NATIONALITIES QUESTION: SOCIAL CHANGE PROPOSAL TO PREEMPT AMERICAN DOOMSDAY FOR NIGERIA
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Abstract

Recently, the United States of America's State Department predicted a cataclysmic doomsday for Nigeria within two decades owing to some apparent trends of socio-political events in the country. This is against the backdrop of the recurrent demands for a Conference of Ethnic Nationalities in Nigeria a demand that is eternally reinforced by the circumstances of the birth of what is today known as Nigeria. This article therefore critically reappraises the Nationalities/National Question in Nigeria, and proposes that a properly structured Nationalities Conference in present day Nigeria would not only solve the country's apparently intractable Nationalities/National Question but engender broad-based social change that would have implications of social, political, economic, and religious dimensions in the short and long run, and ultimately preempt the doomsday that the Americans have foreseen for Nigeria. Relying on a study of the patterns created by other countries with similar characteristics as Nigeria, but who have successfully enacted such conferences, and an understanding of the radical and conservative models for social change, the article also proposes a perspective towards actualising the conferences without the usually feared hitches.

Introduction

To understand how society work or hold together we must on some level understand how they change (Johnson, 1996:255)

The view of Medieval European philosophers that humanity lived in some kind of a fixed world, where changes went on only within immutable limits of rest and permanence, where the fixed and unmoving was higher in quality and authority than the moving and altering (Dewey, 1957:54) has fortunately been at best shown to be incorrect. Similar viewpoints that relate to the sociological analysis of change in society have over time been exposed as inadequate (Mitchell, 1937; Daris, 1950). Change is indeed constant to social systems. In some cases change comes about as a result of external factors in terms of conflicts and contradictions; as is the case with the Nigerian social system whose internal political dynamics mostly derive from its colonial experiences in political development.

Recently, the United States of America's State Department or the CIA predicted a cataclysmic doomsday for Nigeria complete with all the trappings of failed states in the mould of Somalia et al. Consequently, the United States military has already started making arrangements to benefit from the event of Nigeria's break-up. What is more, numerous Nigerians have expressed the belief that Nigeria is heading for a break-up along the lines envisaged by the United States State Department (Chukwurah, 2007; Kalu, 2009; Ohia, 2009; Ogunwale, 2006; Newsrescue, 2009). However, the recurrent and sometimes violent demands for a Conference of Ethnic Nationalities in contemporary Nigeria is a state of affairs that appears to be inevitable for a country like Nigeria considering that the forging of the entity now known as Nigeria was a factitious act that was solely designed to serve the economic interest of the British colonialists. Nwala (1997:14-15) captures the consequences of such a legacy vis-à-vis the agitations for a Conference of ethnic Nationalities when he observed that the structure bequeathed by the British Colonial power have proved incapable of welding the multi-ethnic society into a virile nation. The federal system which the British fashioned, therefore, becomes unworkable because power was effectively left in the hands of a dominant region which was almost the size of the rest of the federated regions in land mass. Ethnic rivalries, corruption and graft have become the rule of the day. The situation was compounded with the entry of the military into the political arena in 1966. The resultant civil war merely weakened one of the major competing ethnic groups, the Igbo. But this left political and military power in the hands of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. While economic and bureaucratic power was left in the hands of one section of the country. As the Nigerian military regimes became more autocratic, abuse of power and denial of human rights became so rampant and a common feature of the society. This inevitably led to the emergence of human rights and pro-democracy organisations. The idea of a Nationalities Conference was first mooted by pro-democracy organisations and activists. They called for a review of the Nation's mode of governance, with particular reference to: its power structure, which promotes monopoly of political and military power by the North and its resultant domination of the South; the plight of ethnic minorities; inequitable resource allocation and the

deprivation of the oil-producing states; various forms of injustices within the system; long reign of the military and its attendant dictatorship, the absence of democratic culture and rule of law, etc.

