

A DIAGNOSTIC FOR THE HEALING MISSION

We meet here today, as so happens, during the United Nations' celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I participated in some of those activities just two weeks ago, met some remarkable beings – women especially – who had personal, subjective cause to celebrate and fiercely promote the provisions of that document. Several had cause to bitterly lament its absence in public awareness among their own peoples, or the lack of even the loosest compliance with its provisions in their governments, even till today. A number of them testified from personal experience, others simply took part in promotional events, geared towards making humanity understand that, when distilled from beginning to end, that document is based quite simply on an innate pursuit of justice for the individual, as well as equitable considerations between, and within communities and nation. The occasion served to remind the world that this creature, on behalf of whom the Universal Declaration was crafted, is made up from a combination of elements that make humanity unique, elements that we conveniently classify as both physiological – organs, brain, body framework etc - and non-physical, its psychology – a combination of which constitute its personality and earn it indisputable recognition as the very objective, indeed foundation and justification of community, society, state or nation – the reason for their very existence. Without that entity, none of them exists, they would be totally inconceivable. I have ventured into those specialized premises - just briefly, and apologetically - at the outset, simply to stress that it is this awareness that places the medical profession at the front line for examining, even determining the relevance or not of such protocols as the Universal Declaration. Let us keep that firmly in mind as I try to ensure that you share in the commemoration through my takeaway package that pertains to this specialized gathering.

Yes, you least of all need reminding that it is to that singular entity that we have just isolated, that species of the living family, that the medical science and its practitioners dedicate their professional existence, and I wonder if the preamble of that document – The Universal Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights - was on the minds of the organizers of this event, when they offered their original proposal for the theme of my address, which was – *Conflict Resolution*. Unavoidably, on account of the close timing, my mind went straight to the preamble of the Declaration. Let me remind you of the relevant sections:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.

Whereas it is essential - if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression - that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations, Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom....

There it all is, the rest being a listing of the human rights and propositions towards the attainment of that ideal of human existence and societal interaction. Succinctly, nearly comprehensively. It leaves not much to add. So, I had planned to drop in, read out the protocols of the Declaration, advise that Conflict resolution is not merely covered, but that the very prevention of conflict is already prefigured in the Declaration, and that all Conflict resolution demands is that all contending parties, no matter where on the globe, should simply persuade their governments, quasi-governments, quasi- government, major and minor powers and aspiring powers to abide by those protocols, after which I would simply catch the next flight home. The world would be bathed from pole to pole in an aura of peace for the first time since the end of World War II.

However, I suppose that, thanks to their training, doctors also tend towards mind-reading, even across internet correspondence. Somehow, they must have accessed that plan and decided to make sure that I did sing a full aria for my supper! So, along came another letter not long afterwards, changing the subject in more senses than one, by asking me if I would kindly switch to the theme – *Justice is the First Condition of Humanity*.

That pronouncement, for those of you who may not know it, is a quotation from one of my works, and they calculated, quite rightly, that I would not pass up an opportunity to elaborate on its thesis. After all, the nature of the literary vocation - or sermonizing, which is simply part of the trade - obliges us not only to love the sound of our voices but to love sounding off on our ideas. Thus, I came to be saddled with two topics by some people who claim to be scientists but appear unable to make up their own minds over a simple topic for an occasion such as this. Well, I shall concede to them some credit however: both themes are not only conjoined, they are mutually assimilative, and they cover the gamut of humanity, it's

very self-realization, including its social responsibilities. At the foundation of a society that desires to be at peace with itself is indeed one invisible, but palpable corner-stone: Justice. Justice in the absolute, not a relative or qualified apportionment. It cuts across age, gender, faith and race. It is contemporary and ageless. It defines society. And often, society relies on the empirical sciences to assist us in the administration of that sometimes hazy but imperious essence called Justice, otherwise society suffers a miscarriage and gives birth to abnormalities. Where it slips up, the entire world feels more than a little askew. The consequences of such slip-ups sometimes end in a gross miscarriage of justice, including even sending an innocent man to the gallows. It can send the unsuspecting, in large numbers, to their premature deaths or institute gross deformities in the unborn – the Thalidomide generation may be petering out, but the memory should not.

