

CANADA/NIGERIA TODAY
Hon. David Kilgour, J.D.
Nigerian Professionals and Business Network Breakfast
Sheraton Hotel
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Excellency, Mrs Ucha Maduekwe, ladies and gentlemen,

Permit me to begin with a reference to Nigeria's 13th president, Olusegun Obasanjo, who told prime minister Jean Chretien that sustained pressure from Ottawa had helped to keep him alive while he was in Abacha's prison. As Canada's minister for Africa, I was thus especially proud to attend with my wife, Laura, the inauguration of President Obasanjo in Abuja in May, 1999 after his decisive election victory.

There is much in the cultures of Nigeria that many respect. The Nigerian achievements in more than twenty UN peacekeeping/peacemaking operations since 1960, with thousands of Nigerian men and women risking--and many losing--their lives to the cause of peace, is the best of any U.N.-member country. Nigerians are known to be entrepreneurial, industrious, intelligent, strong, confident and self-assured. These qualities among Nigerian-Canadians contribute to the success of Canada.

One Canadian value is honouring diversity and favouring immigration. In daily life, Canadians in many parts of our country are exposed to a wide range of people and traditions. To be Canadian is to acknowledge that all citizens are equal. Canada today enjoys a constitutionally-binding Charter of Rights and Freedoms; we respect the legitimate customs of fellow citizens from every corner of the world. This was illustrated again this week by the compromise ruling on witnesses wearing niqabs in courts by the Supreme Court of Canada. The decision is 'quintessentially Canadian' because (as Sheema Khan wrote in yesterday's Globe and Mail) it strikes a balance between the competing rights of religious freedom versus the right to a fair trial.

Canada is a country to which many come because of what it now offers: physical safety, economic opportunities, freedom to practise one's religion (or none), universal medical services, free education up to the college level, affordable-for-many university, good social programs, etc. Some newcomers find adjusting to Canadian freedoms difficult. One way of surmounting that is by getting involved with other organizations outside of one's own cultural community through volunteerism or participation in a service club.

In 2010, about one-half of Canadians contributed their time, energy and skills to groups and organizations such as charities and non-profits. They provided leadership on boards and committees; canvassed for funds; provided advice, counseling or mentoring; visited seniors; prepared and delivered food; served as volunteer drivers; advocated for social causes; coached children and youth. In short, they shaped their communities and enabled many civil society organizations to deliver programs and services to millions of their fellow Canadians.

Volunteer work is important not only to volunteers but to Canada as a whole. For example, according to a 2011 U. N. report, "...volunteerism... strengthen(s) trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation."

Canada has a long tradition of service clubs. Over the years, these clubs have collectively given millions of dollars to support programs and services. You probably know the Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis and Jaycees, but there are others. The Rotary Club of Toronto, to take an example outside Ottawa, is a microcosm of the city, a jumble of cultures with members of both genders from their mid-30s to mid-70s. The club is celebrating its 100th anniversary by donating \$1 million to local and international agencies. Each month, it announces a \$100,000 centennial grant. The November recipient was a pioneering newcomer clinic, located in a social housing complex in the heart of St. Jamestown, the most densely populated area in Canada with many of the residents new to Canada.

Nigerian 'Black Gold'

As 2012 began, eight out of ten Nigerians expected a 'year of economic prosperity', no doubt fueled by oil exports, which are expected by the IMF to grow from about \$268 billion now to \$400 billion by 2016. It is vitally important to Nigerians that their country moves up quickly from its current 156th place on the UN's Human Development Index. Poverty is still far too common across the country and President Goodluck Jonathan spoke for many citizens of his own country and Canada when he said last year, "Nigeria needs to build a more inclusive society where every Nigerian would have equal access to economic and development opportunities."

