

**An appeal to Nigerians to save Nigeria as a Nation by reasoning, not by sentimental attachment to clannishness and sectionalism.**

We are compelled to write again to caution Nigerians who are making provocative utterances that will lead us to nowhere. The meeting of the Middle-Belt and South-South is a joint effort in search of a plausible solution. I do not think it calls for the Northerners not to meet in search of a solution. It is clear that the insipient nationalism which we welcomed in the 50s had died on the altars of tribalism and sectional affiliations. If all of us were thinking of developing Nigeria as a nation, the problems of section and occupational affiliation at the expense of lives of farmers and people from different sections of the country could not have arisen. I am surprised that some people are condemning the meeting of the South, the Middle-Belt and the East. I want to address the issues serially:

1. Some people are opposed to restructuring. I have given my views on restructuring. Let me say that the call of people to revert to the National Assembly for restructuring is the logical thing to do. I accept the advice by Tanko Yakassai. But Tanko Yakassai should also remember that the series of restructurings of this country done by the military were not done through the National Assembly. When Gowon created his twelve states to cripple Biafra, it was not done by the National Assembly. When General Babangida created his 19 states, it was not done by the National Assembly. When Abacha created his own, it was not done by the National Assembly. All those states' creations that created imbalance in the country were done by the military without logic. I have the belief that we if could hide our pride and return to the last constitutional conference – under Jonathan –

and use the report as a working document in search of a basis for national stability, we will be doing the right thing. Restructuring is imperative because various military administrations had destroyed the structure on which we agreed to be one Nigeria. I am surprised that Tanko Yakassai was criticizing those who are opposed to open grazing of cattle. He talked about the freedom of movement of herdsmen and threatened that the law courts will annul anything that some governors have made. I find this very disheartening and I want to know if the freedom of movement of cattle is a license to murder and rape women simultaneously in different parts of the country. Yes, we agree that anybody can live anywhere in the country but my right to live does not become a categorical imperative that people must be sacrificed, farms must be sacrificed, schools must be sacrificed, in order to assuage the loss of the herdsmen. As I wrote in Vanguard in May last year, cattle rearing is one occupation; there are many occupations in the country and we must learn to live together and tolerate one another, not slaughter and rape some people in order to live and assert my right to rear cattle. The government must do something to institutionalize cattle rearing in a law that will create cattle ranches so that cows do not move and cause accidents on the roads and destroy farms which is another occupation that is being sacrificed for cattle rearing. Yes, I agree that the problem of herdsmen has been with us for a long time, even during the time of British Colonialism. But they did not rear their cattle with impunity that enabled them to rape people's wives and destroy farms in preference for cattle rearing. We have migrant fishermen, we have other kinds of people moving from one place to the other in search of livelihood.

They did not take it upon themselves to slaughter people who inconvenience their occupation. We must look for a way to accommodate ourselves so that Nigeria can grow. In many countries of the world, people produce cattle not at the expense of farming. Therefore government must know that it is imperative that ranching must now become official approach to cattle rearing; not the illiterate movement of people carrying dangerous weapons, killing people who challenge them. I feel sorry that our president who could have given these issues the address that they require is indisposed. I'm praying very hard that he should return because he has the guts to call a spade a spade. We must take our problems to an intellectual plane and find solution, not moving from bush to bush killing people in a very crude and primitive way without reason. I believe we can overcome these challenges. I call upon the Federal Government to set up a committee to study the ecological push that is forcing the herdsmen to move South. We must study the situation instead of making pronouncements on emotional basis. The desiccation of the desert is an ecological push; we cannot run away from it. The herdsmen do not understand ecologism. Let us reason with the government to address the desertification that is compelling the herdsmen to move South in uncoordinated fashion. The desiccation of the Sahelian region is an ecological factor; it is not an emotional factor. Its impact on Nigerian herdsmen must be studied and solutions found. Like I said in my paper in May last year, I served on the Nomadic Commission. We were looking for solution. We were trying to train the nomads in order to make them more useful Nigerians.

Unfortunately, Nomadic Commission was not even consulted when the paper on grazing was written. The paper was sentimental; it was not based on knowledge of the situation. In reply to Tanko Yakassai's advice that those who are calling for restructuring should to go the National Assembly, let me advise Tanko Yakassai that he was present in Nigeria when the military rulers were tinkering with the structure that gave us independence. They did not go to National Assembly; because they controlled the government, they fractured Nigeria to suit their whims and caprices. It is because there was no logic or system to their own restructuring of our independence structure that has created the problems we are having now. My advice: if we cannot meet to study how we can get out of these, problems let us go back to the last constitutional conference under Goodluck Jonathan and start thinking. When a nation has lost the capacity to think, its approach must be crude and the approach must lead to crisis. So, let us meet as intelligent men and women; let us put our heads together to look at the structure we think is not working and find out what has gone wrong. Any nation that cannot elevate its problems to an intellectual plane can never find solutions on a sentimental basis.

Thank you.