

Youth Empowerment is key to Nation-building: Dr. Mimiko, Ondo State Governor

By Dare Lasisi, African Outlook.

The foremost African writer and prolific novelist, Professor Chinua Achebe once said: “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else.

The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership.”

The emergence of a dedicated leader like Dr Olusegun Rahman Mimiko, the first Labour Party governor in the whole of Nigeria has really changed the political history of Nigeria with reference to southwest Nigeria's Ondo State.

As a special guest of honor at the colorful formal launch of Nigerian Students’ Union United Kingdom(NSUUK) held at the University of East London, Docklands campus on Saturday, November 26th 2011. The medical doctor-turned politician who is fondly called ‘Iroko’ by his people delivered the keynote speech titled: **“Importance of good leadership and youth empowerment”**.

Dr. Olusegun Rahman Mimiko, the executive governor of Ondo State used his inspiring address to motivate the Nigerian students in Diaspora to be good ambassadors of Nigeria in the United Kingdom and elsewhere and to also transfer their acquired skills to Nigeria.

NSUUK is a registered non-profit organization run by students and is primarily designed to create a forum for Nigerian students and youths to gather together by contributing their skills and ideas towards the development of themselves and Nigeria. They are also expected to create a strong link and platform between private Nigerian firms, government establishments and Nigerian students from the United Kingdom, for the transfer of internationally acquired knowledge, experience and manpower development and growth of Nigeria. While trying to



Dr. Olusegun Rahman Mimiko

explain the concept of leadership to the cross-section of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom, Dr Olusegun Mimiko stated that:

“Almighty God has given me the opportunity with the support of the good people of Ondo state to be elected as their governor for the past three years, the Sunshine State is blessed with about four million people. From my own personal experience, you cannot be a leader, if you cannot see what your followers don’t see since a leader must be able to communicate his visions to his followers. If you as a leader sees what others cannot see but still fail to carry out the expected actions in the right direction then your call to leadership would be suspect. A



Dr. Olusegun Rahman Mimiko, Executive governor of southwest Nigeria's Ondo State addressed Nigerian students at a UK conference

leader must be able to plan ahead and have compassion for his people.” Dr Mimiko further asserted that most of the successful leaders in this world who have changed the course of history are visionary leaders, good communicators and leaders that can inspire their people to greater things of life and this is his own brand of leadership for the good people of Ondo state of Nigeria.

“I am locating leadership in terms of good governance but when we talk of good governance, one is political and the other is economical. Let us re-examine the Abraham Lincoln definition of democracy as the government of the people, by the people and for the people in relation to Nigerian context then we must be ready to talk about free and fair election, sanctity of electoral process and fulfilling the promises.” Unfortunately the first republic was truncated, second one as well, then we went into military dictatorship for a long time, the British government with due respect planted instability before our independence. We all know of 1963 election crisis tagged OPERATION WETIE. What of 1979 election in which one political scientist called, Mathematicization of Nigerian political system which resulted into the theory of ‘twelve two-third’ to determine who actually won the presidential election.

The election of the year 2007 by international and local observers’ assessment was the worst in our political history. I was a victim of that election, but each time we touch at that precipice, an invisible hand always pull us back from tipping downward but in my whole adult life and for the

first time in my own adult life, we did something that we got right, the 2011 election by all standard was free and fair, I am not saying 2011 election was perfect but compared to 2007 'do or die' election, they are worlds apart as both local and international observers declared that 2011 election is the best by all standards and this is the sanctity of our electoral process.

Dr. Mimiko however advised the Nigerian students to always have interest on who govern their country and to demand for accountability and good governance from the elected leaders. "It is very important to always pay attention to our electoral process back home. We must push for every opportunity to have a better country for both present and unborn generations." Dr. Mimiko further stated that the economic leg of good governance has been defined by the 'high priests' of the international capitalist markets: the IMF and World bank but he affirmed that the gradual collapse of capitalism as seen by the recent global economic crisis is based on imperialistic capitalist paradigm.

"That is the topic for another day', Dr Mimiko said. "To have youth empowerment, we need good governance, transparency, accountability, the role of the civil society but equitable distribution of wealth was omitted from the list by the capitalist worlds but all these are critical elements of good governance anywhere in the world. I love Frantz Fanon so much maybe because I am a socialist from my university days,' "Every generation out of relative obscurity must discover its mission, they will either betray it or fulfill it."

