

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 problematiques, 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 problematiques, and in addition, examine the external dimension of the nation's problems, which are not included in the Dialogue's agenda.

INTRODUCTION

Achieving a united and stable political system is still a serious challenge to the Nigerian state. As a divided society with multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, the task of nation - building and forging of a system perceived by the varied nationalities as justiceable has been difficult. The system has been confronted with complaints of marginalization, inequitable distribution of resources and power, and official injustice. Consequently, various sub-nationalities, ethno-religious groups, opposition parties and other fringe interests have unrelentingly been calling for the convocating of a sovereign national conference (SNC) to address the sectional grievances.

Inadvertently, SNC has since the late 1980s become an emerging tradition of instituting political reforms and constitutional re-engineering, particularly in the emerging democracies of Africa and former communist Eastern Europe. The Nigerian state, since the annulment of June 12, presidential election presumably won by MKO Abiola, has been operating under sustained political strains and stresses, thereby necessitating unrelenting agitations for a sovereign

national conference to address the lingering crises among the varied ethno-religious groups. President Olusegun Obasanjo in a seeming response to these call, inaugurated a National Political Reforms Conference (NPRC) as a way of addressing the lingering national questions.

The study is, therefore, concerned with the challenge of examining the viability of the conference in providing acceptable and durable solutions to the enduring national problems, particularly considering the controversies surrounding its legal status and the doubts about the acceptance of its outcomes by opposition parties, varied interest groups, minorities, and government itself. In addressing these concerns, the paper is structured into six sections. The first is the introduction, and the second part examines the concept, typology and values of a national conference. The third section investigates the national problematiques that engender agitations for a sovereign national conference. The fourth section deals with the national conference inaugurated by President Obasanjo with a stated agenda. Section five examines the outcomes and the legitimacy crisis involving the national conference and its implications for the stability and viability of the Nigerian project, while section

six provides concluding remarks, which in addition to analysing the role of external influence in the nation's unending crisis of socio-political instability and nation-building, also interrogates the reasons for the leaderships aversion for a sovereign national conference.

CONCEPT, TYPOLOGY AND VALUE OF NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Ordinarily, conference implies a formal assemblage of people for consultation and deliberations on specific issues, which could border on common interests. Such interests could be civil, communal, national, global or professional. In such conferences, delegates or conferences air their views and opinions on the problematics at stake. Conference and convention are synonyms, implying the same intentions. Of major concern to this study is national conference.

National conference denotes a formal congregation of interest groups, including sub-nationalities and sectional representations in a polity. National conferences can be gingered by the imperatives of engineering a new constitution or as a way of forging common solutions to perceived national problems, particularly in divided societies such as Nigeria, where ethnic and other sectional cleavages have become constraints to the emergence of a sense of nationalism and national integration.

Omitoogun and Otite (cited in Babawale, 2003: 3) specify two broad types of national conference, namely, one, national conference with limited autonomy, and two, national conference with sovereign powers. The delegates devoid of finality in the decisions arrive at limited national conference. Such conference is also prone to executive interference, because in the first instance, government may have selected delegates, thereby, giving room for airing the views and opinions that are pro-government, and consequently, the final report is subjected to official tinkering before approval. In another instance, the report may be absolutely jettisoned if decisions contained therein are not favourable to the establishment.

The second category of national conference is distinguished from the first by the affiliated concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty denotes supreme political and legal authority. In this wise, authoritative decisions emanating from a sovereign authority is a supreme political order,

which is not subject to any authority. It is, therefore, considered as an absolute authority enjoying a supreme order in a state (Fassassi, 2005: 8). Sovereignty has an inalienable, individualized and absolute character with an order that cannot be subjected to any other order or organ resulting from any established power (Ibid). Consequently, a sovereign national conference has sovereign powers in its deliberations. It sets its own agenda and has the authority to take any decisions on the issues before it. Government manipulations in the conference's decisions are limited, because the delegates of such conference are not nominated by government but in most cases by the varied interest groups of the civil society. The interest groups may include representatives of ethnic groups, political parties and associations, labour, students, farmers, women and religious groups, and even that of government. The electorate can also elect the delegates. Such conference is commonly referred to as sovereign national conference (SNC). The SNC and its decisions are superior to the executive and the legislature because of its sovereign status. The outcome of an SNC may herald a new political order, and sweep away all vestiges of the existing system. It can determine the power and survival (tenure) of the incumbent government. In a way, the ordinary national conference tends to sustain the *status quo ante* for its pro-establishment status, while SNC is revolutionary and *anti-status quo ante*.