That these agitations still persist over 10 years into the tenure of civilian regimes in present-day Nigeria indicates that the social problem which the Nigerian people perceive with regard to the National/Nationalities Question is far from being solved. However, it is our belief in this paper that a properly structured Conference of Ethnic Nationalities in present day Nigeria would not only solve the country's apparently intractable National/Nationalities Question but be a timely solution to Nigeria's myriad problems of social, political, economic and religious dimensions as well, both in the immediate and the long run in short, that such a Conferences would engender broad-based social change in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, discusses the phenomenon of a Nationalities Conference with a particular focus on Nigeria. Situated within a discourse based on the major theoretical approaches to the study of social change, the paper argues that economic as well as social political factors are responsible for the undying agitations for the convocation of a (Sovereign) National Conference for the nationalities that make up Nigeria to meet and discuss the basis of their (co-) existence. The paper proposes a model of National Conference for Nigeria which has been synthesised from the observable models gleaned from the political history of countries with similar socio-political history as Nigeria. The paper also advances a probable Conference programme.

National Conference and Social Change

Sovereign National Conferences are usually convoked to discuss the National Question in multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria. This usually comes about through a persistent process of mass agitations for a change in the economic, social, political, religious, ideological, etc characteristics of the status quo. When convoked, a Sovereign National Conference possesses the basic elements of having a constituent authority; delegates to it being elected by popular forces of the people; and its decisions being automatically binding on both the Government and the people.

In most countries however, where the Sovereign National Conference have been attempted, the exercise has often met with failure. The reason or such failures are not far from the fact that a Sovereign National Conference in actuality represents a civilian coup of some sort; and such an endeavour is most likely not to succeed if those attempting it do not read the political barometer very well to determine whether the alignment of forces in the society are in their favour or not. Nevertheless, in those countries where a Sovereign National Conference had successfully taken place, it ushered in social change of far-reaching dimensions.

For the avoidance of doubt, social change has been defined by experts as "the successive difference in time of some enduring social relationships, norms, role,

status, or structure"(Nisbet, 1972:2); "[arising] when the relationship among persons or groups are modified" (Ryan, 1962:3); "the significant alteration of social structures including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms, values, and cultural values and symbols" (Moore, 1974:336). However, for the purpose of this work we adopt Johnson's (1996:255) definition of social change as "any alteration in the cultural, structural, population, or ecological characteristics of a social system such as a society". Johnson (1996) further contends that sociological interest in explaining and predicting patterns of change, indeed social change, can be traced to the 18th and 19th centuries and the social upheaval that accompanied the Industrial revolution in addition to the political revolutions that surrounded the development of democracy in the Western World. The pedigree of the sub-discipline of social change as part of the sociological enterprise thus make sit apt as the branch of study with which to examine the vexed issue and phenomenon of Conference of Ethnic Nationalities in Nigeria.

The Question of Model

In the sociological reckoning of social change 2 possible models could be adopted, namely: the conservative model and the radical model. We shall briefly examine these models in outline form to determine their characters.

The Conservative Model

Perhaps the most influential of conservative sociological theorists to theorize about social change is Talcott Parsons. In the application of his general functionalist theoretical framework for the study of change in social systems, Parsons believes, like most functionalists, that all societies must solve the functional problems of: (i) pattern maintenance and tension management; (ii) goal achievement: defining of objectives and the mobilisation of resources to attain them; (iii) adaptation: the accommodation of the system to the reality demands of the environment coupled with the active transformation of the external situation; and (iv) integration: establishing and organising a set of relations among the member units of the system that serve to coordinate and unify them into a single entity. The foregoing general functions make Parsons and fellow functionalists to hold the view that some institutions are necessary and inevitable in every society and, therefore, not subject to change. Indeed, for the conservative social change modelists generally, changes in a social system can only be limited, slow and incremental, and benefiting all classes (Parsons, T., 1960; Parsons, Bales and Shils, 1953).

For conservative social science theorist, cultural values, dissatisfactions, some psychological dispositions and even the activities of liberal politicians are the factors behind social change. For example Weber (1958) argued that the cultural values of Protestantism were a major factor in the change from a feudalist to a capital Western economy. Smelser (1959) posits that change sin technology and family

patterns were initiated by dissatisfactions with previously existing technologies and family structures in England, leading to Smelser's seven-stage model of social change that culminates in a more complex socio-technical structure. Similarly, Feuer (1969) resorts to psychological dispositions to explain social change with regard to violence and revolutions.