There are times when such an aberration has been deliberate, made to serve inglorious ends – such as racism. We can also debate, quite dispassionately if we choose, certain controversial directions in which medical exploration has taken off, such as stem cell research – in the end we remain totally dependent, and ultimately rely of scientific findings of what such research does for humanity. A substantial part of laws, the codification of the provisions and administrative processes of justice, are often based on the findings of science. Since such findings guide the conduct of humanity who make up society, it is only to be expected that the science of the human body is paramount in deliberations that aspire to that desired pinnacle of – Justice. How, for instance, do we prescribe for the protection of the weaker, the more vulnerable units of the human community – the infants, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged – to whom do we assign the last word in enshrining the well-being of worker, peasant, tycoon, bureaucrat, politician, pop musicians and even convicted prisoners? Or if that roll-call of total dependency is not sufficient, try and recall where the current president obsessively pitched his war-camp, when he decided that his first act as president was to dismantle the legacy of his predecessor, the first black man to occupy the White House – Obamacare!

Now, there was a question that preoccupied us during our own events at the UN gathering. That issue was that of cultural relativism in the observation of human rights – some of you may have watched parts of the debate that were streamed over Internet. That very alibi for the violation of human rights is, fortunately not tenable in this profession - scientific findings are simply not relative – they are either true or false, provable or conditional. Much of the time, they are also still under trial – hence the all-important, tedious but meticulous attention given to research and trials. Even those trials, including their uncertainties, place

society on a holding pattern. We can choose to ignore the doctor's recommendations for ourselves, but we cannot transgress their constraints where such conduct affects others. From the commencement of uncertainty, a morality is imposed on society, once our conduct, physically or psychologically, affects others. A contentious case in point here is the restriction on smoking, involving what is termed second hand inhaling. Such graduation from speculation to the mandatory is logical and humanly considerate. While we are regarded as creatures of will, volition, self-regulation, *others* cannot be, should not be compromised by the exercise of that volition, such as a choice of life-style which we chose to retain, even while detrimental to our individual well-being. That is one obvious deduction from Fundamental Human Rights. It claims, simply that where empirical pronouncements prescribe regulations on human conduct towards one another, they are also to be regarded as morally binding, since any infraction constitutes endangerment of another human, or the community, whose well-being, and own fundamental human rights to health, form the very foundation of community survival.

Now, what exactly are the arguments that permit any blithe dismissal of scientific interdictions, such as – and this specific example is deliberately selected from an ongoing aberration in my own society – a recent epidemic, no less of - under-age copulation, most especially through rape. The Nigerian media across the country has been deluged with the sordid details, in the past few weeks of how a 13-year old child was raped to death by a father-and-son team. This was a case that only happens to be the latest, and of a singularly harrowing dimension – a father-and-son rapist binge that ended in the child's death. An extreme case, but it always begins with impunity, transits into emulation, and ends in an epidemic. The mental progression goes thus:

If *they* have the right to do this without sanctioning, then so do *we*! That is why there can be no compromise on justice. The nation's judicial system failed that child! The nation betrayed her! Is it really beyond speculation that a nation's failure to exert justice where due has contributed, at the very least, to this epidemic phenomenon? Many would like to deny it, to deny the very probability that a dereliction in the application of justice amounted to a legitimization of whatever infringement of the provisions of the law a people permit. Where the provisions of Justice are flouted, brazenly and defiantly by the powerful, or influentially placed, the ordinary citizen sits up and takes notice. Tendencies in the same direction, which have been held under check, are given free rein and self-gratification takes over, all constraints are loosened, encouraging the worst expressions of injurious and egocentric propensities in the citizen.

Many of you may have forgotten, or were not home at the time, certainly it does not appear that a connection has been made. I invite you to cast your mind back to a notorious instance that took place in the nation some four or five years ago, when the system of justice faltered, broke down, and remained hobbled in favour of a former governor - later even a senator, that is, a lawmaker, who had been proved a serial, cross-border paedophile. He even virtually **bought** his victims – I believe his last purchase cost him 10,000 US dollars, and he took her out of school, brought her back into Nigeria for their nuptials. What was touted by this degenerate at the time, in his defence, was indeed nothing other than - Cultural Relativism. My culture, which happens to be religion based – he defiantly declared - permits marriage and consummation to any ‘underage’ female. Therefore, you cannot take me to task. And he even cited the marital history of his prophet to sustain that defence.

