

NEWS

L-R: Mr. Femi Adesina, Deputy Managing Director/Deputy Editor-in-Chief, *The Sun*; Mr. Joseph Nassif, Group Managing Director, Slok Nigeria Limited; Mr. Vijay Sarpal, Executive Director, Prime Group, India; Mr. Tony Onyima, Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief, *The Sun*; Mr. Rohan Mehta, Managing Director, Prime Group; Mr. B. D. Roy, Group President, Technology and Mr. Ajay Sarkar, Manager, Projects, Prime Group, during the visit of a delegation from Prime Group to The Sun Publishing Limited, yesterday.

PHOTO: DELE ONATADE

Nigeria at 53: Jonathan raises committee on national dialogue

By NDUBUISI ORJI

The Federal Government yesterday heeded the call for convocation of a Sovereign National Conference as President Goodluck Jonathan announced the setting up of an Advisory Committee to work out modalities for the confab.

The President who stated this in his independence day broadcast, however, admitted that these may not be the best of times for the country.

He said that the setting up of a committee on national dialogue was borne out of his belief in the strength of dialogue in charting the way forward for the nation.

According to him, the committee which will be chaired by Dr Femi Okurounmu and Akilu Indabawa, as secretary will work out modalities for the conference and submit its report within a month. President Jonathan said other members of the committee would be announced soon.

On the proposed dialogue, the President said, "our administration has taken cognizance of suggestions over the years by well-meaning Nigerians on the need for a national dialogue on the future of our beloved country. I'm an advocate of dialogue. When there are issues that stoke tension and bring about friction, it makes perfect sense for the interested parties to come together to discuss."

"In demonstration of my avowed belief in the positive power of dialogue in charting the way forward, I have decided to set up an Advisory Committee whose mandate is to establish the modalities for a national dialogue or conference. The committee will also design a framework and come up with recommendations as to the form, structure and mechanism of the process," the President said.

On the state of the nation, the President said: "I admit that these may not be the best of times for our nation. Our people are divided in many ways; ethnically, religiously, politically, and materially. I cannot hide from this reality. I cannot hide from my own responsibilities."

According to Jonathan, the country has not had a smooth sail in the past 53 years, nevertheless, it has made some appreciable progress, adding that "Whatever the challenges that we may face, we have every reason to be proud of our national accomplishments. We have every reason to remain proud and optimistic. Our collective national journey has witnessed great watersheds, thanks to our spirit of endurance, perseverance and sacrifice. Getting the rest of the job done

•Says, these are not best of times for Nigeria

with determination and courage is just a matter of time.

"In our journey to greatness as a nation, we have built an economy that is robust and erected, enduring infrastructure and institutions of democracy. Our social system is now more inclusive, open and compassionate. We are waging a steady battle against poverty, unemployment, and corruption. Our sense of community, solidarity and shared expectation is strong and capable of withstanding the present social, economic and political challenges that still confront us," he noted.

"This is after all, our Fourth Republic; but despite all its flaws, it has lasted longer than all the previous three, put together. That is progress and it proves that, our differences—real and imagined—notwithstanding, we are, in every sense, a united nation."

The President said, though Nigeria's place in the global scene is strong and safe, the country must continue to build on it by remaining a nation and people "committed to ideals, the noblest humanitarian values, and the rule of law."

While calling on Nigerians to spare a thought for victims of terrorists activities across the world, Jonathan said he was overtaken by grief each time he received news of the atrocities of the terrorists in any state in the country, especially in the North-East geo-political zone.

On the massacre of over 50 students in Gujba, Yobe State, two days before independence celebration, according to Jonathan, was a barbaric act and a "demonstration of the extent to which evil forces will go to destabilize our nation. But I assure you, they will not succeed." The incident, according to the President, cast a dark cloud on the country.

He pointed out that the threat confronting the nation may be real and immediate, Nigeria is not

alone, as this is generally "a difficult season for much of the world: industrialized or developing; rich or poor. What matters are the lessons we learn, the wisdom we demonstrate, and the victory we snatch from the jaws of likely defeat."

