

Appendix 13:

Address by His Excellency, Alhaji (Dr.) Abdullahi Adamu, (*Sarkin Yakin Keffi*) Executive Governor of Nasarawa State, Delivered at the Northern Peace Conference, Kaduna, Wednesday, December 1, 2004.

This distinguished gathering of the great stars in the northern firmament is the first of its kind in recent times. God, in His infinite mercy, has brought us here and to Him we must render our gratitude. We are but instruments in the hands of God. May He continue to use us as the instruments of peace and progress in the north in particular and the Federal Republic of Nigeria in general.

I am truly privileged to address this distinguished gathering of northern leaders. This privilege should not be misconstrued as a claim on my part to possess greater wisdom than anyone of you. It would be unwise of me to even entertain such a satanic thought in the midst of this distinguished gathering of former heads of state, military top brass, old and new breed politicians of timbre and calibre, technocrats, academics of towering intellect, and our revered royal fathers. Let me extend to you a very warm personal welcome to this momentous gathering; a gathering in search of peace but perhaps more importantly, in search of the lost soul of the north. It has come at the nick of time.

The organisers of this forum deserve our special commendation. They put in a lot of time and effort to bring all of us here. They were driven to make the sacrifices because they too believe the time has come for northern leaders to seek the truth, speak the truth, accept the truth and face the truth among themselves. This forum must be a watershed in the new spirit of oneness in the north. We must give it all we have got to get the best there is. It is said that man is the architect of his fortune. Let us be the good architects of a new northern edifice of unity and brotherhood. If this gathering achieves its objectives, as we all sincerely hope it will, future generations of northerners will look back to this day and remember all of us with fondness and appreciation. We too would similarly remember this day with a gratified sense of achievement. We are here because we share a common purpose; that purpose being our individual recognition of the historical responsibility that fate has thrust upon our shoulders as leaders in our individual rights in this part of the country. Leadership is a burden. Brave men and women bear it with fortitude. So, must we.

The *search for peace* is a commitment to progress. Peace is critical to all human societies. Its absence in a society has serious implications and enormous consequences for it. But we cannot search for peace outside ourselves. Peace resides in the mind of men and women. Wars and disagreements begin in the mind. The same mind that hatches wars and disagreements also hatches peace. A meaningful search for peace must begin with an honest admission that there is absence of peace. Let us so admit. Things have fallen apart. The north has become a killing field as a consequence of growing social, ethnic and religious intolerance. Since the return to civil rule a little over five and half years ago, Kano, Adamawa, parts of Plateau, particularly, Jos and Yelwa, the southern senatorial district of Nasarawa State and Kaduna were convulsed in inter-ethnic and religious crises; hundreds of people died, private and public properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed. The crisis in parts of Plateau State forced the federal government to

impose a six month emergency rule on the state as part of efforts to stem the violence and prevent it from spreading to other parts of the country. Thousands of victims of these crises are still nursing the wounds. The guns are silent at the moment but we must not give in to complacency. We must take concrete steps to arrest the situation. If we fail, the north would be doomed and with it the fate of our people. History and future generations of northerners will hold us duly responsible. None of us will escape the harsh judgment of history.

We must get back to those times when our tribes and religions were instruments of unity and peaceful co-existence and not a source of discord and strife. The Premier of the then Northern Region and our revered leader, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardaunan Sokoto, of blessed memory, always spoke fondly and genuinely of the north as a family. He saw himself as a father of the region. And he showed that he was an ideal political father. The sense of family infused all his actions and decisions. He promoted a northern family in which the sons of the rich and the sons of the poor ate from the communal bowl like blood brothers. He brought the sons of royalty and the sons of commoners together to forge a common purpose in the Federal Republic. He promoted religious tolerance and inter-ethnic harmony. He sought for the best for the region. He fought for what was best for the people. For us, he gave his life in the prime of his political career.

