REDUCING THE INDCIDENCE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: BEING THE KEY-NOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED ON MONDAY 3RD MARCH, 2003 AT THE ZONAL WORKSHOP ORGANIZED BY FRIEDRICH EBERT-STIFTUNG (FES) OF GERMANY FOR PARTICIPANTS FROM THE NORTH-CENTRAL GEC-POLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA: HELD AT CIRCULAR HOTELS, ILORIN: HELD AT CIRCULAR HOTELS, ILORIN: DELIVERED BY YUSUF O. ALI ESQ: SAN

INTRODUCTION

Let me start by thanking the organizers of this workshop, the Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung (FES) not only for inviting me to deliver a key-note address at this workshop but also for the initiative for the organization of the workshop.

Where are barely **Forty-seven days** away from the 2003 general elections, but the political atmosphere is anything but conducive nor congenial to a successful election.

The spate of political violence is such that virtually all the 36 states of the Federation are imbroiled in political crises. One would think that politicians in these states are trying to win medals and laurel for the number of political violence perpetrated in their domains. Our situation have degenerated politically to the level where peace loving Nigerians have taken a wide berth from political discourse for the fear of political reprisals

It is daily becoming unfashionable for any political critic to say anything considered negative about any political office holder without the risk of being visited with physical violence. The signs are ominous, discordant, non-cheering and above all foreboding.

The above clearly supports our gratitude to the organizers of the programme which we hope will assist our political gladiators to see reason why political violence should not be tolerated nor encouraged.

In this paper we shall highlight the historical genesis of political, violence in Nigeria causes consequences and solutions.

History of political violence in Nigeria

Before the attainment of independence, reports of political violence have been with us Those who were old enough at the time would remember the myriad of political violence that attended the general elections of 1959. This trend continued both at the Regional elections and reach a crescendo at the general elections of 1964.

The defunct Western Region as a result of this violence acquired the epithet if **wild West**. It is now history and probably unarguable anymore that the aftermath of the crises of 1964 general elections precipitated the **coup detat** of **January, 15" 1966.** The general elections of 1979, those of 1981 and 1999 were not without bloodletting. It is instructive however, to note that the spate of political violence in Military organized elections were not as widespread as when civilians undertake the same process.

We are now on the threshold of another general elections being organized by a civilian administration and it has become a daily occurrence to see banner headlines in Newspapers proclaiming the various violent deeds of our politicians. Political assassination is assuming an endemic proportion. There is hardly any Newspaper or Magazine in Nigeria you open that you wouldn't read stories of political violence. Columnists and writers in these Newspapers and Magazines daily write on this National malaise.

Wale Adebayo, a regular columnist in "The Punch" Newspaper writing under the title **"CHECK THIS TREND"** in the February 24th 2003 edition of the Newspaper at page 15 provides the following prognosis as to why people resolve to political violence when he opined thus;

> "But seeking the physical harm of perceived opponents in the game of power has, since the earliest times, remained the prerogative of those lacking grassroots support. Minority elements in the society, who know that the polity. for one reason or the other, will not allow them to have their way without putting up a fight, often resort to violence to force certain positions or view points on the society."

The same writer in the article went on to express very serious worries about some named states, but one cannot do better than to quote him again when he said:

"Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of some state where the governors and some political big wigs believe that they are the gods of such areas. Lives have been lost and property destroyed in orchestrated orgies of violence which without doubt have politics tied to them. Bayelsa, Delta, Anambra, Plateau and Kwara States remain areas of utmost concern to the average Nigerian."

One can only add that it is a well-known fact that violence breeds more violence. We shall now address some of the causes of political violence.

Causes of political violence

Intolerance is such a terrible disease that the person that possesses same cannot accommodate contrary opinions or views. This is probably the first thing that is lacking in most politicians in Nigeria and they therefore find it intolerable to be challenged even though on rational grounds. Given the history of political development in Nigeria and the long sojoum of Military in governance, there has been no enduring democratic culture or ethos in our body politic. It is therefore strange to the average politician that anyone should challenge his position. This merges into political immaturity which is also a bane of the political leadership in Nigeria.

The average Nigerian political believes that the institutions saddle with the conduct of elections are capable of being bought over. Since this is the mindset of most politicians. it engenders a lack of faith in the electoral process and electoral bodies This explains why a loser at any election in Nigeria never believes that he has lost fairly. The loser usually believes that he has been out bided

Unemployment and idleness of able-bodies young men and women makes ready materials for political violence available. The old cliché that the devil finds work for the idle hand is very true.

Pervasive poverty goes in tandem with the above. This explains why with just hundred Naira some individuals will be engaged to risk their lives in the protection of electoral and political success of their hirers.