The value of national conference lies in its provision of avenues for national dialogue by the various shades of opinion in the polity over crisis issues. It avails the different contending cleavages the understanding of the national problematics, thereby making it possible for the need to forge a consensual and popular solution to the divided interests, including complaints of institutional violence by certain ethnic groups such as the minorities, bordering on state injustice and marginalization, resource control, and domestic insecurity. The national question can even be on how to resolve the nation's economic crisis. In totality, a national conference is often aimed at achieving national political and economic reforms, which are meant to provide for new ways of doing things and achieving good governance and national unity.

UNDERSTANDING THE AGITATIONS FOR SOVEREIGN NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The primary contradiction, and perhaps the anomaly, of the Nigerian state is its colonial evolution. The nation did not emerge from the civil society, and hence defied the conventional social contract theory of state origin as pontified by the trio of Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke, whose point of consensus is the emergence of state through the basic agreement of the civil society to live under the same polity for the purpose of law and order (Kolawole, 2004: 74-75). Contrarily, the British imperialists imposed the Nigerian state. Implying that Nigeria, as a political entity, did not exist before colonial invasion.

The colonial origin of the Nigerian state has placed some dilemmas on the nation. According to Kolawole (2005: 7), the colonial effect relates to the fragility of the state. According to him, the political fragility implies the weakness of the institutions of state to withstand and survive incidence of disequilibrium. In the same vein, Suberu (2001: 1) points out that the state has its peculiar and irregular characteristics. Post-colonial Nigeria, besides its alien origin, is characterized by multi-racial, multi-culturalism and multi-linguistics, arising from the arbitrary partitioning and aggregative territorialization of about 250 ethnic groups speaking about 400 languages, thereby depicting the nation as the world's linguistic crossroad.

Other hallmarks of the nation are inter-ethnic and inter-religious contestations. Inter-ethnic contestations over power-sharing and resource control have since independence been inflicting damaging injuries on peaceful co-existence, political stability and national integration. Contestations for political power led to the 1967-1970 civil war. Thirty-five years after the civil war, irredentist tendencies have not waned. Instead, sub-nationalism and primordial sentiments have taken increased tempo. Some Igbos under the aegis of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) are still threatening secession. To demonstrate MASSOB's seriousness regarding its independence agenda, the Biafran currency has been put into circulation and is actually being spent in some parts of the country and the neighbouring states along the nation's borders (Williams *et. al.* 2005: 45), while the Biafran flag and anthem are already emplaced. Other

primordial groups, such as the Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC), Egbesu Boys, Asari Boys, Ijaw Youth Congress, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Itsekiri Youths and the Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Force are equally canvassing for sectional autonomy and self-governance. The emergence of these ethnic groups poses the latest danger to the Nigerian federalist agenda as they employ violence and militancy against the state and its apparatuses.

Distributive contentions relating to resource sharing have gained more intensity since the emerging democracy. The oil producing states constantly agitate for the control of their oil resources as done in a true federal practice of which the United States, Canada and Russia have been easy references. As Suberu (*op. cit.*: 2) observes, the distributive pressures have pitched the Nigerian federation and the constituent governments and segments against each other in a relentless struggle for the nation's abundant financial resources and distributive largesse.

The struggle for resource control has equally led to the emergence of sub-nationality groupings, which serve as vanguards for resource autonomy. The renewed politics of resource control and revenue sharing has heightened political strains and stresses among the constituent states.

Inter-religious contests and rivalry are fall-outs of ethnic contestations, which have resulted to wanton destruction of lives and property. Ethno-religious conflicts have become an enduring feature of the polity.

