



Text of the Lecture Delivered by

His Excellency
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Entitled:
**REAWAKENING THE RESTRUCTURING DEBATE: SETTING A NATIONAL
REBIRTH AGENDA**

At the

THE PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK: ***AKETI: THE COURAGE TO LEAD IN
TRYING TIMES***. IN HONOUR OF ARAKUNRIN OLUWAROTIMI ODUNAYO
AKEREDOLU, *SAN, CON*; GOVERNOR OF ONDO STATE.

Alagbaka, Akure, Ondo State

Friday | March 24 | 2023.

Protocols:

Introduction:

1. Let me start this lecture by paying glowing tribute to Arakunrin Oluwarotimi Odunayo Akeredolu, *SAN, CON*, Governor of Ondo State and Chairman of South West Governors' Forum, in whose honour, we are all gathered to witness the presentation of the book written in his honour.
2. Governor Akeredolu is the quintessential gentleman, the archetype of courage and fiery *ebora* that professes in the market square. Aketi is everything an Omoluabi should be. He is the epitome of courage, composure and candour that is associated with the pantheon gods of the Yoruba spiritual cosmo. I did not know *ogun*, the valiant iron god of courage but I have found an avatar of



him in Aketi. He is the caterpillar that brings to submission the arrogance of the bullies no matter who they are. He does not falter nor shrink before them.

3. It is not surprising that the title of the book that is being launched today is entitled: *Aketi: The Courage to Lead in Trying Times*. The title is very apt, fitting and topical to his trajectory. It summarises the totality of the Aketi phenomenon as a student activist, public-spirited lawyer, NBA President and consummate politician and governor.
4. We are all very proud of his strong conviction and unwavering dedication to the cause of the public good. As President of the Nigerian Bar Association, he led a courageous team that gave direction to the nation during a very challenging time that tested our national stability in 2010. As Chairman of the South West Governors' Forum, Arakunrin has led the Forum with character, panache and courage. There is no doubt that his voice has become that of the Cicero, whose sagely intervention can only be ignored to one's peril. As a result of his courage to speak truth to power, he has become a major compass through which the Nigeria political space often navigates its ways out of difficult situations and I am sure this is accompanied with its attendant consequences only which His Excellency alone could tell.
5. I am therefore glad to be here today to discuss one subject-matter that has been a recurring motif in his political advocacy as a distinguished legal icon and avowed progressive politician. To indicate his undying commitment to the actualisation of a more perfect federal union in our Republic, he was specific in requesting that I give a lecture on restructuring, even though he left me to determine the topic, scope and focus.
6. Ladies and gentlemen, it is therefore my pleasure to speak on the topic: **REAWAKENING THE RESTRUCTURING DEBATE: SETTING A NATIONAL REBIRTH AGENDA**. I settled for this topic because it represents what Arakunrin, as well as many of us, has advocated so vigorously enough that he has attracted some inevitable attention, if not enmity to himself, over the time.
7. I also think this topic is very relevant at this time as we begin a new journey in our national life. It can be said that the election of Asiwaju Bola Tinubu



signifies a new vista and opportunity for us to reinvent our political structure, its underpinning political economy and its implication on our national development. It is even more so, as this will be the first time that a core and committed progressive will be in the saddle. So, as we look forward to the dawn of the new government at the federal level, there is the need to begin to interrogate the issues around restructuring and a workable federalism for Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Restructuring

8. Truly, the word ‘restructuring’ has been long belaboured to the point of cliché in our sociopolitical lexicon as a nation. The clamour for ‘restructuring’ or return to ‘pure’ federalism has permanently been in public domain for over thirty years, even though agitation for it could date even longer. It has remained a terminology which has refused to leave the nation’s consciousness.
9. Sometimes, those who had previously spoken against the call for restructuring while in the saddle had later become its vigorous champions just immediately they are out of power. Conversely, very well-known voices who had previously campaigned for restructuring before coming to power, often turn a blind eye as soon as they are in the saddle. So, the restructuring debate has been as enigmatic as it has been hypocritical.
10. Even though the conceptualization of restructuring has continued to evolve from time to time, such that restructuring now means different things to different people. Like the phoenix, the debate has stubbornly continued to resurge from time to time; especially, whenever the nation is on tenterhooks. While some see restructuring as a euphemism for the balkanization of the country, some see it as an opportunity to renegotiate the nation – Nigeria; while some others see it, as a resource control mantra. For some others however, it is a call for the return to regionalism or pre-independence constitution, among other possible interpretations.
11. To be sure, these interpretations represent the spectrum of one’s attitude to specific socio-political crisis at a time. The fact that the call has also remained a recurring decimal indicates that it is an important socio-economic and political matter that requires a courageous and correct conceptualization if the nation must progress.