He added that, "I have told my people for those that care to listen, the mission of the present politicians and leaders of this generation must be number one: to create jobs, number two, to create jobs and number three, to create jobs." The governor also lamented the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria which he said is a recipe for national disaster if nothing is done as urgent as possible to curb the menace.

"The high unemployment rate in Nigeria is no longer an economic issue, it has transcended that level, it is not the issue of per capital income or GDP, it is now a survival issue and what I know is that if there is one issue that can heat up the country, it is not about religion or north-south dichotomy as we are often made to accept. It is the youth unemployment in Nigeria. Let us take for example, on the streets of Kano in the northern part of Nigeria, we have up to 1.5 million youths unemployed who are just roaming about the streets to look for survival. In Mushin area of Lagos, you would see young, strong and able Nigerian men playing draughts (checkers) early in the morning. These are the ready-made army for militants, Boko Haram members and what have you."

On the issue of youth empowerment, Dr Mimiko further stressed that:

“In politics, when we talk of empowerment, some people always have the wrong notion of what drops into their pockets but I wish to talk about youth empowerment within the concept of making the youth to be meaningfully beneficial to themselves and to the larger society. We need to empower them through qualitative education with unlimited life-enhancing opportunities. This would ultimately transform our youths from a docile economic entity to the level of high productivity. I am talking of youth empowerment with the bedrock of both sound and appropriate education because education is the only key to open the gates of opportunities for over 150 million Nigerians if our country wishes to be respected as a viable country in the world. It is very important that we invest our resources more in education in Nigeria.”

How can we create youth empowerment through education? We need infrastructures to be able to empower youth, as at today, we have infrastructural gap in Nigeria. South Africa with about 50 million people in population is producing over 35,000 megawatts of electricity but Nigeria of over 150 million people is producing only about 3,000 megawatts of electricity, these are the issues that youth empowerment would solve, these are issues that would truncate empowerment in Nigeria.” Dr. Mimiko exhibited his sense of humor at the event when he comically informed the Nigerian-born Councillor Susan Fajana-Thomas (Speaker of Hackney Council) who claimed to be representing Her Majesty, the Queen Elizabeth of England in any civic event except if a senior civil servant is in attendance when he said: ‘I don't know the British protocol of conveying goodwill messages to the Queen of England but warmly tell her that I am bringing her good news of abundant investment opportunities from Ondo State, the Sunshine State in Nigeria.’ This statement attracted a standing ovation from the students and guests.

The Chief executive of Ondo state then listed his achievements in office in the areas of agriculture, Information and Communication Technologies, ICT, employment opportunities, renewable and sustainable energies, health sector and others. While still stressing the importance of agriculture as a form of youth empowerment, Dr Mimiko stated that:

“Let me tickle your imagination about agro-business opportunities in Nigeria, we import 1 billion naira worth of rice on a daily basis and that is 365 billion naira per year. We spent roughly 240 billion naira per year on sugar importation. Our food import budget annually is more than 2 trillion naira, the opportunities at home are limitless if you're into farming business. If you're opportuned to read any elective course in Agriculture, please read it. It is very useful back home. We are yet to cultivate up to 20 per cent of arable lands in Nigeria. Our

people are very creative and hardworking if the environment is suitable and conducive for them.”

“Agriculture is one major area that we have profoundly utilized to create employment opportunities in Ondo state. We have established modern farm cities in Ore, Auga and Epe and we have been able to recruit graduates who are currently working and enjoying themselves, fully-mechanized farming with DSTV. Our graduates are producing more than 20 crates of eggs per day. China is about 1.6 billion people in population and India is 1 billion people but Nigeria is over 150 million people, if we focus on agriculture, with our large population, we are expected to be the ‘food basket’ of Africa if not the whole world.”

He added that, “I can gladly inform you that we are building the largest cattle ranch in West Africa as agriculture still remains a focal point of job creation in Ondo state, a French graduate lady who is fully working and earning money on one of our farms was asked if she would leave this job to pursue civil service employment, she said NO because even though she studied French at the University, right now she is satisfied with her present job because if she speaks French to her fish, they respond to her perfectly. If you establish any company preserving and packing fish in Nigeria right now, there is a ready market with high profit for such a business venture. We must be able to produce our own food in Nigeria.”

