

## SOCIAL JUSTICE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### **Introduction**

Human actions are characterized by irrationalities which are obviously showcased in discriminatory activities as they relate with one another. In order to close this gap resulting from the observed outlawed behaviour and to create a social environment where actions of these individuals are harmonized for the purpose of promoting justice, happiness, peace, safety, growth and development of both individuals and society, government is established to stand in between man and the state. Therefore, the essence of government is to ensure justice through equitable and fair distribution of the societal values without any form of discrimination.

Based on this, both the principles of fairness and equality are upheld by the natural and philosophical ideas anchored on the belief that human beings are created by God and as such are endowed with reason and conscience which form the basis for relationship of sense of oneness and brotherhood. In addition, justice and equity are based on the principle of spiritual golden law as recorded in the Bible in Matthew Chapter 7 Verse 12, which states that you should do to others as you would expect them to do to you. Nnamani and Okpara (2010) state that both the natural, moral and constitutional laws indicate that all are equal before the law and as such, every body should be treated equally before the law.

### **Meaning of Social Justice**

Social justice is that which advocates that everyone is equal before the law so that each deserves equal treatment in economic, social, political and cultural rights or opportunities. Social justice has to do with a society that gives priority to citizens' fair treatment and equitable share of the benefits of society. Central to social justice is equality and fundamental human rights. Social justice refers to indiscriminatory and fair distribution of a nation's resources, opportunities, and privileges. This further explains the principle of practical demonstration of equality in terms of the values of a society such as employment, positions, social class, gender, politics, health, race and ethnic affiliations among others.

Ibeanu (1995:271) defines social justice as the increasing improvement of the well being of the mass of members of a society, based on the equitable enjoyment of social, political and economic rights. This simply means that social justice exists where the fundamental human rights are respected. Also, Chukwudozie (1999:5) expresses that social justice means giving each person his or her due by respecting his or her rights or civil rights by allocating benefits, resources, sanctions, punishment and burden equally among the members, and equal protection to all. Therefore, social justice is the foundation of social order in any organized society. Plato (1955:146) sees justice as the most fundamental basis of ordered social life and peaceful social existence. According to him, every society requires three functions to achieve harmony (peace). These are production (appetite), security (soldiers) and knowledge (rulers). In order to ensure justice in social activity of a given society, the talents possessed by the members of the society shall be harnessed and used as the basis for achieving harmony. Plato was of the view that for justice to prevail in any organized society, people who are talented and skilled enough to produce means of society's material existence that is the appetite, should be given the opportunity to produce. Those who possess the skill of courage should be allowed to defend the society while those who are knowledgeable should occupy the leadership position of a society. Also Karl Marx expresses that the root of coarseness in a society is caused by inequality (social injustice) which he pinned down to the constant conflicts between the bourgeoisie and the protectorates. The constant conflict between the two groups is rooted in injustice in the production and distribution of goods and services produced. Marx explained that capitalism is the source of conflict hence it is made up of economic and political structures which determine the distribution of the nation's wealth in the interest of the rulers.

Social justice is two edged sword, each face has a role to play. That is to say, both the state and the citizens must fulfill their expectations by playing their civic responsibilities for the sustenance of social justice. Therefore, the principles of social justice are:

- (a) Access to resources
- (b) Equality
- (c) Participation
- (d) Diversity and
- (e) Human Rights.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended, Section 36(1) states that in the determination of a citizen's civil rights and obligations, a person shall be entitled to fair hearing. Also, Section 34(1) states that every individual is entitled to resp

ect for the dignity of his person. The stand of the Constitution is anchored on respect for the fundamental human rights which when observed with justice, the nation is capable of attaining the deserved development. The United Nations in 1948 declared Universal of Human Rights of the member nations of which Nigeria is one to include security, political, equality, social welfare and group rights. Cook (1994) observes that the purposes for which the United Nations was established as spelt out in the Charter are to promote higher standard of living, encourage conditions for economic and social progress, development, and to proffer solutions to international economic, social, health and related problems. The Charter as expressed by Cook (1994) was also charged with the responsibility to encourage respect for the principle of equal rights, to promote universal respect for the principle of human rights and fundamental freedom for all without distinction.

