

## **'Collective Security Is the Answer'**

*By: Olusegun Obasanjo*

*H. E. President Olusegun Obasanjo will certainly occupy a unique place in the annals of Africa's contemporary political history as one of the leading personalities on the continent this century and beyond. At the time despotism was the rule on the continent, he chose to tread the path of exception as a military ruler of Nigeria by willingly handing over power to the civilians in 1979. Perhaps, this action, more than anything else, hauled him onto the mainstream of global efforts against apartheid, wars and conflicts, disease, poverty, hunger and problems of bad governance. In 1988, he founded the Africa leadership Forum as an international Civil Society Organisation (CSO) devoted to the problems of leadership and governance in Africa. 1995, President Obasanjo was caught in an ironic circle. The Nigerian Military Government put him in prison on trumped up charges of treason. Three years after, he was released from jail.*

And few months after, exactly twenty years after relinquishing the exalted office, he became the president of Nigeria through a popular election.

In this interview with, *Ayodele Aderinwale, Bolaji Abdullahi* and *Reuben Abati*, his first with any international journal since he was sworn in May 1999, President Obasanjo spoke with characteristic candour and, sometimes, passion on various issues and problems confronting the continent of Africa as it faces the next century.

***In the last eleven years or so, you have done a lot of work for the development of Africa, especially under the auspices of the Africa Leadership Forum. How do you think your being the president of Nigeria now could help in further advancing those causes, which you have pursued as a private citizen?***

Well, of course one needs to back to the objective, what really is the objective of Africa Leadership Forum? The objective as clearly stated is to help the development and enhancement of leadership in Africa, at all levels and in all walks of life. Be that as it may, of course my position in Nigeria now separates me from involvement with Africa leadership Forum, but in another way, it also affords me an opportunity to do more from another position what I was trying to do with the Africa leadership Forum. For instance, the Africa Leadership Forum in 1991 had the Kampala Conference in Uganda. Out of that conference came the Kampala Document. Since 1991, we have been trying to advance the process of the Kampala document. We like to call it Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa. In between, of course, as I used to say, I went on sabbatical, but now in my new position I could help, working with other African leaders to advance that process and we are in fact doing that right now. In other words, what I was trying to do in my private capacity, as you said, starting from about eleven years ago through the Africa Leadership Forum is not being abandoned, rather, it is now being done now in my new capacity as the president of Nigeria.

In Algiers you requested the OAU to declare the 2,000 as Africa's Year of Peace & Security. It was subsequently adopted. You also proposed a re-launching of CSDCA, the Sirte Summit also resolved to convene a Ministerial Conference on Security, Stability, Development & Co-operation in Africa. Given the limitations of the OAU, how do you see the actualization of these proposals?

Well, commitment of course is normally handicapped, but also one must bear in mind that commitment can also be energized in other people, which is the role I see for myself. If I believe in something, I am personally committed to it. I should try to infect others with my commitment. I should also try to energise commitment in other people, that is possible and in fact, it's being done. That is why it has been possible now for the CSSDCA to be listed during the OAU extraordinary summit in Libya as one of the issues that must be taken on board. Then you talked about how we can move on with that resolution unanimously passed by the OAU to make 2000 the year of peace, security and solidarity for Africa. Again, you can generate commitment, you can inspire commitment. You talked of funds. The amount of funds require for these things are not really excessive, because for instance the amount of funds require to run round, organize roundtables, deliberations and dialogues and interventions in and dialogues and interventions in areas where conflicts are raging in Africa is nothing compared to what it costs Nigeria to militarily intervene in Liberia. It cost us billions of dollars, so what are we talking about. It probably will not cost us five million dollars in the one year we need to relentlessly pursue conflict resolution and conflict management in Africa between now and the end of year 2000.