That case was a very special challenge to the medical profession, and I personally expected a robust, collective response from the doctors and their association. The abduction and rape of a mere girl-child is not a relative issue. It is ethical, and it is medical. The law is based on the findings of the science of human anatomy, and has absolutely nothing to do with culture of religious faith. Either justice is administered with an even hand, or impunity proliferates. A society takes its cues from what is permitted at the top. Open the pages of the Nigerian media today, any day, and you will be extremely lucky not to encounter yet another reported incident of child rape, sometimes, even of the gang rape variety. It proliferates with a frequency that one finds difficult to absorb, wondering into what kind of society one wakes every morning. It has reached fever pitch, so predictable that I dread to open the newspapers every morning, afraid of encountering yet another reported atrocity against the girl child.

I repeat: simply go through the media, especially the court reports. Compare the level of this perversion today with its level before the Zamfara escapade I have just narrated. A serious sociological study cannot fail to find a correlation. First, no one will deny that we now have an epidemic on our hands. All epidemics – be it Lassa fever, Ebola, bird flu or whatever - are traceable to a moment of infection, or resurgence. Next, I challenge any epidemiologist to trace the ongoing epidemic backwards and then, with careful observations provided by sociologists, health workers, and the police, assure the nation that the media exposure of that case of decadent self-gratification, and his arrogant parade of immunity from prosecution or even social ostracism is unconnected with the alarming incidence of child-rape and its brutal, unconscionable escalation in the past five years or more. And so, when I encounter arguments of cultural relativism applied to any practice that involves violation of another human being, I have only a short cut response to this artificial and cynical ploy. It takes the form of a

question. Human rights, after all do not exist in the abstract, they apply to the palpable being as this speaker and his listeners, that is, to a species of that animal/spiritual life whose defining components we began by itemizing and are independent of race, nationality, gender, diet, culture and the imponderables of survival and death – not by any vaporous construct of religion or secular ideology, but by physically testable components. It is an entity that continues to manifest itself as a sensory network of feeling and thought – the human entity is the beginning and end of otherness and self-apprehension – so, since we cannot eliminate the ‘humanity’ that gave meaning to human rights, we pose the short-cut question: is the human being relative? I posed that question during the UN anniversary I spoke of earlier – perhaps this subsequent gathering of scientists of the human body will provide me an answer. What applies to the individual remains applicable to entire communities. Just like individuals, entire communities can be subjected to the experience of rape – it is not by accident that the word ‘rapine’ found a place in the vocabulary.

Merely perceived or actual, conflict commences as a consequence of injustice. It will only be resolved when that imbalance is corrected and equity in human relations restored. Of course, conflict can also claim to have been restored when one side has beaten the other to a coma, or both sides attain a stalemate, and further violent engagement becomes mutually untenable. We all know however, that this is merely a pause, saving up for resumption sometime in the future. This is the rationale behind the framing of the Universal Declaration, as frankly stated in the preamble, in addition to the fact that the initiative was a conscious response to a devastating war that went beyond all carnage and degradation of humanity on a scale that the world had yet to undergo since the very construct of nation was ever conceived.

Doctors know what conflict means, and I believe that they know that war is a disease. Thus, they recognize that conflict resolution is only another department of healing, sometimes requiring a greater sensitivity perhaps than probing into the tissues of that powerhouse and control panel of the individual entity – known as brain surgery. In any case, no matter the nature of conflict, when it blows open, they are in the front line, never mind if their makeshift hospitals are logically located behind the firing lines – which does not prevent a sizeable proportion from becoming casualties themselves. Mostly however, its units are stretcher and pall bearers in turn, with bouts of frenetic services to the restoration of mangled life – often futile - in between. But they know also that they are not themselves immune from the virus that begets the disease and sometimes, are identified as promulgators of social dissonance that results in conflict, or that they also stoke the flames that prolong its duration. After all, they are also human, and thus harbor human failings and emotions. Can the world ever forget the

infamous Nazi, Dr. Mengele? Radovan Karadzic is cooling his heels in one of the palatial residences reserved for war criminals who only happen to have also been Heads of State, etc. etc. And we must not permit ourselves to forget one of the most unconscionable medical crimes committed against African Americans in this nation – the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment, for which President Clinton had the grace to apologize during his tenure of office.

