THOUGHTS ON THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA: PRESENTED AT A ONE DAY CONFAB ORANISED AT IBADAN BY THE MONITOR NEWSPAPERS LIMITED:BY YUSUF O.ALI ESQ; SAN

INTRODUCTION

I wish to thank the organizers of this forum, the **Monitor Newspapers Limited** for the opportunity afforded me to rub minds with very eminent Nigerians on the desirability or otherwise of the system of government we are practicing in the country.

Permit me to state from the out set that my understanding of today's gathering is not so much to dwell on the theories of the presidential or parliamentary system of governments but rather to X-ray how the system we are practicing can be used to achieve the attainment of a **stable, prosperous**, **united** and **egalitarian nation state**. In my short contribution therefore, I would rather want to beam the search light on those factors which I believe if properly attended to and addressed, will lift our nation from the current state of despondency and hopelessness.

I form the personal view that our problem is not the system of government we practice but rather the workability of the system. As a corollary to this, is the problem of the operators of whatever system is being practiced.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR NIGERIA

Given the views I have expressed above, there are certain urgent matters that need to be attended to no matter the system of government we practise, which to me are basic **des darata** for the type of nation all true nationalists crave for. It is these that I will address myself to anon.

NATIONAL INTERGRATION

1. The first task before all the true lovers of this country is to start the systematic and orderly integration of the various discondant and disparate interests that make up the entity called Nigeria. Matters like local government and state of origin for purposes of employment and seeking elections should be seriously

down played. A person that lives for a continous period of at least 5 **years** in any native community, in any part of Nigeria should be treated for all practical purposes as an indegene of that area.

2. THE NATIONAL QUESTION

There have been various calls from many quarters for the convocation of a sovereign national conference to address the national question. One thing that is clear from the calls of the protagonists and antagonists of this issue, is that there is the need for the various nationalities that make-up Nigeria to sit down and address the national question. Now is the time for this.

3. RELIGIOUS BIGOTARY

It is an unfortunate development that our leaders had wittingly or otherwise woken this dangerous cankerworm in most adherent of religions in this country. This tide must be stemmed if the country is to enjoy religious harmony and peace. Our leaders both political and religious, should stop paying lip service to the war against religious bigotary.

4. ETHNICITY

This has been a bane in our national psyche before and after independence. Where a man comes from is more important in this country than whom he is and what he can contribute. A look at the nomenclature of the personal aides of elected national office holders in this country will confirm our fears on this issue. Also a visit to any Federal establishment would also reveal the ethic hegemony of those who head the ministries or parastatals. This same problem is also prevalent in the states where the battle for supremacy amongst the various ethnic groups has made the call for the creation of new states inevitable, and unending.

5. MASS POLITICAL EDUCATION

One of the very serious problems confronting the sustainance of democratic governance in Nigeria is the near total absence of the empowerment of the civil populace on the qualities and benefits of democracy. The political education of the people and their enlightenment of the need to stand up at all times and defend the democratic institutions of the nation is imperative and urgent. One of the reasons why democracy succeed in other places is the awareness by political

office usurpers that the people will resist any other form of government other than as laid down in their constitution. Until Nigeria gets to this stage, the democratic project is in serious peril.

6. GOOD GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPARENCY

It is unfortunate that this country has not been lucky to enjoy a large and continous dose of good governance since independence. That the current government has had to launch an anti-corruption crusade underscores this point. It is still a moot point whether today corruption is higher or lower than before the advent of this government and the launching of the anti-corruption crusade. Leadership by example is still very much in short supply. Integrity in public places, transparency in dealing with the public are still rare commodities in our national life. All these shortcomings would have to be attended to, to make progress.

7. LAW ENFORCEMENT

The most singular contributory factor to the rising wave of crime and the aberrant behaviour of many Nigerians with the attendant indiscipline in all facets of our national life, is the virtual non-existence of law enforcement by the agencies of government especially the police. The knowledge that with the right connection and money, one can virtually get away with any illegality in this country emboldens criminals and law-breakers.

A defiant traffic offender for example believes that with a N20 bribe, he can get away with any traffic offence. In other countries, the laws are effective because the citizens know that their law enforcement officials will insist on the due observance of the laws. The converse is the position in this country. I honestly believe that the time is ripe for an all inclusive stake-holders meeting to address the question why our security agents are neither respected nor well regarded by the citizens.

8. DEVOLUTION OF POWERS

One of the reasons why there is cut throat scramble for power at the center is the unnecessary awesome powers and privileges that is at the center. In otherwise words, there is too much power and money controlled by the federal government. There is the urgent need therefore to wittledown the powers that presently reside in the center and devolve some of them to the states. Items like Drugs and Poisons, Evidence, Stamp duties, Public Holidays, Traffic, Fishing and such other items now on the exclusive legislative list should at worst be transferred to the concurrent legislative list. The principle of derivation should be at least 40% of the criteria for the sharing of revenue.

The Federal government's share in the revenue accruing to the federation should not be more than 30%

9. TENURE OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

It is undoubted that this country has never enjoyed a smooth change of baton of political leadership from one democratic government to another. 1964 and 1983 general elections bear this out. A radical disease deserves a radical cure. Since our politicians have refused to imbibe the spirit of sportsmanship at elections it may not be out of place to recommend the amendment of the constitution on the tenure of offices of elected officials by making all elective offices to be a one term of 5 or 6 years tenure.

10. STRENGHTING OF CERTAIN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

There is the urgent need for constitutional and statutory provisions that will strengthen certain public institutions which will in turn promote the ideals of the nation. The judiciary, the press, the ICPC, the Public Complaints Commission the Federal Civil Service Commission, INEC and other such bodies need to be strengthened and largely independent. The judiciary should be strengthened in terms of financial requirement and the setting up of a special unit in the Nigerian police.

The unit advocated, should be specially trained for the job of carrying out court duties, providing security for judges and the court, execution of judgments and so

on. The kind of unit one is urging for, will resemble a special command created in the Nigerian police for the railways.

11. CONCLUSION

All we have stated above are by no means exhaustive of the areas of our national lifes that deserve urgent attention. The views expressed are suggestions which could be modified, expanded or in any other way made workable. Once more I thank the organizers for the opportunity and I thank you all for your attentive listening.