

SECURITY CHALLENGES: THE ROLE OF THE NIGERIAN WOMAN

BY

PROF. WAHAB O. EGBEWOLE

Being the Keynote Address presented to the Annual Conference of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Kwara State Branch on 19th March, 2013

INTRODUCTION

I feel highly honoured to be invited as the Keynote Speaker at this all important conference of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Kwara State Branch. This great and noble association has played and is playing pivotal roles in the enhancement of the rule of law and the championing of the rights of women and children all over the world. I have no doubts in my mind that with the kind of theme for this year's conference, the association is destined to play greater roles in the charting of a democratic and crisis-free path for the Nigerian State. I am proud to be part of this noble objective.

The theme of this conference cannot come at a better time in the annals of our development as a country when we are witnessing serious internal strife as a result of multi-faceted and multi-dimensional causal effects. From the array of speakers paraded, it is clear that the conference will add to the literature in this area of study.

Let me enter a caveat that my choice as the Speaker at this conference is a manifestation of the aptness of the theme of the conference that we are indeed facing a very challenging time on security issues in Nigeria and thus a clarion call on all concerned at all levels to take appropriate steps to secure our land from the hands of those bent on destroying the peaceful co-existence of our country. As a stand in speaker, listeners beware!

The presentation is designed to raise posers for all participants and beam a search light on the issues of security and insecurity in our land. These posers include: who is a Nigerian woman? What are the major causes of insecurity in

Nigeria? What have the government and other critical stakeholders in security matters done or left undone about it? What roles for Nigerian woman? It is my expectation that when these posers are addressed by all of us within the period of this conference, we will be able to come up with a workable solution to this fundamental challenge in our body polity. Let me then welcome you on the ride to the world of Security Challenges: The Role of the Nigerian Woman.

In year 2000, Gbolabo Ogunsanwo had this to say:

“What kind of a country is this in which you don’t know whether anybody wearing police uniform is for real or a robber staking out a potential victim? If a serving Minister and his family are not safe in a country, who is safe? Do we all have to live in Aso Villa to be safe?”¹

My reaction then was that the scenario was a daily affair in Nigeria and this kind of situation had serious implications for the security of an average Nigerian.² I added that it was not a peculiarity of Nigeria and that it was a global phenomenon. Northedge confirmed the global dimension of insecurity, its causes and possible solution when he said:

“I think that the maintenance of order and peace in our world-wide international system is the greatest problem by far which modern man has to face. There are other problems of race relations, the population explosion, conservation of the environment, ignorance and poverty. But I would say, first, that the solution of these problem is dependent upon the maintenance of world peace, and second, that it is possible to imagine these other problems being solved with our present techniques and resources. But none has yet come up with a satisfactory answer to the question of peace and order within the global international system.”³

The question is: thirteen years after, has anything changed in Nigeria? To the uninformed nothing has changed. To my mind, a lot had changed negatively. Since then we have had the trouble of the Niger-Delta militants, the menace of kidnapping in the East, the Boko-Haram insurgency in the North and a

¹ G. Ogunsanwo, “Nigerian Thieves on the Internet” *The Comet on Sunday*, September 10, 2000 p.11

² W. Egbewole, “Crime, National Development and Security of the Person” in Ogan, C (ed) *The Challenge of Peace, Security, and Development in the Twenty-First Century Nigerian Society of International Law Thirty-Second Annual Conference Proceedings* p.69

³ F. Northedge, *Order and The System of International Politics* N.I.I.A. Lecture Series No.3 p.7

prostrate government who appears not to have capacity to decipher the problem talk less of finding solutions to it. Between then and now, Nigeria witnessed the Independence anniversary bombing⁴, the bombing of the United Nations office in Abuja⁵, the bombing of the Police Headquarters in Abuja⁶, the bombing of the military base in Kaduna⁷, the unrestricted killing in Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna and other states in the North and the recent killing of the serving Kwara State Commissioner of Police in far away Enugu right in his own village.⁸ This necessitated my being drafted to present this paper.

