

*Appendix 52:*

The Sultan, CEDAW and Our Values (1)

By Sonnie Ekwowusi, 07.17.2007 ThisDay

At the meeting of Northern Emirs, Imams, members of the Jama'atu Nasril Islam and prominent Northern Islamic scholars on 2nd July at the Arewa House, Kaduna, Alhaji Muhammadu Sa'ad Abubakar 111, the Sultan of Sokoto, raised an alarm over certain International Conventions and foreign lifestyles, which if adopted in Nigeria, would destroy our cherished values and beliefs. He urged the Northern lawmakers at the National Assembly not to accede to the domestication of any treaty or convention without first ascertaining their implication to the cherished values of the people. Specifically the Sultan made reference to the on-going conspiracy to get the National Assembly to domesticate the controversial Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). His words: "In passing the bills and making laws, including the CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) currently before the National Assembly, the sensibility of our religion and culture must be respected at all times"

One cannot agree less with the Sultan. As the preserver of the great cultural heritage of the North; as purveyor of great Islamic values and as a respected traditional ruler in the country favoured by many across the geo-political, ethnic, religious and cultural divides as the man we need to forge ahead in the task of building one virile Nigeria devoid of religious violence, the Sultan's alarm should not be dismissed with a wave of the hand. You will recall that about two weeks ago, Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka raised a similar alarm that the West is destroying other nations by importing its bad values to them. Also, if you have been a keen watcher of world events, you would have observed that over the years the West has been consistently ambushing Africa and trying to throttle it to death with all kinds of strange Western values and lifestyles. Last year, aided and abetted by some foreigners, some sick Nigerians took to the streets in agitation for the legalization of homosexuality in Nigeria, all in the name of right. These days one can hardly watch any entertainment program on TV because it is filled with trash. Look at the shameful revealing dress of our daughters of Eve, all in the name of freedom; all in the name of modernity. This is the conflict between modernity, our traditional values and religious values. Agreed, culture is dynamic, but it is suicidal for Nigeria to continue to swallow wrong Western values hook line and sinker. If Nigeria must grow, it must grow with its own cultural heritage. Our democracy will remain stunted unless it is firmly rooted in our cultural values. The American democracy thrives on American heritage championed by Winston Churchill and other American founding fathers. If I may ask: where is the Nigerian heritage? Is it in the immoral foreign TV programs? Is it in the campaign to "liberate" Nigerian women by depicting them as mere sex objects? Is it in the campaign to make abortion legal in Nigeria so that any school girl can freely walk into any abortion clinic and secretly procure abortion without the consent of her parents? These are some of the questions we have to tackle as we reflect on the words of the Sultan.

Europe and America are becoming extinct due to the scarcity of children to replace the dying and ageing population. With its bourgesening population, the Chinese are ruling the world at the moment. If you go to Idumota market, Alaba International, Onitsha main market, the Chinese are there upstaging and outwitting our local traders. Europe and America are dying out. In fact, it is estimated that by 2050 Europe would be littered with octogenarians with nobody to cater for them. Do we want to be like Europe and America without young people in the streets and in churches and mosques? Why are we afraid of children? Are children our problems, or bad leadership? Last year Senator Daisy Ehanire-Danjuma sponsored an abortion bill otherwise called reproductive health bill which was dismissed by the National Assembly. Interestingly enough, the same abortionists who supported Danjuma in her failed bid to get abortion legalized in Nigeria under the Obasanjo government, are the same ones now clamouring for the domestication of CEDAW.

As usual, they argue that CEDAW has nothing to do with the legalization of abortion. As a lawyer and a writer who has attended most of the international conferences where the idea of legalization of abortion, homosexuality, prostitution and contraceptives in Nigeria was mooted, I think I am qualified to explain the real meaning of CEDAW and reproductive health. At one of these conferences, Professor Rebecca Cook, a CEDAW advocate, who publicly announced to the bemused participants that she castrated herself to avoid having children, lamented that she couldn't understand why the Nigerian cultural and religious values pose obstacle to the sexual enjoyment of women. On its face value, CEDAW contains many laudable articles aimed at abolishing or modifying existing cultural laws and practices which discriminate against women or depict them as inferior to men. I argue that women are our mothers, wives, sisters, aunts, cousins etc and therefore it is highly condemnable to discriminate against our womenfolk. Besides, women share the same dignity and the same radical equality with men. With women as the Speakers of the House of Representatives of America and Nigeria ; with women occupying top leadership positions all over world, who is the mad man still bringing a case of inferiority against our womenfolk? Therefore, I agree that all laws and cultural practices which portray women as inferior to men or as the property of their husbands should be jettisoned as the case of *Mojekwu V Mojekwu* loudly illustrates.

But regrettably the *raison d'être* of Cedaw, the main thrust of the 30-article CEDAW Convention, the whole life-wire of CEDAW is centered in articles 10(h), 12, 14(b) and 16 of CEDAW which are aimed at legalizing abortion, sterilization of women to control population, prostitution, under the soft language of family planning. Because of the strong cultural, legal and religious resistance to the promotion of certain repugnant Western values like abortion, sterilization of women etc, women liberators and radical feminists working in Africa have become adept at concealing abortion, sterilization of women inside International Conventions or concealing them in euphemistic expressions or coded languages so that nobody would detect what they are doing. For example, instead of using the word abortion, they prefer to use the highly deceptive concepts: pro-choice, family planning, women's health, safe motherhood, or adolescent/women reproductive rights. When Senator Danjuma brought the abortion bill last year, she came under the seemingly harmless phrase: National Institute of Reproductive Health Bill. In

fact, the word abortion was never mentioned in her Bill. But the intelligent members of the National Assembly Health Committee were still able to unmask the hidden abortion agenda in the Bill and therefore dismissed it.

To understand the real meaning of CEDAW and how it works in countries that agree to ratify and domesticate it, we must have recourse to CEDAW General Recommendation 24, which can be downloaded from the Internet. In this Recommendation, we are told that there is a CEDAW Committee, which regulates the operation of CEDAW in countries that ratify and domesticate CEDAW. The CEDAW Committee affirms that access to abortion otherwise called Reproductive health is a basic right under CEDAW and that State Parties' compliance with article 12 of CEDAW is paramount to giving women unimpeded access to abortion. It further states that all women should be allowed access to abortion clinics and be given contraceptives to terminate their pregnancies to promote their right to safe motherhood and equal right with men.

Over the years, this CEDAW Committee has become notorious for urging countries that ratify and domesticate CEDAW to decriminalize prostitution and abortion. Even though the CEDAW document itself does not specifically mention abortion, the CEDAW Committee, under the likeable phrase "family planning" or "reproductive right or health" has been promoting abortion in many countries. It is on record that the CEDAW Committee has pressurized 37 countries to liberalize their abortion laws.