



The Greek donation to Niger Republic

The outrage over the reported donation of N1.14 billion to Niger Republic for the purchase of 10 operational vehicles (Sports Utility Vehicles) is not misplaced; and even if the donation was well intended, government should accept blame for bungling the scheme. In the first place, government did not carry Nigerians along of the donation which appeared not to have been duly appropriated. In a democracy, government should be accountable to the citizens, even if the donation is from the bogus 'security vote' that has been subjected to gross abuse. Second, the scheme appears to have been shrouded in secrecy, which cover was only blown off by a whistleblower. That is not good enough. Third, such a donation is bound to raise curiosity, coming at a time that the country is admittedly broke and unable to meet some of its basic obligation including funding the universities to assuage teachers who have been on strike for about six months. And lastly, secret donations appear to be gaining ground with government, considering similar gift to Afghanistan earlier this year without a corresponding clear benefit to Nigeria.

The Niger vehicles were sourced from / Kaura Motors Nigeria Limited. While that could be a plus for the country's economy, Nigerians are understandably irked by the secrecy surrounding it amidst the crushing economic and social hardship in the country. The Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Zainab Ahmed, who confirmed the development to State House correspondents at the end of a Federal Executive Council (FEC meeting) in Abuja, said it was not the first time Nigeria was supporting its West African neighbours.

Government's approval was exposed by a popular social media influencer, David Hundeyin. The minister argued that even though Nigerians have the right to question the rationale for such donation, President Muhammadu Buhari, who approved the purchase, also has the right to make his own assessment on situations and act accordingly. The document released by the media influencer showed that the president approved the release of the fund on the February 22 this year.

Similarly, Nigerians became aware of the Afghanistan gift, not when it was made, but following a response by the Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Hissein Brahim Taha, who commended the Nigerian government for its generosity. In both cases, Nigerians would not ordinarily oppose the donations if government had done the needful by making a case for them before the donation. The explanation by the Buhari government is not only late, it amounts to putting the cart before the horse; and raises strong suspicion about the innocence of the donations. Ahmed said the money to Niger Republic was a support to enable the Nigerian government to tackle insecurity in the landlocked nation. The minister stressed that Buhari has a responsibility to make decisions he believes would be in the best interests of the country.

Ahmed said: "To those who don't know, this is not the first time Nigeria will support its neighbours, especially, immediate neighbours Niger, Cameroun and Chad. This support is to enhance their capacity to secure their countries as it relates to us.

Fuelling public concern on the gift is that not long ago, Buhari, among other policy matters, outlined his plan for the development of the economy, the transportation sector, especially, the railway network in Nigeria with a view to connecting the entire country. He curiously said "negotiations are also advanced for the construction of other railway lines, firstly from Kano to Maradi in Niger Republic passing through Kazaure, Daura, Katsina, Jibia to Maradi. And now, it is the purchase of latest SUV cars.

The question is what is the rationale behind these Father Christmas donations to Niger Republic? Why construct a 55-kilometre rail line to Maradi, a city in Niger Republic? Has Buhari connected all the cities and important towns in Nigeria to the railway network that serves the nation's economy? Has the government adequately secured Nigeria's railway and road routes which are being daily hijacked by terrorists and kidnapers? Is the president not cognizant of the fact that many terrorists in Nigeria come all the way from neighbouring countries including Niger? Or is the railway his deliberate plan to facilitate their entry into the country? Could this plan not be interpreted as part of the much-touted consolidation of a certain hegemonic tendency that is causing tension in the country? Of what economic benefit is the rail line and monetary donation to Nigeria?

Furthermore, where are the funds coming from? Should a country burdened with huge indebtedness, borrowing to pay salary, be donating free money? Who is advising Mr. President or to whom has he been listening in the last one year on all the issues crying for serious and statesman-like action? Is there indeed a cabal that has taken hold of Buhari and whose interest is at variance with the collective will of Nigerians? The President swore to an oath to be loyal to Nigeria and not to Niger Republic or any other. On this and many other matters, some of his recent actions and inactions tend to suggest parochialism and a penchant for ethnic chauvinism. This is tragic, considering the massive national support that brought Buhari to power. Most Nigerians are expressing regrets now that they may have judged candidate Buhari wrongly. This is the time for him to listen to the people who elected him.

Without doubt, Buhari's N1.14 billion to Niger Republic and another \$1 million donation to Afghanistan, a rogue country and pariah regime, without the approval of the National Assembly (NASS) is reckless and an affront to Nigeria. Why do it in secret? What sort of relationship has Nigeria with these countries and for what benefit? All the explanations being made came only after the deals leaked, otherwise, they would have been swept under the carpet. The National Assembly has a lot of intervention to do in this regard; and it is unfortunate that the arm of government that is supposed to be separate, independent and one that should put the executive on its toes has become so dormant as to be part of the rot. Otherwise, the lawmakers should call the President to order.

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