Nigerians to choose between a strong leader who might adopt unusual approach to tackle a problem or a weak leader who will leave the problem to fester.

Answering a question from a pastor from Borno State on how he could forge any form of unity with those who are perpetuating violence in the northern part of the country, Obasanjo went emotional, saying: "Boko Haram is an ill wind that blows nobody no good."

He proceeded to narrate his experience when he went on a fact-finding mission to Borno State which was regarded as the base of Boko Haram.

He said: "They Boko Haram stated their grievances and I promised to relay them to the authorities in power, because that was the best I could do. I did report. But my fear at that time is still my fear till today. When you have a sore and fail to attend to it quickly, it festers and grows to become something else.

"Whichever way, you just have to attend to it. Don't leave it unattended to. On two occasions I had to attend to the problem I faced at that time. I sent soldiers to a place and 19 of them were killed. If I had allowed that to continue, I will not have authority to send security whether police, soldier and any force any where again. So, I had to nip it in the bud and that was the end of that particular problem," he said.

He was, however, careful to admit that all problems might not require that kind of treatment. According to him, "if you say you don't want a strong leader who can have all characteristics of leaders including God fearing, then have a weak leader and the rest of the problem is yours."

He argued that "the beauty of democracy is that power rests in the people, and every elected person would seek your votes to come back; if you don't want him, he won't come back. He noted that people had been saying that he brought President Goodluck Jonathan but what they have failed to admit is that he didn't give all the votes that brought the man to power.

The erstwhile president therefore charged Nigerians to stand up and take their destinies in their own hands, reminding them of a Yoruba adage, "if you say it the way it is, you will die; if you don't say anything at all, you will die, why don't you say it and die?"

Earlier in his lecture, titled: "The Nigeria of my Dream: Towards the consolidation of national unity", Professor Akinyemi had, among others, said emphatically that the way we can have a consensus in the country is to have a national conference.

The former External Affairs Minister was appalled by the hypocrisy shown by ex-presidents and ex-heads of state who had continued to preach what they did not practice while they were in office. "How does one explain revelations that from 1960, outflow of funds from Nigeria had got worse and yet the sanctimonious

speeches about anti-corruption continue to rent the air," Akinyemi asked, arguing that current attempts to amend the constitution would not solve the socio-political problems troubling the nation.

According to him, "we will continue to amend the constitution and further amend and there will be no solution until we all agree to sit down at a round table to write a constitution that Nigerians can truly identify with."

The professor had argued that if, "at independence in 1960, the political elite had reached a broad consensus on the fundamental values that should be the overriding principles of governance in order to make life more abundant for all, to cater for the poor, to increase opportunities for all, to provide safety net for the widow and the orphan and to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, between the North and the South and between the haves and the have nots, they would have laid a solid foundation for stability in Nigeria."

But Chief Obasanjo disagreed with the argument people had often preferred to canvas for a sovereign national conference, saying there would be no room big enough to accommodate every Nigerian at a roundtable conference to find a national consensus, noting that he would rather want to see a Nigeria where justice, fairness and equity reign supreme.

"Only a mad man will fail to acknowledge that there is high level corruption in the country", he said, stressing that the same World Bank that is always releasing figures about Nigeria's poor state of economic condition, recommended a structural adjustment programme for the nation and nearly all the eggheads in the country bought it even when the political leaders at the time said it would be detrimental to the nation.

Obasanjo argued that the World Bank had been talking about corruption in the country and "I challenged them to tell me the names of the Nigerians who had stashed monies abroad but they were not forthcoming except for the case of the Abacha loot. We recovered a large chunk of that loot and they told us there was still over \$1 billion from that family but my successors did not pursue any further.

"What I am saying is that it is the same World Bank that came to us with structural adjustment and some of us said it would make us poorer, you (Akinyemi) were in government at the time. We went for structural adjustment and we were poorer. And then they came up with an excuse that we didn't do it the way they wanted us to do it. Many years later, they accepted that we were right and they were wrong," Obasanjo stated.

Emphasising the need to tackle corruption in the country, the ex-head of state narrated an experience he had in Anambra State, saying the government signed a contract for turnkey project for carpets for \$10 million, the money was paid but no job done and when I asked they referred me to the terms of the contract.

"I called World Bank, they said go and look at the agreement, and the agreement says they are not responsible for how the money is spent. The Word Bank then told me that is the agreement and there is nothing we can do.

"I don't say that we are not corrupt, we are. But are we doing something about it? Once, people said, the fear of Ribadu is the beginning of wisdom. Then what happened to Ribadu? Then there was no longer any wisdom," he stated.

Obasanjo also disagreed with Akinyemi on federal character. While the political science professor wants the nation to dump federal character as a means of choosing leaders, Obasanjo was of the opinion that every nation of the world has its own peculiar way of addressing its peculiar problems.

"I don't see anything wrong with federal character if we want to wedge this country together because if you want to enter a place where there are 40 people and they require somebody and you are Urhobo and at the back you find somebody speaking Urhobo, the tendency is for you to go for that man. It's natural. So there is some form of security in the application of federal character," he said.

On the location of strategic and military assets which the lecturer argued are located on the Zaria-Kaduna axis out of mutual suspicion, and recommended that the nation must adopt the South African model of locating military formations across the nation, Obasanjo said: "If you look at the deployment of troops and formations in the country, it is fairly well spread.

"When I joined the army, there were five battalions, Enugu, Abeokuta, Ibadan and two were stationed in Kaduna. That was done by the colonial masters. Immediately after independence, our political leaders decided that there must be a battalion in Jos, Lagos, but as at today after the civil war there is a battalion in Warri and some other places.

"When we were doing that, we took into account the strategic interest of this country and don't forget that there are certain types of trainings that you can get in certain parts of the country," he pointed out.

Obasanjo, Akinyemi and the two other discussants including Elder Gamaliel Onosode, and Prof. Jim Omatseye extolled the virtues of Pastor Oritsejafor, praying that the 40 years he had spent in ministry would be like the 40 years of tutelage of Moses. "Your achievements in the last 40 years must be regarded as mostly time of preparations and now you are beginning again. Those of your flock who love you and believe in you will be with you all the way through," they said .

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