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THE most significant issues of the Nigeria crisis—and the one most emphasized by foreign commentators—is the future of the Ibo people among their countrymen against whom most of them have been misled to fight.

Some of these commentators have argued, on wrong premise, that the civil war has generated in the minds of other Nigerian deep anti-Ibo feelings to such an extent that reconciliation is impossible.

It must be stated quite clearly that the civil war has not been directed against the Ibos as a people but against an unpatriotic and rebellious clique.

The future of the Ibos as a people is clear. They will live with their compatriots again in the peace and prosperity which served Nigeria so well for over half a century—the peace and prosperity in which Ibos, themselves, thrived magnificently in leading positions in business, education, the professions and the public services.

The Federal Military Government is determined to ensure that nothing prevents the re-intergration of the Ibo people into the Nigerian community in a wholesome manner, totally devoid of bitterness and rancour.

Sharing this determination with the Federal Government are the people of the country amidst whom the Ibos will live on their return. The Ibos can be sure of sympathy and understanding from other Nigerians.

Evidence of good intentions on the part of other Nigerians towards the Ibos can be found in the experience of those Ibos who did not respond to Ojukwu's call to break links with other parts of the country. Such Ibos can be found in all parts of the country, including the Northern States.

Ibos resident outside rebel control number over 2 million. In spite of provocations from Ojukwu's regime, other Nigerians have lived as peaceful neighbours with these Ibos. They go about their business unmolested and have equal rights with other Nigerians. Many of them responsible hold positions in both the public and private sectors of the Nigeria economy. *A number of Ibos represent the Federal Government in abroad such high capacities as Ambassadors.*

The Head of State, General Gowon, considers the unimpeded return of the Ibos into the Nigerian family the keystone of his policies and programmes.

In confirmation of General Gowon's position in this matter, the well-known British peer, Lord Hunt, conqueror of Everest, declared recently: 'I am convinced that he is a man of high ideals, deep sincerity and great humanity. He is not bent on genocide of the Ibos.'

Lord Hunt was speaking after leading a British relief mission to Nigeria.

He continued: 'I can deny from personal observations the allegations of ill-treatment or concentration camp conditions in the refugee camps in the Federal Areas.'

What is not easily recognized in the turbulent days of this crisis is that, although Ibo leaders planned to subvert their country, Ibos as a people are still acceptable in all parts of the Nigerian Federation and are still contributing their talents in no small measure to the advancement of their fatherland.

Mr Ukpabi Asika, the University Lecturer, who stepped forward in the thick of the national crisis to guide his Ibo compatriots to a better and happier future has taken over administrative control from the Army in liberated areas and brought succour to his people.

One of Africa's leading men of culture, Mr Ben Enwonwu, famous artist and sculptor and man of vision has called on his people to accept the spirit of reconciliation which is very evident in Nigeria today. Already more and more Ibos are responding to this call.

In a public statement, just before he returned to Lagos, Mr Enwonwu called for a new Ibo leadership which would seek the best interest of the Ibo people within one united Nigerian Federation. In Lagos, he has been enthusiastically welcomed by his old friends.

Abandoned Property

One fear which the Ibos may have about their future in the Nigerian Federation, is the recovery of abandoned property. In their hurried return to the former Eastern Nigeria at Ojukwu's behest, many of them left behind real and landed property in other parts of the country.

This fear has no basis, because the Federal and State Governments have made provisions for the maintenance and preservation of these properties until the return of their owners. For example in the Kano and Benue-Plateau States, the governments have set up caretaker committees to maintain these properties and collect rents on them on behalf of their rightful owners. Correct records and accounts are kept in respect of money

collected on such properties, and it will be a pleasant surprise to the owners that on their return substantial sums of money will be paid to them.

Job Opportunities

On their return to the Nigerian fold, Ibos will have equal job opportunities with other Nigerians. In most cases, posts previously held by Ibos in the Federal Public Service have been left unfilled in anticipation of the return of those who formerly occupied them.

The Federal Military Government has declared that Ibos who deserted their posts in the Federal Public Service would on their return be treated as officers returning from an indefinite period of leave without pay. This way, all their entitlements in the service as to seniority, pension and gratuity will not be affected.

Those Ibos in the services of the former Eastern Nigerian Government who are willing to serve their State, will be absorbed into the East-Central State Public Service. Already, Mr Ukpabi Asika, Administrator for the East-Central State's, liberated areas has reinstated a number of officers formerly serving the defunct East Nigeria Government.