***On of the issues you vigorously canvassed shortly before you became the president of Nigeria is the concept of African Renaissance. In real terms, what does this concept entail, and how do you intend to pursue actualizing its ideals?***

On African renaissance, let us say that our Charity should begin at home. African renaissance must begin for us in Nigeria as Nigerian renaissance, Nigerian rebirth. With does this mean? It means we should move away from corruption, we must move away from crime, we must have democracy, we must have good governance, we must have transparency, accountability, we must have popular participation and human rights, people must accept their responsibility and not just talk about rights, we must balance rights with responsibility, and we must move our country towards political stability, and economic progress. That to me is what rebirth in Nigeria means and of course it must be firmed up or anchored on certain moral and ethical foundations. And when you extend that to Africa, you won't have any much difference. Africa must go for certain basic moral and ethical standards in our relationships, in our governance, in the way we do things in our land, in our different countries, and then democracy will stand. We must eliminate corruption, we must see us as treating our people as decent human beings. I think this is what African renaissance should be. In such a way that we can now move Africa forward as a continent of civilized governments and civilized people.

***You once pushed for a Cairo-Pretoria-Abuja platform for African development. Do you still subscribe to this idea, and how do you intend to pursue it?***

To lift Africa up, we need more than one hand on the basket, the more hands you have, the easier it is. Here we are talking of Africa standing on a minimum of a tripod, and we are working on it and we will get there soon. You can call it CAP, Cairo, Abuja, Pretoria. So, the Cap is almost on

our heads. There are things that South Africa has that can complement what we have. There are things that we have that can complement what South Africa has. In the same vein, there are things that Egypt has that can complement what we have, there are things we have that can complement what Egypt has or which ever country you want to mention. Having said that, let me take South Africa. In terms of technology, South Africa is more advanced than we are. In terms of resources, our resources are more complementary. For Instance we have oil, they do not. So, there is no reason why we should not be the major suppliers of oil to South Africa. There is no reason why we should not participate in what I call the 'down-stream' of that aspect of industry in South Africa. There is no reason why we should not look at what we can buy from South Africa in terms of manufactured goods, and what they can produce here. And, indeed, you can say that for any other country in Africa.

***The post of a minister for co-operation and integration in Africa is a novel appointment. What do you intend to achieve with his?***

What I want to achieve is simply this; I want to achieve faster integration, particularly in our sub-region of West Africa. Of course, we should not exclude the integration of Africa in general. The issue of integration has many components. It has security dimension, economic dimension and cultural dimension. So, the Ministry of External Affairs does not really touch everything. Of course, no ministry works in isolation, but I want to oversee that ministry to be under the presidency so that I can give it a personal direction.

***Demilitarisation has been seen as a major answer to the security problem in Africa. How do you think African countries should go about this process?***

Demilitarisation can only come a little bit late. What we need to do now is to harmonise our security differences, so that we can have confidence in ourselves. This I call Common Security. If we have Common Security on the basis of Common Prosperity, then we would have moves a long way. The next thing after this is the issue of a common army. Between us, we do not need an army, but until we get to that stage let us develop necessary confidence by having Common Security, so that I see your security as being contingent on my security and vice-versa. And what Common Security am I talking about? First of all if we have a defence accord within West-Africa Sub-region, it shall allow us to harmonise the training of our military. It will help us to standardize our equipment, standardize our military. It will help us to standardize our equipment, standardize our doctrine, so that, we can exchange equipment or part of our equipment in the theatre of war and training. Then that will also allow us, in planning for peace-keeping, to say that Nigeria will earmark so many. I am talking of Common Security and the defence accord obviously says that an attack on one of us will be taken as an attack on all of us. Therefore,, if you are being attacked, I cannot just fold my arm, I must show concern and that is the way it should be. Otherwise, we will all be taken in piecemeal. One is taken and the rest of us fold our arms; then another one we have, until we are all taken. But if we have this situation whereby an attack on one of us will be regarded as an attack on all of us then it will not be easy for us to be slaughtered.

