

CONFERENCE ON THE NORTH AND THE NIGERIAN FEDERATION
HOLDING AT AREWA HOUSE KADUNA, OCT 11-12, 2017
BRIEF ON THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE
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PROTOCOL

The chair of the board of the ARDP, General John Shagaya (rtd) has already welcomed all of you to this conference. My task is to speak to the objectives of this conference. Perhaps I should first inform you that this conference is being organized by the ARDP along with other Northern platforms, the Sir Ahmadu Bello Foundation, the ACF, the NEF, the Code Group, the Jamiyyar Matan Arewa in collaboration with Mambayya House, Aminu Kano Centre of Democratic research and Training, BUK; the Center for Leadership and Peace of UDU, Sokoto and the Centre for Security Studies FUT, Yola, among others. This conference was conceived not only as a response to the demand for a review of the nature and structure of the Nigerian federation but also as an internal self evaluation of the North as a major component of the the Nigerian federation.

Many will agree that it is important to respond to demands driven by a discontent whether genuine or otherwise, but even more import is the need to interrogate ourselves, precisely the abdication of the North from its traditional role of being the stabilizing factor for this country. Clearly these demands for restructuring are in many ways symptoms of poor leadership at various levels of governance over a period of time. The North, not only because of its landmass and population but also because of its culture and values has always accommodated the other and provided the leadership that had stabilized the federation especially in times of crises.

One immediate objective of the conference is to bring clarity, accuracy and precision to the debate on the future of the Nigerian federation. This is necessary because at the moment there is a lot of confusion about what a federation is supposed to be. People who talk about true federalism clearly need to revise their notes and realize that true federalism is not only misleading but also untenable since every federation is unique and there are no two federations that are the same. Similarly the concept of fiscal federalism has been grossly misunderstood and many are reading their parochial wishes and confusing the debate. The conference's immediate objective is to get experts in the field to clarify all of these issues.

The other objective is to get experts to guide the North in identifying its priorities as we go into this debate and negotiations. The North has a history and has come a long way, sharing values and aspirations and has therefore a collective responsibility to chart its future together. In this respect it is important to say that the knowledge generated in this conference will feed into the committee of Northern Governors and Traditional Rulers, which is headed by the chairman of this occasion, Governor Tambuwal of Sokoto State.

Yet another object is to bring together the North in all its diversities, Christians and Muslims, male and female, the young and the old, those in politics and those out of politics, professionals and laymen, indeed all our diversities to listen, ask questions and make inputs into the process of shaping of a Northern position in this current national debate and the positioning of the North in the Nigerian federation. In doing all these we need to bear in mind the lessons from history.

Chairman, distinguish ladies and gentlemen, it is amazing how we so easily forget, perhaps this is why we appear to have failed to learn from the lessons of history and keep making the same mistake over and over again and again. For in the midst of this debate there are calls for using the reports of the 2006 and 2014 so called national conferences. How can we forget that these are conferences designed to achieve predetermined results; results that exclusively serve the personal ambition of one individual and his cabal. The 2006 conference was out to amend the constitution to give the then president a chance for a third term in office. The other one in 2014 was designed to bring a new constitution crafted with interest of a particular people in mind, for which a whole section of the country was excluded and during which a clandestine constitution was surreptitiously circulated. How can we ignore that these are rouge conferences, which lacked legitimacy. It should be remembered that what confers legitimacy to a document, like a constitution, is not it's content but its process and once the process is flawed, legitimacy is lost. We believe that the North should have nothing to do with these rogue conferences beyond learning from their failure.

The North must realize that in the real world where we seek to survive and thrive, no one gets what he deserves, people get only what they negotiate for. And the currency for this negotiation is power. The good news is that power has varied sources; power can be military, it can be economic, it can be political, it can be intellectual, it can be demographic, it can be territorial. It is important that the North figures out which the source of power it should leverage to negotiate what is best for it in the Nigerian federation. We must not lose sight of the fact we are living in the 21st century where knowledge, not oil, is the greatest capital.

Chairman, distinguish ladies and gentle men it is particularly important that the North begins to appreciate the future. It has been said that, politicians only worry about the next election, it is statesmen that worry about the next generation. This year the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division projected that in 2030 Nigeria's population is estimated to rise to 264 million, this 12 years from now. In 2050 it is estimated to rise to 410 million, which will make it the third most populated country on earth after China and India. Already we have an estimated 15million children out of school, we have an estimated 30million people without jobs. In other words our population growth has out stripped our economic growth, if there is any growth at all. Already, every year, hundreds of thousands of young people fail to find placements in higher institutions, those that find admission and graduate can't find jobs. From where and how are we going to provide for the educational

infrastructure, health services, transportation, jobs and a host of other needs, if our leaders are oblivious of the future? How do we achieve self-reliance and grow our economy in these circumstances? How do we achieve the peace without which we can't have development? We don't have to read Robert Kaplan's, 'The Coming Anarchy' to see what is waiting for us a few years down the line. We need to do a lot of introspection and creativity, more importantly we need a lot of courage to make the right, if difficult choices in order to get out of the woods and secure the future.

The raging debate about the future of our federation is only a fraction of the problem. We must see it as the first and necessary step that will help us prepare for our future. It is therefore important that we bring a lot of objectivity and maturity. Mere display of emotions is not going to be useful here. We need to think through whatever proposal we make. We should also realize that we can't force any view on any body in this day and age. We must seek to persuade rather than dictate.

I thank you for listening.