However, as a clan, medical practitioners, by vocation, are healers. It is therefore ironic – and unfair! - that they should offer one of many routes to understanding the genesis of a specific root of conflict – not all forms of conflict, let me stress that but – a specific yet underrated passage into a seizure of the major incubatory for the hatching of conflict. And we arrive at this root simply by studying them and the implicit status of their vocation. I pose this question: what does their profession guarantee most fundamentally, which ordinary humanity – that is, the majority outside of this hall - do not possess. The answer to that question offers a small window of apprehension where we can seize an element that is especial to this unique profession. From that recognition, we are able to open that window of application wider and wider to embrace instigators of social rupture of different kinds, and at different levels. It is not, I readily admit, a yet widely appreciated aperture, since the world is pragmatically preoccupied by the substantial – the open, graspable and even quantifiable causes of conflict - conflicts of material immediacy, such as the struggle for resources – water, land, minerals, property etc, or in some cases, the struggle between the haves and have-nots, the so-called class conflict, erupting under seemingly unrelated guises, but at base a demand for equity in social apportionment. However, there is a missing predisposition that sets the doctor apart, a ‘value added’ item, albeit unsought, a non-physical facet of humanity, historically amplified, that is a provable source of social ruptures.

All right, here is a clue. What was the commonest description used for the sensational careers of the following: the nurse, Greenie Jones of the seventies; Harold Shipman, known as Dr. Death, whose career spanned nearly a quarter of a century, or indeed, in his own unique class, the earlier mentioned Dr. Mengele who felt a calling to rearrange the human anatomy, ideally on the living species. Add again Radovan Karadzic, the psychiatrist and one-time leader of the Bosnian Serbs and President. Any takers? Well, here it is: they relished the power over others. Of Dr. Shipman, as a matter of fact, the actual words were: “He wanted to play God”. In practical translation, to exercise the power of life and death over others. But it is a fact, isn’t it, that doctors do have that power, only not in a warped apprehension, and that possession is exercised, even captured in their Hippocratic oath, on behalf of life, its quality and preservation.

Now let us add to that list another roll-call: shall we take the Mafia lord, Don Corleone? Caligula? Nero? Mobutu Sese Seko? Idi Amin Dada. Adolf Hitler. Mariam Mengistu. Emperor Bokassa. Josef Stalin. Nigeria's own Sanni Abacha. Again Radovan Karadzic? Pablo Escobar and that entire line of the underworld where the godfather's word is law.

No fault of the medical scientists, but that is the connecting link, a much neglected pointer in our search for one timeless, unceasing source of human conflict – Power. Is it possible to recall any other profession as yours with such an unwholesome proportion of that – within their hands. Let me spell this out: doctors exercise an inordinate amount of that value almost routinely. Virtually on a daily basis. Alas, it is only through incidents of a negative exercise of that very value that such apprehension percolates through to most of us – the more sensational, the more penetrating. The names we have cited are of course incidents, mere blips on the healing template that is stamped with records of achievements and breakthroughs in the preservation of human life and the enhancement of its quality. The extract exists none the less, and its negative conversion continues to haunt the world, bedevil relations between communities and nations. It is a much neglected instigator of cycles of sanguinary, intractable conflicts among peoples and nations – Power! Domination. Control of the environment in its totality, including the exercise of the power of life and death. Playing God.

You can restore stolen cattle, recover appropriated land, water resources and mineral deposits, but the corollary of Power being freedom, how do you restore, for instance, years of that portion of the human repletion and essential being that has been appropriated for years, sometimes generations. How do you restore – to examine it through the framework of that unique entity with which we began our exploration – how do you restore to that individual the years that have been taken from him or her during long years of wrongful or arbitrary imprisonment for the most productive part of existence? How do you restore the original wholeness of a victim of torture? How do you heal any victim of rape, but most especially child rape? Perhaps you begin to grasp the full import of that existential pronouncement: Justice is the first condition of humanity. What restitution can be made?

Is the hair-ribbon sized fiefdom of Yahmeh truly resolved simply because Yahmeh was eased out of Gambia through the concerted efforts of ECOWAS leaders – that is, the leaders of the West African states? He left with his negotiated fleet of cars, and unexamined boxes of accumulated loot, having blasted lives, homes, livelihood, and the life prospects of

others, tortured, killed, traumatized and physiologically damaged members of the opposition through forceful administrations of hallucinogens. The purpose? To convict or indict them of being witches who wanted to use witchcraft to topple him from his micro kingdom.

