

Nigeria and the United Nations: The Past, the Present and The Future

by

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Introduction

My assigned topic “Nigeria and the United Nations; the Past, the Present and the Future” is so vast that it will not be possible to do justice to the subject matter within the time allocated to it. Fortunately however all the other four papers are so closely related that all I can do is to compliment the efforts of the others within the main theme which is “Nigeria and the Reform of the United Nations. As you are all aware, Nigeria has been an active and supportive member of the U.N for almost 45 years when the membership of the organization was 99 against the current membership of 191 members today.

The United Nations

The United Nations was established in 1945 “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”, the United Nations is unquestionably the most sophisticated diplomatic machinery ever created for the promotion and management of international peace and security. The United Nations emerged after the catastrophe of the Second World War. Its founding fathers assigned to it the following objectives: (i) to maintain international peace and security (ii) to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of people; (iii) to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, humanitarian character; and (iv) to be a center for

harmonizing the actions of nations for the attainment of these common goals, the United Nations Charter established six principal organs to enable it implement its broad mandate and the programme agenda that flows from it.

The first and most representative organ is the General Assembly often referred to as the “parliament of the global community of sovereign states”. All member states are represented in this organ, which is constitutionally empowered to “discuss any questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security” and to “make recommendations with regard to the state or states concerned to the security council or both”. The Security Council is the second organ in terms of importance, it is the nerve center, indeed the most strategic organ of the world organization, consisting of 15 member states, with 5 of them, USA, Russia, France, Britain and China enjoying permanent membership status and veto-power associated with it. The third organ is the economic and social council with a membership of 54 mandated to make or initiate studies on international, economic, social, cultural, educational, health and related matters and make recommendations to the General Assembly.

The fourth organ is the Trusteeship Council which has now become redundant following the virtual end to the process of decolonization. The principal judicial organ to the UN, the International Court of Justice (**ICJ**), the fifth organ is made up of 15 judges. It adjudicates on legal matters and also offers advisory opinions at the request of the General Assembly, The Security Council, or of any of the specialized agencies of the UN. The sixth principal organ is the Secretariat headed by a Secretary-General who is appointed by the General Assembly at the recommendation of the Security Council.

Given the relationship between peace and development, the authors of the UN charter made provisions for the establishment of specialized agencies in specific technical and functional fields, and provided institutional linkages between each of them and the UN proper in the firm belief that a durable peace and security can only be built on a solid edifice of social and economic development. Most prominent among UN specialized agencies are the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) the United Nations Industrial Development Organization

(UNIDO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Each of these agencies has its own statute with its own board of directors and its own budget. It is through the Economic and social council that they report to the UN General Assembly.

Since the creation of UN, there has been a massive proliferation of economic commissions, social committees and administrative agencies which make the administrative landscape of the UN look like an institutional anarchy. The Secretariat itself has over the years, expanded considerably and the complexity is indeed baffling.

The need to reduce high cost of administration which has risen with the expansion of responsibilities all over the world and in the wake of new challenges and expansion of membership has made it imperative the task of reorganizing the UN also the need for legitimizing the world body as the fulcrum for multilateral diplomacy. Thus, in this submission an attempt will be made to highlight Nigeria's role within UN since its admission in 1960.

Nigeria and the World

In his inaugural speech delivered at the plenary session of the General Assembly in new York on October 8, 1960 the Late Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of blessed memory asserted that "Nigeria would participate actively in the work of the United Nations organization and uphold the principles upon which the United Nations organization is founded". This is not only for the international legitimacy that membership confers on states, but also the opportunity that it affords for new and poor states to engage in multilateral diplomacy and contribute to global peace and security.