Sadly, none of these security issues have been resolved till now. Just pick a newspaper in Nigeria today and you will see a number of such dastardly acts perpetrated by agents of darkness. Where are we going in this country?⁹ Not resolving the issues is disturbing enough but more disturbing however, is that it appears the government lacked solution to even analyse the issues involved correctly. It also appears that government lacked clue to all of them. Different songs are rolled out on a daily basis showing that the problems are well beyond them. It has been said a problem identified is a problem solved. Alas, it appears to me that the Nigerian leadership needs to be more pro-active and improve its intelligence gathering capacity to be able to resolve the security issues facing our fatherland.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

‘Security’ means a state, feeling or means of being secure, while ‘secure’ means free from danger, safe, assured.¹⁰ It has also been defined to mean ‘things that are done to keep a person, building or country safe from danger or

⁴ ‘Car Bomb Attacks on Nigeria’s Independence Day Kill 10’ The Telegraph, October 1, 2010 available online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/8037584/Car-bomb-attacks-on-Nigerias-independence-day-kill-10.html> accessed [10 March 2013]

⁵ ‘Bomb Blast Hits UN Building in Abuja’ BusinessDay 26 August 2011 available online at <http://www.businessdayonline.com/NG/index.php/news/76-hot-topic/26502-bomb-blast-hits-un-building-in-abuja> accessed [12 March 2013]

⁶ ‘Bomb Explosion Rocks Nigeria Police Headquarters in Abuja’ Sahara Reporter, June 16, 2011 available online at <http://saharareporters.com/news-page/bomb-explosion-rocks-nigeria-police-hq-abuja> accessed [11 March 2013]

⁷ ‘Bomb Explosion Rocks Army Base in Kaduna’ Sahara Reporter, February 7, 2012 available online at <http://saharareporters.com/news-page/bomb-explosion-rocks-army-base-kaduna> accessed [11 March 2013]

⁸ ‘Kwara Police Commissioner Shot Dead in Enugu’, Vanguard, March 3, 2013 available online at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/03/kwara-police-commissioner-shot-dead-in-enugu/> accessed [9 March 2013]

⁹ On 14th March, 2014 there was a report that there was armed robbery attack at the Lagos Airport.

¹⁰ *Chamber’s 20th Century Dictionary*

crime.¹¹ The antithesis is insecurity which is a state of fear, deprivation, grave danger and unqualified exposure to want and despair. This is the essence of having government in place in any country. To ensure that the citizen is safe from any form of danger, deprivation, fear or want. The issue of security may be internal or external and the government of any sovereign state is expected to take care of both in order to ensure a balanced life for her citizenry.

In the first place, it is expected that the government must protect her citizens from any form of internal insurrection or external aggression. Internal security has been explained to mean:

“...the act of maintaining peace within the borders of a sovereign state or independent territory. Internal security is attained by upholding law and order and by securing the state against internal security threats. Threats to internal security may include low-level civil disorder, crime, organized violence, or even an armed insurgency.”¹²

External security connotes the maintenance of peace within and provision of a safe and peaceful environment that allows citizens to live without any fear of foreign conquest. Today, what we have in most parts of the world is challenge to internal security as it appears external aggression is now relatively considerably minimized. As a corollary to security we have peace which has been described by some scholars as absence of war but this has been criticized as begging the question and a negative connotation of the concept of peace.¹³ These twin concepts appeared to have eluded Nigeria over a long period of time and nothing is being done to properly address the situation. The issue is that this inability is a question of lack of will and capacity to appropriately deal with it.

The government of the Federal Republic as represented by the National Assembly is imbued with power to make laws for the “maintenance and

¹¹ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* 4th edition p.1482

¹² N. El-Rufai, “The Challenge of National Security and Implication for National Development delivered at the National Conference of the Obafemi Awolowo University Muslim Graduates Association (UNIFEMGA) on 19th May, 2012

¹³ M. Ajomo, “Reform of Security Council” *Nigerian Economic Integration* (1990 Guardian Lecture) and reproduced in A. Popoola “Globalisation and the Challenge of International Peace, Security, and Development in the 21st Century” in Ogan C. (ed) *The Challenge of Peace, Security, and Development in the Twenty-First Century Nigerian Society of International Law 32nd Annual Conference Proceedings* p.28

securing of public safety and public order and providing, maintaining and securing of such supplies and services..”¹⁴ Section 14(2)(b) of the Constitution imposed a positive duty on the government and provides:

“the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government”

This provision is part of Chapter two of the Constitution dealing with Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy which is not justiciable.¹⁵ The provision has been described as

“a toothless provision with no profitable yield in its nine years of existence! It is most unfortunate that such highly classed provisions are mainly left to be decorative of the Constitution rather than effective.”¹⁶

It is imperative to note that the fundamental importance of the issue of security ought not to be left to the whims and caprices of the people in government. The fact that this issue is under this chapter portend a grave danger to the Nigerian state and ought to be given a more critical appraisal and should actually be provided under a more practicable and pragmatic section of the constitution that will make those in government accountable for their actions or inactions on this issue.