The house he built has more or less fallen. The region is in disarray because the bond of the northern family has snapped. The north has degenerated into an atomistic society in perpetual conflict with itself; a vampire sucking its own blood. It has been the north against the north. Even northern military men turned their guns against the north. They toppled the Gowon administration in 1975; staged abortive coup against General Murtala Muhammed in which he lost his life in 1976. They overthrew President Shehu Shagari in 1983. They might have been motivated by what they considered to be the national interest rather than by their personal ambition. But did their action in any way serve the political and social interests of the north? Or, indeed, did they do more for the north than those they toppled?

Never in the history of this country has the north been as polarised as it is now. It is polarised along political, ethnic, religious and economic lines. The gap between Moslems and Christians is widening by the day. The same applies to the growing social inequality in the region. The super rich and the poor in this region lead parallel lives. This growing inequality is a perfect recipe for social discontent. History has taught us that the pauperisation of the people ultimately leads to social upheavals in which the rich become the victims. The rich among us must watch their back if they do nothing to ameliorate the condition of the poor.

The concept of the core north and the Middle Belt is something we cannot run away from. Some of us believe that the attempt by the people of the Middle Belt region, also known as the North-Central zone, to create their own identity is inimical the northern interests. Its leaders are accused of attempting to divide the north. It seems to me that we have judged them without trying to find out what their problems or their worries are. This agitation has a long political history dating back to the years before independence. The people of this zone made representations to Willink Commission set up the colonial authorities in 1957 to examine the fears of the minorities throughout the country. It would be wrong to suggest that this is a new political development. In any case, their agitation did not stop the people of this region from

being true and committed northerners. They have always stood up for the north. If there are fears about the agitation in any quarters, the most sensible thing is to discuss these fears and find a remedy to them.

The Northern Peace Forum is a clarion call on northern political, business, traditional and community leaders to rise up and shoulder the task of restoring the house the Saradauna built. This meeting raises the hope that we have heard and answered the clarion call. The house will not be ruined by either the short sightedness or the self-centredness of any one of us. We must draw the line in the sand at this forum.

This distinguished gathering must not begin in hope but end in despair. It must not be a talking shop in which each person must strive to have his say and then we go home empty-handed, unsure of what we have said; unsure of what we stand for, and unsure of where we go from here. ***Let us be prepared to tell one another the bitter home truth where necessary. Let us have the grace to accept the truth. This forum is not an inquisition. No one is on trial here. As we begin this meeting, let us also bear in mind that the failure of a society is not the failure of the gods but of men and women who choose not to call a spade by its correct name. The times call for brutal frankness. Let us be frank. Conscience is wounded by dishonesty and pretensions.***

More than forty years ago when the then Western Region was torn by political crises, the late musician, Herbert Ogunde, composed a special song addressed to his people, the Yoruba. ***Perhaps the most memorable phrase in that song was: "Yoruba, ronnu." It means Yorubas, think. Let us borrow his advice and say to ourselves and our people: People of the north, think.*** That is the theme of my address to this august gathering. It is a wake up call. The time has come for us and our people to wake up to the new realities in the nation's politics. The time has come ***for us and our people to forge a common, united front.*** The time has come for us and our people to define and articulate our broad social, economic and political objectives within the context of our federalism. In the context of the inter-play of social and political forces in Nigeria, we are all representatives of our states or geo-political zones. Therefore, let no one think that he can ascend the national ladder of power entirely on his own merit. This region is the step ladder for all of us. If we destroy this ladder, we destroy our chances of going anywhere in Nigerian politics.

Our gathering is a fair indication as to what is fundamentally wrong with Northern Nigeria in contemporary Nigerian politics. We represent diverse interest groups in the region. We have here members of the Northern Governors' Forum, members of Arewa Consultative Forum, members of the forum of the national assembly and the traditional institution as well as other lesser known interest or pressure groups. This rainbow collection is not a thing of beauty. It lacks the colour blend of the rainbow. Each of these groups purports to be the authentic voice of the north. Each group takes the liberty to define the northern agenda within the context of its motive. With the multiplicity of voices in the north, our people no longer know who speaks for them. They are confused by the many voices; they are bewildered by the many self-acclaimed leaders. They feel like sheep without a shepherd.

