

Don't Expect Miracles from Developing Nations

By: Shehu Usman Shagari

*Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari, the first Executive President of Nigeria is not a man given to flippant talks. Since he was removed from office in a military putsch on 31st December 1983, he has maintained a dignified silence on the allegations of corruption, indecision, ineptitude and economic mismanagement levelled against his administration. Several years after the military interregnum, **Shehu Shagari** waited with bated breath to churn out an autobiography "Beckoned to Serve", which took the world by storm. The autobiography defended the actions of his government and exposed the follies and fantasies of the junta that kicked him out of office. A few months before the release of the memoirs, he spoke to **Bolaji Abdullahi** in Lome, Togo during the International Conference of African Civil Society Organizations and the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) on a wide range of issues including women liberation, youth empowerment, crisis of development in Africa, one partyism, military dictatorship, Peace keeping operations in the West Africa sub-region, and his life and times in and outside government. Excerpts:*

It is about 17 years since you left office as the Executive President of Nigeria. Can you tell us how life has been since then?

Life has been pleasant, I would say better than the three years when one was not free. Now one is always busy, very engaged, and sometimes worried, but now (with) all these behind me and at my own time I have more liberty to do what I want to do. I have no pressing problem that worries me. So, for the first time in my life, I have regained much of myself.

Okay, you left office only a few months into your second term as the President of Nigeria. Do you think Nigeria would have gone a different direction from the way it went if you had not been over- thrown?

Yes, certainly! Now, you see the first term was somewhat experimental because, as you know, we had been under the military regime for a long time and the old system (of government) as they say, was history. So we were practising a new system and a new direction. And for everything new, we have to learn from experience, by practice. So, the first term was actually experimental and we were trying to make mistakes (and learn from them). And there was nobody who was experienced in that new administration. Imagine that! Neither the legislature nor the executive had any experience. We were all new to it. What we were used to was the parliamentary system of government and, if you remember, the parliament was even using the standing orders of the British parliament under the parliamentary system of government which was clearly different from the executive presidential system of government that we were using.

So in all, the second term afforded us the opportunity to correct all the mistakes that we had made in the first one. Also, the executive and the legislative arms of the government had gained some experience in the system. We should have been given the chance to practise it the second time and I'm sure it would have been better.

As for the president, he had to work with many people he didn't know especially at the executive level, I mean the ministerial level. By the time we finished the first term, I knew who was who and I knew who to choose and who to drop. So there were a lot of things which we had to devise against ... You know even in my second term in the choice of ministers for example, I told the party to give me a chance because in the beginning they were always dictating who should be appointed, and some of them, I didn't even know them but the second time, I told the party: Look, now I know the people so I should be given the chance to choose the people I think I can work with and they agreed. Of course, it was dependent upon the Federal character system as provided for by the constitution among many other considerations. But as I said earlier, the second term afforded us a great opportunity to correct any mistake that was made in the first term. We had projects that we wanted to complete, some of which we had started, and some we were hoping to get through. So all these things were halted by the unnecessary intervention of the military that led to the interruption of everything. Then it means that whenever democracy came back again now we were starting all over again because we had lost a lot of time.

You have been a leader and of course you had been in power. So what do you have to say about both now? That is talking philosophically now, what do you have to say about leadership and its relationship to power in the context of your own experience?

Well, in leadership itself, although it is difficult there is some sense of self-satisfaction in that one has now reached the stage in which people have accepted his leadership. It is a great responsibility! But to have a feeling that you have a great following and people are ready to do your bidding is something that is really, really very important because of all those responsibilities attached to it.

Now, power is much more unpleasant under leadership because, when you have power, the way you use it is most important and you don't know yourself that by accepting power and later losing it ... through a coup for instance, the tendency is for other people to say that; you know he is bad. And you are always condemned for much of these things. Whatever you do to people especially with the kind of opposition we have here in Nigeria, they condemn whatever you do, they would want to over run you! That is the most difficult point. Yet you have to exercise your powers, your authority in the best interest of the people, the way you see it.