"And I tell you, more than anything else, there are lessons to learn, and every cause to be thankful. If I must cite one example, take Syria. As we all pray and work for a return to normalcy in Syria, it would be helpful for us to reflect on the fact that Syria was once a peaceful, thriving, multi-cultural nation which played host to a mosaic of religions and ethnic cities."

The President called on Nigerians to begin to align their political utterances and conduct, solely with the nobler passions that unite the populace, pointing out that it is the common folks that make a nation and not politicians.

His words: "Our politics should be an art of patriotic labour and selfless service to the community, particularly, by the political elite who are placed in positions of great trust and responsibility. Politics has its own high moral principles, which abhor distracting and divisive rhetoric. As men and women in leadership, we must continually focus on service, duty, responsibility, and the next generation. Those who are elected to govern at all levels must focus on improving the lives of our people, not selfish ambition. Whether we are Muslims or Christians; rich or poor; from the North or the South; East or West; regardless of our political affiliations, this is the time for every one of us to be a statesman."

This is no time for the harmful clutches of parochial sentiments and the politics of bitterness, impunity, arrogance and unhelpful indiscipline. We must stand as one, with absolute commitment and resolve to resist any force that threatens us and the sanctity of our union", he stated.

ASUU: Students shut down Ibadan

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Adeyemo urged ASUU to take their struggle to the next level, by embarking on a nationwide mass action. The student leader said what the university teachers are demanding is for the improvement of the education sector, and as such, they could not be indifferent to the content of the agreement just because of fears

for the disruption of the academic calendar. "We have to actively join the struggle to force government to implement the agreement with all unions so that our tertiary institutions can reopen. If this agreement is fully implemented, it will mean better funding of education and a great relief to overburdened students," the students noted.

The Sun Award for Shobanjo: Gov Amosun is chief host

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Apart from Gov Amosun as Chief Host, the governors of Lagos, Oyo, and Ondo states have also been invited as Special Guests of Honour.

Also expected to grace the award ceremony are Minister of Information and Culture and Tourism, Mr. Labaran Maku and Chief Edem Duke, top advertising and marketing communications professionals, captains of industry, and a battery of celebrated Nigerians from all walks of life.

Mr Biodun Shobanjo has had a career spanning broadcasting at the then Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), now known as Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), and advertising, where he has put in more than four decades.

His first foray into the profession that has fetched him fame and repute, was at the then American-owned Grant Advertising, which he joined as an Accounts Executive Trainee in November 1971. He rose rapidly to become the Deputy Managing Director of the company in 1976, and in December 1979, he left to co-found Insight Communications in January 1980. He was the Chief Executive Officer of the company for 25 years, before standing down in December 2004.

Shobanjo is the Chairman of Troyka Holdings, the largest and most innovative integrated marketing communications group in sub-Saharan Africa, with businesses in marketing communications, resource management, and asset protection. Some of the companies under the group include: Insight Communications, All Seasons Mediacom, Media Perspectives, Optimum Exposures, The Quadrant Company, Hot Sauce (Digital Marketing), Black Onyx Properties, and Halogen Security.

Holder of the Certificate of the British Institute of Public Relations, London, as well as Certificate of the British Institute of Marketing, Shobanjo is a Chartered Member of the British Institute of Public Relations (CMIPR), Chartered Member of the British Institute of Marketing, Member, International Advertising Association, Fellow, Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria, Fellow, Commonwealth Journalists Association, and past President, Association of Advertising Agencies of Nigeria (AAAN).

Widely travelled, the winner of The Sun Advertising Man of All Times award holds many other awards both nationally and internationally. Married to Joyce and blessed with five children and two grandchildren, Shobanjo's hobbies include music, tennis, swimming, and meeting people.

While responding to the letter of nomination for the award from The Sun Publishing Limited, Shobanjo had described his landmark strides as "modest contribution to the marketing communications industry in Nigeria," but most professionals in the industry say that is an understatement, as he is the singular person who has had the most phenomenal impact on indigenous advertising in the country in the past 40 years.