

“DID THE OLDER GENERATION DO ENOUGH WHEN THEY GOT RID OF THE MILITARY?”

On Sunday 13 December 2020, the Intergenerational Alliance held its first deliberative forum on the topic “Did the Older Generation do Enough when they Got Rid of the Military?” The forum was held at Freedom Park, Lagos Island. In attendance were Oyinkan Bello-Edet, Eniola Anuoluwapo Soyemi, Deji Toyé, Lilian Chibuzo, Lai Brown, Ugonma Chibuzo, Omobolaji Bello, Tabia Princewill, Daniel Ofodirinwa, and Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi.

The forum discussions were started by Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, a former prominent member of Nigeria’s National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), a former External Affairs Minister, and former Director-General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs. Akinyemi put forward that NADECO’s reputation in the public imagination did not fit the reality of the organization’s history. NADECO was an organization of members, many of who had contrary motivations to being in the organization. Many simply wanted the military gone, but beyond that NADECO members were not united in their political ambitions. As such, despite work on a draft constitution for Nigeria, NADECO was unable to provide and implement the intellectual, ideological and structural groundwork that was sorely needed once the military had been removed.

Lai Brown, a socialist activist proposed that the older generation had done their best but their best had produced what he called ‘a bourgeois democracy,’ that is, a rotten kind of democracy that failed to work for anyone but a handful of rich and powerful people.

Oyinkan Bello-Edet did not agree that the older generation had done enough and called on young Nigerians to follow a different example to the one that had been set by many in their parents’ generation and begin to be honest both about the state of politics in Nigeria and the nature of many of the country’s politicians. She gave the example, which she believed was widespread across Nigerian society, of publicly praising politicians who were known as corrupt and/or inept. What would happen if, instead, when Nigerians saw such people in public, they honestly made their true feelings about them known?

Deji Toyé, an enterprise lawyer submitted that it was, indeed, up to current generations to follow up on the work of previous generations. For him, it was not possible to determine whether a previous generation has done ‘enough’ because the work of developing a country is always

ongoing. What was essential was for younger people to learn from previous mistakes, not remake them, build and move on.

Omobolaji Bello, another lawyer, put forward that Nigeria does not work for the majority of its population, only the rich few. So much so that the minimal levels of electoral democratic participation allowed to the masses are unusable by them due to the fraudulent and violent practices of the political elite. He argued that it was necessary for ordinary Nigerians to start taking part in the daily developments of their most immediate communities. No matter how small these efforts may seem, it was necessary to reversing the trend of big-money politics that rarely, if ever, positively touched the lives of most ordinary people in the country. Bello also suggested that focusing on closer localities was necessary to more wide-ranging development across the country as the concerns of many people in the South-West of the country was, for instance, not often the same as those of people in the North or central Nigeria.

Lilian Chibuzo agreed that focusing on what may appear to be smaller developments in our immediate communities, things that each person can do on their own—mentoring poorer children, clearing a blocked street drain, for example— was a good way for younger Nigerians to build on the work of an older generation that ought to be seen as having tried its best.

Daniel Ofodirinwa concluded the meeting with his thoughts that an older generation had been too comfortable in achieving the military's removal. They did not push themselves further to attaining more and better. For current generations, satisfaction with shorter-terms gains would do little to move the country beyond where an older generation had got it.

The founders of the Intergenerational Alliance, Eniola Anuoluwapo Soyemi and Oyinkan Bello-Edet resolved to secure the attendance of a wider ethno-linguistic composition, and more women at its next forum **“Yes Ma, Yes Sa: Does Nigeria's Respect Culture Stop us From Telling Power the Truth.”**

ABOUT THE INTERGENERATIONAL ALLIANCE

The Intergenerational Alliance was formed to foster bottom-up dialogue between young and old, rich and poor, and across genders on matters affecting Nigerian society and its state. Intergenerational Alliance forums bring together small groups of Nigerians from across the generational divide, from all walks of life, religious backgrounds, and ethnicities, to talk about the past, present, and future of our home, Nigeria. We believe in conversation. We believe in genuine and complex communication that bridges division, increases understanding, and unites us in communal purpose. We believe that for the benefit of our future, it is essential to dialogue.