

Snippets from the 74th UN General Assembly 2019 Part I

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End of January 2016, I had the opportunity of listening to late President Robert Mugabe as he gave his last address as African Union President handing over to President Idris Deby of Chad. His speech went viral, especially among Africans. He raised questions on the effectiveness of the United Nations for African nations. Questioning the rationale of having the UN HQ in NY, he wondered about why African Countries annually spend so much to attend the General Assembly without achieving much in return since ab initio, they are unequal and have been unable to realise change in the organization. I really don't know how much Mugabe's successor expended in order to have his day in the sun. The fact, however, is that whatever he wanted to say did not interest other member States. He gave his speech to an almost empty hall.

Of course, the Nigerian President came to the 74th UN General Assembly with a very large retinue of officials, friends and friends of friends. Some, (among the limited who can get a place in the limited space allowed Nigeria) would have entered the inner sanctuary to listen to him. Others would have entered the UN building but only move around open spaces and corridors. UN Security have elaborate annual plans on where each person can reach without what they call secondary passes. No matter who you are, without secondary passes, you cannot bribe your way. So, it is interesting when people ask if saw who or who at the UNGA. Meetings hold in different hotels over cocktails, dinners etc.

I saw some of my compatriots who are not at shopping malls at the corridors. After all, I understand that over 70% of people from around the world coming to the General Assembly only came to see NY and enrich the American economy through massive shopping. Some of Nigeria's Governors claim they were searching for investors. Indeed, they ate many dinners supposedly in that quest. Though, I did not read it directly myself, I learnt from friends that influential Bloomberg media had indicated that only investors willing to lose money will go to Nigeria. These Governors, if they were not on a jamboree, should have been in China and India - countries that care little on corruption in Africa and its effect on the ease of doing business. For sure, China cares about corruption in its own country. It could be a single bullet at the back of the head after all, each bullet has a cost. But importantly, organs can be harvested for use by other needy Chinese.

For me also, it was not all work. I spent reasonable time inside Central Park every morning with my entourage and walked severally all over NY, including on the Brooklyn bridge and savoured different great breakfasts and national cuisines - thanks to Sheikh Hussam bin Isa Al-Khalifa. I also went to see my granddaughter. I took the opportunity to initiate her into the game of chess overnight and drove with her and her mother for a night in New York.

My interaction with the Nigerian delegation was very limited. I took a brief time to greet only two of my friends on the presidential entourage: our intelligent and very professional Ambassador of Nigeria to Ethiopia and the African Union and the Presidential Photographer who I had known since 2011. With my flowing gown and Yoruba hat, I bumped into Governor Obaseki without a retinue as they all do at home. Since I felt he was acknowledging me as a compatriot not one of them, I winked at him in acknowledging him. This was before he was shouted on, on a different day probably by the group Nnamdi Kanu brought to the city. I did not see Nnamdi Kanu's side event but was told about it by a respectable Tanzanian friend - one of those who feel disappointed about Nigeria's inability to give salutary leadership in Africa. I also saw videos of Nigerians popularizing the expression "ole" at the Nigeria House with the police assisting to ensure they do not touch our officials as happened in Germany. But the police collaborated in having them shout as much as they could without muzzling them. This is America where free speech allows insults on the American President with protection to do so and not kept in jail and refused bail like Sowore is

experiencing. As a lawyer, I feel ashamed about actions of our Attorney-General. How does one explain the threat on the Judiciary by wanting to drag a Judge to the NJC for exercising discretion to honour the human rights of Wole Soyinka?

I saw the Emir of Kano with a number of people. Not his normal retinue. This time, he was not covering his face and showing only eyes. I chose not to step aside to say hello as I was on my way to the important side event of Bahrain. I did not see Ganduje. So, I could not be sure that Mr. President was being a Mediator. I saw a short video of the Emir that I cannot say if it was at a side event at the 74th UNGA in which he was pontificating on education for the girl child. Don't get me wrong. This is important, especially in places in Nigeria like Kano. On looking at that video, I wished he is walking the walk in Kano on the lot of the girl child beyond his smart deliveries of nice to hear speeches for those wishing Nigeria well. I wish he had rendered a public account on the devotion of the Kano Emirate Council resources to the empowerment of the girl child. But this diversion can wait for another day as I positively relish having a Nigerian, Prof. Tijanni Bande as the President of the 74th UNGA. Some positive news as opposed to the scammers image of Nigeria out there.

I was not in New York under the auspices of the Nigerian Government as a friend of mine had thought. I had asked him if he thought I fit the category of one of those that could have been so honoured. So, I didn't attend any of their events. I attended the 74th UNGA like the 73rd before it, as an Adviser to the President of the Court of the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain (I will share info on this in my part II). I normally take my responsibilities seriously and happily related with my Bahraini friends without deviating to wonder about what other statements my President would make on where we stand to the world.

I have listened to so many laudable statements from President Buhari, especially on corruption but with little delivery except when it comes to manipulations against opponents or feared enemies like former CJN Onnoghen even though I much supported that ex Chief Justice being brought to book. The objectives of my President were less than mine. I see what happened as just to get Onnoghen out of the way (I have no problem with that because we would have all stood up for him if he had no allegations of transgressions that needed answers), and instill fear into the many corrupt members of the Judiciary. If this was not the case, former CJN Onnoghen wouldn't have been so easily forgiven. After all such forgiveness the APC Chairman had intimated is only for those who move from the PDP opposition alliance of thieves into the ruling one. As a trained Political Scientist schooled in Parties and Party Systems, PDP & APC are definitely not political parties.

On my return, I am reading that Abdulrashid Maina has finally been arrested. It is a welcomed development if there's sincerity of purpose. Who brought Maina back into Nigeria will continue to hunt the Buhari administration? Mrs. Oyo-Ita was helpful in confirming (since there has been no denials) that the President knew about what happened. It is unfortunate that she threw stones when she is being alleged to have soiled her hands.

The struggle against the theatres of the absurd in Nigeria will hopefully result in genuine successes against corruption.