

## **DIVERSE TRIBES AND TONGUES: PANACEAS TO NIGERIA'S PEOPLE'S DIFFERENCES.**

Our dear nation must acknowledge the impact of ethnic diversity on our collective welfare. It is crucial to recognise that the multiplicity of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds presents a pivotal challenge that we must confront to advance our common interests and progress as a unified community. This has to be the thought that informed Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah's words when he said, *"The first mistake we may make is to assume that ethnicity, tribe or tongue does not matter. They all do. This has been the reality of human existence from the beginning of time. The challenge has been how to turn diversity into an asset, how to create a society where each citizen can have a sense of belonging and believe in fairness and justice."* The Guardian Online Newspaper of 6<sup>th</sup> March 2017.

Everyone must acknowledge that the aftermath of the 1914 unification of the Southern and Northern Protectorates, which individually are a mixture of hundreds of tribes and tongues, has, even after a century remained a multidimensional and intriguing topic in discourses within and outside the shores of Nigeria. This can be attributed to the homogeneity of each distinct tribe that forms the country Nigeria, wherein, by extension, her greatest strength lies.

Has this strength been deployed in the development of the country?

If this is the present-day reality of our dear great country Nigeria, we must therefore, as a matter of necessity, obligation, and service to the country, have a change of attitudes and mindsets towards building a country that embraces unity in diversity, and nurtures the spirit of oneness, creating equal opportunities for everyone regardless of tribe or tongue, and setting a global example of excellence, greatness and progress.

### **PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS**

1. **DIALOGUE:** The first step at solidifying the unification of the various tribes and tongues representing the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria is by having a national

dialogue. Dialogue has been the bedrock of most conflict resolutions all over the world; it is a fundamental reconciliatory mechanism. While acknowledging the several ethnic bickerings and political agitations that have shaped our daily national discourse, a regular roundtable national dialogue involving the government, opinion leaders, and ethnic representatives should come up with reconciliatory drives such as establishing commissions that will address historical grievances and promote national healing across diversity lines.

2. **ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA:** Addressing critical issues responsible for hostilities such as poverty, economic disparities, unemployment, land border conflicts, religious intolerance, ethnic jingoism, et cetera without tilting towards any selfish political interest is a necessity in the quest to attain sustainable peace and stability. The government must therefore create initiatives geared towards addressing these issues by:

- i. **All-inclusive Poverty Reduction Programmes:** As the saying goes: *a hungry man is an angry man*. Therefore, an indiscriminate poverty alleviation programme across tribes and tongues will go a long way in decimating ethnic tensions in the country. Such intervention should include food assistance programmes, affordable consumption subsidies, conditional cash transfers, as well as social insurance schemes that cater for the most vulnerable citizens irrespective of their tribes and tongues.
- ii. **Job Creation:** The government and policymakers must consider job creation a panacea to emerging inter-tribal intolerance. An idle hand, they say, is the devil's workshop. Hence, job creation must be a priority in the process of harmonising the diverse tribes and tongues in Nigeria. Developing programmes such as soft business loans through microfinance banks, skills and vocations training, establishment of technical schools, public works programmes and agricultural support to empower youth and women economically are

essential mechanisms for reducing youth restiveness across the country.

- iii. **Rural Development:** Building strategic infrastructures such as water supply, roads, electricity, schools, and primary healthcare centres across the length and breadth of the country will create a sense of belonging and enhance the lifestyle of the people living in the hinterlands, making life more meaningful to people across ethnic and tribal divisions, and promoting the spirit of patriotism and loyalty to one's sovereign motherland.

3. **INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE:** The current principle of federal character tends to distribute public offices across the sub-national divisions through political permutations. This powerful mechanism must be advanced as it fosters national unity and douse mistrust in governance. Consequently, a quota system should be deployed in the appointments of not just political office holders, but also in the federal civil service and public corporations to ensure a fair representation of all tribal, linguistic, religious, and regional blocks, guaranteeing equitable access to opportunities and the commonwealth of the country.
4. **EDUCATIONAL REFORMS:** To achieve a more harmonious society, Nigeria must reshape the education system to promote unity, tolerance and mutual respect across the diverse tribal and linguistic lines by laying a strong foundation for future generations through the integration of civic education into the curriculum of all levels of schooling. Topics such as national unity, the value of diversity, human rights, harmonious living, and the responsibilities of citizens must be considered.
5. **STRENGTHENED LEGAL FRAMEWORKS:** Enactment and strict enforcement of robust anti-discriminatory laws is essential in managing the Nigerian diversity lines. This, coupled with an independent judiciary, will guarantee the rights of all citizens irrespective of tribe and tongue, promoting equality, addressing grievances, and creating a more inclusive and just society for all.

Furthermore, to foster harmony across Nigeria's diverse linguistic and tribal lines, it is essential to promote national integration through cultural exchanges, national identity, the national youth service scheme, arts and culture, interfaith initiatives, sports, national reorientation, volunteerism, diaspora engagements, strengthened civil societies, and the development of conflict early warning systems. These are key factors in achieving a cordial society.

In conclusion, the rich tapestry of our diverse tribes and tongues often seen as a source of division must be harnessed as a force for unity and progress. It is our collective responsibility to embrace the strength of our diversity and build a Nigeria that thrives on inclusion, fairness, and justice for all.