However, if you really wish to understand the tawdry nature of power in the hands of the mental mutants that control our lives – and we do not speak merely of the African continent - I exhort you to access the scene where the West African leaders were received in audience by Alhaji Dr. Yahaya Jameh, a stage specially set to set him apart as lord of that environment, even though he was receiving his peers. Anyone of those intercessors could have blown him away – literally, by merely exhaling - if he refused to vacate a throne that had been lost in an election that the whole world had declared free and fair.

Let me briefly describe to you – in case you never did see the recording – the scene where the final act of the resolution of that crisis was played out. It took place, naturally, in Yahmeh's audience chamber. A long table, on either side of which sat Yahmeh's West African peers – Sirleaf-Johnson of Sierra Leone, the Senegalese president whose troops were massed on the border to enter and take over Gambia if Alhaji Dr. Jahmeh proved stubborn. Muhammed Buhari of Nigeria who had already sent troops to join the Senegalese contingent. But, in that audience chamber, they were all deliberately positioned by Jahmeh to make them look like naughty school pupils summoned to receive a dressing down. Jahmeh sat at the head of this long table in his signature white robes and worry beads on a raised dais, so that he towered above his visitors, come to negotiate details of his quiet extraction from the borders of that decades-old troubled nation. It was as tawdry a pretence at the status quo of power as you could hope to encounter in the most amateurish Nollywood production. This little squirt felt that he had to show who was lord, pretend to the world that he was still in control of an environment that had long quit his grasp. It was, however, a plus for the West African leaders, and for that region. But such an intervention could never have succeeded on his own. It succeeded because it was backed by an alternative – force. In the words of Marlon Brando's Don Corleone – one of my favourite citations - they had merely come to 'make him an offer he could not refuse'. That is one way to resolve a conflict – identify, then remove the cause of injustice, forcibly if need be.

So, we have no choice but to accept that sometimes, especially with power besotted individuals, conflict resolution is obliged to take a not totally pacific course. Conflict resolution is based on the principle of the restoration of justice – otherwise nothing is resolved. This means that both parties must understand, to begin with, that desired terminus of

equitable dealing. They may – and usually are – divided over what it entails in the specific conflict but at the very least, they must have a minimal grasp of what that value is. This, alas, is not often the case. Power blinds its possessor, deafens him, occludes even vision – which is internal. Without a grasp of its ultimately arbitrating value on both sides, alas, the news is bad, very bad. Conflict resolution is a non-starter. The phenomenon of power in itself demands dedicated study.

For a contrasting scenario, we need not go far to seek our example. Take the case of Southern Sudan, for instance - let us use this as a model for constructive resolution. The decades enduring civil war in Sudan, concluded only four years ago - that is, between North and South - as is often the case, sadly, with wars of liberation - was also complicated by cleavages within an opposition that was largely united against the common enemy – the Northern Arab hegemony. It developed into a brutal confrontation between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, clashes lasted on and off for almost eight years until around the year 2000, with the loss of thousands of lives and destruction of numerous villages. Then an initiative was undertaken by some missionaries who, with foreign assistance, eventually succeeded in bringing together over three hundred participants from the warring communities - community chiefs, traditional healers, moslem leaders, christian ministers, family heads etc. - for a peace conference. The process appears to have been similar to that of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as each speaker spoke of the pain of personal and family losses, bereavements, the abandonment of ancestral homes and continuous uprootings and dispersals.

What I must remark, from my own approach to this dilemma, was the ethic of Restitution that appeared central to the encounter. Hundreds of stolen cattle were returned - thus removing the emotive obstacle of the 'spoils of war' - and, despite the fact that the leader of one of the warring factions appeared to have remained allied – at least at the time - to the oppressive government in Khartoum, the people themselves had heroically decided that between them, as peoples, there had to be peace and reconciliation. Now that was a successful model of conciliation that sought neither your peace nor mine, but Peace itself as a common denominator in the relationship between once implacably opposing groups. Both sides understood the meaning of justice, and valiantly pursued its trail. Restitution, that is the basis of conflict resolution, and the plinth that upholds Justice. Without restitution, even symbolically, the suppurating wounds are merely covered by scabs.