Only a few weeks after this famous speech of the Prime Minister, Nigeria was inducted into global politics when the world body asked the country to contribute and deploy a contingent of its national troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo for peacekeeping under the United Nations auspices. This request provided the first unmistakable indication that Nigeria was already fully accepted as a credible member of the world community, and was expected to assume a decisive role in African

affairs – a role which was to taken for granted because of her size and population. It also confirmed the deep-seated belief among Nigerians that their country was manifestly destined to play a leading role in African Affairs for being faithful to the ideals of the UN. Nigeria did not join other radical African states who withdrew their troops after the Congolese Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, was murdered. Nigerians troops served in the Congo operations from 1960 to the end of the operations in 1964 with Nigeria's major General J.T.U Aguiyi-Ironsi eventually becoming the overall commanding officer of the UN forces.

Nigeria successfully utilized the platform of this world body to effectively pursue its dreams of decolonization of other African countries and particularly the eradication of apartheid and racism from the continent of Africa arising from this commitment, Nigeria organized and hosted the first United Nations conference for action against apartheid in Lagos in 1977, and subsequently chaired the UN Anti-Apartheid Committee from 1970 until that Committee was dissolved in 1994. Nigeria has also availed itself to the UN to press other issues of global concern such as trade, debt relief and forgiveness, etc. Nigeria has successfully represented Africa on three occasions in the Security Council, and has also had the honour of guiding the activities of the General Assembly when General Joe Garba served as president of the 44th Session.

As prominent member of the international community Nigeria continues to play a very active role in global governance in different international organization and bodies such as the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement, the G-77, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), etc. At the global level Nigeria has chaired the Non-Aligned Movement, the G-77 and is the current chair of the Commonwealth, while it has also headed several UN committees, among them the UN special committee on peacekeeping operations. Nigeria has represented Africa creditably as a non-permanent member at the Security Council on three different occasions (1966-1967, 1978-1979 and 1994-1995) And in terms of the maintenance of global peace and Security, hundreds of thousands of Nigeria soldiers, policemen and civilians have taken part in peacekeeping operations, truce supervisions, monitoring and observer missions in diverse regions from Africa to Asia and the

Middle East. This is aside from scores of Nigerians who have served in various UN bodies and other international organization and specialized commissions including the likes of Professor Adebayo Adedeji as Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UN/ECA) for fourteen years, Chief Emeka Anyaoku as Commonwealth Secretary-General, and Professor Ibrahim Gambari a current Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Adviser to the Secretary – General on African Affairs.

It was Nigeria that organized and spearheaded the 18-month long EEC-ACP negotiations in 1973 to ensure that the small and poor African, Caribbean and Pacific states got a good bargain in their economic and trade relations with the developed states of Western Europe. This agreement, which replaced the neo-colonial Yaoundé Accords and Lome Francophone African states signed with the EEC, was later re-named the Lome Convention, and has been revised and strengthened several times since then. What is particularly remarkable in this is the pure Nigerian altruism, as the country was already a major oil producer and exporter by then, and by far the richest African state, and thus did not stand to benefit anything from the arrangement. This is because crude oil, its main export, was not covered under the STABEX arrangement.

Nigeria's contributions to the U.N and global governance in peace and Security, have, understandably, been most prominent at the continental level. For instance, Nigeria is founding member of and an acknowledged powerhouse inside the Organization of Africa Unity, and was in the forefront of this recent transformation into the African Union; the formation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the establishment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); the decolonization of countries like Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia, and Anti-apartheid activism; peace-making, peacekeeping and conflict mediation in Africa; continental economic development and integration, to mention just a few. It was in recognition and appreciation of its unparalleled commitments towards the eradication of the insidious settler-colonialism and racism in Africa that Nigeria was, in the mid-1970s, conferred with the prestigious status of a "Frontline State" by the Southern African States. Nigeria chaired the OAU two times in the organization's first thirty years of existence, was the moving force behind the formation of ECOWAS which it has chaired several times since its inception in 1975.