I remember when I was first sworn in as the executive president, I went to Sokoto and I met the late Sultan, an old man, Sultan Abubakar Saddiq III and he said: well, Turaki (as he used to call me), "Turaki" is my traditional title. He said: well, Turaki now, you have now been decorated with a silk gown. And you know what a silk gown is? Whenever you wear a silk gown, it will never stay where you choose. If you put it on this side of the shoulder, it goes down! You put it

on the other side of the shoulder, it goes down again! And that is what Nigeria is! So Nigeria is like a silk gown.

You can never wear it properly. And it will not stay where you want it to stay. It will keep on dropping down. So, you be careful”, but, that time, I really didn’t catch on what the idea was until I started. It was then that I realized. “Ah! So this is what it was all about”, I said to myself later on. So whatever you do, you should know the kind of people you work with; there are people who are bent on running you down, to undo what you have done. So you have a double job. You’re doing something good in your opinion but also having to contend with those who don’t want the good element and want to bring it down! So that was the problem at the time.

Well, you have been in and out of government in Nigeria since the 1960’s up to the 1980’s, what was your experience like?

Well, it follows this same question, which I have just answered. It was not easy. Being in the executive, as I said, there is, of course, some satisfaction achieving something especially when you look back, but there are always obstacles in your way as you go on.

So in all these years that I’ve been in government, that will be my best opportunity to serve my people and my country. But I did not enjoy it. I did not enjoy it! That was why when it came to the question of the selection of our nominees for who would be the president in the second republic, I declined the offer, I never wanted to be president!

It was because of my past experience in government and my association with our leaders. I was very close to the Prime Minister in the first Republic, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and the late Premier of the Northern region, Sir. Ahmadu Bello, I was also very close to General Yakubu Gowon. All these were powerful people and they were also very good people who served their country well. But I was watching them, because I was very close to them. I know each one of them had very good intention, was devoted to duty, loved this country and the people, but people around them always sort of tried to build a wall between them and (the) realities of the situation at the time. So was it for the people around me. They never allowed me to know (most things I needed to know). And they will not allow the kind of people who will come and tell you the truth to be near you. And so, unconsciously, while you go out thinking that what you are doing is the best, they push you into doing things that, as far as you are concerned, are not good.

But the people outside won’t believe that. And that is a dangerous situation. So what happened with each of these leaders, it was because of the barrier, this artificial barrier raised to shield them from the realities of the situation. And I knew that there was no way I too could have escaped this if I accepted to be the Chief Executive. In the past, I had served under somebody but I had not been the chief executive. I have also seen what has passed during these past few years under all these chief executives that we have had. And at times, I even pity them, because once it came to a situation when I myself wanted to go and tell them the truth but I hesitated because of the fear of those people who will come and say: Oh! No! Don’t believe him! You don’t know this man? He’s doing this because of that ... and they will try to poison the mind of the leader. So I knew I could not escape that. So it is better not to even start. It took a lot of persuasions and pressures to bring me to accept the leadership in the end. So altogether it was not easy.

So, when you accepted, did you go into the office with a clean strategy of how to manage this kind of problem or as the case may be...

I did, I did, because it was something that I knew about and feared. Of course, I worked very hard to escape that but I could not guarantee that I could escape everything.

Okay, with the benefit of hindsight, were there things that your government did then, which you would look back and feel that if you had another opportunity, may be you would not do. Were there such instances?