When the government removed fuel subsidies at the start of 2012 to try to save \$8 billion a year to be invested in infrastructure, it took away the only thing the state provided to some citizens: cheap fuel. Nigerians have since come together to hold their government accountable. There are only four oil refineries in the country, all evidently in a state of disrepair. The result for many Nigerians is that the diesel that runs their generators, the kerosene that lights their lanterns, and the gasoline that fuels their vehicles are all imported. Nigerians in Canada could encourage the government in Nigeria to invest some oil money in refineries.

Permit me as someone from oil/gas-abundant Alberta to highlight the importance of using hydrocarbons as a means of diversifying economies. Revenues from hydrocarbons have allowed Alberta to improve health care, education at all levels, pensions, social programs generally and to diversify its economy to a degree. Importantly, Alberta has since the days of the first big oil strike at Leduc in 1947 done well at minimizing corruption in the sector.

Two points here were made recently by Paul Collier, a professor of public policy/economics at Oxford University, while at the University of Waterloo:

- The billion residents of the African continent are in "the throes of a massive new resource bonanza" and many of them are saying "never again" to the violence, plunder and corruption that so often accompanied similar booms in the past. Collier cites the case of Guinea, which in 2010 elected its first properly elected president, Alpha Conde. Conde's finance minister in turn chose the fearless Aissatou Boiro to oversee the treasury. Tragically, Ms. Boiro was recently

murdered and the new rule of law in Guinea is in danger, as Collier puts it, of “degenerating into the rule of lawyers.”

- Collier thinks Canada can play now an effective role in the struggle for integrity in resource governance across Africa because the U.S. Congress in 2010 required American-listed companies to report payments made in winning contracts. The European Parliament is expected to pass similar legislation soon. Canada, home to the most important financial markets for resource-extraction companies, must step up and do the same. If we do not grasp the baton on this, Collier thinks we will blow “a hole in the struggle for transparency-the issue for which Ms. Boiro has just died...The alternative is too degrading to contemplate”.

State-owned Enterprises

Let me mention something about Canada’s recent experience with state-owned enterprises (SOEs) from China:

- Unlike responsible businesses in Nigeria and Canada, Chinese SOEs operate with priorities far different from the concerns of customers, employees and shareholders. The recent Ottawa-approved takeover of Nexen by China National Overseas Oil Corporation (CNOOC) constitutes in reality its nationalization by the government in Beijing, which is dominated from top to bottom by the Communist Party and whose economy is permeated by a culture of corruption. Transparency International ranks China far down its list in 75th place on its perceived corruption index for 2011. An Ipsos Reid opinion survey indicated earlier this week that 74% of Canadians are opposed to the takeovers of Canadian companies by SOEs from any country. Like many, I opposed the Nexen takeover strongly.
- What of the conduct of Chinese SOEs internationally? When, for example, one of them bought a stake in Sudan’s oilfields in 1996, Beijing subsequently backed the racist al-Bashir regime in Khartoum, selling it arms and providing diplomatic cover at the UN Security Council. Bashir and his agents committed systematic atrocities in south Sudan and Darfur against persons they deemed Africans, for which he has been indicted by the International Criminal Court. In Zambia, Chinese mining companies banned union activity, and in two instances, were charged with attempted murder after opening fire on local employees protesting work conditions. Major corporations in fact operate above the law in China and routinely ignore safety, environmental and employment legislation with impunity. The rule of law does not exist in China.

Inter-faith peace

As we are only a few days from Christmas, and knowing that there are persons here from Ottawa’s Muslim and Christian communities, permit me to offer some hopefully constructive thoughts on inter-faith bridge building:

Hundreds of Edmonton residents of many faiths demonstrated at city hall concerning the persecution of Muslims in Bosnia in the ‘90s. Thousands of Canadian soldiers later joined the NATO peacemakers that went into the Balkans to protect Muslims.

Canadian journalist Geoffrey Johnston summarizes the link between religious intolerance and political violence: “Those countries that do not actively protect religious minorities or prosecute the perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence are ultimately undermining their own security. A climate of impunity emboldens militants, who eventually turn against the state, using violence...” That’s partly why it’s necessary to ban the incitement of hatred against identifiable religions at home as Canada’s Parliament did years ago in our Criminal Code.

