

CALL WIKE TO ORDER BEFORE HIS FIRE DESTROYS NIGERIA.

By Luka Danboyi

The self-immolating tendency for people to be indifferent to situations in which they are not directly involved seems to be playing out in the debacle in Rivers State. Curiously, there are people who are enjoying the political drama between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his predecessor-cum-godfather, Nyesom Wike, Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, FCT. There is no question that the vast majority of Nigerians are inured to the shenanigans of a disoriented political elite that hardly reckons with the plight of the people. Only such a situation would produce the present economic nightmare afflicting a country so richly endowed that, less than 50 years ago, other countries were visiting to understudy its impressive developmental effort and to borrow 'seeds' for their agricultural revolution. While other nations were evolving through that developmental trajectory, Nigeria was mired in destabilizing politics, the type that Wike has foisted on Rivers State. Nigerians can only ignore the signals from the Garden City at the risk of a national implosion: when Rivers State sneezes, Nigeria catches cold. Ditto Kano and Lagos.

A country is like a human being. What affects any part tends to affect every other part. That is the systems theory. That is why perceptive systems strive to prevent localized dysfunctions from spreading to other parts; that is why doctors strive to quarantine benign tumors before they become malignant and spread to other areas. In politics, at least two previous experiences should alert Nigerians that danger is looming. The first example was the Western regional crisis in 1964. The mishandling of the crisis created the environment for the 1966 coup that unleashed a chain of sad developments in the country. The adverse impact of that crisis has remained with us ever since. The second political example was the 1983 Ondo crisis where the determined people rose against an electoral heist. By the time the people had finished processing the violence, destructions and killings, the soldiers struck, consigning the Second Republic to history's ignominious scrap heaps. Nigeria must watch it. The drums of destabilization are being beaten again. This time, by the events in Rivers State. And the chief drummer is Wike. Wike's actions are a threat to democracy in three disturbing ways. First, by rejecting a practice that he benefited from, Wike is sowing the seeds of confusion in the Peoples Democratic Party. His declaration that President Tinubu would be re-elected in 2027 casts a monumental doubt on his loyalty to the PDP.

Whether or not Wike is still a member of the PDP is a different question altogether. If unchecked, the FCT minister's unrelenting actions in trying to have his way in Rivers State could snowball into a major national catastrophe. All that it takes for an inferno of unquenchable proportions to start is for every gladiator to adopt Wike's unguarded utterances and actions. Secondly, for an ex-governor and now a serving minister to openly threaten to destabilize some states of the federation just for selfish reasons is not only unacceptable, but unlawful. Considered against the background of the security crisis bedeviling the country, Wike's threat to escalate the misery of the people for personal political benefit and ego trip is mindless, uncharitable and unpatriotic.

What Nigerians deserve and indeed demand at this critical watershed is not the threat of fire and brimstone but a soothing balm to their worries and distress. That Wike is still throwing bombs at fear-drenched, shell-shocked citizens, some of whom have either lost loved ones or have been displaced from their homes or indeed both, is a regrettable cut from someone who is supposed to inspire confidence and hope.

Thirdly, Wike's threat that he has the capacity to destabilize Bauchi, a state in the North-East zone of the country, an area that has been on the receiving end of insurgency, banditry and terrorism, is an unconscionable assault on the psyche of a zone whose entire life has been shattered by the scourge of violence. To imagine that a public official can be so insensitive to the sufferings of others is heart-wrenching and unfortunate. Wike's threat to throw Bauchi State into disarray smacks of bare-faced arrogance. It is a slap on the faces of the Bauchi political elite, that they are so cheap that any ambitious power broker can procure them to foment chaos in their state and derail a government that, since 2019, has continued to uphold the finest traditions of good governance through visible development indicators and the type of inclusion that Wike insists on denying the people of Rivers State.

Sadly, what is playing out in Rivers State has become a barometer for measuring the conduct of politicians where, rather than show humility, they play God and arrogate to themselves omnipotent powers such as Wike is doing presently. That Governor Fubara has, so far, resisted the temptation to join his estranged godfather in this macabre show of shame is a commendable approach that should be sustained, no matter the level of provocation.

In the same vein, the re-energized PDPGE, under the table leadership of Senator Bala Mohammed, deserves commendation for standing on both the Constitution and the convention of the Peoples Democratic Party irrespective of the status or idiosyncrasies of any member. What is good for the goose is also good for the gander. To the extent that the convention of the PDP cedes control of the party structure in the state to a serving governor, a privilege that Wike enjoyed, the PDP Governors Forum is treading the path of honour by insisting that Wike should allow Fubara the same privilege. It is noteworthy that the position of the PDP Governors Forum completely aligns with the good governance principle that prioritizes institutions over individuals and an enduring civic culture over arbitrariness or the whims and caprices of any individual and his cohorts. What is even more: by subjugating his well known friendship with Wike to the larger interest of the PDP and by extension Nigeria, Bala Mohammed has, once again, shown himself to be a statesman, a patriot and reliable democrat?

It is now incumbent on the Board of Trustees of the PDP, the National Working Committee of the Party, the PDP Ministers Forum as well as all men and women of goodwill in the PDP to rise to the challenge of the moment by sticking to the constitution and conventions lest Wike's wildfire provide anti-democratic forces the justification to truncate this democracy.

Danboyi, a technocrat and commentator on public affairs, wrote from Abuja