Well it is difficult. The only thing, one instance, I can remember is the same situation that we are in now. I even warned the incumbent President (Olusegun Obasanjo) about it. You see the problem with democratic governments is that even before you are sworn in, you would have made promises to the electorate. You are (then) duty-bound to carry out these promises but when you get into office, there are some cases when you come out and you begin to see a different thing from what you envisioned. I mean, when you make promises, you are just guessing what is going to happen in the future. That you may be able to do it or you may not be able to do it, depending upon the economic situation of the country. Now, what happened was that, when we came in 1979, there was the oil boom, the price of oil was very high. There was plenty of money. So we started implementing our political programmes because the money was there. We had no excuse to tell the electorate that; "look, we cannot afford this, because they could see that we could afford it. But as our economy was oil-oriented, in just two years, the position was reversed and the price of oil just collapsed and there was turmoil. So if I had the chance again the second time, I would, despite all the promises, have tried to put a substantial amount in our foreign reserve, so that, when we reach a burst situation like that again, we would have somewhere to lean upon. This is what other countries are doing. And this is what we failed to do! And even now, we are going through the same thing. We rely upon this oil money, but tomorrow it may be something quite different. After you have committed yourselves to so many things, then the price of oil just collapses, and if you are not careful, either your country collapses or you will collapse because of this situation. This is a very difficult situation and one cannot explain to the people. It's better to tell them, that look we know we have money but we have to reserve some for rainy days. Nigerians will never listen to that. To them, all of the money is to be spent.

So what I am saying is that if I was given the chance, despite everything that happened I would endeavour to reserve some foreign exchange against the rainy day.

Okay sir, I could remember that in the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) logo we had a house, on the two sides of which we had two maize plants. And what I can pin that to was the low-cost housing (project) that was carried out all over the country. And I could also pin that down to the Green revolution. Of course, there would be different views (about) the extent to which these programmes were successful. Now, looking back at that period, how would you assess these programmes? And if there were difficulties, where would you say the difficulties came from?

Well, our logo was food and shelter because the NPN believed that these were the most important things that we had to face and to solve. So, our focus was poverty, poverty, and now people are talking about poverty alleviation. You can't alleviate poverty without doing something about food, and doing something about housing. So these are very crucial. And that is why we faced those problems. But what we faced was also a very difficult situation. One thing that we did not envisage was the hostility of our so-called opponents. They shouldn't be our opponents really because under the presidential system of government, there was no official opposition but these other parties who were not in government, in the federal government, ganged up, together to bring us down! Anything that we did was bad! And they were out to destroy it! Just for political reasons! Otherwise, how could one imagine a housing estate being built in a state and for that particular state government to come and bulldoze the whole houses? For what reason?

Those houses were made for their own people, not at their expenses, only simply to help them. But they bulldozed them! Even where they bulldozed, they had the land, we had to ask them to give us the kind of land where we would build the estates. They gave us land far away from the city, undeveloped land! So that we would spend more money making an access road, without electricity, water, nothing, instead of having satellite town near the city where we could use the facilities available at little expense. But they were doing all these deliberately to bring us down!

The same thing happened with the agricultural inputs we distributed to the farmers. But when we gave it to the states, that were not in our party, they distributed them to their supporters at the expense of our own supporters!

How do you get on with that! So we had to devise ways. That is why I had to appoint my own representatives there, because I couldn't depend upon the governors of other parties to implement my own programmes. They were out to destroy it That's why I had to appoint what we called PLOs.

Presidential Liaison Officers to oversee what was going on. Otherwise, the whole thing would be one – sided and we would spend more money than we should have spent ordinarily on these projects.

So they didn't see it as development for their people. They saw it as a device by the NPN to gain more votes. That's the way they saw it. It was ridiculous!

Okay sir, if we were to have a similar problem. A government is in power, it has the main intention to do things for the people but by way of execution, the governments in those states who are in other parties try their means to sabotage all these good efforts. How do you think we can get out of this problem because when you were talking what came to my mind was, would it have been better if we had had single party?

No! Single parties are out of date nowadays, not only in Nigeria but also everywhere in the world, because it's not democratic. We have to try democracy but we have to do it in the proper way! We were trying democracy but other people wanted to make it something else through confrontation. Democracy does not provide for confrontation between different parties. We were

all working for the same purpose... the people; they (the politicians) are out there to serve the people. So there should not be confrontation like the type we faced.

And thank goodness, now I don't see much of what happened in our time. So this is an improvement! The opposition is less ferocious now but in the first republic, that was really our problem ... biggest problem. This opposition...combined opposition...sustained opposition by a gang of political parties who were out just to destroy us! They don't have to run a democracy like that! But that was our lot!

