

MAKING COMMON SENSE:

HEALING A NATION SCARRED BY INJUSTICE: BEING A SPEECH DELIVERED BY SENATOR BEN MURRAY- BRUCE AT THE 2017 HOUSE OF JUSTICE SUMMIT/DINNER ON 19 DECEMBER,2017 AT YARÁDUA HALL,MURTALA MOHAMMED SQUARE, KADUNA-NIGERIA.

I want to speak to Nigeria on the topic ‘Healing a Nation Scarred by Injustice’.

In this day when Nigerian citizens prefer to face a perilous journey through the Sahara Desert, then risk slavery in Libya and afterwards death by drowning in the Mediterranean Sea, we have to ask ourselves why with all these dangers, more than half a million Nigerians still want to make the journey and leave this nation with all her riches, minerals and opportunities.

I was thinking about it recently. Obviously, because of the station of life that I find myself in, I exist in a reality distortion zone and am generally blind to what drives these Nigerians to make such a perilous journey. It is not just me. Most of Nigeria’s elite exist in that zone.

But then recently, I have been crisscrossing Nigeria and meeting everyday people and becoming more intimate with the issues they face and the scales have fallen from my eyes.

I listed three perils that Nigerians face if they decide to risk their lives by immigrating to Europe through the Sahara Desert. I never knew that to many of these people, if not all, the dangers are more if they remain in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, they face Boko Haram terrorism, and if they escape that, they may encounter killer herdsmen. But even if they do not meet death by killer herdsmen, they may become victims of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad or SARS, who many times stereotype Nigerian youths as armed robbers or Internet fraudsters.

I have not talked of kidnappers, militants, one checkpoint per one kilometer or the menace of one chance robbers.

In fact, it is a jungle out there!

Social injustice is so rife in Nigeria today that it is hard to find a Nigerian who is not in an abusive relationship with Nigeria.

And year after year, we keep on treating the symptoms instead of curing the disease.

Nigeria is not working in her current state. Our population is growing far faster than our economy and in two months’ time the United Nations projects that we will overtake India as the nation with the highest population of extremely poor people. Yet India has eight times our population.

It should be obvious by now that if we do not renegotiate Nigeria, if we do not restructure, we will just keep reacting from one problem to the other until one day we end up with Armageddon.

Recently some people said that Nigeria does not need restructuring and I laughed. How can you say a nation with one of the highest numbers of private jet owners/users and yet without its own national line, does not need restructuring? Obviously anyone with such a view is living in denial!

Nigeria needs restructuring to foster peaceful and prosperous coexistence between her various people because the alternative to coexistence is not something we should ever contemplate. If we don't promote peaceful coexistence we will eventually get violent co-destruction.

So how do we heal a nation scarred by injustice? By restructuring her according to the principles of justice so that we do not have a situation whereby Lagos generates 55 per cent of Nigeria's Value Added Tax yet other states get a larger share of the revenue than Lagos State. This is even when some of those states ban the sale of some of the items that make up the 55% from Lagos.

You cannot rob Peter to pay Paul and expect Peter to be happy. And of course Paul will not want the situation to change. But Paul must realize that one day Peter will have nothing left to rob and then Paul will be faced with a situation where both he and Peter are penniless.

We have no choice to restructure now that the center can still hold. We should not wait for things to fall apart because the center no longer holds.

We need to restructure Nigeria so that we do not turn away an applicant to the civil service from Anambra because of quota system, meanwhile, this individual has the science, technology, engineering or mathematics degrees that Nigeria needs to grow meanwhile we hurriedly hire someone who has a degree in religion because he is from a state with a greater quota.

Only restructuring will create the atmosphere for Nigeria to thrive. But denial of restructuring will create the atmosphere for Nigeria to die.

That is why we are spending 70 per cent of our budget to pay salaries to less than 1 per cent of our population and when we don't have the money to pay we go aborrowing instead of reducing the size of our civil service.

Of course a leader who knows that he is never going to repay what he has borrowed will continue to borrow so that future generations will repay the debt that he has spent but if we restructure we can make sure that instead of that we have a situation where elders plant trees whose shade they know they will never enjoy. Ladies and gentlemen, let me not take even more of your time belaboring an obvious issue. The answer to the question that I have been asked to speak about is restructuring and thank God the report of the 2014 National Conference is

available. If we implement it and other reports like the Orosanye Report, we will bring justice to Nigeria speedily and heal our land and our people.