

# The Mothers of the 2023 Nasarawa State Uprising,

By Nkoyo Toyo

The Mothers of the Nasarawa State Uprising began their demonstrations on the 20th of March 2023, in Lafia, soon after the gubernatorial elections. In their hundreds, they staged a seven-day march in major towns across Nasarawa State to peacefully protest the results of the governorship election, where INEC returned the incumbent Governor Abdullahi Sule as winner. The women, who came out in their numbers, wore black as a sign of mourning, later, they resorted to prayers and further adopted age old method of protests reminiscent of the 1929 Aba Women Riot and the 1946 Abeokuta Women Revolt during which some women came out nude to press their demands. Those women who stripped naked waged a righteous war, remembering that they were the representatives of the power that was taken from them. They poured out their pains of subversion and used their nakedness to engrave scripts in the minds of the public, telling tales of hopelessness, decades of political denials, rejections, exclusion, emotional torments and trauma as well as abandonment.

Their physical appearances were garbed by placard-carrying MARCHES OF RESISTANCE, which were largely peaceful. They wrote on posters... "INEC Should Give Us Back Our Mandate." "Let Our Votes Count, Ombugadu Won", "We Say No To Election Manipulation." The women also petitioned INEC and Mrs. Stella Oboshi, who spoke for them, said the purpose of the protest was to channel their grievances over the insensitivity of INEC towards the real votes cast by the people of Nasarawa State. The women wondered how the contention emanating from two wards Gayam and Ciroma electoral wards of Lafia Local Government Area could overturn a victory so manifestly won in all other parts of the State. Originally, their protest was about their displeasure with the election outcome, but with time, the group metaphorized into a movement with the mothers continuously making demands, dressed in black and engaging the public in ways that drew local and national attention



to their issues. When the Supreme Court on Friday 19th January 2024 sealed every hope by ruling against their candidate, Hon. Dave Ombugadu, nerves were frayed. Expectedly, the women went back to the streets in peaceful protest. As veterans of many protests, they could see the impending death to their democratic rights to speak out. Same day, they became victims of hasty judgments arranged by a Chief Magistrate Court in Lafia. 38 of the protesting women were sentenced to a Correctional Centre over allegations of violence and destruction of public property with none such property mentioned. These year-old symbols of a worthy democratic struggle were momentarily eclipsed, though not overwhelmed.

As women speak up for these Mothers of the Nasarawa Uprising, we know they too will rise again but in ways to counter oppressive State managed acts and actors. Their future actions will pull the uninitiated into a genuine narrative authored by these disciples of oppositional politics. They will teach other men and women from experience, telling stories of how elections were grabbed, snatched, and taken away from those who worked hard to earn what could be termed empty victory. These women must also know that they are walking into a new phase of the repressive and dictatorial tendencies of the Gov Abdullahi Sule government. As a result, their endurance will serve in the revival of Nigeria's declining multi-party democracy is very much needed. This is their legacy laid on the foundations of "UNITY IN DIVERSITY." Their stories will be well in scripted into the annals of Nigeria's history books for the Mothers of the Nasarawa Uprising have written their names into our democratic consciousness...demanding that acts of justice, inclusion, and fairness are upheld. They were on the streets in protest

for 10 months because they believed in the cause. They were resilient and graceful. These Mothers will forever receive accolades and recognition as the true symbols of our democratic rights and its aspirations to see the expression of Freedom of Thought and Association.