Even if they were going to oppose, why should they form an alliance? Against us! For all of them to combine so that they could destroy anything that we did was in itself detrimental to progress. Even in the National Assembly, we were a minority in the National Assembly, but we had more seats than the other parties, than any of the other parties. So they combined their forces to confront us! And that's not the way to run democracies.

Okay sir, a little bit away from politics ... but related to it. Most of the people you contested against in Nigeria, Chief Awolowo, Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe, Alhaji Aminu Kano, Waziri Ibrahim are all dead! So, how would you remember them as citizens of Nigeria and as contemporaries?

Well, I have a great, great respect for each and every one of them ... because whatever happened, they were not dictators ... like the military. They tried in whatever way they thought was democratic to serve the people in their own way despite the confrontation, and opposition against us. I believe that whatever their fault, it was better to have that kind of system in our (own) democracy at the time than to have a dictatorship by the military because the military destroyed everything that was real in that democratic experience. There was no semblance of democracy during the military regime. So these people tried in their own way and, in whatever case, although they were opposed to us, they were also serving the interests of the people... especially the people who voted for them, (whose) permission of course they had to lead those states.

Okay sir, in relation to that, how would you compare politics and politicking in Nigeria during your time, and what we have now, including the various experiments under the military?

Well, politics is always politics, but in a way, what people like to call "politicking" is different. I can understand the problem of the new Executive and the Legislature but they were not given enough time to form political parties-general, broad-based political parties. They were not given enough time to campaign for elections. Now, we had an advantage over them in this area. We were given plenty of time to organize political parties and we were firmly on the ground for the election, which took place. In the case of this new regime, it was not so, they had a very short time. In fact, some of them, even many of the politicians joined political parties without knowing what their manifestoes were ... or what they wanted to do, before becoming members ... And they were also not given enough time to reach out to the people in order to explain to them their programmes. So it was just guess work. That's why now, although they had won election, and are now in government, many of them don't even understand the programmes of their own party, and they hardly respect their parties because they won election by themselves, on their own scheme, not by the efforts of the party. So that is the difference, and I think it's a great difference. Political parties now are very weak, not like those political parties we had. So that

situation tends to bring a kind of dictatorship from the Executive, because they think their progress is self made and they don't rely on the party.

You mentioned military rule earlier. Are you then saying that it is not possible for us to say okay, this is the way military rule has benefited Nigeria?

Every cloud has a silver lining. One can't say everything that the military did was bad. There has been a lot of development since that time. But one thing that comes out crystal clear is the creation of the states. It would have been impossible if the civilian government had wanted to create states. I wouldn't say impossible but it would have been very difficult.

Although we tried in our own time, we couldn't even create one because the opposition did not agree on it themselves and the constitution provides that we had to agree. You know, for those of you who were young at the time, the problems we faced centred on the legal basis; concerning the creation of states; proposals were made quite well by people yearning for the creation of states. But the problem was that when it comes to a thing like enactment more important steps have to be taken. The motion has to be approved by the two houses of the National Assembly and by at least 2/3 thirds of the Houses of Assembly in those states where the new states were to be created.

But if there was a demand for two, three states, the opposition would say; we will pass that one if you also agree to pass our own, "we also want states." I came to a point that all of us, everybody wanted states. So everything became a waste of time.

But the military on their own, by decrees would just say, they would create states and that was that, by fiat.

Now what is the philosophy or the idea behind the Shehu Shagari World Institute for Leadership and Good Governance?

Before I talk on that, to go back to your last question I'm not saying that I support the creation of new states. What I don't agree with is the idea of creating states improperly, without clear resolution. In fact I think we have created too many states... 36 states? That is too much.

That's my opinion

Tied quickly to that, can we trace some of the structural problems of managing the states as it were to the burden of bureaucracy that too many states would create?

