

Memo to the National Assembly

Wednesday, 01 November 2006

By Okey Ndibe

Dear legislators,

It is time to impeach President Olusegun Obasanjo for his many manifest acts of treason against the Nigerian nation. This is a bounden duty, a matter of the greatest urgency. You must commence his impeachment, not tomorrow, but today. Clearly, the man who occupies the nation's highest office has become a clear and present danger to the health of the fledging republic.

The choice before you is as simple as the consequences of inaction are weighty. Impeach Obasanjo and save the nation from collapse. Yet, if you decide to remain nonchalant, offering him latitude to proceed with his destructive politics, then you, as well as the rest of us, risk imperiling the fabric of a nation that is already frayed. But you can count on history's merciless, unforgiving verdict if you elect to slumber while one man's depraved politics brought down the roof over the nation.

So I beseech you: send this man away, and spare the nation the grief he is adept at manufacturing.

An impeachment fever has gripped Nigeria. A messy impeachment in Ekiti state gave the president the window to declare a state of emergency, effectively dimming the democratic lights in that state. As I write, the governors of Plateau and Anambra state are starring in ludicrous impeachment processes of their own. In Anambra, renegade legislators

are barring the impeachment fangs at a governor whose only crime, when all is said and done, is that he occupies an office the president desperately wants for Andy Uba, his acolyte.

Obasanjo is the invisible hand behind the untoward developments in Anambra and Plateau, the monkey marionette manipulating the sordid political games. This imperial president appears determined to torpedo the ship of state. And he will, too, unless you (and other Nigerians) stop him.

Nigeria should indeed be gripped by the impeachment fever, but its target ought to be, first and foremost, President Obasanjo. No public office holder poses a more perilous threat to the corporate interests of Nigeria. Despite his oath to uphold and defend the Nigerian constitution, the president has set about shredding that sacred document, disdaining democratic ethos, mocking the concept of a society founded on law and order, and desecrating all noble

principles of governance. The president, who recently confessed to missing his calling as a roadside mechanic, is assuredly, mindlessly tearing down the national edifice. We reckon this tragedy of a nation: somehow, a man who might have made a good or mediocre mechanic finds himself at the helm of his nation's affairs. Worse, he evinces no greater scruple in his statecraft than if he were tinkering with the engine of a car whose problem confounds him.

In seven plus years, Obasanjo has accumulated a list of impeachable offences long enough to warrant not one, but multiple, impeachments. Should I belabor you with the details when you are quite acquainted with the president's reckless acts? His gruesome goring of defenseless civilians in Odi. His extension of the same genocidal treatment to the people of Zaki Biam. The frequency with which he has flouted court orders. His refusal to implement duly passed budgets. His extra-budgetary expenditures, culminating in the squandering of billion of naira on the Abuja stadium. Remember how he fired Vincent Azie, then the nation's auditor-general, who detected and reported widespread sleaze in the government? Recall how his relative, Julius Mankanjuola, was spared prosecution on charges involving the disappearance of four hundred million naira.

The portrait here, you know, is merely a sketch of presidential crimes. Juxtaposed against some of the more egregious misdeeds of this president, they would seem mere peccadilloes.

The man who relishes being addressed as "Mr. President" or "Baba" (as if he were presiding over a family enterprise) has set records in election rigging that nobody will be able to touch for years to come. Even so, unless you act resolutely today, he may well be tempted to break his own records in 2007.

Under this presidency, what used to be called the Nigerian Police Force has degenerated to a farce, a veritable tool in the execution of illegalities. This president lent armed police to Lamidi Adedibu, the loose cannon of Ibadan politics, for use in sacking Governor Rasheed Ladoja of Oyo. The president remained curiously sanguine when an assistant inspector-general of police led two hundred police officers on a mission to abduct Chris Ngige, the former governor of Anambra, who would not let the president's minions raid the state's coffers. This president permitted the police to provide protection to hoodlums who swept through Anambra state in a three-day orgy of arson and looting. This president brought Nigeria to the brink of chaos, all in pursuit of his illicit gambit to tamper with the nation's constitution in order to perpetuate himself in office.

