

Participation in Oslo Peace Forum

Babafemi A. Badejo, Ph.D.

When Norway is mentioned, many people automatically think about peace. So, on landing in Oslo and picked up by Armir Sheikh, (President Foundation Dialogue for Peace), for the long drive to the city, I felt a lot of peaceful relief as I took in the greenery of the environment and chatted with Aamir who wasted no time in sharing information about his adopted country dotted with lamentations about the country he left as a kid. Bonding with Aamir was very easy as I informed him I had written my PhD dissertation on his country of origin, Pakistan. We agreed our two countries could benefit from peace that accompanies development. I knew his Foundation had joined with the Oslo Centre, headed by former Norwegian Prime Minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik to put on a seminar on Peaceful Coexistence, Religious tolerance and human trafficking. The President of the Office of His Royal Highness, Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain also provided support for the Seminar.

My day of arrival, June 11, 2019, showed Oslo having the problem of Lagos - traffic, even though it is not as bad as perennially the case at my city. It is also important to note that there are alternatives of rapid mass transit arrangements that Lagos lacks with the exception of the attempt to make the ferry service idea that Lateef Jakande had introduced for Lagos in the second Nigerian Republic look like a new innovation by former Governor Ambode who for four years, abandoned the metroline project that his predecessor in office started. Since it is based on loan from the Chinese, it means that for political scoring of points (no economic or any other explanation was given), it means that interest unnecessarily continued to accumulate for the unborn in Lagos without service being provided.

And even the idea of metroline for Lagos was within the master plan of Alhaji Lateef Jakande. He had started by acquiring the corridor as well as entered into contract with Bouygues to build the metroline almost forty years ago. But Muhammadu Buhari (yes, the same PMB), as our dictator got late Gbolahan Mudashiru, the Military Governor of Lagos to renounce the contract. You can imagine the possible expansions of the initial line over a forty-year period. Well, Nigeria had to pay the contract sum of billions at an arbitration without having a metroline to date. Jakande, as a servant Governor, had laid so much forward-looking plans that are attributed today to others who mainly are busy lining their pockets and enriching their family and friends. Jakande a.k.a Baba Kekere, had the opportunity to own and put the riches of Lagos in his pocket. But he was not greedy. He was dedicated to service and transformed the provision of education with a fraction of the money flowing into private pockets in Lagos today as laws are being made specifically for favored companies to accumulate. I was delighted early this month to learn that Jakande remains in his original house at Ilupeju, Lagos but had given the widow of late Prof. Ayodele Awojobi, land on expensive Victoria Island when he learnt that the late Prof., spent his life struggling for a better Nigeria, including criticizing Jakande but left nothing for his young family at an early death.

Arriving at the hotel, I felt at home as I received Jens-Petter Kjemprud who was visiting home on an official assignment as well as having a short break. As usual, it was an animated exchange on Africa, Nigeria etc and the seminar that I was attending. He told me more about the Norwegian Sovereign Fund that was put in place to transparently invest a reasonable portion of Norway's wealth from their oil for the future generations of Norwegians. I learnt that they are not secretive about the worth of their fund. Any of my readers can browse nbim.no and see the per minute changes in the value of the Sovereign Wealth of Norway. Jens-Petter's wife, Anne Marrie Skjold, joined us in a different capacity from being a friend's wife. As a Senior Adviser at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she wanted an exchange on humanitarian issues in Africa, including on the African Humanitarian Agency. An interesting exchange followed on the positive role of Norway to ameliorate problems in Africa as African leaders repetitively face challenges

from nature without adequate preparation. Of course, probably with the exception of two or three or even four, five and six, they never fail to line their pockets from being in office. They even cheat refugees and internally displaced persons of the gifts meant to make the squalor in which these Africans live a little better.