Equality means that no man shall be placed in society that he can over-reach his neighbour to the extent which constitutes denial of the latter's citizenship rights. It means that my realization of my best self must involve as its logical result the realization by others of their best selves. (Laski, 1980:153). The Declaration of the Rights of Man 1789 issued by the National Assembly of France during the French Revolution states as follows: 'Men are born, and always continue, free and equal in respect of their rights. Also, on American independence in 1777, it was stated 'we hold these truths to be self-evidence that all men are created equal... (Ezeani, 2010). Irrespective of these provisions, one striking fact about men is their inequality in social relations. Inequality means the rule of few.

Citizenship right is that right in which the citizens of a state are treated alike in respect of the control that may be legitimately exercised over them and of the measure of protection which they may be entitled to demand at the hands of the government (Appadorai, 1975:86). For instance, political equality gives every citizen of Nigeria the right to vote, be voted for and run political offices. This is the foundation of democracy. Then, economic equality means provision of adequate economic opportunities for all Nigerian citizens to make life meaningful for them. They include right to work, to wages, to reasonable hours of labour and leisure and to self government in industry, so that everyone may have a fair start in life and the chance to develop the best that he is capable of (Appadorai, 1975:89).

It is in the pursuit of social justice that the Federal Government of Nigerian Official Gazette (1995:2-7) established the National Human Right Commission (NHRC). The Commission was charged and empowered under Section 11 to:

- (i) Deal with matters relating to the protection of human rights as guaranteed by the Nigerian

Constitution, African Charter, United Nations Charter, Universal Declaration on Hum

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Rights and other human right treaties to which Nigeria is a signatory;

- (ii) Monitor and investigate alleged cases of human rights violation and make appropriate recommendations to the federal government for prosecution;
- (iii) Assist victims of human right violation and seek appropriate redress and remedies on their behalf;
- (iv) Conduct studies on matters relating to human rights and make inputs in the formation of human right policies;
- (v) Publish regular reports on human right situations in Nigeria;
- (vi) Organize local and international seminars, workshops and conferences for public enlightenment on human right issues;
- (vii) Liaise and cooperate with the local and international organizations and participate in all levels of international activities relating to the promotion and protection of human rights;
- (viii) Collect and analyze data, documents and disseminate information and materials on human rights.

Therefore, the federal government of Nigeria in creating this commission is on the premise that Nigeria cannot achieve any measure of national development in a chaotic environment arising from discriminatory allocation and distribution of the nation's resources.

## **Types of Justice**

There are four types of justice which are legally provided for the Nigerian citizens to seek redress whose rights have been trampled upon. That means those who feel that they have not been fairly treated to seek for correction.

### **1. Distributive Justice**

Distributive justice is at the heart of social justice. It means fair and equal distributio

n of justice in the areas of all expected benefits of a society. It further refers to the feeling of members of a society to get fair and expected attention. Here, members have equal opportunity in the allocation of the nation's resources and as a result, there is no justification for a protest since they are fairly treated. However, when individuals have a feeling of marginalization and unfair treatment, they can go for a distributive justice so that the wrong can be corrected.

## **2. Procedural Justice**

This form of justice has to do with the adopted procedure for the allocation of resources. It then suggests that there are procedures established by law and documented which serve as a guide for the allocation of such resources. If this procedure is understood and clear, members of the society may accept such decisions. On the other hand, where there is injustice or foul play in the allocation of such resources which the affected members of the society consider injustice, they have the option of seeking for a redress so that the right formula should be followed. That is, the aggrieved members of the society may seek for a restorative or retributive justice.

## **3. Restorative Justice**

Once a person feels that he or she is betrayed in the allocation of the desired values or opportunities, the person has the legal right to seek restitution. It means, correcting the wrong done by either rendering apology or asking for forgiveness. Restoration means putting back things as they should be by pursuing the rightness of the action to appease the aggrieved party. Restoration justice is also called corrective justice. Restoration justice is a social justice movement that intends to repair and restore a soared relationship. Restorative programmes have the following strengths or benefits:

- (a) Encounter: This creates opportunities for the victims, offenders and community to do so to come together to discuss the issues and the consequences.
- (b) Amends: This move makes the offenders to take appropriate steps to repair the harm they caused.
- (c) Reintegration: This approach has the effect of uniting the soiled relationship so that the parties come together to work as patriotic members of the society.
- (d) Inclusion: It provides the affected parties in the soared relationship to participate in t

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reconciliation and resolution of the observed conflict.