When the social change being studied was the process of social development, conservative social scientists used static psychological or political models (Dennon, 1969). Many conservative sociologists studying economically 'underdeveloped' societies tended to treat small ethnic nationalities or nations as static and isolated societies, without regard to their relations to the rest of the country, or the rest of the world. Some of them were known to select small "societies" in Africa and elsewhere for study and analyse them as though they had an isolated existence independent from the imperialist system of which they nevertheless formed an integral part at the time of study (Frank, 1967).

A similar conservative social change theory with reference to the process of social development holds that some countries do not develop and are 'underdeveloped' because of their psychological deficiencies. Typical of social scientists propagating this thought is economist Everett Hagen, who claims that oppressed, underdeveloped societies are 'so persistent' because the people in these societies have personalities of the sort that find submissiveness satisfying. In one word, they are masochists (Hagen, 1966; 1962). Also, McClelland (1961) argues that economic growth and development derives basically from psychological dispositions.

However, the psychological dispositions, etc. approach to social change cannot be supported by empirical evidence, and thus does not exactly lead us to apprehend the socioeconomic barriers to social change.

The Radical Model

Virtually all sociologists agree that social changes occur. However, not all are prepared to deal with basic revolutionary changes. This is where radical sociologists enter, because social change for radical sociologists means radical, revolutionary or basic change. The change is basic or radical in that it represents a total change in an important aspect of human relations.

Radical sociologists generally believe that basic conflicts lead to revolutionary change: that revolution is any thoroughgoing change in society. Nevertheless, they do not insist that revolutionary change must be violent. For them, it may be violent or non-violent, as it is part of their goals to make sociological analysis more dynamic.

Radical social scientists studying dynamic change do not assume that a social problem is static and unchanging. They always look to see if the rate of change is

quick enough to be suitable and relevant to a dynamic social analysis. They endeavour to ask the origins of the problem as well as the direction and rate of current tendencies. They "in other words, consider the subject matter in terms of its evolutionary path of development, and try to see it in relation to what it was and what it is likely to become" (Somerville, 1946:209).

Nationalities Conference in Nigeria
The State of Social change Versus Agitations for National Conference in Nigeria

The history of social change in Nigeria could easily be described as a history of contact with European particularly the British, who brought, in their wake, colonialism, Western capitalism, Western education, Western religion, Western legal system, etc. Colonialism no doubt disorganised the hitherto existing patterns of social, political, and economic life in Nigeria, replacing them with entirely new ones (Igbo & Anugwom, 2002:71-73). The new socio-political and economic relations were albeit strictly for the economic interest of the British colonialists.

For further administrative case of the British colonialists, the northern and southern parts of what is today Nigeria including the then Lagos colony was amalgamated in 1914 by the colonialists complete with a coinage of the name, Nigeria, by the mistress of the then British colonialist Governor of the 'Nigeria' territories. According to Irukwu (2003:4), "because it was an arrangement made by a colonial power" for it own administrative and economic convenience, the few indigenous nationalists saw the exercise as a 'colonial masters' unification not really for the benefit of the people.

Thus were the seeds to dissatisfaction about the Nigerian polity, which would snowball into social problem proportions, planted right at the inception of the Nigeria experiment. These dissatisfactions arising from the lop-sidedness in the economic structuring of Nigeria are understandable in perspective especially when one considers that:

> The geographical area now known as Nigeria was, before the colonial days, a collection of small indigenous African states and kingdoms of different historical, cultural, political and ethnic backgrounds. Long before colonisation each of these African states and kingdoms had their own governments and other institutions and were at various stages of social and economic development. At that time, practically each one of the ethnic nationalities, cultural or linguistic groups in Nigeria today had its own state, mini-state or kingdom with its own social, political and administrative institutions (Irukwu, 2003:3).

