

'Bad Governance is a Major Cause of Coups in West Africa

... *Senator Francis Alimikhena*

A Member of the Fifth legislature of the regional parliament Senator Francis Alimikhena has identified the major cause of Military Coup d'état in West Africa as bad electoral system which promotes bad governance. Speaking at the floor of the regional parliament during debate on Matters of Public importance to the Community Citizens Senator Alimikhena said that when politicians rig themselves into power through manipulating the electoral process in connivance with the electoral umpires who are supposed to be neutral the result is that unpopular candidates are declared and sworn in as winners.' This has the potentials of not only igniting crisis among the citizens who may feel their candidate have been shortchanged but also creating opportunities for mediocrity to find way into government against the popular will of the people'. According to him such politicians will not have the capacity to deliver the dividends of democracy to the people and this will certainly result to bad governance. He said that when the opposition is suppressed and silenced the people are bound to revolt and such revolt can throw up opportunity for coup d'état as being experienced today in some countries within the sub-region. Look at the case in Niger, the civil populace welcomed the Military junta because democracy could not deliver democratic dividends to the people and so they are agitated for a change. They were already disenchanted with the democratic system that appears to be subjugating and pushing them to squalor and poverty. This is because of bad governance. African democracy should strive to meet the yearnings and aspirations of their people. That is the only way coups can be really discouraged in Africa and the sub-region.

While also commenting to the issue of not according the regional Parliament its proper recognition at the meetings of ECOWAS Council of States as disclosed by the Speaker, Senaor Alimikhena admonished the Speaker not to give up noting that the Authority of Heads of State and Government are aware that the regional parliament is conscious of the reality on ground and as the heartbeat of the citizens of the sub-region, are always ready and willing at any time to tell the truth to power. 'Why do you think they will give the regional parliament a smooth ride? He asked. 'You must not be deterred. The Parliament's voice must be heard in the Council. We are here to represent the sub-region as a team even though we are representing different countries. We must not be parochial or think only



about our individual countries. We must ensure that there must be a desk in our National parliaments where all our discussions and deliberations are channeled to the Council via the states. All the discussions we do here must be impressed on the Council. Our voice must be heard at the Council and the Authority of Head of States and Government. This is why we are here for the collective interest of the citizens of the sub-region.' He added.

Senator Alimikhena used the opportunity to commend the Speaker of the 5th legislature Rt. Hon Sidie Mohammed Tunis for his drive, sense of maturity and inclusiveness in the steering of the affairs of the regional parliament. According to him leadership and governance is a continuum and I believe that whatever lapses this legislature could not achieve will certainly be improved upon by the incoming 6th legislature.

'The best antidote to overcome democratic threat is good governance.'

- Hon SALAM BAMIDELE

Hon Salam Bamidele a vibrant Member of the Fifth Legislature of the ECOWAS Parliament and current Member of the 10th National Assembly spoke to our Editor-In- Chief, Mr Peter o. Emuekpere at the sideline of the Regional Parliament debate on Matters of Public Importance to the Community citizen at the just concluded 2nd Ordinary Sesion of the Parliament which held in Abuja the Federal Capital of Nigeria. He spoke to us on the efforts made so far in the Fifth Legislature, his personal experience and the prospects ahead.



On his assessment of the journey of the fifth Legislature so far Hon. Salam said'

So far, so good the journey of the Fifth Regional Parliament has been a mix bag of both the high and the low or rather what you guys in the media will call the good and bad. Part of the milestones that the regional Parliament has achieved in the last four years has actively responded to a few of the global crisis that happened in the course of this session. You know this session witnessed the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic which took a part of the first two years. There was lull in our activities as physical meeting were drastically reduced. There were more of virtual meetings and engagement and this slowed down the activities of the parliament but by the time we got into the post COVID era we had more regular engagements and meetings apart from our regular sessions. We had several delocalized meetings that were focused on specific thematic areas of the needs of the sub-region like democracy, good governance, access to justice, human right and the promotion of the cause of women. In some of these areas the fifth parliament appears to have done very well especially in the area of raising awareness for

example on the issue of women, the promotion of the activities of the ECOFEPA which is the female wing of the Parliament, the inclusion of youth and children in the activities of the parliament through the establishment of the West Africa youths parliament. But on the reverse side there are lots of grounds that have not been covered. For example at the beginning of this fifth legislature an agenda was set on the issue of direct election of members of into the regional parliament but this has not really seen the light of the day. Also the issue of accelerating the economic integration through the adoption of a common currency and other fiscal policies which are yet to be actualized. Then the biggest one which is the threat to democracy. Perhaps more than ever before the usurpation in Niger, Mali and a few of the country in west Africa including the recent attempt in sierra Leone which has casted negative blight on the framework and image of the ECOWAS as a body and the parliament in particular.

On why he thinks that democracy in West Africa is under threat?

'We have to look at it holistically. It is combinations of factors that are responsible. One of them is the apparent dislocation of the people from the government. When people feel frustrated about so many things about governance, anything can happen. We see a situation in Niger where the civil populace appears apparently appears to support the military during the truncation of the civil rule. This is because there is disconnect already between the people and the civil authority and this happens when there is a perceived or real human right abuses where there is gross violation of people's right and privileges'. This most times coupled with the manipulation of electoral process and the deepening economic crisis in the sub-region where poverty is about 60percent so what people are really concerned about now are the deliverables, the tangibles that comes out of our the democratic experience. And then also we have weak institutions of government and security architecture coupled with situations where individuals are more powerful and stronger than institutions.

In some of these countries we have situations where the presidential guards are more like a law unto themselves where even elected president do not have firm control over the Military and security forces. I have always said it and will continue to say it that the biggest antidote to overcome

democratic threat is good governance. And then connecting the people with governance in a manner that make the civil populace take ownership of the democratic structures. They see themselves as the government and if there is any threat to the government the people will rise to defend the government. But when there is disconnect between the government and the aspiration of the people anything can happen. These are the issues that the ECOWAS and indeed the parliament need to address and take proactive measures to safe guard the interest of the sub-region.

On the call by some parliamentarians for ECOWAS to withdraw the sanctions against Niger, Hon Salami said 'To be candid with you I believe strongly that these sanction is hitting hard on the civil populace more than the military junta because the junta are elites and can meet up with whatever challenges the sanction impose but the average Nigerien on the streets of Niamey, the farmers, the market women, the artisans are the one feeling the heat of the sanctions especially in the area of food, energy and medical supplies. These are critical areas that affect mostly the common man. Yes, the sanctions impose may seek to seize the properties of the junta across the world and deploy a no flight zone here and there and the rest of that but that does not affect the commoners. So I still insist that the sanction be lifted so as to alleviate the pains and suffering of the civil populace and ordinary citizens.

On how his membership of the regional parliament has enriched his legislative experience,

'My being in EOWAS Parliament has really impacted my personal life and legislative experience. You know collaborating with other lawmakers from other countries to exchange views and ideas and deliberate on issues of common concern across the sub-region can be very enriching. It has helped in building bonds of unity and oneness. It is enriching in terms of knowledge, contacts, experience and networking. Travelling to other countries across the globe and sub-region for meetings and engagements has more than anything else expounded and broadened my horizon and perspective about other people and their culture.