#### 4. Retributive Justice

Retributive justice is a theory of justice that considers punishment as a morally justifiable and acceptable response to an offence or crime committed as appropriate measure to placate the anger of the offended or aggrieved party, its intimates and society. In this circumstance, the aggrieved citizen sees the punishment meted on the offender as commensurate to the offence committed. The essence is that the betrayed individual wants or puts the offender in the same level of suffering which the victim passed through so that the offender can equally feel the weight of his or her action against the victim. The appropriate punishment is necessary because it deters the offender from committing the same offence in future. Retributive justice is a form of natural law which Deuteronomy Chapter 19 Verses 17-21 upholds.

Since social injustice is common in Nigeria, the topic educates Nigerians who are ignorant of their rights when violated to seek a redress through the appropriate types and the extent of betrayal they suffer. In other words, social justice is the only phenomenon that advances growth and development of an organized society. For instance, the function of the Correctional Centres in all the states of the federation are where the citizens found guilty of social justice are kept to receive the appropriate punishment due their actions. Such offences range from cases of killing innocent citizens, corruption, embezzlement and other forms of offences in which the offenders have to pay for their wrong doings. However, there are some cases in which social justice with respect to retributive justice is perverted. The glaring case of this nature is the unlawful arrest and detention of people such as the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, who was discharged and acquitted by the Nigerian court of justice, but has refused to be released by the both Nigerian past and present Presidents, Muhammadu Buhari and Ahmed Tinubu led administrations, among other cases social injustice in Nigeria.

#### Abuse of Social Justice in Nigeria

Social justice has been not fully implemented which serves as an obstacle to the achievement of the desire national development. The following factors contribute to that

##### 1 Weakness of the Judiciary

There are cases of delays in dispensation of justice by the judicial system in Nigeria. The ways in which the judiciary executes and processes matters before it is not only alarming but ridiculous. These are evidences in the manner of delivery judgment, of frivolous court adjournments and injunctions. The case of the IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kalu is outstanding here whose case has been unnecessarily adjourned and delayed without giving a fair hearing to it. Also there are cases of respect to court order which have added injury to

the realization of social justice in Nigeria. The introduction of the concept of Plea Bargain in the judicial system in which allows the accused who is sentenced to terms of imprisonment based on the offence committed who at the same time granted an option of fine in alternative to imprisonment has tarnished the image of the judicial system with respect to execution of judicial justice in Nigeria. an example of Plea Bargain include the embezzlement saga by the former central bank of Nigeria, Godwin Emefiele, who was accused of embezzling Nigerian money and was sentenced to imprisonment but at the same time given an option of plea bargain. Also, a former assistant director of the police pension board, Yusuf John Yakubu, who embezzled ₦32.8 million and was sentenced to six years imprisonment or pay a fine of ₦750,000. In addition, the former Edo state governor, Lucky Igbinedion was accused of embezzling ₦4.4 billion also entered into plea bargain and was fined ₦3.5 million bail. A onetime Chief Justice of Nigeria, Dahiru, Mustopha (2013) remarks that the concept of plea bargain is not only dubious, but it was never part of Nigeria's legal system until it was smuggled into our statutory laws with the creation of EFC C (Daily Sun, Sept. 11.p. 28).

## 2. Corruption

Corruption which is a dubious way of enriching oneself AT the expense of others has served counter-productive to the execution of social justice in Nigeria. This ranges from mis use of opportunity, power or authority aimed at achieving selfish gain. Corruption is on increase on daily basis and the government's inability to tackle this squarely aggravates the situation and has made social justice unrealistic in Nigeria. They include in politics, education, industries and organizations, judiciary among others.