Nigeria could have done with such a proceeding – who knows, we may yet resort to that approach, but such signs are not within sight or hearing, and the impunity with which blood has been spilt, and other negative derivatives, are not so easily forgotten. How could they be, when even after a succession of midnight raids on sleeping communities of farmers, with the roll-call of slaughter climbing into the hundreds, with the governor of the affected state screaming for help, with the news channels publicising gory images of the aftermath if such raids, even as the survivors narrated at first-hand accounts of their ordeal – not that their pathetic physical conditions, required any verbal attestation! The population of the IDPs – the internally displaced persons - continued to swell exponentially and the whole nation wrung its hands in impotence, frustration, bewilderment and anger. Death statistics pursued, overtook and surpassed, within one year, the total of fatalities inflicted on the nation in five years, by that other Murder Incorporated – Boko Haram!

Now, what was going on on the other side – within governance that had responsibility for the security of its peoples and the punitive power for crimes against public well-being? The head of law enforcement in the nation insisted that what was going on amounted to nothing more than minor communal clashes. He was not alone. Yet another crucial figure in the architecture of security of any nation, the Minister of Defence no less, validated governance lethargy, indeed took the hands-off attitude to a new level, unambiguously a defence of the aggressor. His words, more or less went thus:

“Well, if people block the passage of the herdsmen’s cattle on their way to grazing, how do you expect them to respond?”

Answer: Grab hold of AK 47s, descend on the obstructionists, burn down their homes, slaughter them asleep, burn down their farms and hunt them down as they take refuge in the surrounding forests, resume the campaign the following day, continue the following week, expand the ‘legitimate’ punitive action into other states, other farmsteads, summon reinforcements even from neighbouring countries, give press conferences narrating the historic valour of your ancestors etc. etc. etc.

Just to recapitulate, and also to fill in a few gaps in this yet ongoing outlawry: An organization, not anonymous but with faces, both human and bovine, has been rampaging up and down the nation, armed to the teeth, descending on innocent villagers and farmers with their cattle, which of course eat up their crops and trample over the rest. The herders burn down farms, dismember any protesters, rape their women young and old and defy all agencies of law and security. To ensure that the message of impunity is not missed, their spokesmen appear on the media, unrepentant, defiant. They proceed not only to distort history, they

mangle the sequence of cause and effect, so that everyone becomes confused: which came first? The chicken or the egg? The destruction of farms by the cattle, which led conflict? Or the laws to confine cattle to designated grazing land to avoid further clashes and destruction of food crops? Work out the logic of that whoever wishes, but it is ultimately of little relevance.

What counts is the voice of power: Repeal that law, the spokesman of the killers demanded. We shall settle for nothing less! In short, power transcends even law – that is the entire point of the rhetoric, the mind-boggling sequential distortions that attempt to override all notions of justice for the aggrieved. Power thrives on cynicism. And this is a most instructive instance, since it reminds us that the practitioners of the power game are not always the state or its agencies. Even morons understand and exploit that cannibalistic relation that exists between power and Justice, the latter inclusive of legitimate apportionment. Even as I speak, over a year after the commencement of the serial butcheries, the demagogue for these herdsmen has yet to be checked in stride by any government agency. The upside-down historian of first settlers and the logic of some ancient conquest by his great forebears apparently endows his meandering clan with eternal power of dispossession, of life and death over human settlements in that unmapped region. As for the Head of State, he simply went Missing in Action, and only appeared after what must have been immense pressure from his image makers and insider forces. When he eventually showed up, it was to propagate a stunning banality of conflict resolution – neighbours must learn to tolerate one another etc. etc. ad nauseam. This, after day and night mayhem with fatalities in their hundreds. No mention of compensations, restitutions, but above all, a resolute declaration of intent to enforce the rigours of the law and ensure security for citizens. Blessed - he must have recently read, somewhere – are the peacemakers.

Yes, he did surface eventually, but also to declaim another original - a plaint of surprise: 'But I ordered the Inspector-General of Police into action. I told him to relocate to Benue' – he complained -Benue being the epicenter of mayhem. Now remember that this was the same Inspector-General of Police who had already relegated these mounting statistics to minor neighbourhood disagreements. Ordered by his president and commander-in-chief to relocate his command post to Benue, this servant of state had indeed popped in. That was confirmed. He breezed in and breezed out on a flying visit, and never since, to the best of my knowledge till today, has his shadow fallen across the borders of that state. The killings escalated. This pinnacle maintainer of law and order retains his position till today. There is no

record that he has even been mildly reprimanded. As we say in our part of the world – *Pawa pass pawa !*

Injustice is a virus which, once entered into the body system, courses through the blood stream. A sense of injustice breeds a feeling of abandonment by the entirety of humanity, and when a people feel abandoned, they lose hope. When a people lose hope, they resort to desperate measures. That is a human response, and we underestimate it at our own peril. It is the major extract, the main message to the global community from the framers from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as expressed in the warning:

if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression.....

