

A Bad Week for Aondoakaa and his Clients

Sunday, 20 September 2009

By Okey Ndibe

It was a bad week, recently, for Michael Aondoakaa, Nigeria's attorney general and minister for justice. A week or so ago, Mr. Aondoakaa had occasion to put his warped sense of his office on display.

British authorities had the temerity to indict former Governors James Ibori and Victor Attah as well as Ibori's associates, David Edevbie (a former commissioner under Ibori and now Mr. Umaru Yar'Adua's private principal secretary) and Henry Imasekha for allegedly swindling the public of some \$38 million in a stock divestment deal.

The indicted men seem to be some of Mr. Aondoakaa's favorite people, and so he wasn't going to fold arms and let the British traduce the men's immaculate reputations.

To be sure, Nigeria has hardly been lucky in its roll of past attorneys-general. One or two who served under military regimes encouraged the juntas to lay siege on the judiciary and wage war against Nigerians' fundamental rights. They wrote decrees that ousted the jurisdiction of courts to review any violations of the (partly suspended) constitution. Bayo Ojo, one of former President Olusegun Obasanjo's justice ministers, remained unfazed as his boss

made vulgar attempts to tinker with the constitution in order to award himself a third term in office.

Yet, measured against his far from impressive predecessors, Mr. Aondoakaa has catapulted himself to the height of infamy. In a line-up of crass ministers of justice, he holds the record for badness and shamelessness.

Though called attorney general, Mr. Aondoakaa carries on as if he were a "protector-general" for men who could be Nigeria's biggest, most mindless crooks.

Nigeria is saddled with an attorney general who parrots "rule of law" but acts what somebody has called "ruse of law." To judge by the issues that trigger his passion, he appears to regard himself as a general factotum whose specification is to serve the interests of a cohort of former or serving public officials accused - or widely suspected - of blatant corrupt enrichment.

Mr. Aondoakaa never wakes up when egregious harm is done to "small" Nigerians. He remained nonchalant when some prisoners in Ibadan, protesting the subhuman conditions of their haunt, died horrific deaths. He never stirs when the

police maim the limbs of riff raff, or even execute innocents in a homicidal orgy.

On the Internet is the disturbing videotape of Nigerian soldiers executing a cowering, unarmed man, identified as Buji Foi, during the July onslaught against real or perceived members of the Boko Haram group. There's also the case of the extra-judicial execution of Boko Haram leader, Mohammed Yusuf. An attorney general worthy of the name should have been furious that the police (or soldiers) played prosecutor, judge and executioner. Mr. Aondoakaa was apparently too busy consorting with his "steak holder" friends to care.

He forgets that corrupt public officials - exactly the group he uses the rhetoric of "rule of law" to spare from serious prosecution - have done infinitely more harm to Nigeria than the dispirited Nigerians driven by desperation to embrace the anti-modern harangues of Boko Haram. In fact, the kind of unbridled plunder of which Mr. Aondoakaa's favorite people are accused functions as fertilizer for the Boko Harams sprouting in Nigeria. Yet, when it serves the interests of his well-heeled "clients," the attorney general deploys the abracadabra of "rule of law" to shield persons whose acts of turpitude create, or deepen, misery across the land.

Nigeria and the UK have a treaty on mutual legal assistance. But whenever UK police and prosecutors have asked for Mr. Aondoakaa's assistance to prosecute Nigerian officials suspected of laundering looted funds in Britain, Mr. Aondoakaa has refused. And he's invoked a false

sense of national pride to justify his posture. As if seeking recognition as a national hero, he's always argued that he would never hand over a Nigerian to be tried in the UK. Then, shamelessly - covertly - he sends letters of exoneration to the defense counsel of Nigerians being tried in British courts for money laundering.

With Ibori, Attah, Edevbie and Imasekha indicted, their "attorney general" came close to telling British law enforcement to go to hell. With the speed of a Usain Bolt, he rallied to the defense of the indicted Nigerians. He asserted, falsely, that the men had been scrutinized by agents of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and declared irreproachable.

Over all, Mr. Aondoakaa's performance further ridiculed the office that his previous antics had debased.

The Nigerian "steak" holders' minister for justice is twisted because British prosecutors have called out his friends for shocking acts of corruption. Mr. Aondoakaa's - and his friends' - bad week was a good week for the rest of us.

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About Okey Ndibe



Okey Ndibe is a Nigerian novelist, poet, and political commentator. He is the author of the critically praised novel, *Arrows of Rain*. Ndibe relocated to the United States in 1988 to be the founding editor of the *African Commentary*, an award-winning and widely acclaimed magazine published by the novelist Chinua Achebe. He currently teaches fiction and African literature at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. He is finishing work on a novel titled *foreign gods, incorporated*.

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