Rehabilitation of displaced persons

The Nigerian civil war, like all wars, has brought suffering to many civilians. A number of people have been displaced from their homes by both the disturbances of 1966 and the civil war.

The problem of resettling these people is probably the greatest challenge facing the Federal Military Government. It appreciates the magnitude of this problem and has already set the machinery for tackling it into motion.

At the pivot of the Federal Military Government's rehabilitation programme is the National Rehabilitation Commission established early in 1968. The Commission is responsible for the co-ordination of the work of various Federal and State Government agencies charged with such matters as relief, resettlement, and rehabilitation of displaced persons, the custody and administration of abandoned property and the general rehabilitation of war damaged areas. A large amount of rehabilitation work is being undertaken in Ibo-speaking areas and concern displaced Ibos in the different parts of the country.

The Federal Military Government, in its rehabilitation programme, has stated its commitment to the following courses of action:

- (i) caring with the utmost compassion for the surviving victims of past disturbances and of present military operations;
- (ii) all soldiers, no matter on which side they fought in the civil war, will be rehabilitated and gainfully employed at the end of the military operations;
- (iii) those whose properties have been destroyed or damaged, as a result of civil disturbances are to be reasonably compensated;
- (iv) all those who fled from their normal places of residence or business will be resettled and assisted to make a fresh start;
- (v) all roads, bridges and public buildings which have been destroyed or damaged will be rebuilt.

These are great tasks and the Federal Military Government has allocated £1 million already to this programme. There is also the National Rehabilitation Appeal Board to which voluntary donations have already been made.

ONE NIGERIA BOND

To provide funds for national rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes, the Federal Military Government in January 1968 inaugurated a ONE NIGERIA BOND involving a mandatory deduction of five per cent from the salaries and wages of all Nigerian workers.

Similarly, Mr Ukpabi Asika, Administrator for the East-Central State launched a 'ONE SHILLING FUND'. As a gesture of goodwill, Nigerians from all the States in the country have been donating generously to the Fund.

It is significant to note that in the North-Western State, the Sultan of Sokoto has embarked on the collection of £100,000 towards the One Shilling Fund.

In the Surulere area of Lagos, blocks of flats were allocated to displaced persons brought down to Lagos from the war-affected areas. They live in free houses and are well provided for. These displaced persons live in a free atmosphere without fear of molestation. Many of them have already been provided with employment.

The safety and well-being of these displaced families as well as the experiences of other Ibos in the liberated areas are pointers to the future that awaits Ibos within the Nigerian Federation.

Reopening of Schools

Education is an important factor in the advancement of a people. Following the commencement of hostilities, schools and other educational institutions were closed in the former Eastern Nigeria by the rebel regime. In its rehabilitation programme, the Federal Military Government has given priority to the reopening of schools in the liberated areas.

Schools and colleges have reopened throughout the South-Eastern State and the Rivers State. Similar efforts have been made in the East-Central State.

In Onitsha, the Federal military authorities, in co-operation with the local people, have opened a school, designed to cater for technical students, also has a nursery attached.

Hospitals, medical centres and first-aid posts—apart from those maintained by the Red Cross and other relief bodies have been opened by the Federal Military Government. Hundreds of Ibo civilians receive medical attention from these posts daily.

The policy of the Federal Military Government, in respect of the future of the Ibos, was sufficiently emphasized at the Addis Ababa peace talks by the Federal delegation.

For easy reference they are reiterated here—

The Problem

“How can the people in the areas under the control of the other side be reintegrated into Nigeria? This formulation enables us to concentrate on the essentials and the problem is that of guarantees on the basis of one Nigeria. It is obvious that a different set of solutions will be inevitable if there are two sovereign countries.

