34TH ANNUAL CONGRESS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NIGERIA, MAY 15 - 18TH, 1989 UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE 34TH CONGRESS HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, ON 18TH MAY, 1989.

The 34th meeting of the Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria met at the University of Benin, Benin City, from Monday 15th to Thursday 18th May, 1989. Participants were drawn from all the Departments of History of Universities, Colleges of Education and other tertiary institutions throughout Nigeria.

The theme of the Congress was History and Nigeria's Third Republic, with the following as sub-themes:

i) Institutional mechanism and decision-making
ii) Elections and Party Systems
iii) Democracy and Popular Participation
iv) The Military and Democratic Practices
v) The Political Economy of Independent Nigeria
vi) Issues in Socio-Cultural Relations
vii) Towards an Effective Local Government System
viii) The Role of Women
ix) External Relations.

Congress discussed many papers on these issues at length after which it came up with the following observations/decisions:

1. That Nigeria should embark upon a radical restructuring of the economy, making it more inward-looking and self-reliant. In addition, it calls for measures that will ensure more equitable distribution of the national wealth.
2. Congress expresses concern that the present socio-economic conditions in the country - increasing poverty, inequality and unemployment - will not make for the survival of democracy and political stability in the Third Republic and expresses the hope that Government will address these issues decisively.
3. It further expresses serious concern and fear over the Debt-Equity Swap which it views as an open invitation to recolonise the Nigerian economy and therefore enjoins Government to review the policy.
4. Congress also sees the present value of the naira as politically determined and not based on free market forces. Therefore it calls for a political solution to the on-going devaluation of the naira.

5. Congress took a critical look at the transition programme and calls on Government to ensure that the two political parties it plans to register derive from popular wishes and aspirations and that they are not the manipulations of the ruling elite as was the case in the Second Republic.
6. Congress is of the view that there should be a principled, official and consistent handling of the national question in order to ensure respect and equal treatment for nationalities and sub-nationalities. Congress notes also that the constitution of the country guarantees the secularity of the state and calls on Governments to uphold this provision.
7. Congress took a critical look at the Local Government system in the country and commends the Government for the creation of more local Governments and making them the Third tier. It

however, advises that the autonomy granted them in the constitution should not be hindered by State Governments. In addition Congress is of the view that the Local Governments should not be seen as mere administrative units but centres of initiative in respect of the political, social and economic development of the country.

8. With regard to the Woman Question, Congress, while noting the current efforts at improving the socio-economic conditions of women, feels that more attention should be given by Government to the encouragement of research-oriented strategies that will eliminate the persistent prejudices and provide realistic solutions.
9. Congress is of the view that military rule by its very nature is undemocratic and therefore feels that further military intervention in Nigerian politics is undesirable because it stultifies the natural evolution of a true democratic culture.
10. Congress agrees with the basic principles of Nigerian Foreign policy, that is, non-alignment at the global level and on the African continent, total commitment to decolonisation and the dismantling of apartheid. But in pursuing these principles, the country should be more forceful in defending its specific national interests such that no internal politics or sectional interest are allowed to distract from the main goals of our foreign policy.
11. Finally, Congress noted with regret the attitudes of various Governments, Federal and State to the discipline of History as exemplified by the virtual elimination of history at the Secondary School level, non-employment of history graduates and the refusal to award scholarships to deserving students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in contradiction to the avowed cultural policy of the nation. Congress calls for a complete review of these attitudes and reminds the Governments and the entire nation that those who ignore their own history and fail to develop historical consciousness among their citizens do so at their own peril.

PROFESSOR G.N. UZOIGWE, F.H.S.N.
(President)

DR. A.I. NWABUGHUOGU
(Ag. General Secretary)

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