

Farida Waziri's job as undertaker

Tuesday, 21 October 2008

Written by Okey Ndibe

At the very minimum, Mrs. Farida Waziri should cease parading herself as the chairperson of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). She should also stop collecting the salary as well allowances pertaining to her office. More than that, she ought to refund the sums already paid to her to assume the challenge of fighting financial crimes.

Last week, Mrs. Waziri basically confessed that she lacks the will, skill and desire to prosecute the war against graft and sundry financial crimes. She also served notice that she's presiding over an agency that has sabotaged the anti-graft crusade.

There's no question that, in some quarters, Mrs. Waziri is viewed as a "hero," a woman doing a "fantastic" job. A Yar'Adua impostor-regime that lacks the moral spine or ethical capital to stare down corruption has reason to hail this woman who is slowly, surely re-making the EFCC into a vendor of farce and comedy. There's Obasanjo, a man who set his moral bar so low that he now lives under the blissful illusion that history is about to transport him to the pedestal of greatness. Then there are the indicted governors who, comforted by Waziri's assurance, are sleeping a little better now. Soon their lawyers may head for courts and petition that their cases be thrown out. And why not? After all, the woman who should know has exonerated them.

She has proclaimed that they stole nothing; that their prosecution was done, in the first place, out of malice.

To be sure, this Wazirian maneuver is bizarre but hardly surprising. From the outset, some of us suspected (and predicted) that Waziri's primary task as chair of the EFCC was to emasculate and then oversee the folding up of the agency. When she grandly told the panel that screened her that she was fully willing to step on big toes, the words rang hollow. It seemed to me, in fact, that she meant the collective big toes of dispossessed Nigerians. Those who stood behind her strange appointment to head the agency seemed driven by one wish, and one wish alone: that she would accelerate the demise of the EFCC. Last week, she took a giant step towards realizing their expectation.

She startled Nigerians with claims unbecoming of somebody who draws a salary for allegedly fighting crime. First, she stated that the agency has no case against former President Olusegun Obasanjo. Who does she think she's kidding? Unless she was on vacation in Neptune during the House of Representatives' hearing on the power sector; unless she slumbered in outer space while witness after witness detailed how Obasanjo bypassed due process to authorize huge payments to foreign and indigenous contractors for projects that were not executed, and probably were

never meant to be executed, she would not have had the effrontery to say there's no case against the former president.

Then, in an equally scandalous move, Mrs. Waziri "revealed" that the EFCC's files on thirty-one former state governors contained little or no damning information. In effect, the EFCC chair let Nigerians know that the indictment of the thirty plus ex-governors was nothing more than hype.

Of course, she craftily sidestepped some questions. Did the agency ever gather the information, and if so, was it stolen? If the former was the case, then what happened to the information? If the latter, then she must tell Nigerians at what point the files were raided and emptied of documents and other evidence. At any rate, Waziri was put in at EFCC ostensibly to lead the charge in investigating quick-fingered thieves who paraded themselves as leaders. If she lacks the ability to unearth evidence of corruption against public officials who daily parade their loot in public, then it amounts to a confession of incompetence. It follows that she has no business occupying the space she does as EFCC chair.

But let's tell ourselves the truth: Waziri is doing a "terrific" job for her sponsors - among them, some of the governors under investigation or indictment for money laundering and other forms of abuse of public trust. I suspect she must have received calls from a lot of these former or current public officials patting her on the back for a job excellently done.

It is no secret that former Governor James Ibori of Delta and Bukola Saraki, current Kwara governor, were part of a coalition of former and serving governors who

sponsored Waziri's headship of the EFCC. Months before Mr. Umaru Yar'Adua finally appointed her, Saharareporters.com had disclosed that a number of indicted politicians were lobbying Yar'Adua to put her forward. The website also reported - and backed it up with documentation - that Waziri had in the past intervened with the anti-corruption agency on behalf of at least one indicted ex-governor.

Is it conceivable that these embattled politicians who facilitated Waziri's appointment considered her a tough, sinewy prosecutor who will pursue their prosecution with renewed vigor and zeal? Were her sponsors remorseful felons who wanted a woman capable of seeing to it that they were sanctioned harshly? What does it say about Nigeria that it is a country where men charged with the grave crime of manipulating their offices for personal financial gain are permitted to choose the person who will investigate and prosecute them?

If Nigeria took its anti-corruption crusade with a modicum of seriousness, then it should have occurred to Yar'Adua as well as members of the National Assembly that Waziri was one person who should never have been recruited to captain the EFCC. Quite apart from her coziness with some of the people she was supposed to give hell for their alleged illicit self-enrichment, her record as a crime buster was far from impressive. In appointing her to lead the EFCC, Yar'Adua hung out a loud sign, to Nigerians and the rest of the world, that the fight against corruption had gone from the era of selectivity into that of absurd comedy.

Let's be clear: Waziri's predecessor, Nuhu Ribadu, was far from an exemplary head of the EFCC. Under his leadership, the agency sometimes came across as part of Obasanjo's vindictive apparatus for witch-hunting those who stood in the way of his self-perpetuating agenda. Ribadu seemed willfully blind to the fabled corruption enacted in Rivers State under the watch of Peter Odili. Odili, a self-styled golden governor who, since leaving office, has kept away from Port Harcourt, was in Obasanjo's graces - and so not to be touched. Ribadu also refused to see the billions of naira that Obasanjo used in a (thankfully) futile gambit to buy a third term - even if it meant raping the constitution in the process.

After Yar'Adua's installation as occupant of Aso Rock, many of his cohorts began to make the case that Ribadu's style of fighting corruption was selective. That argument, while unimpeachable, did not justify gutting the EFCC. If anything, it provided an opportunity for Michael Aondoakaa, Yar'Adua's attorney general - if he was serious-minded - to begin the prosecution of those that Ribadu had chosen to spare.

At any rate, to remove Ribadu and replace him with a woman of Waziri's deficits was a mark of Yar'Adua's poor political judgment. With Waziri running the show, the EFCC has become a "show." At least Ribadu brought a measure of passion to the cause of fighting corruption. Mrs. Waziri has brought, on the other hand, a commitment to turning herself into a fashionable and ostentatious figure. Ribadu successfully prosecuted Diepreye Alamieseigha and Tafa Balogun. Forget that these two men received what amounted to light slaps on the wrists. But

what has Mrs. Waziri got to show for her salary and allowances? Only this: to tell Nigerians that she has no clue how to establish that a single politician stole anything from the public coffers. It's a scandal and a shame!

If the agency beat a slight retreat from what Mrs. Waziri told the legislature, it was merely because of the groundswell of criticism from every sector of Nigeria. Does it mean that the EFCC is back to the work of fighting corruption? My hunch is that, as you read this, Mrs. Waziri is thinking up fresh ideas for making the agency disappear altogether. Nothing less would satisfy those who her big-toed sponsors.

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?

Read or download more titles at

<http://www.okeyndibe.com>

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

To discuss a speaking engagement, please contact Okey Ndibe by e-mail (okey@okeyndibe.com) or by phone (860.306.7843).

PDF conversions done with Adobe Acrobat Professional 6.0 (US & International Patents) under license to All Hands Business Solutions, Inc.