

# ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND THE EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION OF THE GRASSROOTS IN NIGERIA

*Being a paper presented by Hon. Ifeanyichukwu Ibezi (Ochiagha Idemili) at the annual Great Ethical Leadership and Business Entrepreneurship Lecture organized by University of Nigeria, Nsukka on Wednesday, July 25, 2018*

## PROTOCOLS

Today, I have been dragged into the Lions' den for an intellectual feast with some of Nigeria's finest academics. It is also my privilege to bring my 'town' experience to the 'gown'. I sincerely thank the management of this foremost institution for this opportunity.

As a leading institution in knowledge production, it is heart warming to observe that the office of the Vice Chancellor deems fit to annually focus on the imperatives of ethical leadership in national development. I have been asked to speak on the subject: *'Ethical Leadership and the Effective Representation of the Grassroots in Nigeria'*. I admit of no greater honor, and I am deeply grateful.

Since democracy is a government that allows people a voice in the exercise of power, typically through elected representatives, it is important that representation at whatever level of government should be of serious concern to all. A representative who holds the mandate of the majority in trust should be as concerned as the people he represents. He should be able to embody diligence, hard work, trust and justice if he must be effective. There is very little chance, if any, at negligence of duty to which he has sworn.

We would have made quite some effort since the dawn of this democracy to strengthen the rough ends in ethical leadership and effective representation at the grassroots. But so far as the effort, we have not made appreciable progress. Because of my time I must be brief and to the point.

In a democratic country such as ours, those who compete for elected office always make promises to effectively represent the people. Such political representation dates back to Athens in Greece whence democracy was born. By conception this form of government was designed to be the people's government, for them and by them. However, since everybody cannot be involved at the same time those entrusted to represent the majority are mandated to speak and act with authority on behalf of those they represent. But you should agree with me that more often than not those entrusted with the collective interest are enticed away by partisan, business and personal interests. It may sound a

tad too immodest, but permit me to say that I stand for ethical leadership and for ethical representation of the grassroots people in whatever level of government. That way I believe the lives of the majority will be transformed effectively.

What then is ethical leadership? How have we been able to apply it in our politics? Ethical leadership is about “core values and the courage to apply them in all aspects of life in service of the common good”. Unfortunately, we have not been able to apply this concept in leadership as our actions almost always negate our professed interest to serve those whose mandate we hold in trust. Though there may be lack of consensus on political representation, yet there is no doubt that the practical definition of effective representation refers to ethical advocacy, defense, and projection of the core interests of the people whose mandate is held in trust.

You know as well as I do that to be ethical in representation is to be duty conscious and to work hard, using the resources made available by the law to impact the lives of those represented. Under ethical leadership framework and the dynamics of effective representation of the grassroots, a good elected authority carries the grassroots people along in whatever is being done. This applies to every aspect of representation whether as the president, governor, national or state legislator. There should be dividends of democracy enough to positively impact on the lives of those being represented. Ethical leadership should serve the interests of both the constituencies and the representative himself. Neither should be denied the gain of ethical representation. It is fairly reasonable to argue that value-based representation gives joy to all stakeholders in a democracy. To that extent, I shall make bold to relive the observations of the political ethicist and British politician Edmund Burke. According to Burke:

“It ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union; the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. It is his duty to sacrifice his repose, his pleasures, his satisfactions, to theirs; and above all, ever, and in all cases, to prefer their interests to his own. But his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. These he does not derive from your pleasure nor from the law and the constitution”.

I have to make this quote to show that a representative is wholly beholden to the represented and owes them a duty to sacrifice sometimes his comfort to accommodate the needs of those he represent. Sadly many of our elected representatives tend to serve the needs of the wealthy and powerful minority whose interests quite often are at variance with those of the majority. Some of our 360 representatives at the House of Representatives return to their constituencies every four years to solicit or buy votes and disappear again. I find this practice, which is very common in our clime quite

pathetic, since advanced democracy, which we look up to keeps improving on ethical leadership and representation. There is very little to be said in defense of this type of representation other than that it smacks of irresponsibility and should be discarded if we are eager to move governance forward. It is true that political representation is a very complex issue, especially in our democracy with its unique diversity, but we will achieve much if we exert energy and try to refocus attention to ethical leadership.

Nigeria is not alone as a country with diverse nationalities. The United States of America is no less diverse but she has been able to get her acts together through discipline and a sense of fairness. In my view, the constituents have a greater duty in asking and enforcing ethical leadership. They should always insist on transparent and accountable leadership. The Nigerian constitution has given them enormous power of recall even though some will argue that it is a very difficult and cumbersome process to implement. But the act of its invocation serves as sufficient deterrent to recalcitrant representatives.

I know as well as everybody else that the only way out of the problem is by conscious effort to control our greed, and to see public office as a call to duty and not for enrichment. If we realize this - that the greatest test of political representation is the ability to cater, however minimal, for the interest of those we have sworn to serve - we would have started making good effort towards ethical leadership and representation. If we start today we have done so early and may save ourselves the continued slide towards underdevelopment.

Once again, I thank the Governing Council, the Vice Chancellor, management and staff of this great university for the opportunity to make this presentation.

Long live UNN

Long live Nigeria.

**Hon. Ifeanyichukwu Ibezi**

Wednesday, July 25, 2018.