The earliest manifestations of dissatisfaction with the structure of the Nigerian polity came in form of nationalist protests. The nationalists had set up newspapers and had become adept at mobilising the masses of their different ethnic nationalities against a common British colonialist enemy's meddlesomeness in their

running of their lives. But is would appear that the best concessions that the nationalists ever got out of the British colonialists somehow was always the series of constitutional conferences that gave rise to Nigeria's earlier constitutions with all their celebrated defects. Had the British convoked a Sovereign National Conference or Conference of Ethnic Nationalities, it could no doubt have resulted in a much earlier demise of colonialism in Nigeria. However, even when the British conceded to constitutional conferences after Lord Lugard had single-handed written 3 constitutions for Nigeria, it was with minimal input by Nigerians. For example, during that period, out of the 30 members of the Colonial Governor's Advisory Deliberative Council, only 6 were Nigerians (Nwala, 1997:7). Until the achievement of political independence by these constitutional conferences continued giving rise to one constitution after another, for example, the Ibadan Constitutional Conference of 1951 gave rise to the Macpherson Constitution and was also significant in terms of representing the first time that Nigerians had the opportunity to be involved fully in forging their political and constitutional fate as well as constituting some sort of victory for the nationalists. Similarly, the London Constitutional Conference of 1953 and the Lagos Constitutional Conference of 1954 resulted in the Lyttleton Constitution. There were also the 1957 and 1958 Constitutional Conferences before independence.

After independence, there had been the Lagos Constitutional review Conference of July 1963, which produced the [first] Republican Constitution for Nigeria. Then amidst the ethnic crisis occasioned by the Yakubu Gowon, July 1966 counter coup, the ad hoc Constitutional Conference of 1966 was convened and virtually on course before the events of insecurity of lives and property on account of ethnic violence, etc. overtook it. Gowon's victory in the civil war that ensued and the long military interregnum (except between 1979-1983), spearheaded by a military which had become ethnically sectional in its leadership owing to the civil war, ensured that the imbalance in the Nigerian polity persisted and even became exacerbated in certain respects.

It was the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election that jolted Nigerians into a renewed contemporary frenzy seeking to address the imbalance in the polity that had been factored in from amalgamation to serve British colonialist interests. According to Nwala (1997:15):

> Pro-democracy and other social, cultural and political groups called for a Sovereign National Conference with unfettered powers to deliberate and take decisions on the future of the nation. Central on the agenda of such a proposed conference is the *National Question:* many Nigerians were questioning the justification of a situation where some section of the country claims monopoly of power and treats other as second-class citizens. Alhaji Maitama Sule, for example, was credited with the view that God had given

the Hausa-Fulani in Nigeria the gift of rulership while the Igbos [sic] and Yorubas [sic] were gifted with trade/commerce and dip lomacy respectively... The military has been a major instrument of the ol igarchs (i.e., those Northerners interested in preserving by all means the u nstable polity and the monopoly of power that has kept the South out and alie nated). But there is no reason to suppose that the North who, since the Luga rd and Richard Constitutions has had, for reasons best known to the Briti sh, an uncommonly free access to power, was given a gift of uncondi tional rulership to the exclusion of the South. There are, no doubt, some nor them democrats who believe in equality of all Nigerians in the exercise of political power, Aminu Kano of blessed memory was one, Chris Abashi of the NCC is another. There are many more.

However, all agitations for a Conference of Ethnic Nationalities were able to get out of the Abacha regime that was desperately seeking legitimacy was a Natio nal Constitutional Conference (1994-95) instead. By the time the 1994-95 Natio nal Constitutional Conference had come and gone, Nigerians would realise that it l ıad obvious limitations as government appointee were part of it and the Aba cha government did all it could to influence and undermine its authority as well as tir ker with its outcome. Nevertheless, critics and pro-democracy activists hig ,hly acclaimed the outcome of that Conference as a basis for Nigeria to forge ahead u ıder the prevailing circumstances. But the Abdulsalami Abubakar regime dealt the resultant Constitution from that Conference the *coup de grace*, employing a l ɔt of manipulation to discredit and discard that document.