The Babel of voices is a symptom of a deeper malaise inherent in all societies where true political and traditional leadership is either lacking or has broken down. Such a society becomes

a periwinkle kingdom in which everyone is a king. This has become the lot of the north. Individuals seek to carve out empires for themselves as local ethnic or religious champions. They preach hate and exaggerate our differences. Their inordinate pursuit of personal interests and agenda is at the expense of the interests of the north and its people. We talk across purposes and we act across purposes. The northern voice has more or less become a thin, whining voice. The rest of the country now feels inclined to ignore it or treat it with contempt. This region, like the famous Egyptian newspaper, Al-Ahram, was once dubbed *mai fada, aji*. When the north spoke, the rest of the country listened. It is not the same today. I have just told you why.

The political, social and economic interests of the north are ill-served by the present multiplicity of voices. We must have one voice and one voice only. That voice should emerge from our deliberations at this forum. This must be the beginning of a sincere effort to pull us back from the precipice and make the north what Sir Ahmadu Bello sacrificed his life for - a people united and bound with the cords of a common cause. We have repeatedly demonstrated the strength our unity and sense of national purpose each time our nation was on the brink. The crisis of the middle sixties which led the country into a thirty month civil comes easily to mind. If the north had had divergent voices and pulled in different directions, this country would have been history. Keeping Nigeria one would have been a task not done; a mission impossible.

Our core values as a people are surely being eroded. Support for and loyalty to authority, respect for our elders, honesty and integrity form the core of our value systems. Our tradition upbringing in the north makes no room for selfishness or self-aggrandizement. These core values gave the north the moral leadership of this great country. Sadly, a new generation of northerners regards these virtues of innocence as blasé. The core value system of a people is the foundation on which its progress is built. I see the foundation shaking in the storm of indifference. We must bring our youth home from the wilderness of radicalism and make them drink from the fountain of eternal wisdom of our core values.

Our country is now forty-four years old as an independent nation. Two important events have shaped a new national outlook. One was the military involvement in politics and the other, the Nigerian civil war. Both have had a profound and lasting effect on every aspect of our national life. ***Indeed, it is right to view Nigerian politics as a product of two eras - the era before and the era after the civil war.*** The era before the civil war was the era of nationalist politics in which the first generation of our political leaders grappled with the problems and challenges of independence from colonial rule. The period was characterised by regional political rivalries, some of which resulted in intra-tribal clashes.

The era after the civil war, including the long period of military rule, brought with it a new national political complexion in which the military, technocrats and academicians are major players at state and national levels. Post-civil war Nigeria is a vastly different country from the pre-civil war Nigeria. In general terms, we are still contending with the same problems such as tribalism, the locus of power, etc. But these problems have taken on new, almost intractable complexities. The creation of states did not destroy tribal loyalty. It accentuated it. Our national political interests are more than ever before defined strictly in terms of tribal interests. There is hardly a pretence to nationalism. Where the states are ethnically homogenous, they are regarded as merely administrative units of tribal interests.

The era after the civil war has been an era of identity crisis for the north. Its tragedy is that the first generation of political leaders of the other three regions, East, West and the Mid-West, outlived their contemporaries in the north by between twenty and twenty-four years. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Dennis Osadebay guided their respective regions through much of the years of the military regime and the changing times in our national politics. They defined and determined the political interests of the Yoruba and the Igbo respectively. We had no one to define our political interests and the direction we should follow. Self-preservation being the first law in nature, many of us found it expedient then to repudiate our first generation of political leaders and what they stood for. We denounced them. The other regions glorified and even deified their first generation of political leaders. We turned our political heroes into villains.

The political crisis following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, witnessed the birth of two major ethnic pressure groups, namely, Afenifere for the Yoruba in the south-west and Ohaneze in the south-east. Their primary brief is to define, pursue, promote and defend the rights and the political, economic and other interests of the Yoruba and the Igbo respectively in our national politics. And we must concede that they are doing a great job.