Complaints of institutional marginalization by the respective ethnic components have enacted pressures for the struggle for the creation of new states and localities. Creating new states and local governments over the years is yet to resolve the crisis of counter-accusations of ethnic marginality. Intra-state marginalization has equally become a feature of the component states as they also made up of ethnic and cultural diversities. Ethnic contestations, therefore, take place at all levels of governance, thus, the polity is being heated up and pressured at all times. Agitations for redress of ethnic marginality, resource control and power sharing are, therefore, provocative strategies meant to engender systemic distributive and social justice.

Colonial and post-colonial constitutional engineering and creation of new localities of administration, and other modalities such as federal character and zoning are yet to abate

complaints of structural imbalance, marginalization in power-sharing and resource distribution, and social injustice. In essence, the state has failed to forge unity among the diverse ethnic groups, and at the same time lacking in capacity to establish a regime of social justice, equitable distribution of resources and failure to arrest feelings of political marginality. In summary, incidences of religious and ethnic conflicts, emergence of ethnic militias, *coup detats*, and other divisive and disruptive phenomena are attestations to the fragile character of the Nigerian State (Kolawole op. cit: 8).

Arousing explanations for this failure, Cabral (cited in Mimiko, 1995: 183), in his assessment of the problematique of nation-building in Africa generally, observes that:

The nature of the state we have to create in our country is a very good question for it is a fundamental one. The problem of the nature of the state created, is perhaps the secret of the failure of African independence. Cabral is of the belief that African states have failed because of their colonial origin, which lacks taproot in the respective civil societies in the continent.

The failure of the state in addressing the varied contradictions often referred to as the national question, has continued to provoke the varied sectional interests and groups to continuously advance calls for a sovereign national conference, particularly since the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election assumed to have been won by MKO Abiola, a South - Westerner. However, the intensity of the pressure for a SNC became more heightened, and louder when democratic governance was re-established in May, 1999.

Variegated opinions had been advanced by all shades of interest advocating the convocation of an SNC. The consensus of opinion is the imperative for a new Nigeria that is more efficient economically, politically and administratively, and which is restructured on sound, distinct and clear federal principles (Aluko, 2005: 5). Emergence of a new system, which recognizes differences and diversity in unity, and the same time subject controversial national issues such as constitutional reforms, restructuring of the federal arrangement and creation of state police to people's debate and decisions (ibid). It is also argued that debates on the future of Nigeria must be sovereign for reasons of hindsight arising from past constitutional re-engineering efforts by

military regimes (Nwosu, 2000: 1). The utility of the public input during such constitutional debates and their outcomes were always lost in the lack of sovereignty of such fora as the ultimate sanction or approval/disapproval always rested in the military regimes. The reports were often tinkered with, manipulated to suit the power ambition of the regimes' leadership, rather than being used as potent avenues to address the national question.

PRESIDENT OBASANJO AND THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

As a way of responding to the sustained advocacy for a sovereign national conference by civil and non-official groups and the opposition, President Obasanjo, on February 21, 2005, inaugurated the 400-delegate National Political Reforms Conference also referred to as the National Dialogue. In addition to hand-picking the membership, government also announced the conference's agenda. The agenda included:

- Reformation of the political party system
- Electoral reforms
- Judicial and legal reforms
- Civil Society reforms
- Police/Prison system reforms
- Intergovernmental relations
- Structure of government and governance (Obiagwu, 2005: 8-9)

Having set out the agenda, the president limited the scope of the agenda to the announced by setting a no-go area for the conference, which border on such issues as the: unity of the country, federal character; federalism; multi-religiosity; separation of powers; and, fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy (Onuorah et al., 2005: 1). These are core issues that are very vital to the unity, survival and existence of the country, and which the Conference should ordinarily not be restrained from debating, sustaining or do away with if they so consensually wish. These no-go areas are indeed vexatious issues, which have persistently undermined harmonious ethnic relations, and the stability and unity of the nation. Government also determined the conference's life span by giving it three months for its deliberations. It is, therefore, clear from the on-set that government had vested interest not only in the composition of the conference but also in its thinking and apparently, in its outcomes. For the fact that the

membership of the conference in its entirety were establishment appointees of both federal and state governments, in addition to setting the list of problematics to be discussed, indeed divest the conference of a sovereign and independent status contrary to opposition and interest groups demands.