Well, part of the problem is that once you create a state you have to face the issue of the development of the state. This is largely based on funding the administration. Every state has local governments to cater for. They have to pay their staff and they just cannot afford it. If they pay the staff there is nothing left. Then added to that is the fact that they have to build secretariats, build houses, build roads for their staff in the city. So the whole money goes towards financing the administration. When the other sectors of the economy get money, they follow suit.

Before I go back to the question I asked earlier, part of the problem we have now is to determine what should be the proper relationship between the local government and the state government on one hand, and the state government and the federal government on the other. Another angle of the major problem started with this new experience. What will you say went wrong, sir?

Well, it is unfortunate. Under our own constitution, all these were defined under the constitution. But it is not being applied strictly, according to the constitution. There is a lot of interference by the federal government in the affairs of the state government; by the state government over the local government; sometimes the state governments are under the federal government. This is not so. The same thing applies to the local government within the state. Of course the state government has close cooperation or control over the local government. But between the states and the federal government there is a clear demarcation! Such that, even on the concurrent lists, the states know their own responsibilities and they act accordingly. But now, all these have been mixed up. The federal government interferes with the state government. The state with the local government ...and (more unconsciously) we are still having the remnants of the military kind of system, where everything is done by military command. This is not so under the constitution!

Sir, let's go back to the earlier question I asked. What is the driving force behind the Shehu Shagari Institute for Leadership and Good Governance?

Well, like every other NGO, our approach is directed towards bringing about an understanding between people, between societies and even international organizations. The emerging fact that civil society is exerting a kind of influence on what is going all over the world and then this is one of the things we want to contribute to in our own way. And then, we are a new organization but not funded by government, but we are trying to organize lectures, seminars, forums in concert with other similar organizations in Nigeria and abroad. And I believe that what is most important is not the organization but how to educate the public so that they will be interested in what goes on in their immediate constituency and the nation. And they also call to mind their role to be of assistance to the government in the country in the interest of all. So this is the much that this organization is doing in line with others.

I want to ask another question not connected to this, something on a personal level. I know that when somebody is in power, he is likely to have so many friends who want to get one favour or the other but when he is out of power, he is also likely to lose many of these friends. What has been your own experience in this regard?

Well, I am happy that I had many friends, well many of them and I still regard them as good friends. Of course, there are a few, the just-not-so-sincere friends but by and large with God's help, I'm still with most of my friends and they are still in contact with me. Although I would say I am always very busy, at home now, but I continue to get visits, calls, from friends, far and wide. I have some other things that friends did for me. Some of them were willing to do and they

helped me financially to get on, because I came out without anything from detention. Without their help, I would have been a pauper! So some of them have been very helpful.

That leads me to another thing. Your government with the subsequent experience that we have had under military rule has shown that what people were actually talking about then was child's play but we can still talk about what was on the ground then. However, many people would regard your government as one of the most corrupt governments (in the country's history). They point at individuals who were very corrupt, and even out of government, we know some of them who are actually still very rich. But it shocks one to know that you who was a head of that government could only survive by the assistance of friends and know that even as far back as 1983, when things were still new, many people were still saying, well, Alhaji Shagari was not corrupt? So how did this happen?

You see, what happened is that what the people were saying were lies. Those people they talked about were not very rich as being bandied about by those persons. I ask you to tell me here now who among my own people came out very rich and still rich? Tell me now?

I know that the people they normally talk about. It is either Adisa Akinloye, they also mention Alhaji Umaru Dikko?

Alhaji Umaru Dikko is a pauper now! You see all these were propaganda, rubbish ...completely rubbish. They wanted to run us down and that in fact made me so sad and so angry with them. Yes, because while I was in detention, I had the opportunity that the other detainees did not have. I read everything because they were sending me papers everyday, all the papers. So all the things being said were lies. They were lies and liars! It was all complete favouritism.

Each one of them was out to destroy us. After all, we had been overthrown and detained. What more did they want? But these people still went around; they thought propaganda could be done with our stories. They painted the stories, which were complete lies. And what happened after? I mean the people could see at the end of the day, who the culprit was so it was all lies, complete lies against us.