The north saw the handwriting on the wall. It responded to this development with the setting up of the *Arewa Consultative Forum*. The founding fathers of the forum told the world that the forum was non-political. In less than one year, however, they changed their tune. They decided the forum should be fully political and to define a political agenda for the north, including who its candidate for national leadership should be. This created a crisis of focus for the forum. However, we must admit that the founding fathers of the forum, all of whom are men of timbre and calibre, were motivated by a genuine desire to unite the north and strengthen its voice in national affairs. The forum has provided a counter-weight to Afenifere and Ohaneze. I congratulate the forum and its leaders.

ACF is not essentially a tribal pressure group because the north, unlike the south-west and the south-east, is ethnically heterogeneous. This is, perhaps its main weakness. Its leaders cannot speak out or react to national issues with the same passion with which Afenifere and Ohaneze pursue their respective tribal political agenda. Afenifere sees itself as the godfather of Alliance for Democracy, AD, which is an entirely south-west political party. It dictates to the party on all national issues as they affect the interests of the Yoruba. But its grip has become tenuous because AD is confined to one state, Lagos, alone.

I draw your kind attention to a major political development in the south-west in the 2003 general elections. The region came in from the cold. President Olusegun Obasanjo has done what the great Awo could not do. He brought the Yoruba into the mainstream of Nigerian politics. For the first time in the history of this country, a political party other than that formed by Awo or his supporters, is the ruling party in the south-west. You may say that the president and his people have seen the light. It confirms my belief that a region or zone that does not understand and move with the dynamics of our contemporary national politics is doomed to remain a lone spectator. Pluralism may be the soul of democratic politics but pragmatism is its own political reward.

The north is in the eye of the storm. The agitations for power shift and resource control in its variants such as true federalism or fiscal federalism, all of which are popular in all three geo-political zones in the south, are directed squarely at the north. They feel quite strongly that the north has cheated them in all respects. It denied them the leadership of the country. They also believe that the north used its years in power to deprive them of their own resource, which is crude oil, the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. The average southerner believes that northern leaders stole the oil wealth or diverted it to develop the region at the expense of the areas that produce the wealth. They believe that every road in the north is a dual carriage way and every hamlet has all the modern amenities such as potable water, electricity, etc. This rather popular fiction has permeated every stratum in the south. They hate us for what they believe we and our leaders have done to them. The 1990 abortive coup against the Babangida administration showed this most clearly. In the coup announcement written by the coup leaders from the oil-producing states and read by the late Major Gwaza Orka, certain northern states were excised from Nigeria. The agitation for resource control ended with victory for its proponents with the abolition of the on shore-off shore dichotomy. The north is the great loser. President Obasanjo was opposed to the abolition of the on shore-off shore dichotomy because he knew it would be to the detriment of the north. In ignorance of his motive, many of us here even attacked him for his principled stand. Yet this is the man we tend to portray as a hater of the north. Even with this victory, we must not be naïve enough to think that it is over. We must give a thought to some possible developments such as a constitutional amendment granting each state the right to control its mineral resources. If that happens, all the northern states would be impoverished in one fell sweep. Let no one think that it cannot happen.

Anyone who talks to the north about power shift is preaching to the converted. We believe in it as a deliberate national policy that would best give every part of this country a sense of belonging. In the 1999 general elections, the north effected power shift with the election of Chief Obasanjo as president. This was not merely an attempt to appease the south-west over June 12. In that election, the north rejected its own son in favour of the late Chief Moshood Abiola from the south-west. We thus demonstrated our commitment to power shift from the famous June 12 election.

In the early years of his administration, *Chief Obasanjo* was regarded with suspicion by his own people as a northern stooge. They believe the north put him there to do its own bidding. I believe the north did not have a hidden agenda when it persuaded the chief to run for the nation's highest political office. When he had some problems with the national assembly it was promptly interpreted as evidence that he had refused to be the stooge and had to be removed. The national assembly was not doing the bidding of the north.