## 3. Lack of Seriousness on the Part of the Nigerian Leaders

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided for the protection of fundamental rights of the Nigerian citizens. The experience is that the Nigerian leaders are not committed to its implementation. These are manifested on the roles of the military, police, and the judiciary which infringe the rights of Nigerian citizens. The inability on the part of the Nigerian leaders to be proactive towards dispensation of justice on the rights of Nigerians works against the expectation of justice in Nigeria.

## 4. Weak Leadership Style

Nigerian leaders have failed in their executive of social justice resulting from poor leadership styles. Their leadership style is often dictatorship in nature. For instance, on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2024, when Nigeria was to celebrate her democracy day, the Nigerian President, Ahmed Tinubu, imposed the rejection of the extant National Anthem and replaced it with the one that was dropped in 1978. According to him, that is what he wants. The imposition and rejection of the existing National Anthem was criticized by Nigerian who requested

d the President to focus attention on addressing the excruciating hardships Nigerians are battling with which range from fuel subsidy removal its other negative multiplier effects on transportation and overall high cost of living among Nigerians which makes life unbearable for them. Uja (2003:119) says, "consequently, human right abuse is rather on the increase and the violation of perpetrated is done by the government, the powerful. and the individuals who manipulate and corrupt the very agencies which have been created to protect these rights".

### **Effects of Social Injustice in National Development**

It is a true saying that no nation achieves any form of development in a crisis ridden social setting. Nigeria is never an exception. There are instances attesting to the failed social justice and their negative impacts on the development of the nations. They include the following:

#### **1. Political Injustice and Political Crisis:**

Nigeria is saddled with the cases of political woes as a sovereign state to organize a credible election devoid of electoral malpractice. There are cases of electoral malpractices in the Nigerian political system. They include electoral fraud such as snatching ballot boxes in which the wrong and defeated political opponents are declared the winners by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Others include political assassination by political opponents and forms of political irregularities. This is evidenced in the Nigerian 2022 political election in which the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Mr Peter Obi, claimed that his political victory was robbed by the INEC which declared the forth candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu the winner of the election. Since 2022 to till, there has never been peace in Nigeria. Hardship is on increase which led to the nationwide protest in all the states in Nigeria in February to March, 2024. Also, the annulment of 12 June 1993 General Election allegedly won by late M.K.O. Abiola of Social Democracy Party (SDP) is a political injustice in Nigerian.

#### **2. Abuse of Socio-Economic Rights of Citizens:**

Unemployment rate is high in Nigeria and these youths after their graduation from Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions roam the Nigerian streets without hope of getting employment. In addition, Nigerian workers are not promptly paid their monthly salaries as and when due. A clear case of this include some workers in Abia State Civil Service such as Abia State University workers who as at today, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2024, are owed eleven months arrears of salaries. In addition, the pensioners in Abia State through various



s radio stations in the state complained bitterly on how the Governor Alex Otti led administration wrote off their accumulated gratuities and used unclassified formula to pay their pensions arrears. The Nigerian Labour Congress is warming up for a national strike in which the federal government has been given up to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024, to fix a new bargaining minimum wage for Nigerian workers or face nationwide strike. Also, there are cases of a buse of fundamental rights by the law enforcement personnel. They include brutal treatment on Nigerians especially the youths. In September 2020, there was a nationwide demonstration in Nigeria by the Nigerian youths. Most of these youths were massively killed to the extent that in 2022; there was a mass burial organized for the youths who were killed in thousands at the Lekki Gate of Lagos State of Nigeria. The argument is that in a state where youths are massively killed, then where lies the development of the state? In addition, there are various degrees of infringement on privacy rights by the police and military Nigeria. Youths complain that the security agents on many Nigerian roads deliberately search them and seize their cell phones especially the costly ones, accusing them of one allegation or the other which they are innocent of and thereby having their handsets forcefully taken away from them by either the police officers or the military personnel.