Could it be then that the military that took over from you was only saying those things because they thought that would be an excuse to the public or they were also responding to what the public was also saying? Could this be so, because I know for example that one of the major excuses that was given was that your government was corrupt?

It was not true and I challenge them to bring the examples. Even, now let them tell me among my ministers and the ministers under the military, which set was were richer between two? So all those stories were all lies.

Okay sir, let's leave Nigeria, a little bit. What do you think should be the nature of cooperation in West Africa as it is today?

We are just beginning. We are a new nation so we can't expect miracles from developing countries especially those who are poor like we are, but all the same we are trying. I am very happy (that) the West Africa issue is a very good example. I think we can boast among other region of being one of the best and I think if other regions (in Africa) do the same, we will move forward together in progress ... but we just hope of course that we have to make mistakes to learn. All the same, we have hope, great hopes.

Sir, what do you think about ECOMOG?

ECOMOG is doing a very good job. Thanks to Nigeria, I must say. That is another thing to talk about on the military and the military regime. I think one of the good things that the military did for us was ECOMOG this wouldn't have been possible unless under a military regime.

Why?

The civilians do not have the right? I mean it may be true in private to say that all our money is fritted away through the Liberia and Sierra Leone interventions. In a civilian administration, it would not have happened. There would have been much noise from home to stop all these efforts. For us we may have good reasons for what the military did in the case of ECOMOG and this is commendable. Because we have put the West African region on the world map and we have set an example for others to follow, not only in Africa but also in the rest of the world, I think it's a good thing.

Sir, if I may ask you, how would you see Nigeria in the light of our current experience, say in another 10 years?

Ten years is a short time in the history of any nation and this is not different in our own case ... but we have a programme of development. If we follow that programme we will be able to develop our economy. But I have my doubts if we will be able to stick to that programme.

Why sir?

Because we don't have the resources, I mean sure resources. Our economy is currently in an uncertain position. Nobody, even those who make all the plans, know what is going to happen in ten years time. That is the story. But it is true. As I was saying, even if you plan for a few years with a particular government tenure and in the middle of it you simply find that you can't go on any longer. Because this is the kind of situation in which we do not control the state. It is controlled by outsiders, that is the problem. We don't control our economy; other people control it for us. Simple.

Sir, what do you think should be the role of traditional rulers in modern governments?

Well, they still have a role, I believe, at least in Nigeria. I am aware that Nigeria has to deal with the peasantry, who have got a great deal of respect for their traditional institutions and despite

the programme of democracy, this people still turn to their traditional rulers for orders, and until that situation changes we have to continue to work with them and to assist them. This is because of the influences they have on the rural populace. But of course, the situation is not the same as it was a few years back. It continues to erode as education and democracy progress and there will be a time when it will become much developed. But it is not now. Not now.

Sir, what about gender imbalance and the role of women (in leadership); what's your attitude to this?

Well, one can call for women education, and awareness. I think a lot of progress is being made in Nigeria, in Africa on this at the moment. This is a good sign. This will happen in other areas in the future. That is very encouraging because it is the women themselves who can help themselves. It is the women who will still have to fight for their rights. They should therefore think very well on this. At the same time, I would advise them to consider very carefully issues of development and to know that it could happen if we persist. We are very traditional in Africa as opposed to what is happening in other parts of the world, in Europe or America. So we should not copy the West blindly just because we want women to be emancipated. We should do it in our way to preserve what we value in our culture and our traditions.

What about the youths?

Yes of course...youth. The case is much more difficult for youth than women. I think in the case of women, what we need to do is to educate them, enlighten them, everybody, government inclusive. In the case of youth, education alone is not enough. We have to provide them employment because without self-employment for them, you have created a new problem. And this is what is happening in our country today.

Now so many youths are unemployed; so many have become area boys. We have so many armed robbers and the rest of them.

So what is important is to prepare a programme that will solve these problems, to keep all these people busy, doing something, by giving them something to make them useful for themselves and the society. In this way, we can make progress.