Thus, from the historic Ibadan Conference of 1951 to the Abuja Nat ional Constitutional Conference of 1994-95, Nigerians have been involve d in constitutional conferences most of which have been convoked at times of po litical tension in the country. Indeed, one of such conferences the ad hoc Constitu tional Conference of 1966, failed to take off because political leaders delayed in emb racing it thereby allowing the already existing political tension in the country thei more duration to get heightened, and the rest is now history. The situation in Nigeria now however is far from what obtained in 1966; nevertheless, the vital lessons of our historical political experiences endure.

As it is now, the 2007 general elections have come and gone leading to a continuation of President Yar'Adua's Party in office despite complaints about irregularities in the processes of the elections. While this is not unexpected and while the storm is already gathering against 2011, it is, however, necessary to understand that the over-heat which the Nigerian polity suffers perennially, is attributable to the inherent contradictions in the fabrics of the Nigerian federation (starting with the foundations laid by the 1914 Amalgamation) lacks balance; if anything, it is skewed with quite a lot of concentration at the center so that politicians would always see

electoral struggles i n Nigeria as a 'do or die affair'; and elections can never be adjudged free and fai r as long as this lop-sided structure persists. It is in this sense that ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria are tied to the imbalance in the federal structure, as politiciar is would always deploy ethnic and religious sentiments to their own us in their struggi 'e for the center, which they somehow succeed in making their groups (ethnic, religio us, etc..) to perceive as some sort of an *El Dorado* of unlimited power, resources and ir. ifluence.

Unfortunately, . neither the resort to numerous Constitutional Conferences held in the past nor the c, linging to power at the center by some privileged elite groups for many years has resolved Nigeria's chronic and endemic socio-economic and political ailments; if anything, they have been exacerbated. But an objective historical and diagnostic analysis of the country's problems would show that these problems are surmountable if only her leadership can take the right steps. This is so because what Nigerians (especially the leadership) lack is the courage (political will) to face the real problems of the country, not ignorance of the problems.

Without equivocation therefore, most Nigerians are urging Mr. President to ensure that a national forum is convoked to discuss Nigeria's diverse and endemic socio-economic and political problems, so that a truly federal status of the Nigerian state is put in place during his second term in office. It is our conviction that there would be no better time than now to do it, and the most appropriate, popular and legitimate instrument to achieve the desired objectives is a National Conference in the nature and character suitable to Nigeria.

In pursuance of this goal, therefore, a number of proposals have been presented here for consideration. However, before discussing possible conference models and recommending an appropriate one for Nigeria, it might be necessary to have an overview of the determinant conditions for a national conference from which models are drawn.

Determinant Conditions for a National Conference

Demand for a national conference may develop as a result of systemic crises in the authority structure. It may be a crisis of legitimacy or a crisis of participation. Crisis of legitimacy occurs when the legitimacy of the authority structure of a polity is called to question by a significant segment of the politically relevant elite.

Similarly, crisis of participation develops when there is a wide-spread demand for participation in the decision-making process by a vocal and politically active segment of the population, and a denial of their right to participate by the power elite. Very often the two types of crises reinforce each other, when for instance the basis of authority is called to question and when the government's right to govern is rejected, attacked and subverted, and when the political authority is both unwilling and unable to cope with protests and demands allow them to develop into systemic

crises. Three possible conditions can result from a systemic crisis situation in a polity; first, popular uprising involving all forces, civil and military, giving rise to a civilian-led coup against an incumbent regime. As the victorious forces take over power, an interim Government of National Unity is put in place. The interim government runs the country and supervises a National Conference to chart a new constitution for the country; second, given the systemic crisis, an incumbent government may find that it can no longer govern as before and accepts the necessity for a national forum to forge a new mode of governance. It steps aside and interim government is put in place. That interim government sets the mechanism for a national conference, which it supervises. At the end of the conference, elections are held on the terms agreed to by the conference. At the end of it the interim government hands over power to the newly elected government; and third, an incumbent government accepts the necessity of addressing the National Question (Nationalities Question) for restructuring and reorganisation of the economic, social and political structures in the country corresponding to popular demand to eliminate the status quo and introduce true and appropriate model of governance, justice, equality and level playing ground, etc., in the national life. The incumbent government calls for a national conference and continues to govern while the conference is in session. At the end, the decisions of the conference come into effect and old government gives way to a newly elected one.