***But, there is this problem of division along linguistic lines in the sub-region, don't you think this will hinder the collective security agenda?***

How do they do it in the NATO? They do not speak the same language, there are certain equipment that are standardized, so what happens is simple, your ammunition can be used by my own weapon when I'm short of ammunition and ammunition is common.

***Beyond the issue of language, there is a kind of sentiment that positions the Anglophone African countries and the Francophone African countries in conflict and this is exactly the problem...***

The problem is in your mind and the minds of those who want to see it that way. Like I keep saying Anglophone and Francophone are bound together. Geography has bound them together and they might as well start understanding that and managing it happily no. France understands that and if anything, she tries to encourage co-operation between us. That is the reality and that is provided what I call the historical interests of France not understanding and not encouraging our co-operation.

***Small arms proliferation has been a major factor in African conflict. Sadly the moratorium on small arms that was put in place in 1998 will expire by the year 2001. Will Nigeria push for the extension of this moratorium for, like say, five or ten more years?***

Small arms constitute a serious problem. But through defence accord you can really control it better, because you will know what everybody is thinking and doing. In fact that can be part of our defence accord, if the accord says no member should receive any small arms without all members of the defence accord knowing. They should know, because defence accord and common security is also part of confidence building. If you receive anything, the rest of us should know and if I receive something and you know, obviously, you will be less agitated by it than if suddenly hear that you have acquired bomber aircraft. What Nigeria will do regarding the moratorium? Well, I don't know because Nigeria is not going to live in isolation. What are the other countries doing? What other countries are doing will be of interest to us.

***The recent wave of democratization in Africa has led many people to declare that the days of coups are over on the continent however, the recent events in Niger Republic and Guinea-Bissau show that the conclusion might have been hasty. So, what do you think Africa needs to do to put a final end to the problem of military intervention in government?***

Well, first of all, we have always said that good governance is about the best antidote to military intervention. I still believe that the military need the right kind of orientation in other areas rather than political. They must be made to want to excel in their professional line, rather than wanting to excel in being in the state house. It must be shown that, no infringement will be condoned and people must have political education. But nobody can categorically say the he has god a miracle to stop coups. I believe, however that with good governance and the support of the people in making democracy popular we can stem the tide.

***Part of the criticism against ECOMOG is that it is mainly a Nigerian show. What do you think should be the future structure and role of ECOMOG in the sub-region?***

That is part of the reason we want genuine defence accord. To have an ECOMOG that is truly ECOMOG force not a 'Nigerian-MOG' camouflaging as ECOMOG. That is one thing the defence accord can do and should do. ECOMOG in the first instance cannot stay as it is. It can't go on having Nigeria foot the bill, Nigeria contributed about 95%, what sort of ECOMOG is that? The burden must be shared. If you have a defence accord that we all are signatories to and then we have what we have earmarked as the troop that each country will have to contribute to peace keeping, whether the peace keeping is in West Africa, in Africa or anywhere else in the world, and you have worked out how it will go, supposing you say look, anytime that is a peace keeping mission, the first two battalions is one battalion from Nigeria and one from Cote d'Ivoire and the next two battalions should be one battalion from Ghana, that is something. Then you can go along with that on the basis of burden sharing, responsibility will be spread.

***As the head of state of Nigeria between 1976 and 1979, you pursued a vigorous pan Africa agenda. Your contributions to SWAPO in Namibia, MPLA in Angola, ANC in South Africa, and others were well recorded. However, the way these countries have been treating Nigerian nationals through deportation and all forms of harassment does not reflect recognition of Nigeria's assistance to them. How do you intend to redress this?***

If you have helped SWAPO, South Africa and then export to them criminals from Nigeria, 419 and what have you, what do you expect them to do?

