

Snippets from the first General Assembly of the Yoruba World Congress

Yoruba Nation Beyond Nigeria

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Yesterday, February 29, 2020, I honoured with pleasure, an invitation to the first General Assembly of the Yoruba World Congress (YWC). I attach the invitation below. It was an invitation to the general Nigerian public to witness a meeting of the Yoruba nation, including and beyond the Nigerian border. The four to five hours meeting took place at the new Secretariat of the YWC on CMD road near NEPA station, Magodo Phase II. In the hall, we had approximately 75 people in attendance. Some 15 of these, including 2 very professionally senior people from Benin Republic were from the Diaspora. They came from the USA, Venezuela, Mexico, Cuba/Spain and Great Britain

Sparsely decorated, the hall at which the meeting held had pictures of a few Yoruba heroes/heroines around the picture of the current Yoruba leader. Standing out were: Oriṣa in his own right, Obafemi Awolowo; Abraham Adesanya; Adekunle Ajasin; Hubert Ogunde; Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti; Samuel Ajayi Crowther; Ayodele Awojobi; Duro Ladipo etc. Missing were the pictures of Herbert Macaulay; Fela Anikulapo Kuti etc., if we reserve the status to those already dead. If we include Yoruba heroes still alive, Olusegun Obasanjo, Wole Soyinka, Lateef Jakande etc., would clearly have spots.

On substance, it seems the invitation was overly too generous with letter (s). As far as I know, there's only one Yoruba nation. Members of this nation in different countries are as a result of spatial configuration of our world, from different nation-states that are many a time abbreviated as nations. Yoruba people within those nations are part of a larger family of the Yoruba nation that Emeritus Professor of History, Stephen Adebajji Akintoye stated as being 300 millions all over the world with only 56 millions of this number being in Nigeria. In fact, thanks but no thanks to slavery, there are many more Yoruba in Brazil than in Nigeria.

The YWC classifies the homeland Yoruba as those in Nigeria, Benin, Togo and a slice of territory in Ghana. There are the millions of African Yoruba in places like: Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire, Gambia, Mali, Sudan and South Sudan etc. Diaspora Yoruba are in places like: Great Britain and Europe, Americas, West Indies, Cuba, Haiti, and as far as Papua New Guinea. The Leader informed that there is an organized YWC group in Papua New Guinea, that recently sent him commendations on the realization of Amotekun. The Yoruba nation, in this sense, is not juridical. It is based on affect that comes out of consanguinity and/or language, culture, including the Ifa religion or given the welcoming nature of Yoruba people, those who appreciate the culture and want to belong to the Yoruba nation. In this case, the Yoruba are different from some nations that insist you can only be an insider as a result of consanguinity only.

Within the Yoruba nation are different nationalities (again, not in the legalistic sense of citizenship of countries), but major subdivisions like the Ijebu, Egba, Oyo, Ekiti, Owo, Okun, and some would add the Itshekiris if not even the Edo etc., that are by far larger than many recognized countries in the United Nations.

Back to the YWC meeting, the theme was: Oduduwa land: Networking the Yoruba Nations for Prosperity and Development.

There were two presentations and I hasten to pay particular attention to the one from the Leader. He noted that there is a pact between education and the Yoruba nation. I take education in this sense to be referring to Western Education that Obafemi Awolowo liberalized in the Western Region of Nigeria which allowed people like myself to be educated and have a voice. Knowledge of Ifa was guarded and only a few had training on this body of knowledge. The liberalization of Western Education by Obafemi Awolowo has resulted in many Yoruba sons and daughters without rigged federal character of Nigeria holding their heads high all over the world. Accounts for a reasonable portion among the Nigerians being praised in terms of comparative achievements and leadership with integrity all around the world. That integrity comes from the concept of Omoluabi which is the cornerstone of being Yoruba.

Clear in the message of the Leader is the need for the Yoruba nation's presence in many countries all over the world to be an opportunity to look out for and supportive of the developmental needs of one another. In Prof. Akintoye's words: "The message of the Nigerian Chapter of the Yoruba World Congress to the Yoruba people of Nigeria has been a message of bold self-reliance. It is that being part of Nigeria does not make it incumbent on the Yoruba people to keep surrendering themselves, to Nigeria's abysmally low standards of politics and governance, to Nigeria's chosen moral and material retrogression and decline, to Nigeria's horrid unemployment and hopeless poverty, to Nigeria's all-pervading culture of corruption, and to Nigeria's descent into rampant insecurity and anarchy. It is that we Yoruba people command the cultural assets and the human and management capabilities to raise ourselves and our nation up to any height in the world, even in the context of Nigeria. It is a call to Yoruba people to wake up and strike boldly forward to revive their true destiny as a civilization-building nation in the world. It is an assurance that the large and prestigious world-wide Yoruba nation is already beginning to pull itself together, and that help therein will be available to the Yoruba of any country in the world".

There were several interventions, including on self determination for the realization of a sovereign Yoruba state by a young lady who flew in purposely to attend the meeting. Though her view was not representative, she got very good hearing. Several of the speakers from the Diaspora were Ifa practitioners who saw the irony of Yoruba lives in wanting what is outside and abandoning what outsiders see as strength - the Ifa religion.

I raised my hand several times but did not have the opportunity to intervene, though I was granted space to announce that my new book that contextualizes the evolution of Amotekun is available for free download at www.yintabstrategyconsults.com or for 1,000 naira at the event.

The YWC first General Assembly was a positive development towards concretizing the Yoruba nation beyond the cultural efforts that Prof. Wande Abimbola, former Vice-Chancellor Obafemi Awolowo University had intellectually started, to which Ooni Sijuwade and the current Ooni Ogunwusi and the Alafin of Oyo are providing cultural and spiritual support. It is a political

development whose time has come. The internet is forging strong bonds all over the world. The Yoruba nation should be part of this revolution brought about by technology.

It is very understandable that Yoruba people are seeking to harness their world-wide bonds to see to the development of one another. The Yoruba nation, while assertively consolidating in the Southwest and adjoining areas inhabited by other Yoruba people in adjacent states of Nigeria for development under the rubric of integrity based Omoluabi ethos should work assiduously to look beyond Nigeria for developmental and security partnerships within the entire nation. Such development for prosperity will automatically boost Nigeria's overall prosperity if other Nigerians are able and willing to pursue a progressive agenda that upholds fiscal federalism and zero tolerance for corruption. Of course, there is no doubt that Amotekun has a pan-Yoruba network even if domesticated within the current states system has come to stay. However, the people must be on guard to ensure its sustenance as a positive contribution that should be larger than the respective ambitions of current Yoruba politicians.