Still on the Issue of Model

Deriving from the above conditions, two possible models of a national conference can be staged. These are: (i) Sovereign National (SNC); and (ii) (Ordinary) National Constitutional Conference.

A Sovereign National Conference (SNC) is a supreme conference of the people, which assumes all legislative and executive authority in a country. It proceeds to set up a government or executive authority, promulgates a new constitution and defines a new direction for the country. The implication of the existence of a SNC is that an existing government ceases to govern, as there cannot be two parallel authorities within the country simultaneously. Indeed, a SNC amounts to a coup. It has constituent powers and autonomy. The first two types of systemic conditions highlighted above warrant a SNC. This is so because in those conditions, the former government would cease to exist by force or by volition. This model is congruous with the radical model of social change, where change is seen as relatively sudden and discontinuous, where change is basic, radical or thorough-going.

The second model is the Ordinary National [Constitutional] Conference. This is a conference of the people, which deliberates on specific agenda set for it by the incumbent government, and has neither autonomy nor constituent powers. A

national conference may simply be a Constitutional (Review) Conference. It may not be radical in its recommendations and decisions. It tends towards maintaining the *status quo* rather than bringing in radical innovation in the constitution and pattern of governance. In short, this is an extension of the conservative model of social change that emphasise limited types of change, reformist changes in the importance and forms of institutions of society without any fundamental alterations.

Towards a Synthesis

Judging from the analysis above, one would say that the third typology of Systemic Crises which would be amenable to the second conference model (i.e., Ordinary National Constitutional Conference) is where Nigeria fits in. That would be logically and technically correct.

However, considering Nigeria's sordid and tragic history which is laden with Systemic Crises, frequent issuing and rocking the country to its foundation and to the brink of disintegration, an Ordinary National [constitutional] Conference would be inappropriate; besides, Nigerians have had several Constitutional Conferences since nationhood and the effects have at best only been palliative without addressing the root causes of the crises. To put it without equivocation, Nigeria's situation requires a Sovereign National Conference a conference with supreme and constituent authority and power, composed of elected delegates and whose decisions would be binding on all.

But since Nigeria already has in place an elected government, which exercises sovereign authority, and besides two sovereign authorities cannot exist concurrently in a polity, the SNC model in its orthodoxy may not be an appropriate model for Nigeria. But an adaptive model of it, a non-radical model can be proposed which we have referred to call *Independent National Conference (INC) Model*. Its sovereignty/sovereign-ness is temporally latent to accommodate an exigent situation such as an existing government, but sufficiently empowered to operate unfettered in order not to compromise the desired outcome. Indeed, the Independent National Conference version is pragmatic and suitable option for Nigeria.

The Independent National Conference Model (INC) has an evolving sovereignty but truly and sufficiently independent of any other existing authority. This model avoids the problem of having two coexistent sovereign authorities in a polity. Precisely, the INC while in session would neither interfere with the sovereignty of the elected regime nor would the incumbent government interfere with its processes and decisions.

The Business Of A Nigerian Nationalities' Conference: A Proposal
Membership and Participation at the Conference

Since what is being proposed is a conference of ethnic nationalities of Nigeria, it is important therefore that all identifiable ethnic nationalities groups

should, be right, be represented at the conference. The problem of how to identify all possible, relevant ethnic national groups will be solved if representation is based on the 6 geo-political zonal basis. In the zones it is easier to determine how people relate and their cultural affinity to warrant their constituting a single ethnic nation.