### 3. Increase in Corruption among Nigerian Leaders

Corruption is at peak in Nigeria due to social injustice. The National Assembly members do not make use of their constituency votes. Rather, such votes are diverted to their personal coffers. In February 2023, it was argued and reported by Flow Radio Station of Umuahia Abia state, during "the State of the Nation programmes" which they feature between 8.30 to 9.30 night programmes that there was unequal distribution of constituency votes. This is a sheer demonstration of social injustice. Corruption is heightened to the extent that there is no more value orientation among Nigerians. Corruption has sprung in every sector in Nigeria, namely, government, military, police, civil service, bank, religion among other sectors in Nigeria.

### 4. Social Injustice in Education

The development of intellectual prowess of the Nigerian citizens is the basis for national development. Based on this, the National Policy on Education (1999:7) states the Nigerian philosophy of education is that there is need for equality of educational opportunities for all Nigerian children irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her abilities. The interpretation of this policy is that everybody irrespective of social linkages is entitled to have access to education. Also, the Nigerian Constitution of the 1999 states that government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels. But the question here remains: Is education free for all Nigerians? Basically, no. There are protests in some Nigerian

universities and tertiary institutions over abysmal increase in students' school fees. They include Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State and other areas. Therefore, the educational objectives of preparing a child for responsible life in the society, develop and promote the child's personality, mental and physical potentials to the maximum level, enhance positive societal norms and traditional values are denied Nigerian children. This is the reason why the Nigerian society is full of social violence and upheavals.

## 5. Social Insecurity

The essence of any sovereign state is the protection of the lives and property of its citizens. But Nigerian experience is high level of insecurity ranging from kidnapping, mass killing, arson, and other forms of insecurity. The question that needs to answer is that "can any nation develop in an environment that is characterized by high rate of insecurity?" of course the answer is no. There are cases of clashes between Fulani and farmers which leads to high cost of living due to the fact that farmers are afraid of going to their farms. The effects of all these are on poor masses as there always an increase in hardship, social injustice and underdevelopment. Others include social injustice and health care, social injustice and employment, and social injustice and poverty eradication.

## 6. Social Welfare

One of the kernels of measuring good governance is social welfare. This is because democracy is about government of the people, for the people and by the people. Therefore, any government in which its policies are not people oriented is tyrannical. Social justice has to do with as a matter of fact, the right to guarantee civil servants their right of prompt payment of salaries, pension, gratuities and other allowances due them. But this constitutional provision is a lip service content. That is why strikes by labour unions in Nigeria is a recurrent phenomenon. Also life is made meaningful for the members of the public only when the leaders are proactive in the provision of social infrastructure such as good road network, regular supply of water, healthcare services, and affordable transportation system. Social injustice in Nigeria is worsened in 2022 to 2024. In 2022, there was the policy of redesigned naira by the President Muhammadu Buhari without adequate provision to cushion the effects in which Nigerians experienced unimaginable hardship till date. Today, the hang over effects are still here with us. Also the removal of fuel subsidy on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2023, by the Nigerian President, Ahmed Tinubu on the day he took the mantle of leadership in Nigeria during the swearing-in ceremony inaugural speech, has increased hardship to every Nigerian

Before we go into the national development as a social concept, it is necessary to explain what development is all about. There are divided opinions on what constitutes development. Some define it in the context of physical environmental factors while others see development as an integrated concept. This observation is in line with Oga in Nwachukwu (2013) who opines that the term development has been one of the ambiguous concepts in socio-economic thoughts where he further argues that it is multivariate and has been used in various contexts depending at times, on the political and ideological leaning of the user. Okorosaya-Orubite (2005) maintains that development does not necessarily stop at economic prosperity alone, but transcends beyond it to include psychological, social, political and environmental changes for the betterment and well-being of society. Okorosaya-Orubite identified three basic criteria for measuring development which are:

- (i) An increase in the efficiency of the production system of society;
- (ii) The satisfaction of the population's basic needs; and
- (iii) The attainment of the objectives sought by various groups in a society which are linked to the use of scarce resources. According to him these development measuring indices translate into social, economic and political growth or development of both individuals and nation.