Very rarely do you encounter a people who simply lay down and die. Sooner or later they embark on that “last resort”. Where the state fails the citizenry, they take the course of justice in their own hands. The result? Commencement of disintegration of the nation entity. The conflict brigade then moves in, but their work has been made a hundredfold more difficult by negligence of the state.

At the heart of it all – once again - is the pursuit of justice. But now, the following question: does anyone truly believe that the marauding herdsmen warriors are remotely conversant with the essence of justice? Even at the most rudimentary level? They mouth the word, but with conscious cynicism, trotting out the number of cattle allegedly rustled from their herds but, do they understand that their random vengeance has nothing remotely to do with *justice*? Cattle cannot equate humanity, and the pillaging of any farms and farming settlements and human slaughter within the range of AK47s is in itself a violation of the essence of justice. To have such ‘justification’ mouthed by their spokesmen, supposedly intelligent beings, who hold press conferences and walk freely, unchallenged and unrestrained in society, is itself the very crumbling of the foundations of equity but – it is also the very expression of – power! Usurped, arrogantly flaunted, a declaration of impunity, it is a crudely instructive projection of the image of society that has submitted itself to the triumphal exposition that is - power!

But now – let us move back in time from herdsmen to their forerunners – the religious fundamentalists of homicidal trendiness – does one believe that a basic grasp of justice is accessible to that current, devastating plague that currently afflicts the world – from the Urals of the Soviet Union through the Asian and into the African continent, taking its toll virtually every day on old and young, male and female, infants, retarding development and adding to

the population of seeming war casualties where the affected have never even smelt gunsmoke until the moment of the devastating impact? How, in the name of all that is sacred, does one propose to talk resolution and closure with assailants whose closed venture is to create the world in the image of God, but who begin by creating God in their own image? And that image? From beginning to the end: morbidity. God as the image of death.

The problem is stark, and no one appears to have been able to fashion a rational response: How do we even begin to communicate with those whose idea of the ideal is – morbidity. I have an expression for them – it emerged quite naturally, as I watched one of their video selfies, grouped around an execution pit somewhere in Northern Nigeria. They were interrogating a member of the Nigerian Air Force whose plane had made a crash landing in their territory. Captured, his fate already decided well in advance, they proceeded with a charade of interrogation, asking him mainly why he had taken sides with infidels and enemies of God. From time to time they intoned their threnody: *Allah Akbar*, perhaps whenever their leader uttered some morbid phrasing that struck a special chord in whatever passed for their minds – perhaps a renewed rhetoric of repudiation of the outside world, or in praise of their fidelity to the commands of Allah. It was a macabre spectacle, with the captive kneeling on the ground, knowing his fate was set, doing his best not to be provocative but at the same time, preparing himself to die bravely.

What struck me most chillingly – and I have watched quite a few of these scenes of the ritual slaughter of humanity, was the smug rapture that suffused the faces of the inner circle of witnesses, albeit partially hooded by their turbans, privileged witnesses to the scenes of supposed religious purification, the bland commonality of comportment, composed gestures, a triumphalist smugness overlaid with inward adoration – yes, I use that expression ‘inward adoration’ deliberately. Supposedly carrying out the directives of an outer being, a Supreme Deity, they were in fact concerned with their appearance, the crafted facial expression, conscious of an audience to which the recording would be played via internet. Such self-adoration is not always of the silent kind, fortunately, so that we can actually cite its expression in the words of those others whose style is not one of reticence, but of bombast and bravado. At least millions have watched the videos of Shekau, the abductor of the Chibok girls, gyrating before his camera as he taunted the families, the nation and the world:

“We have your daughters, what will you do about it? We have your daughters, and we shall sell them into slavery.”

Basayev, the Butcher of Beslan in the Cherchnya region of the Soviet Union was even more eloquently triumphalist after his assault on a secondary boarding school where hundreds

of schoolchildren met their premature deaths. Others remain perhaps traumatized for life. His rhetoric in interviews to justify his atrocity remain some of the most obscene expressions of self-glorification that only paid lip-service to the supposed Supreme Authority for his campaign of childhood murder and degradation. But perhaps the prize for this rhetoric of narcissism goes to one Sheik Musa Hilal, leader of the *Janjaweed* raiders of Darfur in Sudan, who even once came to our own country on invitation to one of the global efforts to end the conflict between the Sudanese government of Bashir and the region of the Darfur.