Then on the basis of the six geopolitical zones, equal number of candidates from each of the zones shall be elected to the conference. The number should be between 100 and 150 candidates per zone. A percentage (about 10%) should be drawn from the current. National and State Assemblies while the rest would be directly elected from the people, including civil society organisations, professional associations and groups, labour unions and the private sector representatives. This would ensure that the several fears being expressed by members of the current National Assembly that border on issues of sovereignty, exclusion of the National Assemblymen, passing of a vote of no confidence on the National Assembly, and plain 'fear of the unknown' (Aziken, 2004) are adequately allayed. Also, taking the foregoing measures on membership and participation would ensure that tendencies for the country to drift into anarchy are checked in time, as some groups are bent on convening a Sovereign National Conference with or without the Federal Government (Olalekan, 2004).

Agenda for the Conference

In the preliminaries of convening the conference, time should be set out for zonal pre-conference meetings. This is intended to provide zones opportunity to sort out themselves, identify and harmonise their views and interests, which would constitute items on the agenda for the conference. These would later be collated and rationalised at the preliminary sessions of the conference, and a common agenda worked out.

In addition, existing opinion survey researches that have identified some exigent issues of national importance and survival should be *collaborated*. One opinion survey research, for instance, already indicated that Nigerians would want discussed at a National Conference such issues as: nature of federalism in Nigeria; power-sharing arrangement/rotation of political power; national unity and integration; resource control; proper revenue allocation formula; good constitution for the country; Nigerian citizenship; rights and obligations; proper census for Nigeria; eestructuring and balancing of he military, the police and para-military establishments; zonal/state security forces; women emancipation; creation of more states; peace and security of the country; reparation for victims of sanctioned marginalisation; Niger Delta Question; The electoral process; fundamental human rights abuses; possibility of peaceful self-determination of any ethnic bloc; educational planning/intervention in the educational sector; Sharia legal System; secularity of the Nigerian state; religion; ethnic and religious conflicts; independence of the judiciary (Chukwu, Arukwe, Nwosu, Aneke & Omenma, 2002:20-21).

Duration of the Conference

If the suggested INC model is accepted for Nigeria, the preparation for the Conference should commence soon. The conference proper should be preceded by zonal election of delegates and zonal pre-conference meeting/dialogues/consultations/colloquia to enable delegates-elect obtain proper briefs from their respective zones.

On commencement of the National Conference proper by 3rd quarter of 2005, the conference shall run and end simultaneously with the tenure of the present elected democratic government in the country (i.e., May 29, 2007); after which the decisions of the conference shall automatically be adopted as the country's new constitution, policies and programmers. However, the general election by the 1st quarter of 2007 that will bring in new government in May 2007 should be based on the decisions of the INC. The National Assembly will be made to amend/suspend the relevant portions of the INC regarding the new electoral process to come into effect by the scheduled period for the general election of 2007.

Furthermore, the Act of the National Assembly establishing the INC shall contain pertinent clauses which should specify the periodic arrangement of the sessions per year so as to allow participants enough chance for zonal consultations, briefings and dialogues. Also, provision shall be made to ensure that participants do not take advantage of the long duration of the conference to introduce a "jamboree syndrome" into the conference business.

Expected Outcome of the Conference

The conference when convoked and concluded in the nature prescribed would be expected to achieve among other things, the following results:

- A truly functional federal structure, which will satisfy ethnic national order and balance based on the six geo-political zones.
- It will create an inclusive consultative and anticipatory process in which the composite parts of Nigeria can be examined as equals and partners in the process of nation-building and continued coexistence.
- It will achieve a reduction in the powers and sphere of influence of the central/Federal government by conferring more political relevance to the geo-political zones as a reference point for sharing power and resources on the basis of equality of the zones. This will automatically lead to reduced competition for access to the Center, since the center will be less attractive and the quest for it would no longer be a 'do or die' affair.
- A strategy for conducting a non-politicised census which will produce a reliable and nationally accepted census figure for Nigeria will be devised.
- It will be expected to vest resources in the zones in which they are found or endowed, with such zones contributing an agreed proportion to the central treasury;

