

If the youths be corrupted, the Nation is finished.

- By Owei Lakemfa

I want to thank the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Amilcar Cabral Ideological School (ACIS) for organizing this Retreat to enable a symbiotic interaction with students from across the country.

A nation should live for its youths because its youths are its future. It is the youths that can guarantee its tomorrow. The youths are the backbone. They are its vibrancy.

It is from the vibrant voices of its youth, a nation can constantly review its positions, policies and direction. It is youthful ideas that propel a people. If the ideas be wrong, it is left for the older generation to gently point this out and redirect the energy of the youths. The youths are the bloodline of a people. When people talk of youthful blood, it is the required blood to renew a people.

But when the youths merely echo the songs of the past; especially when those songs are badly composed and rendered, then the nation has a problem. A nation cannot advance if the youths are compromised. If its youth be morally and socially bankrupt, what future has their nation? If its youths are corrupt or corrupted like virus, how can the nation develop? If the aspirations of the youth is to slip into the shoes of a bankrupt elite, what future can the country have? If Nigeria is to be great, as it should be, there must be youths willing to make sacrifices.

My generation of student leaders refused to accept the State of the Nation as given. Many of us refused to accept the status quo. We faced formidable challenges. Some were expelled and never re-admitted like one of my co-chairpersons at this occasion, Dr. Shola Olorunyomi who was President of the University of Ilorin Students Union. This was also the fate of fine patriots like our late comrades, Jibrin Bala Muhammad and Abdulrahman Black who were expelled by the Ahmadu Bello University. This was also the

fate of the founding President of the National association of Nigerian Students (NANS) Dr. Tenimu Kurfi.

But these can be said to be lucky, as some were killed during various struggles for better, accessible and affordable education, and a better country. One of the two lead speakers today, Comrade Lanre Arogundade who was NANS President in 1983/84 went to the Ife post office one day unaware he was being trailed by security forces. He was kidnapped, but despite such harrowing experience, his spirit remained unbroken, as it has remained today, over thirty years later.

My generation of students might not have succeeded in changing our country for the better but it is not for want of trying. And after over three decades of activism, we are not about to give up. As bad as things were, as unrelenting as the ruling elites are, it was my generation that ran the civil society organisations beginning with the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) through the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) to the pro-people organisations that we have today. With the assistance of our elders like Alao Aka-Bashorun and Beko Ransom-Kuti, we established and ran the Campaign for Democracy (CD) which organized the pro-democracy protests that eventually forced the military out of power. My generation of Activists can proudly report that although we might not have succeeded in our goals to build a better country, but at least, we gave our nation some hope, and are primarily responsible for the democratic politics we run today, even if it be corrupted by the elites.

But why were we so committed and dedicated?

We were products of the pro-people ideas that ran through the gamut of our tertiary institutions. We did not accept our situation as given. We probed and asked questions. More importantly, we read and debated, and based on consensus, took action. But most importantly, we organized!

There is no substitute to organization. Our minority rulers rule and impose their ideas and culture on the rest of the population because they organize and are organized. They

have formal and informal clubs, associations and political parties. They also have capital and international outreach. With these they rule, and we are ruled. In our days, we had various organisations on campus that consciously met to discuss, debate, develop ideas and played active part in student unionism. Why there has been a degeneracy in which student leaders have become megaphones for bankrupt ideas and elites, in which they have become crowds-for-hire, is because the old student discussion groups have mainly been replaced by cults, socially degenerate clubs and religious groups all claiming superiority over others.

In rebuilding, you do not have to start afresh, you have a legacy to build on. Most importantly, you have a guiding book, a manifesto on which you can mobilize the rest of the student populace and run your unions. It is called the NIGERIAN STUDENTS CHARTER OF DEMANDS. The Charter was written and debated across campuses before its adoption by the Third NANS Convention held on this very campus, BUK, in December, 1982.

The organizers have done very well in reproducing for this Retreat, copies of the Charter which although thirty three years old, and in need of a review to update some details, but I assure you, the core ideas it contains do not need updating. They need to be implemented so that this generation of students will be useful to themselves, to the country, and the future.

In concluding, let me remind us all, that today, September 21, is the International Peace Day, as declared by the United Nations. As you know, there can be no peace without social justice, and the best armies for social justice in the world, are the youths. Let us enlist in that army.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.