

Can we for once applaud the DSS?

By Mobolaji Sanusi

DSS urges court to admit statements by terror suspects accused of spying on US, Israel's interests

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader." – John Quincy Adams

Majority of us are fond of talking about negatives oozing out of the country. Daily, we are inundated with the hysterical cries of Nigerians about devaluation, inflation, high cost of food items/drugs, abductions, kidnappings, and killings by armed bandits as if nothing good can ever come out of Nigeria. The sad reality is that most of the challenges that the country is facing today are the consequences of failed institutions spanning over several decades. Not that the institutions don't have good enabling laws but it's just that those institutions are manned by agents of political patronage, sometimes well qualified on paper, and most times lacked and still lack the requisite political will cum right attitude to do the correct things for fear of being removed from their positions. That is the consequence of triumphs of timidity over personal principle, values, and the right attitude. Several holders of political office in Nigeria know the right things to do but do the wrong things to appease their political benefactors. They are not insane for having this survival mindset but are only adept at trying to avoid the detrimental fate of those that have lost their positions to the consequences of doing the right things, and worse still, heavens did not fall after their removal from such positions. Life goes on while society, devoid of the appropriate human capital and critical virtues, suffers. Majority of those in office are ready to do anything for the wrong reasons. Such is today the dilemma of the Nigerian state and a major reason some Nigerians believe we may never get it right, for a long while to come. But echoes from an unusual quarter are restoring hope and changing the narratives of negative vibes. The renewed hope agenda is truly and genuinely echoing in the Department of State Service (DSS) under the leadership of Mr. Oluwatosin Adeola Ajayi, a first class degree holder from Brunel University who reportedly resumed office on August 28, 2024. Quite unlike the arbitrariness of the past, when most Nigerians see the DSS as an institution for oppressing and suppressing opposing views/conducts perceived to be against any leader in power, things are now changing—for good. Under the dreaded past of successive leaders, we witnessed illegal arrests with newspapers being wantonly closed, people, especially journalists being clamped into illegal detention, and even judgments' debts awarded by courts being ignored and not paid, with no consequences.

It is heartening to know that we now have a Department of State Service (DSS) Director-General with humanity, like blood, flowing in his veins and making a difference with barely over one year in office. Young Nigerians with no knowledge of the nation's history may not appreciate what Ajayi is doing in DSS today because history as a subject is just returning to our academic curriculum this Y2025 new school session. As also a journalist of several decades, I should know the history of DSS

of yore. The man at its saddle now is leading the DSS, not only with words, but also with admirable actions. He's a man of good example and not mere precepts. Despite not having met him, which is not necessary, reports about him, with empirical corroborations, is a big plus for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, for getting this one important appointment right. Mr. Ajayi seems an exemplar of what security leadership should be. Through his published numerous good leadership interventions in newspapers, he's giving the DSS a humane face. Quite commendably, individuals who were wrongly arrested by the service, unlike the gory history of the past, have reportedly been compensated with huge monetary sums. Mr. Ajayi's approved benevolence is not for the ghosts but for real humans reportedly identified in Mrs. Chineze Ozoadibe and others, and running to several millions of naira. He looks untiring to do more to straighten this institution, if and when the need arises. Brutish disposition by the service to trampling on the inalienable rights of the people is fast eroding. Abridgement of especially freedom of expression is fast ebbing. This could be gleaned from the service's handling of Professor Pat Utomi's public declaration of toying with the idea of forming a shadow cabinet in a presidential, not parliamentary system of government, like ours in Nigeria. The service, under Ajayi did not, like it was known to do, persecute Utomi.

Rather, he embraced civility in the discharge of his duty by approaching the court. The DSS won. He also filed a suit against Omoyele Sowore for making unverifiable 'tarnishing' statements against the president. Rather than threw him in illegal detention, he affirmed his unflinching resolve to entrench a regime of constitutional virtues in the country, unlike the service' high handedness of the past. Also, days ago, Mr. Ajayi's overzealous operatives wrongfully arrested Ms Ruth Marcus and Keshia Jang, both reporters of Jay 101.9 FM, Jos, Plateau State. This happened during President Bola Tinubu's recent visit to Jos to condole Nentawe Yilwada Goshwe, the All Progressives Congress (APC) national chairman over his mother's death. He immediately ordered their release once the news filtered into his ears. It didn't end there, the Director-General, on behalf of the service, reportedly tendered unreserved apologies to the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) over the incident. The same hitherto uncommon security courtesies, he extended in recent past to the management of TVC over alleged harassment and intimidation of its reporter amongst others. No doubt that Ajayi is committed to breaking the decades of DSS' recycled mistakes by ebbing the tide of trampling on inalienable rights of the people as enshrined in our constitution. Now, he's ingraining a regime of a justice system that places high premium on decent treatment of citizens and in handling complaints, with the public now developing gradual trust in the DSS and the Tinubu administration. Ajayi's precedent has become an admirable template for other security agencies, especially the Nigeria Police Force, to follow.

To think, know, and see the DSS taking recourse to judicial interpretation in courts of law, in matters of 'national security' marks a refreshing departure from the long-standing culture of impunity the service was built on. This is understandable when