Fall-outs of government's deep involvement in the conference are one, delegates are representatives of government rather than of the people as they lack the people's mandate. The conference was, therefore, prone to discuss issues reflecting the mind of government. It may be difficult to fault this opinion because of the fact that the president and the governors meet regularly with the delegates to review on-goings in the conference (O'Neil, 2005a: 1). Consequently, the conference largely expected to reflect government interests rather than either the people's or national interest. Besides, the delegates were paid a sitting allowance of N=20,000 (US\$154) per day by government, in addition to non-pecuniary benefits such as the supply of all dailies and some magazines (Gbadamosi, 2005: 45). Two, government, as an interested party in the conference and its outcomes, cannot but tinker with the report of the conference, which has to be submitted to the president who originated it, even without legislative authorization. A relevant question at this juncture, therefore, is that, can the Conference reduce the powers and tenure of the president and governors who nominated and funded the delegates? Can the immunity clause be removed in line with popular demands to the detriment of the interests of President Obasanjo and the 36 state governors? Like all previously established constitutional engineering conferences since the Murtala/Obasanjo regime, the president is also expected to critically analyse the implications of the report for all concerned before his final endorsement.

THE CONFERENCE'S OUTCOMES AND LEGITIMACY CRISIS

The Conference has concluded its committee session while final decision on all issues on its agenda are expected to be taken at plenary and final sessions. The plenary session was thrice postponed because of deep and irreconcilable divisions on contentious issues such as rotational presidency and resource control. The

issues of resource control and the demand by the South-South geo-political zone for 25% derivation on its resources have pitched the North against the South-South particularly, and the South generally, as the South-West and South-East have taken sides with the South-South, thereby re-enacting the old North-South dichotomy in the nation's conflictual political relations. The attendant irreconcilable posturing by the North and South has made the holding of the plenary session impossible and has, therefore, put further discussions in the conference on hold.

More worrisome, however, is the legitimacy crisis the conference has sustained. Assuming that the deliberations of the conference are tension-free and lacking in irreconcilable logjams, the emergence of the conference is shrouded in legal contradictions and constitutional aberration. The conference lacks legal existence in the nation's constitution, and neither does it enjoy parliamentary support. The conference is not authorized by the National Assembly, and it did not approve its funding (Semenitari, 2005: 27). Implying that the financing of the conference is not appropriated. The president is, therefore, funding the conference illegally, and thereby committing an impeachable offence.

The conference lacks the people's mandate in its entirety. This can be viewed from three perspectives. First, governments handpicked the delegates and hence they are regarded as government stooges whose sole aim will be to protect official interests rather than national or people's interests. Debates and decisions are, therefore, expected to be teleguided officially, while the final outcomes are subject to manipulations by government. Two, the National Assembly did not approve the inauguration, composition and funding of the conference, and it has consequently resolved not to have anything to do with the final report of the conference (Achenese, 2005: 62). The recommendations of the conference could, therefore, be seen as lacking in self-execution. The ground of its illegality has divested the conference of the powers, potency and competence to authoritatively resolve the national question. In its entirety, therefore, the conference is undemocratic without a force of law. Consequently, its decisions would be divested of a binding force. At best, therefore, its final recommendations can only serve a non-enforceable advisory power for the president on how to resolve the nation's contentious issues. Mean-

while, for government's over-bearing influence in the Conference, in a public opinion conducted by *The Guardian* (2005: 1-2) to gauge the degree of public confidence in the conference and its capacity to provide appropriate answers to the national questions, of the 1365 respondents randomly polled nation-wide, 1000 claimed that they had no confidence at all in the national dialogue. The crux of the respondents' lack of confidence in the conference, according to them, is the lack of free hands for the delegates (ibid).