Now, do recollect that – unlike the Southern conflict which was between the rulers of the Arab-moslem north and the Christian-cum-traditional South, this was a conflict not even between one set of religious adherents and another – all parties to the conflict were moslem, so it was a conflict between a central government and a section of the same polity who were seeking equity and justice in the affairs of the nation, a largely black population against the Arabist government. Here comes a little taste of the florid bombast of the death dealers – this took place, not at the Abuja meeting but earlier, when he was accosted in his den by an intrepid journalist researcher who recorded the encounter:

“(I am) a big sheikh...not a little sheikh. I did not take up arms. I answered my government’s appeal, and I called my people to arms. I didn’t take to arms personally. A tribal leader does not take up arms. I am a sheik, I am not a soldier. I am ‘soldiers’.....I am cleaning our land of....agents, mercenaries, cowards and outlaws....We promise you that we are lions, we are the Swift and Fearsome Forces. We fear neither the media and the newspapers, nor the foreign interlopers”

Now that is narcissism at its crudest and loudest, but also of an impressive honesty. No hiding behind any deflective pietisms. The lines of conflict are drawn in this instance in confrontations between race and race – or power and rebellion - not between believers and infidels. Our terrifying warrior then signs himself “The mujkahid and Sheik Musa Hilal, Amir of the Swift and Fearsome Forces”.

But you know, ironically, I believe that dialogue is possible with such a bombastic clown. He believes in nothing beyond himself, and such a self is soon flattered into the commencement of the cultivation of attention and thus, perhaps, just perhaps, the glimmering of reason. For a cultic indoctrination like the Boko Haram, on the other hand, which is narcissism of a hermetic, morbid kind, communication is impossible. That is the hard truth. With that dimension of self-adoration, it is a case of Destroy, or be destroyed. The options of the peacemaker are severely limited.

I know that the medical science names a branch of its discipline - Morbid Anatomy. However, it may fall on that science to embark on an in-depth research, even institute a department of this phenomenon that I have dubbed Morbid Narcissism. It lies at the root of religious fundamentalism of a virulent nature that the world has never before encountered. But perhaps it is more appropriate for its Department of Psychology - allied with Religious Studies? Those are mere plausible approaches. What matters is that the study appears to be paramount, and soonest. Everything, after all, has been tried, including bribery, known as ransom, which of course simply inaugurates and sustains a vicious cycle – it re-furbishes the depleted resources of the enemy, enables not only a repeat performance but emboldens the enemy into undertaking new forays, inflicting new horrors on society. What then, is the choice before assaulted humanity?

I do not pretend to have the ideal answers. I do not pretend to have a temperament for conciliation and, wherever the saintly halo is being distributed, I am certain that none will fit my head. While states make their difficult choices and the people pick up the slack, wherever they can, attempt to fill the gap of inefficiency and complacency created by the state, we can tackle the mystery of certain negative human impulses of which, in my reckoning, Power remains the most neglected, and unmapped, yet the most culpable element in the factors that generate conflict. The power lust that stifles conscience and constantly strives to dethrone Justice and equity. There is a mutant gene in the human genetic structure – perhaps medical science can ferret it out and surgically excise it in every infant. While we await that breakthrough however, we can only continue to reinforce the presence of that counter gene that spells Freedom, Dignity and Volition – the pillars of the Fundamental Rights of all humanity.

For those who dedicate themselves to the fallout from the unending pursuit of the resolution of conflicts, let all understand that it helps to accept that wherever violation has occurred, Restitution makes its moral and just demands. Restitution is the heart of Justice, the capstone in the archway of Healing. Without Restitution, there is no lasting Resolution, and thus, no Justice. Yes, blessed – we agree - are the peacemakers, but such blessing is lodged in extra-terrestrial zones, while Justice, though sacred, resides within the material world, the habitation of you and me in whose hands Restitution equally resides. A hard taskmaster, but we dare not flinch from the pursuit of Justice, being the loftiest virtue to which humanity can aspire. Understandably, some make it the first condition of social existence – now they, I believe, are just as deserving of showers of blessings as the peacemakers of our world.

Wole SOYINKA