This president, dear legislators, has fertilized corruption while feigning the prosecution of a war against the monster. His legerdemain has not fooled Nigerians; they know that he hardly possesses the moral capital to be a foot soldier, much less the commander, in a genuine anti-graft campaign. They are not blind to his apparent accumulation of a stupendous fortune at the cost of the nation's misfortune. The president's farm,

reportedly near bankruptcy in 1999, has mysteriously rebounded as a cash cow, raking in “a profit” of more than \$250,000 a month. Nigerians know that he owns at least two hundred million shares of Transcorp stock, and has since funneled multi-billion dollar deals to the untested, unproven corporate entity. Nigerians recognize the presence of his fingers in too many business pies, from construction to the booming sector of university education. This president has accused Vice President Atiku Abubakar of corruption; in the same breath, he has boasted of doling out millions of naira as gifts to his deputy. Aghast, many Nigerians have asked: From which magic tree did Mr. Obasanjo pluck all this money with which he plays benefactor?

Nigeria may not be the most corrupt nation on earth, but it seriously lays claim to the patent for primitive transfers of public funds into private pockets. Far from abating, that practice has metastasized under Obasanjo’s presidency. He has handed out the nation’s oil blocs to his friends, empowering some truly disgraceful men and women in the process.

There is a real war, an urgent war, to be fought against corruption, but this president lacks the ethical credentials and moral wherewithal to declare, much less lead, it. In his hands, the effort against graft has become more theatre than a focused campaign. He has turned the war into an instrument for savaging his corrupt personal foes (while coddling his often more corrupt friends), a petty tool for bringing his critics and political opponents brutally to heel. The lesson?

That a man deeply embedded in vice and highly invested in corrupt enrichment cannot be entrusted with galvanizing a true crusade against corruption.

Two weeks ago, Obasanjo was feted in Anambra as a guest of Governor Peter Obi (it would be a mistake to say he was a guest of the state’s populace, for Anambrarians have good reasons to hold him in fulsome contempt). In the course of his visit, Obasanjo acted out a pathetic script with suborned elements of the state legislature. In it, the legislators orchestrated a plea that the president “release” Andy Uba, the loathed elder brother of Chris Uba, the hubristic (and even more loathed) “godfather” of Anambra politics, to run for the governor’s seat in 2007.

This pathetic, stage-managed ploy was all that the president needed to unleash the latest phase of his evil-minded agenda. Shortly after his departure, the legislators began the shameless effort to unseat Governor Obi, a first step in stealing the governorship for Obasanjo’s anointed son. The scheming legislators are enjoying all the accoutrements of federal protection. They are being shuttled between Asaba, Abuja and Awka, cocooned in heavily guarded hotels. Meanwhile, the governor’s official residence has been razed under the (averted) gaze of the police! A shame when a nation’s leader wallows in wantonly behavior.

It falls to you to check the president’s proclivity for using stooges to rape the nation’s constitution. It behooves you to stand up and arrest his toxic politics

before it encumbers, indeed engulfs, Nigeria. Some of you, though long disgusted by the president's misdeeds, are wont to counsel patience. You liken the man to a bull in a china shop. Wait until May 2007, and this incubus will be led out and sent off to shameful retirement on his farm. But there is peril in waiting. Before our very eyes, the president has re-made himself into a freak phenomenon, part King Kong and part Gilgamesh. Nothing suggests that our collective patience, even our indulgence, will have a tempering effect on him. Before he brings down the edifice on our collective heads, I implore you: storm the shop with the weapon of impeachment. Spare Nigeria this darkening fate; impeach this would-be emperor. And do it today.

Readers' Favorites

1. Nigeria's savaged children
2. The war we ordered is here
3. What I saw in Nigeria
4. Murder Incorporated
5. No Longer at Ease
6. My Vote for Andy Uba
7. Achebe, Soyinka, and the Nigerian Mess
8. My Biafran Eyes
9. My Father's English Friend
10. A female speaker's manly vices
11. The education of Umar Yar'Adua
12. The triumph of barbarism
13. Achebe's apt censure
14. Andy Uba Goes to War (1)
15. Andy Uba Goes to War (11): What OBJ taught Uba
16. Why I Take It Personally
17. Andy Uba's highest bid
18. The folly of the Nigerian elite
19. Fraud Incorporated
20. Etiaba's father, not mine
21. Our laughing president
22. Fayose and God's response
23. My 419 Call
24. A feud of three bulls
25. More reasons to ignore Soyinka
26. Who does Obasanjo work for?

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About Okey Ndibe



Okey Ndibe is a novelist, poet, political activist from Yola, Nigeria. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain*, a critically reviewed novel published in 2000. Ndibe relocated to the United States in 1988, where he founded *African Commentary*, a magazine described as "award-winning and widely acclaimed." Ndibe is also a published poet, and a former associate professor of English at Bard College at Simon's Rock. He currently teaches fiction and African literature at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. Okey Ndibe is finishing his second novel titled *Foreign gods, incorporated*.

Speaking Engagements

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