We share the views of Hon. Justice Eso that the courts should be in the vanguard of giving life to the lifeless provisions of this chapter and take a cue from other jurisdictions like India which was where the provision was imported in the first place. His lordship argued:

“If the objectives could not be changed, it is submitted that the courts could be persuaded to a favourable interpretation of the provisions. That is favourable in the sense of the common man, the downtrodden, benefiting from such interpretation. If India is our guardian angel, then, with respect, I submit to you here that the Indian Supreme Court with active collaboration of the Indian Bar has broken the ice.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Section 11 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999*

¹⁵ Section 6(6)(c) of the Constitution.

¹⁶ K. Eso, “Waiting for Godot? The Colossus at Law, the Constitution and the Common Man” in *Further Thoughts on Law and Jurisprudence* (Ibadan: Spectrum Law Publishing, 2003) p.41

¹⁷ K. Eso, *ibid* p. 41

The good news is that Nigerians have options to make their government accountable for laxity in security of their lives and property as Nigeria is a signatory to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights,¹⁸ Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁹ and other international instruments which imposed obligation on the member states and signatories to such instruments to abide by their provisions. The ball is in the Court of the Nigerian Bar Association to champion public interest litigations to change the face of our laws and assist the common man in ensuring that the Nigerian government is responsible and responsive.

The fact that the issue of security under the constitution is not justiciable imposes a greater duty on the citizens to take their destiny in their hands and be ready to put pressure on the government to provide adequate logistics in place to secure the people. The current challenge that we face as a people is more on the Nigerian woman and this leads to the question: who is a Nigerian woman?

Who is the Nigerian Woman?

In answering this question, we must first answer the question who is a woman? She is defined as “feminine component of the human species who apart from serving as a vehicle for nurturing human life is also a producer, a consumer and equally an endowed agent for fostering a wholesome political, social and economic development in the society.”²⁰ Equally, she is also defined as “an adult human female, the female sex or any average woman”²¹

From these definitions it is obvious that a woman has a very crucial and central role to play in shaping the society at the social, economic and political levels. It has been said that the empowerment of women is central to all efforts to achieve sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions.²² Are they effectively playing the roles? Is the society conducive for them to discharge the responsibilities nature assigned to them? If the

¹⁸ Cap. A10 *Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2010*

¹⁹ This was made by the United Nations in 1948.

²⁰ O. Ikubani Jurisprudence Assignment on “Should we have Specialised Women and Child’s Rights?”

²¹ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*

²² C. Njinga, “The United Nations Agenda for Peace and Development, and the Imperative of Global Security” in Ogan, C. (ed) *The Challenge of Peace, Security, and Development in the Twenty-First Century Nigerian Society of International Law Thirty-Second Annual Conference Proceedings* p.18

women in the world are striving to play the roles, what is the stake of the Nigerian woman who is the focus of our discourse?

Nigerian woman is difficult to pigeon hole in a one sentence monologue. In order to know who a Nigerian woman is we may need to ask pertinent question because of the difficulty earlier expressed. Answering this question is like answering the question: who is a reasonable man?

Is the Nigerian woman represented by the First Lady or other First Ladies in Nigeria? Is she represented by a member of the Federation of women Lawyers? Is she depicted by Allison-Madueke, Minister of Petroleum Resources or Okonjo-Iweala, Minister of Finance and co-ordinating Minister of Economy or Oby Ezekwesile or the ordinary woman on the street of Ipata in Ilorin, Oyingbo market in Lagos or Onitsha market? We can go on and create different pictures of who a Nigerian woman is. For the avoidance of doubt, a Nigerian woman may be elitist. I am not against elitism or against a Nigerian woman to be a high profile person, a chief executive or indeed a career person. The issue however is that the ideal Nigerian woman should champion womanhood and detest anything that will project womanhood in any form of negativity. The way the woman is projected on our television seem to me not to bother us and it should bother us as it is this debasement that is partly responsible for the security challenges we witness today.

For this paper, our Nigerian woman is the ordinary hard working, diligent, conscientious, industrious and patriotic Nigerian who wants the best for her country and her people. I must say this woman may be difficult to see or meet and may only exist in our subconscious and in the future of our dear country. This position is informed by the fact that the picture we see daily on television, in the newspaper and on our streets does not project the majority as belonging to the group we earlier described. May be our vision is not as broad. Whatever the situation, this is the Nigerian woman that we intend to determine her role in the security challenges facing our country.

