

FREEDOM MANIFESTO

SLAVERY IS NOT AN OPTION.

By Prof Pat Utomi

This is a freedom manifesto for the captured people of Nigeria offered in autobiographical form... I invoke the Spirit of Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jnr, and Nelson Mandela in calling for isolation of the captured State in Nigeria with sanctions as we called for under Abacha... I shall commit to a non-violence resistance to the usurpation in Abuja even as I insist that Nigeria is more deserving of invasion to restore democracy than Niger is. Beginning from age 17 as an undergraduate at the University of Nigeria I have rallied resistance against injustice. My early cry for doing things right peaked with my calling out students at UNN to protest police killing of University of Ibadan Student, Kunle. Given the emotions of the times when UNN students lost three years as they watched friends and family die like chicken while UI students were in class during the Civil war was a hard sell. But we joined forces with Bassey Ekpo Bassey and founded the Students Democratic Society because we prized human solidarity. The mobilization and sensitization crested in February 1974 such that I forgot it was my 18th birthday. A statement by one of the speakers at about 8.30pm extolling the historic significance of that day for post-war emancipation startled me into realizing it was my birthday.

As with my rallying against June 12 election annulment from a hallowed position as an executive in Industry and putting my life and career on the line to push back on the Abacha darkness, what was uppermost in my mind was justice and what would flavor the environment for progress and the common good and not the applause of those around. I would do it if I walked alone. I was seldom driven by the 'popular' appeal of the cause. In all the cases the dictates of a conscience I have struggled to form decently was the propeller. Now in the autumn of my time of being I am moved again to act to prevent a new slavery and deadly fascism I warned about in a book I first published in 2019. The subtitle of that book which rings true today is: Citizenship, State Capture, Creeping Fascism and the Criminal Hijack of Politics in Nigeria. As in 1973, and 1993 and now in 2023 many around me wonder why take the trouble when you can just 'leave it' and move on. Especially as age takes its toll. Why not leave struggle and rest peacefully until you go to rest in peace. To retreat from truth because the flesh is weakening from the pressures of time, is to do injustice to one's purpose and live St Paul's fear regarding pursuing the crown of life till the very end, lose the investment of a lifetime. One more season of inconvenience can be accommodated if it will free the future. When Nigeria set course to elect new leaders in 2023, I chose to suspend my disgust with what we call a democratic process because Mahmoud Yakubu sounded like he could be trusted to organize credible elections. I also thought it was consolidation time on years of sometimes quiet and sometimes not too quiet effort to build a Third Force that could be the only real alternative in the Nigerian political party system.

Wearing my sense of Justice toga, as I believe Chief Ayo Adebajo, President Obasanjo and a few others did, I thought that if a good candidate could be found from the South East, or Igbo speaking communities it would help project inclusion and strengthen the Nigeria project, as a similar view for the South West did in 1999. But the affirmative action inclination recognized that the aristocracy of talent defines our times. Meritocracy was key and if those communities offered the run of the mill politicians who could not lead us away from the troubling road Nigeria was traveling, we would be obliged to turn elsewhere to advance the Nigeria project, its cause, and course. I knew the New Fabians, a reformist social action and discussion group I helped found, were working towards my being the candidate of the Third Force that would bring the Labour movement, several Political Parties and breakaway elements in PDP and APC together under one banner. But in a Live Radio interview in Enugu on May 5, 2022 I said the best deal for Nigeria would be if PDP nominated Peter Obi, and APC, Dr Ogbonnaya Onu. Those were capable people of character from several unworthy aspirants from that part of our national geography. I figured in a three-way context Nigeria would be the winner whoever of the three of us emerged from a free and fair contest. I knew the system was corrupted but not such that those who through state capture had bled government treasuries dry with the effect of many dying from poor state services could draw from the ocean of resources they had primitively accumulated to buy the nomination of their Party, but I did not realize the extent of the narcissism that could have caused the blindness to the inclusion and social justice issues threatening the possibilities of Nigeria. Neither Obi nor Onu were able to win the nomination bidding wars laced