On the issue of renewable and sustainable green energy, Dr Mimiko informed the students and guests at the event about the efforts of his administration to go ‘green’ for the sake of environmental protection. He also talked extensively about a 6-week intensive course for unemployed graduates in the area of renewable energy, green technology and advanced computer studies.

‘On the graduation day of these people, the energy that we used during the closing ceremony was generated by the solar panel constructed by our graduates, as we have been using solar generators to power our markets, our streets and some government facilities in Ondo state.’

On his personal commitment to embark on a crusade for a better country called Nigeria, Dr Mimiko declared that:

“I am proud to be a Nigerian anywhere, I am entitled to a red diplomatic passport but I just love the green color of our Nigerian passport. We are the most resilient people on earth, we are the most creative people on earth. It is not a coincidence that out of every four Black men walking down the face of the earth, one of them is a Nigerian citizen. God created Nigeria for a purpose.

If we solve the problem of power supply in Nigeria, the whole world would witness a phenomenon of development never seen anywhere in the world in our country.

We shall be among the leading countries in terms of economic empowerment. We all have a duty never to let down the whole of Nigeria but the entire Black race. Nigeria has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world but we have considerably reduced that in Ondo state. Our **Abiye project** has been adopted by World Health Organization and some African countries. Our paradox is now a reality with the construction of modern hospitals.”

He received a standing ovation for the third time for this statement.

He saluted the courage and determination of the Nigerian youths who have traveled far and wide to search for knowledge from every corner of the globe.

“What ever you study or do here in the United Kingdom, always try to be the best, make use of this opportunity. I just heard that about 16,500 Nigerians students are in the higher education in the UK. I know that your school fees is roughly £10,000 as a foreign student, not to talk of funds for personal welfare and text books within a year but from the recent statistics, 75 billion naira are moved out of Nigeria to the United Kingdom alone to pay for school fees, recently the deputy ambassador of USA said Nigerians are the highest number of foreign students in the United States. We have the highest number of foreign students in Ghana, over 71,000 in number and so many more in Malaysia, Togo and Cairo, Egypt.”

At the end of the speech, NSUUK officially presented an Achiever’s award to Dr Olusegun Mimiko for his enviable leadership quality and visible achievements so far in Ondo state. He was also decorated as the patron of the UK-based students’ organization by the representative of the Nigeria High Commissioner to the UK, Dr Dalhatu Tafida.

Some of the important personalities present at the occasion were Mr Bimbo Roberts-Afolayan, Chairman, Central Associations of Nigerians in the UK (CANUK), Mr Alistair Soyode, MD/CEO, of UK-based Ben TV, Dr Taiwo Olayinka Afolabi MON, a representative of the Nigeria High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Dr Sarki Dalhatu Tafida, Councillor Susan Fajana-Thomas, Speaker of Hackney Council in east London, Mr Rotimi Olasogba, senior special assistant on administration to Ondo State government, Mr Oluseyi Adeniyi, special assistant to Dr Mimiko on special duties ,Dr Rotimi Akomolafe, UK-based medical practitioner, Mr Shina Oshin,

Hon.Eniola Omosule (Labour Party), Federal House of Representatives, Mr. Modupe Tokunbo, Dr. A. Kehinde, Mr Wole Agbede, Mr Titus Ayodeji, Mr Yemi Soile, Founder NSUUK, Mr. Austine Obiezewani, President Nigerian Students Union, University of Greenwich London, Mr. Mohammed Adelodun, President, UEL Nigeria Student Society, Mr. Joshua Chibuike Nwokeji, Middlesex University, London and several Nigerian students from other UK universities.

Dr Mimiko and his entourage later went to the students canteen at the University of East London (Docklands campus) for dinner with the students and guests that attended the formal launch. After the dinner, he took photographs with the NSUUK officials and other guests. He also met with some Nigeria's Labour party members in London and briefly discussed with Prince Lashley Oladigbolu, Oyo State House of Assembly candidate (Labour party) and saluted his courage for contesting under the platform of the Labour party.