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12. For me however, the call for restructuring is the call for a more perfect union that is just, fair, equitable and functional. I see restructuring as a holistic surgery for the healthy living of our country for a more effective, balanced, prosperous and peaceful nation that guarantees happiness for all.
 13. Even though it has been argued in some quarters that there is nothing like 'true' federalism and that the call for true federalism was a theoretical construct, I hold a contrary view. I do agree that every federal system is unique in its power relations between the federal government and the federating units, yet, it is correct to refer to the original federal arrangement as conceived in the 1963 republican constitution, in terms of power relations, as representing the "true" federal system for Nigeria. I do believe that our political independence forebears studied widely about all federal systems, reviewed our own unique situation and came up with what best suited and true to our socio-cultural and historical reality. For me, the challenge is the operationalization of the concept by the political establishments.
 14. This is more so that a lot of negotiations in conferences and congresses took place before the then regions adopted it as the true basis for their relationship as a federal state. Regrettably, the Unification Decree 34 of 1966 by Gen. G.T. Aguiyi Ironsi's military government, without a referendum, consultations, debates or expressed consent of the constituent regions altered this agreement unilaterally. Since then, the call for the federal constitution before the incursion of the military into the political arena has remained strident and unabated.
 15. For me, restructuring does not have to be a return to regional structure or merging of states, rather, it should mean the renegotiation of political and socio-economic responsibilities and access to opportunities by the different layers of Government. It should also mean a more equitable power relations between the sub nationals and the federal government.
 16. Restructuring does not have to be about unmaking Nigeria, if we do that, we may get the pillars and the beams broken, rather it is about strengthening the base and reinforcing the structure to make it withstand the reality of today. But to be able to do this, we need to get the original plan and the prototype so that



we can identify and evaluate where the tenants have done terrible alterations to the structure.

17. For example, we have to look at what the original architects of the nation imagined the security structure, transport system, road infrastructure, natural resources, tiers of government, water resources, agriculture, power relations and environment among others should look alike. Whereas, we cannot return wholesale to the past, we can definitely take some useful lessons from the past to birth a more perfect union.
18. To be honest, the federation has gained some mileage in the journey into a better federal structure with some amendments to the 1999 Constitution that saw some items moved to the concurrent list from exclusive list. Some of them include: correctional services, railway, sea port and electricity. While this is a significant leap in our quest for a better federal system, there is still a long way to go.
19. In this paper, I will want to briefly call our attention to some areas which still need to be addressed:

Security Structure:

20. A lot has been said about the challenge of insecurity in our country. Some of the factors that are responsible for this include, inadequacy in personnel, poor condition of service, inadequate resources to work with, corruption, lack of local intelligence, lack of passion and commitment on the part of most security personnel because of disconnect with the locality in which they serve. Many large expanse of ungoverned spaces which insurgents and bandits of all kinds occupy today are as a result of absence of security personnel.
21. Apart from the fact that the federal police are grossly inadequate in number, the motivation and morale is low because of poor condition of service. Furthermore, the issue of enforcement of state laws which are best suited to be enforced by state or local police system is another reason I am in support of multilevel policing. I am of the firm belief that any government that is incapable of policing its area of jurisdiction upon which it legislates and



superintends, is a lame duck because security and welfare are fundamental rights of the citizens guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution (as amended).

22. In other words, it is absolutely ridiculous that a state will have a state assembly that can legislate on concurrent and residual matters as ascribed by the constitution, can have a state judiciary to interpret its laws and administer justice within the state powers but cannot have a police to enforce the law through its own police authority. More so, with the new amendment that now makes Correctional Services concurrent, it will mean that there should be state owned prisons and correctional centers which should be manned by state correctional officers. Will these officers be armed with just cudgels and batons? I ask this question because the greatest opposition to state police is the issue of arming them adequately to respond to attacks and for self-defense. It is obvious that the state correctional officers will have to be equipped with modern weapons like their federal counterparts to be effective and fit to discharge their duty.
23. It is just logical that a government can only be said to be autonomous and functional when it can enforce its laws. The concept of outsourcing state law enforcement in the hand of the unmotivated federal police formation is totally ridiculous. The tired argument that the state government could misused the police is not only nauseating and preposterous, the Amotekun experience has proved this lazy speculation as unfounded and retrogressive.
24. Since the establishment of Amotekun by the South West Governors in 2020, in desperate response to the distress call of our people for protection in the face of unprecedented cases of rural banditry, kidnapping, farmers/herders crisis and murder that enveloped our land, there has been no proven allegation against Amotekun Corps relating to arms misused, bribery, intimidation, illegal raids, political attacks etc.
25. Rather, Amotekun has been a source of security confidence in the minds of our people. Our people are very confident in the Amotekun Corps and willingly work with them in getting useful intelligence that has, in many cases, helped the regular police. Rather than being belligerent against the Nigeria Police, Amotekeun, the Army and the Police have continued to work together in



special operations where the local understanding of the terrain by Amotekun has led to massive successes for the police and the army.

26. There is no doubt that Amotekun will be more effective and responsive if they are formalized into the state police structure through a constitutional amendment. They would have been more effective, if they are also armed like other sister security agencies.
27. On this, I want to commend Arakunrin Akeredolu for his dogged effort to see to the survival and sustenance of the Corps in spite of several spirited effort to kill the idea. I am confident that under his watch, the Corps will surmount all obstacles deliberately put on its ways.