with treachery and votes for cash. When the Labour Party harvested Peter Obi as aspirant under the wings of the party I was given to believe the Labour Unions we had been working with would choose a Political Party other than Labour as platform for engagement. But Femi Falana (SAN) and one of the New Fabians, insisted the NLC should retrieve the Labour Party and go with it. He procured a consent judgment to that effect and we found ourselves partners with Peter Obi, working on issues-based campaign pushing for rational public conversation on the afflictions of Nigeria. The vexed other side turned to emotions and parochial deepening of the cleavages Nigeria desperately needed to bridge. More disturbing for me was a disposition to totally, even, violently forcefully dominate others and bully people, violently or by all forms of blackmail and then to cow them when elections were falsified. My worst fears were brought alive when America's NDI and IRI delegations from the US who I had accused in the past of hear no evil and see no evil so long as there was peace and quiet questioned the conduct of the elections. Then the EU and CARITAS reports came. The consensus was that the elections were a farce.

Notice that all through I have not said this or that person won. I was interested in the credibility of the process. As a partisan I supported a candidate but as a citizen I wanted a system that worked well enough to provide the legitimacy necessary to lead and solve a myriad of problems facing Nigeria. Had Sowore or Atiku Abubakar or anybody else come through such a process I would quickly congratulate them whether my goals were projected through their candidacy. As I repeated frequently the four leading candidates were friends of mine of many decades. Still it did not stop me from asking myself the hard question about the long term good of Nigeria and it's young people who are by far the majority but very much victims of a rent seeking old guard quite able to stop at nothing to protect undeserved advantages in the system.

In the 2023 elections this old guard went far too far. I became convinced that if Citizenship conduct did not stop the emerging order Nigeria would become far worse than the Banana Republics of old. The culture of public life has sunk so low that the odium oozing out desperately calls for disinfecting unless our desire is to invite decay. When the ascendance of pure trash approaches its apogee in a society where citizenship is in retreat the will of that society to think and act so it can adapt to its changing environment simply tumbles into collapse. Wearing my Prophet Amos vestments, I had repeatedly pointed thinking Nigerians to the robust works of Jared Diamond in Guns, Gems and Steel, and even more importantly in Collapse, on how societies have failed throughout human history. Nigeria has been positioning for collapse for quite a while and the current usurpation may just be the final straw that breaks the Camel's back. Desperate acts to shock culture back to live are required. That is what we had to do during the Abacha usurpation by canvassing international sanctions, taking to the streets and occupying the media. Yet these times are more perilous for the Nigeria project than under Abacha. This is a time for an accounting to history. Sanctions against our country, sadly, must become the battle cry for all. I want to assure that my fears for the present state of Nigeria have come from very sober digest of extant conduct. I have watched some people who hailed me as unique citizen in 1973 and marched with me in 1993/94 succumb to emotional parochial pitches of a divisive nature seeking to separate us and then turn their back to truth. It is not their fall from Citizen wannabes to the lower levels of tribesmen and even idiots, in the old Greek rankings that alarmed me so much but the collective failure to see how human progress proceeds, and that the path Nigeria was traveling seemed assurance that progress would elude us. I was full of compassion and tried not to judge too harshly those who had climbed down the totem pole from citizenship in the face of emotions triggered by parochial pressures from demagogues and fascists. It was a global phenomenon at play from Trumps America to Nationalists in Europe justifying the work of the Centre for Moral Cognition at Harvard bringing together Neuroscience, Psychology and Philosophy to explain how the new moral tribes are arising. But it was clear from my own work that Institutions, Values and Meritocracy helped define modernity and progress that to allow an emerging fascist order taking form in Nigeria to fasten its grip on the country without resistance would be a collaboration in evil. The fangs of this emerging order of which the Buhari-Tinubu Usurpation is central, glorifies the crippling of institutions such as INEC and the Judiciary, the