***But it is on records that even Nigerians who are legitimately entitled to be in these countries are being harassed in one form or the other?***

If Nigerians come in and misbehave why not? Don't let us deceive ourselves, Nigeria has a very bad reputation in the last five years, in the world generally and that includes in Africa. In some places they tried to help us but in other places they couldn't because politically we have become terribly annoying to the world. Then we have to look at the activities of 419 people and other Nigerian criminals. I went Malaysia and heard that Nigerians went into that country and carried out armed robbery. What do you expect the Malaysians to do? Before then, Malaysians were allowing Nigerians to come in without problem, after that they won't. Let us be fair to ourselves, whatever we did for these countries we did it in terms of self-enlightenment. South Africa, yes we believed that anywhere in the world, the black race should never be treated as an inferior race, so if we did what we did and that was what motivated us, it was part of our principle. Do we believe that black man should run the affairs of his own country? Therefore, we did not do all we did because of what we will gain directly, but because of the principle we believed in. And you know that when we do this, we are also enhanced as the largest black nation in the world, so it is our obligation, as we should.

***Liberia, Somalia and the Great lakes Sub-region have presented Africa with the worst humanitarian disasters in recent history. What arrangements do you think should be put in place to ensure that never again will Africa experience such calamity?***

I think Somalia is particularly tragic. Yes, I must state that I was at the OAU and Somalia was not represented and that is an indication of what can happen to a country can just virtually disappear. What I call eclipse of a state. And a number of things can bring about the eclipse of a

state, it could be war, it could be famine, it could be poverty, total poverty. When a country cannot pay her public servants for a year, then what remains of that country as a sovereign country? So, I think it is an objective case for us, what should we do? Yes, the answer to me is integration, when we come together we will be strong. You asked me earlier why I established a ministry for Co-operation and Integration, this is to help advance a process where no African country will just do things at the expenses of the other. If we have a United West Africa, then, fighting and warlordism like in the case of Somalia and Senegal will cease to be a national thing. It becomes a communal problem. And in a community, nobody wants to be less a part of that land, unless of course things really go sorely bad. Moreover, there is economy of scale. In Nigeria, there are only three major tribes, and other minor tribes, which I don't feel are minor. Well in the United States of West Africa, even those who are regarded as major tribe, in Nigeria cease to be major. Do you understand? They become minor in the context of the larger framework.

***It has been said that whereas this is a geological century, the next century is largely going to be ecological. Reports have it that Africa still has the largest unutilized habitable and cultivable land per capital in the world. How do you think the continent can use these immense resources to achieve a high level of development in the next millennium?***

Well, the land resources we have are dwindling fast. In Nigeria for Instance, desertification in the North and erosion in the South are eating up our soil at a scale we have never witnessed before. So we must work out environmental protection of our coast and other landscapes. Then the land needs to be protected, otherwise it will be washed away and that is the only way to produce and sustain our population. We must begin to see the task of conserving our soil as a major problem that we all in Africa must work hard to achieve.

***Globalisation implies that Africa can no longer be insulated from the wave of changes and development in the world, whether in politics, economy and more, especially, science and technology. How do you see Africa coping with the challenges of globalisation in the next millennium?***

Yes, I think since we are talking of globalisation and talking about its essentials, you are talking about it from the point of view of communications, finance, trade organizations and so on. So what should we do? I believe that we should not taken globalisation lying low. We cannot push globalisation, but we can make sure that the adverse influence of globalisation is minimized, because whether we like it or not, globalisation whether we like it or not, globalization will go on, it is going on. So, how can we minimize the adverse effect of globalization, how can we at least patch up with it rather than hope to delay it? I think that should be our objective. On technology, I believe there are certain area where we cannot achieve much, but there are certain things we can achieve about technology. It should help our agriculture and health. That is something we can achieve. Computer and satellite launching is also within our reach. We can get our own satellite into space. Many countries have done that. There are several areas we cannot compete, but we have to secure our financial interest, otherwise one speculator can make nonsense of our currency. And the amount of money that is being transferred runs into trillions. We can ameliorate our situation, but we must not deceive ourselves to say yes, that we are really part of this globalisation. Where were we when the WTO terms were being worked out, where

were we? We were virtually not there, so how, if they were saying come and let's participate, after the thing had been done whatever it is written will be binding on everybody and you were not there, then after it is done you start complaining, that is more or less what happened with WTO. But the millennium round is here and I hope Africa will participate and hope also that Nigeria will be able to provide some form of leadership.