Nigeria is currently the chair of both African Union and the Steering and Implementation Committee of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Nigeria was also invited to mediate and mount a unilateral peacekeeping in Chad in 1982, was the moving force behind the formation of Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and its operations to restore peace and normalcy in the West African sub-region and actively negotiated return of peace to the war-torn Sudan in the early 1990s. Nigeria has been in the forefront of current international efforts to bring peace to Sudan's Darfur region similarly, Nigeria also successfully mediated the restoration of democratic rule in Sao Tome and Principe after a military coup that country's elected civilian government, and took a firm stand against Faure Gnassingbe's undemocratic seizure of power in Togo after his father's sudden death in February 2005.

With the final winding down of the Cold War by the end of the 1980s decade, it was already clear to all that United Nations would eventually have to undergo drastic reforms and changes if it was to remain relevant for the demands of the 21st Century. Its structure and functions were determined by the victorious allied power after WW II, but there is no doubt that it could not continue that way with less than sixty member states at its inception in 1945, the organization has today grown into a truly universal organization with 191 members. Since the majority members states gained independent after the organization had come into existence, it now has to adapt to emerging geopolitical and geo-strategic changes in the world. To remain static would render it insensitive and irrelevant to the wishes and aspirations of the vast majority of states and peoples today.

The Security Council till now remains the exclusive preserve of the great powers, but then several other states have since risen to the status of global economic and technological great powers and whose contributions to global politics can only be ignored at considerable risk. For example, it remains indefensible that the African continent with 53 member states, and by far the largest regional bloc in the United Nations, is not represented in the Security Council, while Europe, with far less number of states, has three veto-wielding members. Latin America is also severely marginalized. The implication is thus that the Cold War configuration of the world

body has become untenable. This fact was also underscored in the report of the High-Level Panel proposed reform of the UN which state;

”increase the involvement in decision-making of those who contribute most to the United Nations financially, militarily, and diplomatically specifically in terms of contributions to United Nations assessed budgets, participation in mandated peace operations, contributions to voluntary activities of the United Nations in the areas of security and development, and diplomatic support of United Nations objectives and mandates”.

The implication is that the voices of those states that matters and those regions that have hitherto been marginalized must now be given their due recognition and importance.

Those that contribute very appreciably to the work of the United Nations must now be rewarded with greater involvement in global governance as the way to correct the injustices of the past and make the world body truly democratic, representative in the current global realities. In short, the institutional and structural inadequacies of the UN must be overhauled to enable the organization face the challenges and collective threats of the 21st Century. The threats and challenges that face the world today, according to the High Level Panel, and which require collective efforts, are classified into six clusters as:

- Economic and social threats, including poverty, infectious diseases and environmental degradation
- Inter-state conflict
- Internal conflict, including civil wars, genocide and other large-scale atrocities
- Nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons
- Terrorism
- Transnational organized crime.

The High-Level Panel recognizes that the international society in the 21st Century faces myriad challenges and threats that are clearly beyond the capacity of even the most powerful states to address alone. Since collective action is thus a *sine qua non* to addressing these problems, reforming the UN and expanding the membership of some of its principal organs to be more inclusive has become inevitable, consequently, if Africa's voice is not to remain permanently silenced, then the Continent has to be accommodated in the envisaged reforms.

The High-Level Panel recommended that the Security Council be expanded to accommodate regions that hitherto had been marginalized. It proposed two models for consideration, namely: Model A" and "Model B". The Model A proposes six new permanent seats (with no veto) and additional three 2-year non-permanent seats to be divided among the major regional areas. Model B on

the other hand proposes no new permanent seats. Instead, it recommends the creation of eight 4-year renewable seats (with no veto) and one new 2-year Non-

Permanent and non-renewable seat, to be divided among the regional areas.

Either way, the membership of the Security Council would be increased to twenty-four, as opposed to the current fifteen.

The African Union adopted "Model A" of the recommendations to create more permanent seats in the Council but without veto, as this would give Africa two seats. Like any African country, Nigeria has a legitimate right to aspire for permanent membership of an enlarged Security Council.

