

# As Criminals Seize Nigerian Babies

By Sonala Olumhense

Nigeria's leader, Bola Tinubu, is on a trip. He knows nobody trusts him. Not abroad, and certainly not at home. Still, he has made Abuja work for him: he acquired and rigged out a presidential jet with which he soars around the world. When he is out there, Nigerians hold their breath. His smile somewhat awkward, he walks cautiously, knowing that out there, neither the television cameras nor social media can be, emm... controlled. Every step is tentative, almost as if it may be the last upright one. Nigerians do not know how these things are broached, such as: "Please hold my hand when we go out there, I beg," or, "I am afraid of stairs..." No, we don't. And so, we hold our hearts in our mouths. Because we have seen him stumble and fall. We have heard the grammatical "bulaba," now the Nigerian by-word for incoherence. In the United Kingdom, it was King Charles, 77, holding the hand of President Tinubu, 74. In Turkey, it was President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan holding Tinubu's hand. Still, you could see it coming. The Nigerian leader touches his heart, as if reassuring himself. The walk is about 20 metres, but it is complicated, as it involves pausing to acknowledge a brigade of guards before turning around to continue the walk. Erdoğan, at 72, in the same age range as the Nigerian leader, is gracious. He fortifies (almost like the Theodosian Walls of Constantinople, which became Istanbul). He steadies. He guides. He provides robust man-marking, as they say in some sports. It is not enough: the video shows Tinubu, having survived the challenge of the Guard of Honour, appearing to venture off to his right. His frame buckles, and he goes down. To hear palace voices tell the story, the man barely stumbled. One of them blamed a poorly-laid carpet. Another alleged a piece of metal on the floor. Same palace, same fall. We're glad that Tinubu suffered no injuries. The truth is that old people frequently fall. The older they are, the more likely are such incidents. The trouble is that Tinubu's falls do not match his age. The good part is that, at home or abroad, he does not walk around very often in public. We see him sitting down, which is a good place for the elderly. When Tinubu is seated, he tries to appear ebullient and confident. In Turkey, he was composed enough on a chair to offer general bombast. And you know it is bombast when Tinubu is telling the world about his commitment to "democracy, freedom and prosperity," along with his concern for the "vulnerable." Who can be more vulnerable than anyone within Nigeria's borders?

Tinubu attended the Africa CEO Forum in Rwanda. It was there that he delivered what may rank among Nigeria's most remarkable moments in African development economics. Tinubu was on a masculine power roll, speaking glowingly about the important subject of intra-African trade and asking, "Why not start a commodity exchange platform where we can trade with one another?" It appeared to be a matter he was genuinely passionate about until a moderator asked, "Why don't you start the commodity exchange you're talking about?" Tinubu's response was speechlessness: a shrug. He had apparently not memorized that part. A shrug? Before the world, that explained such mysteries as to why Nigeria is stuck in the mud; why the country has no security strategy; why Nigeria is the poverty capital of the world. It explained to the international community why the APC Manifesto and Tinubu's Renewed Hope are routine Nigeria '419.' Once tripped up, Tinubu did not recover or respond to the one question that might have seen him dominate Africa's economic thinking for the next decade.

Having thus demonstrated why Nigeria is in such philosophical and practical filth and squalor, he returned to Abuja and to what really matters: ensuring his coronation in that city exactly one year from now. Remember: He had signed the Electoral Act Amendment within 24 hours of NASS passage, with the infamous Clause 60 making electronic results transmission optional, thereby preserving the mechanism most associated with results manipulation. With no sense of irony, given Tinubu's own certificate troubles in 2023, certificate forgery and qualification issues will not be valid petition grounds in 2027.

Yoruba Ronu, among many Nigerian groups, has rejected this. With no sense of embarrassment, Tinubu has salted away N135 billion in the 2026 budget not to guarantee unimpeachable elections, but for post-election litigation. This is why Tinubu's boisterous democratic claims abroad do not match his practice at home, and why his government enjoys no public trust. In Tinubu's hands, greed, corruption and impunity receive renewed hope: APC has impudently chosen Yahaya Bello, who is on trial by the EFCC, as senatorial candidate for Kogi Central; Ifeanyi Okowa, who was arrested by the EFCC in November 2024 for allegedly diverting N1.3 trillion in derivation funds while governor of Delta State; Within this alternate reality, Tinubu himself claimed a barely-contested APC primary last week with nearly 11 million votes: a result that defies organic political behaviour. Remember that in the 2023 presidential contest, he polled fewer than 9 million nationwide! His 99% party win, therefore, exposes direct primaries as a mechanism that the ruling party controls as completely as the delegate system it replaced. What does direct democracy mean when 99% uniformity is the result? It is a confirmation that Nigeria is now a one-man show, with little party or government presence. Consider this: On Children's Day last week, Tinubu was promising that his government would "intensify efforts" to rescue just-kidnapped children, including two-year-olds. Really? Where are all the other promises Tinubu has regaled Nigeria with? Did he not assure the people of Plateau State that the March carnage in Jos would not "repeat itself," only for it to be emphatically repeated within days? Consider:

As he celebrated his third anniversary last week, a coalition of 52 civil society organizations reminded him that since he took office, nearly 20,000 persons have been killed and at least 12,362 abducted. Consider: Chatham House recently warned Tinubu that travelling the world won't fix Nigeria's problems. Consider: There are suddenly US-Nigeria military strikes against insurgents that Nigerians know nothing about. Who is authorizing them? US troops arrived in February in an advisory and training capacity, but are now conducting routine strikes. Was this ever tabled before the National Assembly? Was it publicly explained by the executive? Tinubu's presumptions and empty claims abroad about his "transformation" of Nigeria are in contradiction with his lifestyle of self-serving policies and the impunity and opulence around him. He never admits his abject failure on the most important task before him: insecurity, and the millions who die because he is Nigeria's president. As he hungers for his coronation next May, I write this in tribute to the hundreds of thousands of Nigerians captured and killed, and those lost to hunger, incompetence and complicity, in the last three years. Especially the babies. Why are you not on the streets, Nigerian parents?