Therefore, the term development can be further explained from two perspectives, namely, liberal and radical schools of thought. The liberal school sees development in terms of the rate of artifacts or physical structures in a given social environment. Such structures include buildings, aerodrome, road network and other social infrastructure. Then the radical school believes that development can only be interpreted in terms of improvement in the living standard of the people in a given social environment. To them man is the prime mover and at the centre of all development. That is to say, development is made for man and not man for development. Uwadia (2010) defines development as the integration of the various given natural, physical, acquired and human of people toward the full working out, permanently and accumulatively of their beings as persons of their nation and their real productivity. Implied in the above definition is that development has to do with progressive improvement that causes a positive change towards the realization of individual's potentials which is the desired product of societal growth. Development transcends economic to other values of a society which include political, social, ideological, and technological all together bring about the desired progressive improvement on the individ

ual basis and the nation at large. Development has to do with involvement and embarking on such ideologies and policies that are capable of impacting positively on the lives of people and transformation of the physical environment for the solution of challenges that are inherent in the area. Gbuoyega (2003) in Tolu and Abe (2011) posits that development is an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. The United Nations development programme (1991:77) says development implies expanding the range of choices for the population that allows development to become more democratic and participative ... access to income... participation in decision and enjoyment of human, economic and political liberties.

National development on the other hand encompasses a process of reconstruction and improvement in various aspects of a nation and its citizens. It also includes improvement in the growth and expansion of industries, agriculture, education, social, religious and cultural institutions. It then means that national development concentrates on all round and balanced development of various areas and facts of national values. Oyelaran in Adama (2020) states that development in human affairs implies the continuous promotion of the well being and security of persons in such a way that they are constantly able to optimize the realization of their potentials.

National development means the growth of the nation in form of unity, education, economic wellbeing, and mass participation in government (Elugbe, 1990). Inyanda and Adama (2003) define national development as the ability of the nation to provide a conducive atmosphere for the realization of individual potential, the existence of buoyant economy and availability of social infrastructural facilities for the populace. When a country embarks on the policy of improving and providing social welfare services such as quality education, encourage individual growth in talented and scientific discoveries, skills, medicare, functional transportation network and social infrastructure, national development has occurred. It has to do with the framework of inclusive growth in the areas of human capital and environmental growth and development. In addition, national development is defined as a set of socio-political, economic and environmental policy strategies designed to enhance the living standard of members and that leads to overall growth and development of the nation in general. National development as explained by Thirlwall (2008) is connected with advancement in the mode of human interaction and relationships in society, that is, an increasing society's welfare, not only in economic variables and objectives but also in social objectives and values for which society strives. Economic development is about advancement in the status or conditions of the society while political development is connected with advancement for better governance in terms of improved and efficient state institutions

(Gozie, 2009). It should be noted that both economic and political developments lie at the heart of social justice and national development. To justify this, Carew, (1993) observes that while economic development provides the material basis for political development, political development provides the organizational structure for economic development.

### **Features of National Development**

The following are the features of the national development

1. Investment in human capital.
2. Priority to competence and patriotism.
3. Internal stability.
4. Inclusive national development policy.
5. High income per capita.
6. Security fortification.
7. Low unemployment.
8. Health promotion.
  1. Improved science and technology.
  2. Low level of import rate.

### **Implications of Social Justice on the Nigerian Citizens**

Social justice if implemented has the following dividends on Nigerian citizens:

1. Reduction in security challenges in Nigeria;
2. Promotion of the principle of fundamental human rights;
3. Ensuring political stability;
4. Promotion of psychosocial and cultural value orientation among Nigerian youths;
5. Promotion of socio-economic and political development of Nigeria;
6. Promotion of national cohesion and tolerance among various ethnic groups in Nigeria; and
7. Producing law abiding Nigerian citizens.
8. Good Governance.
9. Reformation of the Judiciary.
10. Sanity on the Anti-Corruption Institution
11. Women Empowerment

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has made an attempt to explain the concepts of social justice and national development. It first explained what justice is all about which has to do with rightness of action that promotes equality. Social justice on the hand is anchored on the practice of equality, fairness and respect for fundamental human rights in the sharing of a nation's resources irrespective of gender, ethnic, economic, political affiliations and other values of the Nigerian society. The chapter also highlights and explains development and national development from the perspectives of various scholars. The paper upholds that social justice and national development, can be made realistic only when there is the true observation of the principle of fundamental human rights that are rested on social justice.

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