Nigeria's aspiration to seek a permanent seat at the Security Council was first openly expressed in 1992 by General Ike Nwachukwu as the Foreign Affairs Minister and the country has not looked back since then. At the time, no one was sure when the actual reforms would take place, and if at all the reforms would include enlarging the Security Council. But the outlines of the emerging post-Cold War world order had demonstrated that the world organization was overdue for major overhauling.

Although Nigeria's immense qualifications for permanent seat at the Security Council, and its track record of services to the African Continent, and the global

community at large, have already been highlighted, and thus bear no further repetition, The reality is that a continent of 53 states would not lack several other qualified candidates to fill the African slots if and when such slots are created. The five geopolitical sub-regions--- into which the continent is divided, can each produce a credible candidate for a seat in the Council. This implies that Nigeria's own aspiration will have to contend with other credible regional challengers. Thus far, the two other prominent regional contenders that have been identified in the open are Egypt in North Africa, and South Africa in Southern Africa. This must not in any way be construed to mean that other contenders might not have engaged in subtle subterranean campaign and lobbying to represent Africa. Senegal in West Africa and Kenya in East Africa are also rumoured to be interested, while some believe that Libya might choose to exploit its current rapprochement with the West to canvas for a seat. Some of these are still conjectures, but the African Union has not yet decided on which states would represent the Continent.

If the above scenario plays out, that would leave Nigeria with another formidable opponent from South Africa. Although South Africa was only admitted into the UN in 1994, Post-apartheid South Africa is undoubtedly a continental economic, political and military power to reckon with in Africa.

Like Nigeria, it also has considerable clout in world affairs. Besides, it is more likely to have the support of most Southern African states that are largely dependent on it for survival. Nigeria cannot hope to garner considerable support within West Africa because of the divisive factor of Anglophone-Francophone dichotomy which has been at the root of sub-regional disagreements since independence. Nigeria experienced stiff opposition from French-speaking West African states over the formation of ECOWAS in the early 1970s, while its peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts in Liberia in the 1990s were largely thwarted by the Francophone states of Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso.

We must also bear in mind that the choice of Africa's representatives at the enlarged Security Council is not solely an African Affair, other powers outside Africa are interested to which Countries will represent the Continent. Such major powers that bankroll the United Nations cannot be ignored in the realities and dynamics of world politics. The implication is that Nigeria must have to engage in aggressive bilateral and multilateral diplomacy and campaign in and outside Africa to woo to its side the extra-African countries that may influence African states decisions. For example, Nigeria must not ignore France as a major factor in African politics. France's

legendary political and economic stranglehold on many of its former colonies and its role in frustrating the formation of ECOWAS and its initial activities against ECOMOG operations must not be easily forgotten.

The campaign for the Security Council seat must be treated as a critical national project where all hands must be on deck. Nigeria must make good use of its seasoned and experienced diplomats, scholars, politicians, journalists, students' organizations, labour unions, the organized private sector, mass media outfits, professional bodies with international affiliations, and religious bodies, and mobilize both local and international publicists and lobbyists around the world in the campaign. Well-coordinated and aggressive marketing and international publicity are required to continually stress Nigeria's worthy track record of services and its potentialities to contribute meaningfully to global governance and the purposes of the United Nations in the 21st Century. We must not fail to stress its contributions to global and regional peacekeeping and peacemaking activities, the unparalleled experience and Nigeria's acknowledge and track record in global governance. Nigeria must not allow itself to be lured into a false sense of security. Past records cannot be a substitute for today's *realpolitik* and hard bargaining. Today's realities are different from yesterdays. This is the time to deploy all Nigeria's energies, resources and clout to achieve this national objective.

Conclusion

At the end of it all, Nigeria with the largest African population of well over 130million, endowed with enormous oil and gas, agricultural lands and immense human resource potentials, will forever remain relevant and influential in Africa and World Affairs either in or outside the Security Council.
