



THE FAILURE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Honourable (Dr) Usman Bugaje

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlement.

I have actually been requested earlier to say a few things about the National Assembly but I disqualified myself, having contested for the post of the Speaker. I felt I should not make a formal presentation about the National Assembly, which we all know what it is. However, the fact that a lot of issues have been raised in the paper presented by his Excellency, Alhaji AbdulKadir Balarabe Musa, I thought I should make some response.

The first thing I should mention is that a lot of what has been said in the paper is unfortunately true. If not for the fact that there is no enough time, I would have given specific examples to support what he has said, based on my experiences in the National Assembly.

There are, however, some aspects that have not been mentioned that I think we need to know. Some of the three major areas that really worry us as Nigerians in my mind have been mentioned here; the issue of security, the issue of corruption, and the issue of the rule of law. These are not necessarily the only issues, there are quite a number, and I just want to say that the Legislature has a responsibility in each of these areas. It owes the country the responsibility to make sure that the Executive arm of the Government does all that needs to be done to ensure that these areas are adequately addressed. I feel sad that the National Assembly is not doing its job, and I just want to give an example each, some of which I am sure you know very well.

Some of you here will recall that around April 2004, the Governor of Benue State was attacked on his way to Abuja. When he was attacked, the National Assembly – the House of Representatives in particular called in the then Inspector General of Police and he was asked in the Preliminary Session of the House the question “What is really the problem of security in Nigeria?” He said many things but one thing he said was very important. He said that in the 2003 budget N10 billion was allocated to the Police. He was speaking in April 2004, and he said that not a single naira was given to the Police! He also said that in that same year there was a supplementary budget of 2003 and the Police was given an extra N4.8 billion. In April 2004, about 4 months after, he was reporting to the National Assembly that he did not get any naira!

I made the comment on the floor of the house that of all the things he mentioned, I think this is the most important. That here is a National Assembly that has appropriated this sum which should have gone to equip the Police to do their job, and he is reporting to this National Assembly that this money has not been given. To me, what he was telling the National Assembly was that it is our responsibility to make sure that this money is delivered. I did make the comment that it is our responsibility and if we wanted to know who is really creating security problems in the country we should know where to ask and we should know where to go.

The second example is in the area of corruption. Only recently when reviewing the Privatisation exercises, the Privation Process of the Aluminium Smelter Company, it was very clear that the rules and regulations of the Privatisation Board were violated. A company that actually qualified was refused the bidding and it was given to a company that was far less qualified, for an amount that was ridiculously low and we were sufficiently informed that the man behind this company is the son of the President! Again the National Assembly did not do anything.

The third example is on the rule of law. In this case, we had two very clear cases. Let me summarise. When we were going for recess, I remember and my colleagues who are here will remember as well. There were three issues that the house was supposed to have had report on. There was a case of the demolition exercise taking place in Kubuwa. There was a committee set up under Alex Nwofe and he had his report ready for submission but they said they would not listen to it because it was an interim report. There was a committee on Judiciary set up to investigate why the President refused to respect and obey the rule of law in respect to the case of the Lagos State Local Government Fund. There was also a committee set up for impeachment which was also supposed to submit its report. We were going on recess but there was no mention on any of these. I with five other members of the house went to the Speaker and said that we cannot allow the house to close without hearing these reports. I was shocked to see that these five people all chickened out! It was after we have closed and I heard the announcement that Chairmen of Committees were dissolved that I appreciated what was happening. They knew and I did not know that committees were going to be dissolved and so lobbying was going to be started and people wanted to see how they are going to come up as Chairmen of Committees.

We did a lot of things but eventually this was done. There was a report on Impeachment and a report on the Interim. But we had to force them to do it. We were able to do what little we are doing because we formed the Forum for Democracy and Good Governance in the House of Representatives.

The last thing I would like to mention is that the fault is not just that of the National Assembly but our collective fault. It takes two to tango. If our Representatives are not doing their jobs, it is our responsibility to tell them they should either do their job or we recall them! Why are we just keeping quite? The Civil Society is quite. Everybody is simply complaining. We should do more than complaining and there is a lot we can do.

I thank you for listening.

ABOUT HON. (DR) USMAN BUGAJE



Honourable (Dr) Usman Bugaje was born in Bugaje Village of Kaita Local Government Area of State, Nigeria, on the 11th of September 1951. He graduated in Pharmacy from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria in 1975. He later did an MA in African Studies and a PhD in Intellectual History, both at the Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum, Sudan.

Dr Bugaje also worked with Islam in Africa Organisation (IAO) and taught at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. He is also a prolific writer on national and international issues, and has published in both academic and non-academic journals and other media. He was for four years the Political Adviser to the Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar.

Dr Bugaje was Conferred the honorary title of Commander of the Order of Civil Merit and Commander of the Order of Independent Equatorial Guinea by the President of Republic of Equatorial Guinea on 26th March 2002.

He is the Founding Chairman of Network for Justice - an advocacy group concerned with promoting civil education, consumer and human rights. He was elected to represent Kaita/Jibiya Federal Constituency, in House of Representatives, in the April 2003 election.