I preface what I’m about to say that, like yourselves, I’m fully aware that in too many parts of the world persons of Muslim faith are discriminated against, mistreated, or even worse for their beliefs. This must stop anywhere it occurs.

Today we need to stand together internationally and speak out against the persecution of non-Muslims in Muslim majority countries. If diverse faith communities around the world stand shoulder-to-shoulder when members of any religion are being harassed or persecuted, lives could be saved.

A 2011 Pew Forum study on Religion estimated that Christians are today being persecuted in varying degrees by governments or fellow citizens in a majority of the world’s independent countries. Another estimate is that approximately 105,000 Christians are murdered yearly because of their faith. In other words, about one Christian is killed every five minutes somewhere.

Open Doors lists annually the worst-offender countries. For example, Saudi Arabia, home to more than one million Christian foreign workers, bans churches and private acts of Christian prayer. The monarchy permits its religious police to raid private Christian services and to bring participants up on charges of blasphemy. Concurrently, author David Aikman notes; there is a “steady drumbeat of anti-Christian propagandizing by Saudi media outlets.”

For the past three years, the Boko Haram radical group has attempted to drive Christians out of the northern states of Nigeria by way of an estimated 170 attacks which have killed approximately 3000 Christians. They have also murdered many prominent Muslims, including General Mohammed Shuwa, and destroyed many mosques. They want to destroy the Nigerian state.

To their credit, Nigerian soldiers were successful in felling a prominent terrorist leader and two sub-commanders in a raid on December 2nd. President Goodluck Jonathan has assured Nigerians that the country is largely safe and secure. The December 2nd achievement will help to restore faith in the police and the military, but what would be most beneficial would be for both the Nigerian government and other governments, including Canada, to designate the Boko Haram as a terrorist organization because of its obvious goal: genocide.

We cannot pretend to be ignorant of the challenges on many sides across the globe at the moment. We all - people of all religious faiths and none - need to speak out effectively against this - not to speak against each other, but to challenge the act of

religious persecution against any faith community. What can we all do together to work against this?

Human dignity is ultimately indivisible today. It is through mutual respect that we can build a world in which all peoples, religions and cultures can genuinely feel at home. Harmony and peace can occur in this century only if spiritual communities co-operate.

Consider something the Tibetan Buddhist leader, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, said to about 7000 admirers at the Ottawa civic centre earlier this year. The much-loved Nobel Laureate and honorary Canadian citizen stressed that inner happiness comes from doing acts of compassion to enemies. He mentioned a fellow monk who had been imprisoned for years and abused in a Tibetan prison by the Chinese Communist party. When finally freed and reaching the Dalai Lama, he told His Holiness that he was deeply troubled because he felt himself in danger of losing compassion towards his oppressors.

In short, all faith communities must begin to help each other effectively around the world. Congratulations to Chief Ojo Maduekwe, the new Nigerian High Commissioner to Canada, for hosting an Eid event at his official residence for Muslim members of the High Commission staff earlier this year. He is a genuine bridge/peace builder.

Conclusion

Let me close by stressing that more Canadians – and I would include here Canadians born in Nigeria and those born in Canada to Nigerian parents – need to become involved and participate in a variety of ways in the public affairs of Canada. Those who wish to seek public office should be encouraged, whether it be at the city or town council level, at the provincial level or at the federal level. Women, for example, are welcome to join “Equal Voice”, a national multi-party group of volunteers dedicated to getting more women elected to all levels of government in Canada. “Equal Voice” has an online campaign school accessible at www.gettingtothegate.com.

Our elected officials are held to high public scrutiny as they should be. But the art of politics demands that people of integrity, strong values and an unstinting will to serve their fellows without ‘fear or favour’ are needed now more than ever.

One way to begin is to get someone appointed to the Senate as other cultural communities have now done. If you want to suggest one or more names of good Senate candidates, please let me see them. I will be glad to send their names to the government.

Thank you.