

# A Presidential Visit, Amupitan and Other Nigerian Fables

*“I rather sympathise with Amupitan. I also feel sorry for him, or how do you react to a human being who loses in seconds, a reputation he must have built over the decades?”*

By Owei Lakemfa

It was Palm Sunday, March 29, “The Year of Our Lord” 2026. Terrorists dressed in military-style uniforms, and riding motorcycles, arrived in Angwan Rukuba, a district of the picturesque city of Jos. They opened fire indiscriminately killing at least 27 persons. Dozens were injured. There was an immediate outcry. Some distraught Nigerians immediately travelled to Jos to mourn with the people. They had no visible security. Their armour was their faith in humanity and the need to prevent a repeat. The elected governor of Plateau State, His Excellency Caleb Mutfwang later surfaced amongst his people, from the bowels of an armoured tank. He said a few words and ducked back into his tank to be sped back to the safety and comfort of the Government House. The people were on their own. It took two days for the Presidency to issue a statement which, as usual in these increasingly frequent massacres, condemned the dastardly act and ordered security chiefs to track down the perpetrators. A haunting image of the Angwa Rukuba massacre was that of Mrs. Favour Ayuba, the mother who held the corpse of her slain son, Promise, tightly to her chest. She would not let go, believing he could not be dead. Later, she lamented: “I don't have a dad. I don't have a mum. I don't have a husband. I abandoned everything in the world for my kids. I raised my children to adulthood. Promise told me 'Mummy, your birthday is coming soon. I will buy you a gift. I'll buy you a gift. I'll buy you a gift. I'll surprise you.' But this surprise wounded me because tomorrow is my birthday and that's when Promise will be buried.”

Four days later, President Bola Tinubu found the time for a condolence visit. He did the 15-minute flight from Abuja to the Yakubu Gowon Airport, Heipang, which is 40 minutes' drive from Jos. Rather than drive into the city where he could make an on-the-spot assessment, visit the injured in the hospital, condole affected families and assure the populace of their safety, he stopped at the airport. Grieving families had to be brought to him. So, rather than President Tinubu visiting the victims, they were brought to visit him at the airport. He started his comments with a complaint, and told the families he had little or no time: “You have no light at the airport, and I have to fly back within the next ten minutes. To the victims, there is nothing I can give you, whether money in millions, but to console you.”

The President addressed his complaint to the wrong persons. It cannot be the business of the mourners whether there is electricity at the airport or not; that is the failure of his government which runs the airport. In fact, I will not be surprised if the hapless mourners had never been to that airport not to talk of flying from it. As for the ten minutes the President said he could spare with the mourning families who lost their loved ones, why did he embark on the journey when he knew he had little or no time? Surely, he would not have committed any crime or sin if he had postponed the journey and did a proper condolence visit. The Presidency later said the time constraint was due to logistical and security constraints. Did the Presidency realize that the mourning families had similar constraints? But in all things, let us recognize the magnanimity of power and be thankful. Supposing the Presidency had decided that rather than the victims being driven to the Jos Airport, they should be driven four hours to pay the visit to the President at the Presidential Villa in Abuja?

Jos, the scene of the Palm Sunday massacre is a centre of learning. It

hosts the University of Jos, UNIJS. One of the products of the famous university, Joash Ojo Amupitan, with LL. B, MSc and PhD law degrees from the institution, is leading an infamous attack on democracy in Africa. As Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, he attempted the decapitation of the African Democratic Congress, ADC. Incredibly, Amupitan claimed the interpretation of the Court of Appeal ruling that the status quo in the party be maintained, means severing any leadership from the party; that is making it headless. Not even a first-year law student can conclude that the intention of the court is anarchism.

Amupitan must have invested heavily in becoming a lawyer, professor and Senior Advocate of Nigeria. So why would he throw all that away by seeking to decapitate not just a political party, but the main opposition party in Nigeria which is the Minority party in the National Assembly? Why would a person who has gone to school not realize that an organization, including a political party, must always have a leadership? How can the head of an electoral body and a person who has been to a law school, remove the entire leadership of a political party without any replacement? I feel sorry for Amupitan who I believe knows better but must have found himself in a helplessness situation. So, rather than join the endless queue of people, including outside Nigeria, who are condemning him, I rather sympathize with Amupitan. I also feel sorry for him, or how do you react to a human being who loses in seconds, a reputation he must have built over the decades? It is also a lesson to all: never take a job that takes your character and in its place, presents you as a caricature. On this, there are pieces of advice that litter the path of humanity. One of them advises that if you want to dine with the devil, you need to use a long spoon. Another says a good name is better than silver and gold. Yet another posits that it is better to be a king in one's hut than be a slave in the palace.

Amupitan as INEC Chairman has become an aborted flight. Whether to stop or continue with the flight, may be his decision. I will not advise him to resign because I do not know the forces with which he is contending. But it does not matter whether he spends the next one day or one decade in office, public perception has written his testimonial. Amupitan's state reminds me of Shakespearean Macbeth's soliloquy in which he reflected on the transient nature of life: “Out, out, brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale (Itan in Yoruba). Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.”