CAUSES OF INSECURITY

Studies have revealed a number of factors responsible for insecurity all over the world. The first major factor has been identified as ambition and lust of

power on the part of the political class. President Jacques Delors put it in perspectives when he said:

“All around us, naked ambition, lust for power, national uprisings and underdevelopment are combining to create potentials containing the seeds of destabilization and conflict aggravated by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.”²³

The power play and vaulting ambition of the political class encouraged the production of weapon of mass destruction which is also engineered by technological development which in itself has been identified as another causal agent of insecurity.²⁴ No doubt, technology has tremendous positive impact in the development of the world but it also has a way of negatively influencing security and insecurity in the land. The human race is still under the threat of nuclear destruction and today the world is faced by the challenge of chemical and biological weapon.²⁵ Since 1991 when President Jacques made this pronouncement and now lust for power and naked ambition has been on the increase instead of declining and this has continuously fuelled security challenges in the world.

Globalisation has also been fingered as another major cause of insecurity in the land. It has been argued that global market forces can generate wealth and spread prosperity but where development is uneven it can also create “increased political tension and risks of instability.”²⁶ A corollary to this is the internationalisation of criminal activities of certain types which is now perpetrated in a borderless world through all sorts of devices.

One major cause of security challenge is poverty which in itself is a failure of government. Essentially, bad government, maladministration, exploitation of national resources for personal use, corruption, nepotism and crass insensitivity to the plight of the ordinary man on the street results in the

²³ Address to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in March, 1991 and reproduced in Popoola, op. cit. p.34

²⁴ The tremendous influence of internet facility cannot be over emphasised and this has resulted in increased use of internet and fundamental improvement in social networking which is been used for both positive and negative ends.

²⁵ The world was taken through this threat as a basis for the war in Iraq when the regime of the deposed Saddam Hussein was alleged to be amassing weapon of mass destruction. We also witnessed the nuclear test by North Korea. These are very serious danger signals.

²⁶ Popoola op. cit. p.35

people devising survival strategies. This often leads to such vulnerable people falling victim of another set of exploiters who may now use the guise of religion or economic prosperity to lure them into criminal activities culminating in security challenges.

There is also the theory of “born criminals” which was said to be informed by the Darwinian theory of human evolution and was adroitly articulated by Eurico Ferri.²⁷ Even if this theory is right it is submitted that nature is nurtured by the environment. The society in which such people operate has serious implication on what they eventually become since opportunity they say makes the thief. Accusing finger has also been pointed at the media in the way they report security issues as another way of encouraging insecurity. This may be farfetched but suffice to say that the over dramatisation, over representation and over sensationalisation of security issues in electronic and print media portend great danger for our polity. The media also need to critically assess the kind of violent films that are shown on our screens in order to avoid our youths behaving aggressively.

ROLES OF NIGERIAN WOMAN IN SECURITY CHALLENGES

We may be tempted to ask the question why identify the roles of women in issues like this? Omorogbe attempted to answer the question that:

“Gender issues are an integral part of problematic of peace and security. Women bear a large share of the problems of unrest. It is estimated that eighty per cent of refugees are women and children. These women suffer great health risks, over and above those suffered by women under normal conditions.”²⁸

Another justification is provided by Oluyemi-Kusa when she argued that:

“Women, like men, are victims and actors in wars and armed conflicts but usually in different ways and different fields. During wars, women participate

²⁷ E. Ferri, *L' Homo Delinquentes* (The Criminal Man) 1976. This position was contested by O. Oloruntimehin “Criminals are Made not Born: The Myth and Reality of Human Behavior” *Mohammed Lawal Uwais Law Journal* referred to in W. Egbewole op.cit. p.74

²⁸ Y. Omorogbe, “Gender Issues in Peace, Security and Development” in Ogan, C. (ed) *The Challenge of Peace, Security, and Development in the Twenty-First Century Nigerian Society of International Law Thirty-Second Annual Conference Proceedings* p.57

in new activities and assume new roles, often taking on more responsibilities. Despite these changes, women are often marginalised in post-conflict peace building, both in the societies emerging from conflict, and in the formulation and implementation of peace-building strategies by international peace operatives.”²⁹

The Nigerian woman shares the same fate as her counterparts in other parts of the world and naturally feels the pains of insecurity the same way as their male folks. The proposal here is premised on the fact that the Nigerian woman is the daughter, sister, wife and mother of those involved in the security situation in the country. It must be underscored that her role has both preventive, pre and post security implications for the polity.

At the preventive and pre security challenge period the Nigerian woman must properly play the role of the mother to ensure that her child epitomizes the pristine positive behaviour by monitoring what he does, who his friends her, the kind of activities he engages in, the kind of religious and social ideologies he embraces, the kind of education and values he imbibes and on the whole ensure that the child is a responsible citizen of Nigeria. All these can only be achieved if she possesses these positive attributes herself. The principle is *nemo dat quod non habeat*. In a situation where the woman is herself a society woman, one of easy virtue, socially bankrupt and an exploiter of the system there is no way she can give these values.