- A clearly defined formula for revenue allocation clear cut formula for the distribution of federal government sponsored project will emerge.
- It will introduce the basis and pattern of rotation of political power and positions along zonal lines.
- It is expected that it will set the country on the path to real and sustainable democracy and development.
- The outcome of the conference will have far-reaching implications for national stability and integration both in the short- and long-run. It shall lay the foundation for a stable and prosperous Federal Nigeria by engendering the urgently needed restructuring in the Nigerian Federation.
- It is expected that the conference if timely convoked would take the sail out of the endemic circles of dissention and disintegration in Nigeria.
- It will produce a federation of willing Nationalities, and religious accommodation.
- It will introduce a dramatic change in the nature and content of the exclusive and concurrent legislative lists.
- It will produce a clear notion of Nigeria citizenship and establish its rights and obligations such that Nigerians would enjoy and observe these right and obligations where ever they reside irrespective of place of birth or origin. Citizenship will no longer be based on "indigenenity" but on residence.
- It will create an enabling environment by concrete polices and programs which will encourage and allow women to participate and define the future of their country and their status within that future.
- It will produce a new electoral system that is really independent and autonomous, with improved professional and cost-effective management of the electoral process.
- As the conference leads he citizens to embrace a process approach rather than an event approach in constitution-making, it will produce a constitution that becomes the "citizens' handbook", reflecting the soul of the Nigeria Nation and its people.
- It will provide clear-cut policies and programs that will ensure the control of environmental degradation and meaningful participation of the peoples of the Niger Delta in the oil industry, especially as resource will be vested in the areas where they are found.
- It will establish mechanism for addressing the past political, social and economic injustices that have been committed against certain sections of the country, including the Niger Delta and the southeast in order to heal wounds and reconcile differences and proceed in establishing a stable and democratic Nigeria.
- The secularity of the Nigerian State will be strengthened and guaranteed with its reconceptualisation as not meaning the withdrawal of the state from

religious affairs, but as a guarantee of religious freedom to all religious groups.

- It would device an innovative management of civil-military relations to foster military subordination to civil authority.
- Institutionalised mechanism for complete independence of the judiciary from the executive will be strengthened and possibly decentralised along zonal lines.
- Concrete policy measures for the much desired intervention in the educational sector will be realized through decentralisation and proper funding.
- It will prescribe, strategies for professionalisation of the security organs and apparatuses of the state without compromising the forces through an over dependence on foreign governments and consultants.

Programme of Action

Here below is a Programme of Action to actualise the desired Independent National Conference for Nigeria

S/N	Year	Period	Period	Period	Period
		1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
1	2010	Preparations for the Conference including, Bill to National Assembly for the Convocation of Ethnic Nationalities Conference	Zonal election of delegates, zonal consultations, and dialogues.	Inauguration of INC, Preliminary Sessions	Scheduled Sessions
2	2011	General Elections as guided by the INC decisions	Terminal date of the INC and coming into effect of its decisions with a new government		

Note The President should prepare and forward a Bill to the National Assembly of the Convocation for the Conference of Ethnic Nationalities (INC). The National Assembly should on receipt of the Draft Bill give it accelerated hearing and passage. The Act will legitimise the coming-into-being of the proposed conference and enable the timely implementation of the scheduled programme.

Conclusion

It is obvious that positive social change can be ushered into a social system through planned and concerted effort at social engineering. Whether such change is conservative or radical, evolutionary or revolutionary, reformist, thoroughgoing,

basic, etc. depends on the political will, orientations as well as tenacious implementation by the leadership in such social systems. Considering Nigeria's sordid and tragic history, laden with endemic systemic crises, president Yar 'Adua is well advised to *seize the moment of his current mandate* to create a supreme forum where all ethnic nationalities will meet to discuss the bases of Nigeria's continued existence or otherwise as one strong and indivisible nation.

In deference to arguments about the challenge which a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) poses to any incumbent Government when they run in parallel, an *Independent National Conference,* (INC) is proposed which will run parallel but neutral to the elected government but with conference decisions automatically coming into effect bang on the expiration of the life of the current government in May 2011. A conference agenda with the *Nature of the Nigerian Federalism* leading is proposed along with the mode of representation, conference membership based on the six geopolitical zones as well as an outline of expected conference achievements.

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