

From the Demand for Sovereign National Conference to National Dialogue: The Dilemma of the Nigerian State

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ABSTRACT The search for a viable, stable and justiceable polity in Nigeria has continued with the inauguration of a National Dialogue to engineer political reforms for the nation. The Dialogue is at variance with unrelenting calls by opposition parties, social and human rights advocates, sectional/ethnic groups for a sovereign national conference to address the national question bordering on systemic contradictions, distortions, marginalization and structural violence. Nonetheless, the “imposed” National Dialogue has generated dilemmas for the opposition and the Nigerian public alike. The problematiqués, therefore, are: One, does the Dialogue has the capacity, competence, and legitimacy to address the fundamental national questions including agitations for justiceable fiscal federalism, systemic imbalance, self-determination, resource control, institutional decay, minority marginalization and power sharing? Two, can the Dialogue fundamentally re-invent and strengthen the nation’s political future considering the fact that all the delegates are “establishment nominees”? Three, and flowing from the latter concern, is the apprehension that considering the idiosyncratic nature, pedigree and antics of President Obasanjo coupled with the sovereign limitations of the Dialogue, will the report of the conference not be subjected to presidential veto? Four, will the report of the Dialogue not suffer uncertainty and become moribund like such previous exercises as the Oputa Panel on human rights abuses? Lastly and more germane, what are the fears of government in convocating a sovereign conference? The study is saddled with the challenge of addressing these problematiqués, and in addition, examine the external dimension of the nation’s problems, which are not included in the Dialogue’s agenda.