The way to go therefore is for that woman to first see herself as the conscience of the nation and provide the right disposition so that without saying it, the child will pick the values and will thus not be a ready tool in the hands of those that will mould him into perpetrators of heinous crimes or a menace to our security. Where this is absent as it appears it is in Nigeria then the role will be difficult to perform. In my view, all hopes are not lost as the women organisations like FIDA will have to take the gauntlet and mount a campaign for re-orientation of the values in womanhood which over time may yield positive results.

²⁹ D. Oluyemisi-Kusa, “Gender, Peace and Conflict in Africa” in Shedrack Gaya Best (ed) *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited) p.206

During the period of crisis like we are in, the Nigerian woman must also redouble their efforts at personal and organisational levels and be ready to campaign for moral rejuvenation of the youths to let them see reason why they should desist. They must be involved at all levels: domestic, social, economic and political levels. The present disposition where the ones that are influential and/or in government pretend as if nothing is happening or they are not concerned is just like playing the ostrich. As we have been told earlier the womenfolk bear a great percentage of the brunt of insecurity. They must therefore loudly lend their voice to the cry for the stoppage of this carnage.

The rightness or otherwise of proposal for amnesty is an issue that the Nigerian woman must give proper and thorough consideration more from the pragmatic and practical perspective as against the present muffled voice and orchestration of political and religious sentiments. Whatever the Nigerian woman can do she must do to ensure that our land is once again secured as a peaceful and prosperous land.

The post security roles are also as demanding and it should be fashioned along all post conflict engagements where women are involved in peace-building missions. The present cry for affirmative action is not enough but rather how positively and effectively are we willing to deploy the opportunities that we presently have. As postulated by Sofola, that within the African aesthetic continuum, there is peace when all parts of the society operate in harmonious, complimentary manner.³⁰ This harmony is not achieved by fanning embers of discord at any level but rather by concerted efforts at ensuring that peace is achieved at all cost and by all means possible.

This peace building efforts must be encouraged and strengthened because studies have shown that women are especially vulnerable to low level violence during the early stages of post-conflict transition. Such fears have prevented women from engaging in economic activities and will naturally exacerbate the trauma suffered by women during the conflicts.

Women in post conflict are expected to provide care for orphaned or the abandoned children as a result of insecurity leading to conflicts. Strategy must

³⁰ Z. Sofola, "Women and Literature" in A. Odejide (ed) *Women and the Media in Nigeria* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1996)

thus be put in place to ensure that they are properly and adequately taken care of. The experience of the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 must be used to ensure that the innocent kids do not suffer in vain. Women must be involved in peace-making processes at the religious and community levels to secure a partnership in peace-building processes. The positive roles of women in other climes under the same circumstances may also assist the Nigerian woman in the determination of her own roles in these challenging times.³¹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

These are indeed challenging times in Nigeria and the Nigerian woman is definitely affected by the various acts of insecurity in our land. The womenfolk cannot feel unconcerned or be disconnected because they are on the spot. It is therefore a period for serious intellectual and pro-active engagements.

We have in this paper identified the issues of security and insecurity and their various causes with the twin concept of peace. The Nigerian woman was also conceptualised with the attendant difficulties of coming to terms with such a concept in the light of the varying pictures posed by the womenfolk in Nigeria. An attempt was also made at projecting the role of the Nigerian woman in the resolution of security challenges and the post-conflict engagements.

Is the Nigeria woman adequately positioned and equipped for the roles identified for her in the resolution of the security challenges presently afflicting us? I think not if the characterization of the woman as sketched in this paper is correct. Then, if not prepared, what should be done to re-position her for the daunting challenges? The answer is in the collaboration among women organisation to start capacity building and to put machinery in place to play the post-conflict roles having failed to discharge her duties to prevent the menace from happening in the first place then she cannot afford to fail a second time.

It is my hope that all hopes are not lost because the natural disposition of a woman is to create a conducive environment for dialogue, constructive engagement, effective communication, dispute resolution and indeed to build nations. Nigerian woman cannot act differently.

³¹ *Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference* Published by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) available on line <http://www.unifem.undp.org/peacebook.html>

After all, studies have shown that:

“as the influence of women in public life grows, the level of corruption declines. This is true even when comparing countries with the same civil liberties, education, legal institutions, and income levels.”³²

In the last few years the influence of the Nigerian woman has grown in leaps and bounds politically, socially and economically. It is for a purpose and that purpose is positively changing our society. The ball is in your court.

³² <http://wb/n0018.worldbank.org/new>