Unfortunately, we were more or less compromised. Some of us were at the same time complaining that the president had neglected and marginalised the north. We have never been told by those who drafted the chief into the presidential race what they bargained with him on behalf of the north. In complaining about him, we created the impression that the chief held power at the behest of the region and that it could take it away from him when it wanted. The impeachment move against him by the House of Representatives in 2002 further implicated the north in the suspicion of a hidden agenda. If the impeachment succeeded, the north stood to benefit because a northerner would have succeeded him. The north did not weigh the implication

of that eventually. But anyone with a modicum of our national political nous could see that the country would once again be thrown into a needless crisis whose outcome none of us could have predicted.

The attempt to deny Chief Obasanjo a second term in office was also spare headed by the north which also forced the PDP to go back on a subsisting party understanding and declare the race a free for all. Two northerners eventually contest the primaries against him. Why was the north behaving like a petulant child? The north cannot lead if it cannot follow.

The special mark of our cultural training is to respect and support those in positions of authority. ***Our religion teaches that power comes from God. It also teaches us that God cannot make mistakes. It is our moral and religious duty to support the leader that God chooses. The will of Allah must always remain supreme. That is the foundation of our religious faith.***

What did Chief Obasanjo do wrong? In what way or ways did he go against the political, social, economic and other vital interests of the north? ***Was there an agreement between him and the north that he reneged? Perhaps, we may never get answers to these and similar questions.*** The absence of answers more than anything weakened our entitlement to complaints. Moreover, in complaining of neglect, we gave the impression that the two years of Chief Obasanjo had such a negative effect on the north that it lost everything it gained when northerners ruled the country. We know this is not true.

The north remains a major player in the politics of this great nation. It has the advantage of number. No one can rule this country without the full and active support of the north. But this must not be interpreted to mean that the north reserves the right to appoint and fire the country's president. A Nigerian leader becomes such with the consent of the majority of all Nigerians. But politics being a game of give and take, the north must at all times articulate its interests and bargain for their defence and protection in a situation of power shift. The north benefits nothing from throwing its weight around as a champion of power shift. Power shift is not an end in itself. The north has to strategise and bargain and ensure that it gets its fair share from its political support for whoever seeks to lead the country. I am sure that if this had happened in 1999, it would have been both right and proper for the north to hold Chief Obasanjo to his commitment or his own part of the bargain.

In focusing on power as more or less an end in itself, we tend to notice that the north faces the grim prospects of being marooned on an island forgotten by time. Our region is outgunned in every aspect of our national life. There is a progressive widening of the gap in education, the economy and social development between the north and the south.

The north is still the most educationally-backward region in the country. We have impressive progress in the number of primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in the region. The numbers alone do not tell the correct story. In 1963, there were only 52 secondary schools in the region. Today, there are hundreds of them. The degree of our educational backwardness at the beginning of the 21st century is graphically illustrated by this: Akwa Ibom State has 98 per cent literacy rate; Sokoto State has twelve per cent. Zamfara has about two per cent; Oyo has 88 per cent. The number of candidates from Imo who take JAMB annually is more than the number of candidates

from six northern states put together. Only about ten to fifteen per cent of our secondary school leavers gain admission into universities through JAMB. Even if you add the number of students who make it through preliminary programmes, the figure remains very low compared to the south where between sixty and 80 per cent of the students gain admission. In most of the tertiary institutions in the north, southern students outnumber northern students by as much as three to one.

This is a recipe for disaster waiting to happen to the north. In effect, it means that we shall continue to depend on either other regions or foreigners for our manpower needs. It takes something away from our sense of independence.

We cannot expect to compete socially and economically with other regions with limited manpower resources. In his days, the Sardauna committed a full one-third of the annual budget of the regional government to education. He initiated crash training programmes to raise the first crop of our technocrats and educationists. The Kano School of Hygiene became an emergency medical college for the training of northern doctors. Some of our first generation of doctors were products of this school. It achieved its purpose. The manpower challenge is a major challenge for us. A dependent region is a powerless region. If, for every northern professor the south has fifty, no one needs to be told how truly bad the situation is for us.