Guarantees

- (i) “The Federal Government in a reunited Nigeria will not be a foreign government as it appears to the delegation on the other side at present. Ibos from the East-Central State will participate in the Federal Government on the same basis as people from other states in the executive, administrative, military, police, judicial and other aspects of government. The present composition of the civilian members of the Federal Executive Council is one Commissioner from each of the eleven states, for example—Chief Awolowo (West), J. S. Tarka (Benue-Plateau), Aminu Kano (Kano), Chief A. Enahoro (Mid-West). The only state not represented on the Federal Executive Council at

present is the East-Central State. A person will be appointed from the State into the Federal Executive Council. Such a person will be appointed Federal Commissioner with a portfolio as soon as possible. As in the other eleven states a Military Governor will, as soon as possible, be appointed to East-Central State. He will be an Ibo and will be a member of the Supreme Military Council on the same basis as the other military governors. Furthermore, consistent with the national aims of the Federal Government and especially with its already made offer to grant general and specific amnesty it is the policy of the Federal Government to seek to reinstate and re-employ former Federal Public Servants, both in the government service and in the corporations who for one reason or other had to leave their posts in the past two years.

- (ii) "A stable means of livelihood for individuals in a society is a precondition for the functioning of a viable social order and any proper system of law and order based on justice. It is for this reason that the Federal Government lays great emphasis on its proposals and policies for the rehabilitation of persons displaced from their stable sources of livelihood as a result of the tragic events of the last two years, up to and including the current civil war. A National Rehabilitation Commission has already been set up which has responsibility, in co-operation with the state governments, to rehabilitate all displaced persons.
- (iii) "The Administration of the East-Central State will be in the hands of the people of that State. The Federal peace plan ensures that some of the State Commissioners will be drawn from people on the other side. In addition, the law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and civilian administrators will be Ibos of East-Central State origin as is the case in other states. It should be stated that already under the Asika Administration in the East-Central State returning public servants of the former Eastern Regional Government are currently being reinstated and re-employed.
- (iv) "The policing of the East-Central State will be provided by the Nigeria Police Force in which the rank and file in each State are normally people drawn from the indigenes of that state. In the case of the East-Central State, it will be guaranteed that all the policemen and officers would be drawn from people of East-Central State origin. These are the people who come into daily contact with the ordinary people as the instrument of

law and order. This pattern of policing is already adopted in the Rivers and the South-Eastern States, areas of the former Eastern Region now under Federal control.

(v) "Possible guarantees regarding the Armed Forces are indeed limited. The Armed Forces must remain one since there cannot be two standing armies under independent and sovereign command in one country. On the other hand, after the bitterness of the civil war and the consequent propaganda from the other side, it is natural for many people on the other side to fear for their lives until mutual confidence is re-established. It is in recognition of this that the Federal peace plan includes the establishment of an External Observer Force to provide added confidence of security for the people in areas at present under the control of the other side. The details of such a force in the context of one country, its functions, composition, be negotiated during these talks.

(vi) "As already stated, the Federal Army will not normally perform ordinary policing duties and their presence will only be required where there is a threat to peace or breakdown of law and order. There is therefore no need to station Federal forces in all parts of the East-Central State. The Federal Government delegation are prepared to negotiate the number of strategic places where Federal forces are to be stationed in the East-Central State. The presence of Federal forces will not be felt by the ordinary man under these arrangements until confidence is restored.

(vii) "As for the disarming of rebel troops it should be explained that the intention of the Federal Government is to reabsorb Ibos on individual basis in the Federal Armed Forces as is the case with the other ethnic groups. The purpose is not to disarm the forces under the control of the other side and debar the Ibos as a people from even participating in the Armed Forces of their country. The Federal offer of amnesty is relevant here. It will facilitate the reabsorption of Ibos into the Federal Armed Forces as confidence is slowly re-established. The role and duration of the External Observer Force are equally relevant considerations here.

"The Federal Government delegation was prepared to consider any additional guarantees the other side may propose in context of a 'one country' solution without which there can be no meaningful negotiations on the question of guarantees for the

security of people in areas at present under the control of the other side.

“There is no problem of guarantee in areas of the East-Central State under Federal control, since Federal forces including policemen and officers of Ibo origin in these areas are protecting the lives of the civilians there even under wartime conditions. In the Abakaliki Province alone there are well over 600,000 Ibos under Federal control. In the villages around Enugu there are over 100,000 civilians. In the Mid-West, there is an Ibo population of about 500,000. In Lagos and Western States, there are over 50,000 Ibos under Federal control. In all, there are at present about 2 million Ibos in all the areas under Federal control but they do not require any special guarantees now and will not require any special arrangements when peace has been restored.”

The position is clear, therefore, that both the Federal Military Government and the generality of Nigerians are adequately prepared to enable a return to normal conditions in which national advancement can continue unimpeded by conflict.