Well, as the president of Nigeria, you had insights into the workings, of the OAU. You attended and chaired the sessions. Now, what is your view about this organization? Do you think it is living up to expectations? Do you think there are problems that need to be addressed to make it more effective or do you think we don't even need the OAU at all?

We do, we do, it's very important but, as noted by somebody recently, the OAU is what Africa can't leave to go under. Whatever Africa becomes such will the OAU become. If we improve, it will improve, if we go under, it will also go under. That is the point!

As with all international organizations, the most important aspect is for the organization to be adequately funded because if it's just talking, talking, writing documents and so on, we can go on forever. But I think the bane of all our organizations in Africa is that we rely upon foreign donors to support the cause of Africa, and then we also complain that they are interfering in our internal affairs. But the man who pays the piper calls the tune. I remember I had that kind of problem with the ADB, which is our bank. It was in Khartoum. I remember, I had said to Dr. Salim: we need to have our own bank, we must not rely on foreign banks. There must be an African bank, fully financed by Africans, for Africa you know, everybody listened to the proposal. I was also the Minister of Finance when they brought this idea that among those western countries who were just associate members or observers, they should have shares in the bank. This, of course, I opposed vehemently. That time of course Nigeria had great influence upon the affairs of the OAU and I blocked the idea of making them full members. But as soon as I left, they took over the control of the ADB and that is how it is now. So that is the same situation.

We want to have our organization but we rely upon the very people we want to fight against, to finance us. That is the only problem. Now you know that apart from the ADB, we have the Economic Commission for Africa, which is supposed to be the economic side of the OAU. And you know the ECA even preceded the OAU. It was created before the OAU. And they work in the same secretariat, but this one is controlled by the United Nations while this other one (the OAU) is financed, although not fully, by all the member countries. OAU has had many difficulties since its formation. For years members don't pay their yearly subscriptions, subventions, but they are more vocal when it comes to contributing talks and thoughts. Let's face this issue properly.

Our governments have to realize that there are two crucial aspects. We have to realize that you just can't eat your cake and have it. And that is why we have had to suffer all these degradations.

It is not their faults. It's ours.

When we were faced with the Chadian problem, OAU said we should intervene. If we did, we would be financing it almost exclusively. OAU was only to pass the resolution and we were to finance OAU was to control. So the project failed. Even what was to be paid by OAU was not paid, and we were never repaid. Libya had to intervene because it had money and troops and that created a lot of problem for us. It took us a long time to get Libya out.

There was this case of Chadian rebels invading Nigeria. But you refused to take action to the extent that General Buhari had to use his initiative to deal with the situation. Why?

This thing was not as Buhari wants the people to believe. And even if it is so, Buhari should be ashamed of himself that as a soldier he had to act against the order of his C-in-C. I never knew about what he did, I even doubted it happened at all. This is the background. There were these skirmishes around Nigeria's border with Chad. There was a rebel group fighting the government in that country. What they were doing was to attack Nigerian villages, pillaged their food and money and return to Chad to continue their problem. We sent the troops to keep them at bay. But you know between Nigeria and Chad, it was difficult to know where the border was. There were

a number of islands around Lake Chad so much so that to have a clear picture, you had to enter through Cameroon. One day, the President came to Lagos to complain that Nigerian troops were encroaching into his territory. We could not verify this immediately. But we found that Nigerian troops were some 50km into Chad. They were chasing the rebels while the rebels were chasing the Chadian Army and vice versa. But Nigerian soldiers could not differentiate between the two. I then called a meeting and invited the troops on both sides. Then we agreed on a line of demarcation. And after that we agreed that everyone should stop fighting that was my order. Gokoni also gave his orders. How could Buhari then say what he said? Why didn't he say that kind of thing when he was still under me? Why did he have to wait until he became a C-in-C himself. I would have dealt with him. He should be ashamed of himself.

How would you like to be remembered?

I have answered this question before. What I said was that I would like to be remembered as a teacher. All through my life, I have been a teacher and I am still teaching. But because this is for an international audience, I will like them to have more insight. I will like to be remembered as a servant of the public. Throughout my life I have served the public and I am still serving.