Our educational backwardness now reflects comprehensively in the capacity of the north to compete with the south. The telecommunication industry is one of the fastest growing and certainly, the most powerful in the world. The so-called GSM revolution has transformed the nation's communication landscape. But the north is not even a medium player in this vital industry. The entire industry is firmly in the hands of southerners. I leave you to think of the implications for this region.

The north is not even a medium player in the banking industry either. The support of the banking industry is critical to economic, social and industrial development. How can our business men and women and our industrialists compete with their southern counterparts in the absence of the support of the banking system?

Our situation in the news media industry is no different. From the electronic to the print media, the north is fatally out-gunned. The south, particularly the Lagos-Ibadan axis is saturated with electronic and print media where individuals own these vitals organs of public information. There is no major government or privately-owned newspaper or news magazine in the entire north. ***The New Nigerian, which was once the most authoritative newspaper in the country, is hardly the newspaper we used to know and cherish and which alone took on southern parts in the defence of northern and national interests. Under-funded and under-staffed, we cannot expect the newspaper to do much better than it is doing now. Where are The Reporter and The Democrat today? They are defunct. We are left with The Trust group of newspapers which are doing their commendable best to let the northern voice be heard.***

Is there something, I wonder, that makes it impossible for newspapers to survive in this part of the country? Perhaps, the answer lies in our stubborn refusal to appreciate the role that the news media play in the development of societies and in the contest for power, particularly in a

democracy. The balance of power or the balance of terror is a stabilising factor in every society. I do not argue for a press war. I argue for freedom from other people's mass media in order that we may be heard.

How can we explain our neglect of agriculture, once the mainstay of the national economy? Despite this, the north remains the major food producer in the country. We could do more if we stop paying lip service to agriculture. South Africa has more developed industrial and commercial economy than Nigeria. It is rich in and fully exploits its solid mineral resources. It may surprise some of us to know that that country earns 50 per cent of its foreign exchange from agriculture. Does foreign exchange from agricultural produce smell any less sweet than that from crude oil export?

As we know, the north is blessed with solid mineral resources. My own state, Nasarawa alone, has more than fifteen different solid mineral resources, ranging from gold to marble. The late head of state, General Sani Abacha, created the ministry of solid minerals for the express purpose of exploiting them for the benefit of the north. But up to this moment, there is no inventory of our solid mineral resources. Under our laws, all mineral resources in the federation are vested in the federal government. No state, therefore, can do what it wishes with its solid minerals. If we believe the exploitation of our minerals is in our best interests, then we ought to lobby the federal government to make their inventory so that serious-minded investors can come in.

It should be quite clear to all of us that we face enormous challenges as leaders of the north. The challenges are made more poignant by the fact that legacies of the Sardauna in all areas have crumbled. These legacies died long before this current crop of northern leaders. I refer, in particular to my brother state governors. Some of our elders blame us for what has happened to what Sir Ahmadu left behind. The premier died 38 years ago. Some of these governors were not born then. Most of those who were born were either in primary or secondary schools. In other words, none of us was in a position to play any part in sustaining the legacies of the Sardauna. We cannot be blamed. But we need not trade blame. It is sufficient for me to point out that together we share vicarious responsibilities for what happened.

We have a chance to recover our lost treasures. This meeting can set an agenda for tackling these challenges in the areas of education, agriculture, the exploitation of our solid mineral resources, banking, the news media and the telecommunications industry. Let us remove the fence on which we had sat on for so long. Any delay in taking steps to recover our lost innocence and treasures takes nearer the brink.

In 1961, the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, in his capacity as governor-general, undertook a tour of the northern region. At a state banquet hosted for him by the Sardauna, he said: The "advancement of the north will be a blessing to Nigeria as a whole." Think about it. Thank you and God bless.