Subsequently, delegates to the seminar were received by the Mayors of Oslo and Drammen with the latter giving a sumptuous dinner. The Mayor of Oslo, Mrs. Marianne Borgen had the hall at which Nobel Prize for Peace are given within her complex and was proud to be the second female ever elected Mayor using an office that has been left as it was in 1950 when it was opened. It was nostalgic for former President F.W De Klerk who had shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Madiba Nelson Mandela. I had observed many electric cars as we drove from the airport. I did not have to ask when Madam Mayor explained that as policy, Norway that produces fossil fuel is futuristic by encouraging the purchase of electric cars. Those who do so can drive on bus lane and not pay tolls (this is about to change to minimal payment) etc. Little wonder that 76% of cars registered this year in Oslo are electric cars. I think some of our Nigerian leaders are suggesting we ban electric cars! With glee, Madam Mayor informed that Oslo is the 2019 green capital of Europe as she detailed what's being done with 500 events planned this year to foster a greener Oslo. In response to a question, she pointed to trust as being crucial in a democracy. Trust among the people and trust between the people and their institutions. That raised the question that has always bothered my mind - that of whether we should continue to pretend, at enormous costs, that Nigeria has a democracy day.

The Mayor of Drammen, Mr. Tore Opdal Hansen had been Mayor for 16 years. The former Prime Minister testified that he has been positively transforming Drammen over the years. He took us to see a 1964 engineering fit in his city. The drilling of a spiral road into a rocky hill as a way to obtain stones for building and at the same time use the access at the top of the hill as recreational space. From this point, one could conveniently look down at the city of Drammen and its river that had been cleaned and could now be used for many human needs including swimming and drinking. The Mayor proudly informed that 30% of the people in Drammen are from 150 different countries in order to point to Drammen, which by the way is Jens-Petter's city, as a welcoming and accommodating city.

Very glad I was away from the farce of June 12 as Democracy Day in Nigeria and had to make a well received commentary, as one of four commentators, on Keynote Addresses that were given by Presidents F.W De Klerk, Lech Walesa, Prof. Anna Tibajuka and Minister Mohamed Al Mutawa from Bahrain. The Seminar, was chaired by former Prime minister of Norway, H.E. H.E. Kjell Magne Bondevik. I learnt a lot from these leaders who had made several changes in the world as they recommended Norway and Bahrain as good models on the topics of the seminar.

Four of us scheduled to have commentaries. These were Queen Diambi Kabatusuila, the reigning monarch in Kasai in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; H.E. Houda Nonoo, former Ambassador of Bahrain to Washington; Jonathan Grannof, President of the Global Security Institute and myself. I had titled my intervention as: Managing National and International Diversities: Leadership Counts. I noted examples of failure of misleaders to manage religious and cultural diversities as well as the environment as counting for conflicts/wars resulting in unnecessary deaths. By the same token, even though their less open conflicts between states, international misleaders and their local counterparts equally fuel conflicts and deaths when they refuse to acknowledge global climatic changes; support the movement of capital with ease across countries but deny equivalent privilege to labour and neo colonial arrangements in an unjust world order that continue to suck up wealth from weaker countries into already more formidable ones as in secondary school osmosis experiments. I agreed with the choice of Norway and Bahrain as models that are works in progress pointing to some of the significant achievements of Norway and Bahrain under respective leaders - the visionary HRH Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa in the case of Bahrain. The media maybe partly

a problem of leadership by only focusing on negative issues. That Bahrain is an oasis in the larger Middle East is hardly noted. For example, it is in the First Tier of the few countries like Norway in working against human trafficking according to the US State Department. The World Health Organization acknowledged the positive efforts of Bahrain on health delivery. The media can also explain in Europe and America that their investors are making money out of Africa, the Middle East etc and should not be parochial in thinking of people from those places have no basis in seeking better life in countries receiving more than they give.

The visit to the Nobel Peace Centre - a museum for a short period was very educative on the life and times of Alfred Bernhard Nobel as well as technology being brought to bear in the assemblage of the pictures of all the winners in one room. There were Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa, Wangari Maathai who set the ball rolling in the modern day link of the environmental changes to conflict and peace etc.

A short working visit that was well worth it.