Another cause of political violence is the sad complicity and partisanship of security agents. If a political hoodlum knows in the act of political violence, most of them will never dare to be part of such political activities. When you hear to carry out heinous crime, you would appreciate why violence is on the prowl.

Another point in this regard is the faithlessness of our politicians in the different religions they profess. If truly they believe and profess that power belongs to the Almighty and that He gives it to whom He wishes and takes it from whom He wishes. then there would be no reason for internecine struggle for power.

One last point in this area of our discourse is the cancer of election rigging. From our recent history, the orgies of violence that greeted the gubernatorial elections in the old Ondo and Oyo States in 1983 were predicated on the alleged rigging of those elections by those who were declared winners the **FEDECO** the hen electoral body responsible for the conduct of the elections.

One can safely say as well that the hydra headed disease of tribalism and nepotism promote at least in some indirect ways resort to political violence in Nigeria.

However, one must say that the reasons for political violence are as any as the number of such incidents. We have only tried to highlight what to us are the fundamental cause of this national problem.

What then are the consequences of political violence

Consequences of political violence

The first casualty of political violence is humanity itself Sacred lives are taken with impunity. Properties are unreasonably destroyed. The crisis that led to the death of the former Attorney General of the Federation, Chief Bola Ige SAN has been consigned by pundits to the doorsteps of the rollicking political crisis in Osun State. Within a spate of two weeks, a senatorial candidate in Imo State, Chief Ogbonanya Uche and the principal secretary of the governor of Imo State, Mr. Theodor Agwatu were dispatched to the great beyond by people believed to political assassins.

Another consequence related to the above is the unnecessary traunatization of the citizenry psyche. In many cases, breadwinners are shot in the presence of their wives and children. On other occasions, peace-loving citizens are forced by circumstances to witness these dastardly acts.The physcological effects of these happenings on the moral mental well-being of these innocent witnesses to terror is better imagined. It would be saying the obvious to state that political violence breeds and nutures insecurity. These is the all pervading fear and a sense of inadequacy pervading the political landscape.

A closely related consequence of political violence is the mystification of force and promotion of lawlessness. Those who do not engage in these acts of violence are made

to feel hopeless, helpless and intimidated by the shear use of unnecessary force and this leads to loss of self-confidence and a sense of inadequacy. This is all the more so if the perpetrators of these ungodly acts are neither apprehended nor brought to book.

It is saying the obvious that poverty is on the prowl in Nigeria. One of the accepted ways of generating wealth in a Nation is the infusion and in-flow of foreign capital into the economy. But no investor either local or foreign will invest his money in a country where political violence is the rule rather than the exception. Therefore Nigeria stands to loose a lot economically if there is no quick resolution of the multifarious political violence in our land.

One would be saying the obvious to state that uncontrolled political violence has the potential of truncating democratic practices in the land. Moreso given the quick-sand of our politics, political violence is a luxury we can ill afford.

A corollary to this is the sabotaging of the will of the electorates at the elections. It may lead to a situation where leaders that emerge are elected by the minority because the majority that have fears for their lives will not go near the electoral process.

We may now take a quick look at some of the possible solution to the problems of political violence.

SOLUTIONS TO POLITICAL VIOLENCE

The first port of all is to put in place legislations that would provide very tough penalties for the promoters and perpetrators of political violence

Two, political violence should be a disqualifying ground for seeking political officers and any one who is confirmed to be a sponsor of political violence should be barred from holding elective or appointive political office for a minimum of ten years

Legislation on its own is nothing. Enforcement of the law is the soul and the promotion of the efficacy of such law. There is no sufficient of good laws in Nigeria. What is lacking and the real cause of in-effectiveness of our laws is the lack of the will power to enforce the laws. Our situation is not helped in this regard by the legendry corruption of those whose duty it is to enforce the laws.

It cannot be gain said that good home bringing and proper education of the youth will go a long way in dousing the waves of political violence. In the same vein, good and proper political education for the masses of the people is also a sure bet towards the amelioration of political violence. A politically astute person if every other thing is equal, is not likely to become a tool in the hands of perpetrators of political violence.

The media and professional bodies like the NBA, NMA, NSE and other non-governmental organizations should collaborate to promote porgrammes and issues that will highlight the evil effect of political violence. In particulars, the media should reposition itself by black-listing known promoters of political violence. In the same vein, incidents of political violence should not be reported with screaming banner headlines.

CONCLUSIONS

We have in this paper tried to x-ray the problems of political violence in Nigeria. We looked at the history, highlighted the causes, the consequences and possible solutions to the nagging problems. It is our hope that we would all put our hands together to fight this scourge which is an ill wind that cannot bring anyone any good.

Once, again, I think the organizers for the opportunity and all of you for your patient listening.