Devolution of Resource:

28. We have often called for devolution of power without emphasizing devolution of resources. As more responsibilities, which should ordinarily belong to the states and local government, get returned to them, the necessary financial resources to meet them should be effected through a just and fair revenue allocation formula.
29. Similarly, some funds which are presently domiciled in the FG ought to be directly channeled to the States. Let us look at the special funds such as Ecological Fund and the Universal Basic Education Fund. Ecological fund is a fund set aside to tackle ecological problems in the country. This fund is administered by the Office of the Secretary to the Government of Federation, yet, apart from the FCT, FG does not have a land of its own where it can apply this fund. So, the states which bear the direct consequences of environmental degradation will have to pray to receive the favour of the FG to access the fund.
30. Similarly, whereas the federal government does not run basic education, the fund that is created to help promote basic education in Nigeria is administered by the Universal Basic Education Commission. If this fund has been deliberately channeled as a special fund for Basic Education Development Fund for the states, it would have worked better as the overhead cost of running the commission would have been eliminated and more resources would have been available to the State. The bottlenecks of counterpart-fund



matching and the endless redtapism in approval of projects have become counterproductive to the purpose for which the fund was put in place. The states would have better served if the fund is set out as a dedicated fund for basic education and paid directly to the states.

National Industrial Planning:

31. If our federalism must address the issue of imbalance and inequity in economic opportunities, there is the need for a new national industrial master plan for the country beyond the economic free trade zone system that we presently have in place. More of the reasons we have uneven distribution of wealth in Nigeria is because of unfair localization of industries by the federal government for political reasons.
32. So, I advocate that the federation should therefore deliberately create new industrial hubs in the states that have been disadvantaged based on their comparative advantage and competitiveness. The fact that special investments were made by the federal government in the past, to get these hubs in place, will require that special industrial estate development funds should be made available to the disadvantaged state to develop industrial hub infrastructure that can make them attractive to investors. The benefits of this are that new industries will spring up in new places and this will stem the dangerous rural-urban drift that is putting pressure on certain states where all the industrial potential of the countries are located and structural unemployment that plague our country can be brought to a halt.

Environmental Matter:

33. Ladies and gentlemen, I will like to advert our attention to the strange nature of the environmental regulatory laws of Nigeria. Whereas, matters of the environment are issues that concern physical geography of the federating units, curiously regulation about the environment is in the hands of the federal government agency. For example, why should one need to obtain Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA certification) from Abuja before he can undergo construction or build bridges in Ondo State?



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34. You have got to wait for months before you can even get the team to visit for preliminary study and maybe another year before the result is out. Meanwhile, our people would be waiting to see road construction begin as soon as announcement of state approval goes out. Even for industries to install huge equipment, they are expected to get EIA from a federal government agency. Why should a State wait endlessly for the National Bureau of Statistics to re-base or calculate her GDP?

Listing of Local Government Areas in the Constitution:

35. Of course, in the 1963 Constitution, issues about local authority, municipal and council administration were purely in the hands of the federating units. This was in response to the different socio-cultural plurality of the country. Each unit was expected to develop the structure, purpose and function of its local authority in line with culture and needs of the people. Unfortunately, the 1976 Local Government Reform deviated from this originality and made the council a tier of government. An absurd novelty that cannot be found anywhere else in the world.
36. In fact, five of the amendment to the Constitution that was recently assented to, by the President had to do with the correction of spellings of the Council names in the Constitution. You can imagine that the whole country have to debate on the correction of the spelling of a local government name such Obia/Akpo which should have been spelt as Obio/Akpo. To correct this letter “a” with the correct letter “o”, the National Assembly and twenty-four Houses of Assembly had to concur, even though the people in the concerned council had long been using the correct version.
37. Ideally, Local Government is not a federating unit, it is an administrative extension of the State and should not be fixed as it should be able to response to urban expansions, new developments and new realities. But somehow, the federal government has been controlling local council through some incongruous and disruptive interventions. To move forward, we need to take away issues of local government administration from the suffocating grip of the federal government.



Conclusion

38. Of course, there are many areas of concerns that continue to agitate our attention and which we must begin to set agenda around. As the Asiwaju Bola Tinubu's Presidency begins in a matter of weeks, the call for true federalism that serves our people better and brings more equity and fairness that guarantee peace should begin to occupy the attention of the progressives.
39. Good enough, a committee of the Progressive Governors' Forum has done an impressive work on how to attain a more perfect federal system. We now have a duty to dust off this document and push for its consideration at the highest level of legislative and executive authorities.
40. Finally, I want to congratulate the author of this book, Ebenezer Adeniyen, a prolific journalist and astute publisher of the *Trace Magazine* on the success of this book. I have always admired his courage as a media entrepreneur who has distinguished himself as a journalist-publisher in an environment like ours. I pay tribute to his tenacity and commitment to excellent journalistic practice.
41. I want to also congratulate my *egbon* and chairman, Aketi, on this publication which highlights some of his greatest strength and achievements in government. I want to thank you for inviting me to give this lecture.
42. Than you all for listening and God bless.

Biodun Oyebanji.

Governor

Ekiti State

Akure|Ondo State| March 24, 2023.