Three, and which is of greater concern is the acceptability of the conference's outcomes to all shades of opinion within (and outside) the country. The conference groans under a barrage of criticism from opposition political parties, groups including Academic Staff of Universities Union (ASUU) and notable political actors including Anthony Enahoro, Wole Soyinka, Gani Fawehinmi, Balarabe Musa, Abubakar Umar, Ibrahim Adesanya, and Muhammadu Buhari to mention a few. The coming of these notable figures against government is described as a "granite coalition" (Adedigba, 2005: 8). The coalition of opposition and fringe groups under the aegis of Pro-Sovereign National Conference Group (PRONACO) have rejected the conference in its entirety for lack of its popular support and sovereign powers, and, therefore, proposed to convocate an alternative conference with sovereign powers, and with deliberations covering all issues without imposing no-go areas (Oladesu, 2005: 5). In addition, conferees are expected to be appointed by the people themselves.

PRONACO'S resolve to arrange an alternative conference may be best seen as merely reflecting the condemnation by the informed sections of the polity, opposition and interest groups of the lack of sovereign status of government's national dialogue. It is difficult to fathom other explanations for its proposed alternative conference for the varied obstacles confronting such exercise. First, the Police had to authorize such a non-official forum. It is doubtful if the Nigeria Police will give permit for the gathering, which is envisaged to constitute a platform to lampoon government unendingly. Second, how would the outcomes of such opposition conference be executed? What is the framework for executing the decisions of the conference? PRONACO has no constitutional or govern-mental framework to implement its recommendations or will it submit its reports to the incumbent regime for execution?

It is unthinkable that government will implement an opposition agenda since the two are not working in tandem. It can, therefore, be concluded that PRONACO's conference may end up being an exercise in futility and a mere adventurism. Third is the implication of an alternative conference for national security and stability. The PRONACO conference will no doubt be an all-comers forum. It is the fear that hoodlums, political thugs, ethnic militias, street urchins (area boys), saboteurs, students, extremists and those who have varied grudges against the government such as drug barons, corrupt politicians and public officials and economic and finance criminals being tried under President Obasanjo's anti-corruption policy may hijack the forum from the "well intentioned" conveners and thereby stir-up mayhem and undermine societal and national security. The nation may not be able to afford this trauma, particularly with the adverse United States Intelligence Security Report that Nigeria is not safe because of endemic ethno-religious conflicts, which have made the nation vulnerable to disintegration within a short term (Osuntokun, 2005: 44).

Already, disagreements among the varied geopolitical groups over some contentious issues have polarized the nation further and deepened the existing inter-ethnic cleavages undermining the unity and stability of the nation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The deep divisions, controversies and stalemate that emerge from the National Political Reforms Conference are reflections of the divided character of the Nigerian State. The potency of the conference to address and redress the divisive national issues is very weak considering the extreme and irreconcilable positions assumed on issues of resource control, derivation and rotational presidency, among others. The conference, more than anything else, has exacerbated primordial and sub-national loyalty, which has since independence denied the nation of the needed over-arching sense of loyalty and nationalism.

National loyalty is further undermined by the presentation of regional and sectional agendas in the conference. Agendas on the banners of South West (Yoruba) South East (Igbo), the North (Arewa), Middle Belt and South - South (Niger Delta), and from groups such as the women

agenda were presented to the conference with different, incompatible demands. The sectional demands are merely championing primordial, sub-national interests, which have re-awakened and re-fuelled ethnic and sectional consciousness in the polity. Ironically, no group is projecting a non-regional/non-sectional, national agenda. The Nigerian agenda/national interest is totally subsumed, and hence the sharp sectional divides among the delegates on issues. The championing of regional agendas and the uncompromising, no-retreat stand on some contentious issues show that the survival and unity of the nation occupy background space in the minds of the delegates. It equally manifests the nation's lack of tradition for bargaining, compromise, consensus and national strategy for managing and resolving national crisis.