***Perhaps, apart from war, no other singular factor is responsible for the decimation of the Africa's active population today like the HIV/AIDS epidemic. How do you think Africa should tackle this problem?***

Africa used to be called that Dark Continent, now it is a diseased continent. As you said, the disease called HIV/AIDS is terrible, somebody was telling me today that every minute a Nigerian comes in contact with it, and that is the situation all over Africa. What we have to do is give information about AIDS and let our people know what a deadly disease it is. The reason why some of these things have gone bad is because Africans through HIV have lost their immunity to some of these other diseases. Tuberculosis, leprosy and even many of the diseases that are eradicable are becoming intractable problems. The problem now is that these diseases cannot be contained within the borders of a country. Therefore, we can only work on them effectively at the regional level. We will do our best, and hopefully other countries will do their best within our sub-region and eventually all the regions of Africa, then we will get rid of these diseases like guinea worm, etc

***In your Statement to the UN General Assembly and other for a you have consistently clamoured for debt relief for Africa, what are the implications of such a concession for African stability and security in light of the usual conditions attached to similar gestures in the past?***

I don't know what you mean by that, first of all the moral basis of some of these debts are dubious, I said that at the OAU. There are more examples that you can give. There is a case of a strong key project; it was a carpet industry for which a state signed, a loan of 8 million dollars. The money was drawn to the last kobo and nothing is at the sight of the industry. That is part of the money one has been asked to pay. What negative effect would that have? Under normal circumstances, both the lender and the borrower should be lined up and flogged thoroughly, if not shot. You have called us to say well look, Nigeria, what is best for you is democracy and they stood by us when we were under the grip of the most brutal regime in this country, some of us were incarcerated, some were debarred in other ways, we have to run away to Ghana with this outfit stage of democratic process and we are saying thank you very much for everything you have done, but what we have not, we will not be able to nurture and continue to sustain it for as long as we have this burden of debt. And the reason is simple, sooner than later, our people will be asking for democracy. In terms of improvement in their quality of life, we won't be able to give that, if every year I make 8 billion dollars and I have to use 3.5 billion dollars to services debt and you are now saying to me that it will have negative effect. What negative effect? That I use 3.5 billion dollars out of my 8 billion dollars to service debt? Here we are telling them, this is the thing, what you have helped us to attain will slip off and if it slips off, it will be disastrous for Nigeria, for Africa and indeed for the world because the world needs Nigeria, of course, you may say well, to hell with them, but sooner or later you will find out that it is not just to hell with

them. And if they say, look instead of paying 3.5 billion, lets work something out. That is what I'm saying. I am not saying I don't want to pay anything at all. I don't want to renege completely, I'm saying that look, let us look at this thing, I cannot bear the burden as it is, so give me some remission, give me some reduction and you are now saying negative effect.

What negative effect?

***One of the positive developments most people hope the next decade will bring is to see an African permanent member of the UN Security Council. Is this a realistic objective?***

I believe it is realistic, you know human beings being what we are, when we have something we don't want others to have, we want to keep what we have and prevent others from having the same thing. Those who have permanent seat in the Security Council don't in their heart of heart really want to allow others to become members but others must also not give up, because there is again an element of normality, somethings you talk of democracy. In a situation where there are five continents in the world, America, Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia and you will group Australia along with Europe, so we are talking of four continents because they would put North America and South America together, now out of these four, three continents have permanent representatives: Asia, Europe and America. All we are saying is that Africa should also have a permanent seat. So, how will it happen? By never giving up, by making sure that we touch the conscience of those who have to move to actualize this.