The exclusion of the external dimension of the nation's problematics in the Dialogue's agenda, has weakened its capacity to address the nation's problems. The weak and distorted character of the Nigerian state is externally motivated by virtue of its colonization, and imposition on the different ethnic groups, of the Nigerian state by the British colonialists, while the former constrained its development take-off, the latter made nation building very difficult. Originally, the British colonialists never supported a united Nigeria. In fact, Britain contributed to the weak and fragile sovereignty the nation currently suffers as it had before independence promoted inter-regional tension, disharmony and marginality through election rigging and manipulation of census figures for northern Nigeria (Akinkuotu, 2005: 33). According to Harold Smith, a former colonial officer in Nigeria, the British colonialists deliberately, by design, skewed the political landscape in favour of the north, and at another time, had expected Nigeria to break up (Omotunde and Osifo-Whiskey, 2005: 29). Besides, the alien origin of the Nigerian nation, external forces including the West and multinational corporations, promote under-development, and sabotage of the national economy. This they do by encouraging capital flight through corruption. It is noted that £220 billion have been stolen by Nigerian leaders between 1960 and 1999 (*The Editor*, 2005: 72). The stolen wealth are kept in Western vaults. Attempts to repatriate loots from foreign banks are being frustrated by the West, particularly the Swiss government, which has

refused to release the stolen wealth kept in its banks by the late General Sanni Abacha despite its Supreme Courts ruling authorizing the repatriation to the Nigerian government (Obasanjo, 2005: 1-2).

The conference has also failed to discuss the forging of a new image for Nigeria abroad. Outside the shores of Nigeria, the green passport implies that the holder is a potential criminal, a fraudster and a drug pusher. Re-inventing the nation's image, therefore, remains a great challenge in the attempts for national rebirth and re-construction.

The convocation of a sovereign national conference (SNC) saddled with the needed legitimacy and genuine powers remains a better framework for addressing the nation's problems. Yet, the leadership has phobia for such empowered forum. Why then is the nation's leadership fearful of a sovereign conference? Despite the popular demands for SNC, the leaders have aversion for it because of some known precedents across the globe.

The Nigerian leadership is quite aware of the adverse effects of SNC in some countries of Africa, notably; Benin Republic, Gabon, Chad, Mali, Togo, Niger, Madagascar and Zaire. One of the consequences was the removal of incumbent governments (Babawale, op. cit: 4). In other regions, such as Eastern Europe, SNC had led to national disintegration as the cases of former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. The survival of the Obasanjo presidency, and probably, that of the nation, therefore, poses a serious dilemma and constitutes a militating force against the convocation of SNC by the regime, which fears either the known or unknown decisive consequences.

Finally, is the conclusion that the Obasanjo regime's national conference suffers incapacity to resolve the protracted national questions for its lack of popular support and legitimacy, and the irreconcilable differences among the different sub-nationalities. The latter effect has resulted in the eventual collapse, inconclusive and non-consensus recommendations. The conference has failed to provide acceptable resolutions to the sensitive and vexatious issues such as resource allocation, power rotation, oil derivation, re-consideration of immunity enjoyed by the president and governors from criminal prosecutions. The Conference predictably, retained the two-term of four years each for the president

and governors (Ibrahim, 2005: 2). The resolutions proposed for the national questions in the conference recommendations are further divested of a level of legitimacy and credibility by the conference's chairman, Justice Niki Tobi, for allowing only motions for the adoption of its recommendations while counter - motions were disallowed (ibid). The vexatious implications of this action, are that, the mode of adoption of the recommendations was not democratic and two, the recommendations are not popular and probably it could have been defeated by a counter - motion. The Nigerian state may, therefore, remain under pressure, strains and stresses until the contending issues including ethnic contestations over power rotation and resource control, sectional marginality and violent religious rivalry are genuinely converted and resolved amicably in such a way that justice is seen as credibly done in the federal system. For instance, the failure to amicably resolve the oil derivation crisis with the south-south oil-rich zone has escalated the uneasiness in the Niger Delta region with the militant youths threatening renewed attacks on the state and oil multinationals in the area (O'Neil, 2005b: 40). Until these contradictions are resolved, the desired national harmony and unity will not be achieved, while the agitations for a sovereign national conference would be persistently louder.

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