



The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria
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INTEGRITY AND MERITOCRACY:

THE IMPERATIVE FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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Protocols,

Let me begin by thanking the President and Council of our revered Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, for inviting me to deliver this presentation at the 49th annual ICAN conference. As a “Professional in Politics”, I take it as a huge honour to be invited to share my thoughts and experiences on the topic *Integrity and Meritocracy: The Imperative for Political Leadership*.

INTRODUCTION:

1. As a developing nation, our nascent democracy has gone through a myriad of twists and turns over the last 59 years, since gaining independence from the British on the 1st of October, 1960. We started our democratic experiment on a sound footing with visionary leaders who were driven by a sense of patriotism, nationalism and a drive for rapid socioeconomic development, such that Nigeria quickly became a pioneer among the comity of nations. Unfortunately, during the mid-1960s, things took a turn for the worse through ethnic misunderstandings which fueled mistrust that led us to a military interregnum, a civil war and several aborted attempts on the path of our country’s quest to return to democracy.
2. One of the downsides of the political turmoil and instability of the last four decades is that several political leaders attained power for less than honourable reasons or had power thrust upon them by the circumstances of the hour. Due to the enormity of power of our political leaders, there is an inherent temptation for one to use it for personal gain. It is imperative that our leaders should



operate with utmost integrity in order to maximize the delivery of the dividends of democracy to our people. We are all witnesses to the fact that as a nation, we are not where we should be 59 years after independence.

3. This brings us back to the theme for this year’s conference: **Building Nigeria For Sustainable Growth and Development** and our topic for today’s workshop **Integrity and Meritocracy: The Imperative for Political Leadership**.

As a developing nation, some of the critical factors required for socio-economic development are:

1. Security of lives and properties
2. Social security and basic sense of justice
3. Economic growth, human capital development and food security
4. Infrastructural development

LEADERSHIP:

4. A great U.S. Army General, Norman Schwarzkopf once said *“Successful Leadership is a potent combination of Strategy and Character. But if you must be without one, be without Strategy.”* While I do not believe that we need to spend too much time on defining what Leadership is, what is apparent to most of us, especially members of our noble profession, is that without good morals, ethics, integrity, fairness and meritocracy, leadership, more especially political leadership, will not achieve desired results.
5. With the challenge of the various ethnic groups, religions, varying levels of education and orientation in Nigeria, the trust earned



by virtue of the mandate of the people, is the primary currency a political leader has to spend, when leading his people. The people are more likely to follow leaders they trust. This is why our political leaders must employ integrity and meritocratic principles in all their decision-making. These will increase the willingness of the followers to follow a trusted leader.

6. Furthermore, head winds in the global economy, rising youth unemployment, climate change and more instances of technology replacing labour, are global paradigm shifts which we as a continent do not have immediate answers to address. As a nation, we need leaders with the capacity to confront these issues, as the world will not wait for us to catch up.
7. The subject of leadership, especially in governance, is quite complex. It may not be fully understood by all despite the fact that it is a critical element that accounts for government's success or failure. Most leadership commentators mention that effective leaders have vision and share that vision with members of the organization. Vision can be defined as the ability to see and plan the future with imagination and wisdom. Leaders are more effective when they inspire others to believe in their vision. Leadership can be aided and uplifted by effective lieutenants; conversely ineffective lieutenants can drag leaders downward.

INTEGRITY AND MERITOCRACY:

8. To be effective, it is essential in a developing economy like ours, that leaders we elect or appoint, are men and women of good character who emerge based on **merit**.



9. **Integrity** is the quality of being guided by strong ethical principles. A person with integrity behaves in a manner that is consistent in the application of settled rational principles and standards. Leadership is always about doing the right thing, therefore, the place of integrity in leadership cannot be over – emphasized. My years of experience in both private and public sectors have taught me that if leaders do not have integrity, then nothing else matters. The best leaders accord integrity the highest consideration.
10. In my opinion, integrity in the field of public leadership has a number of connotations: the first is honesty or truth-telling, the second is trustworthiness, the third is fairness, and the fourth is conscientiousness or concern for doing the utmost. We should note at this juncture, that the essence of integrity is to foster a reduced risk of corruption and other unethical behaviours, while improving transparency and accountability. Political leaders with personal as well as professional integrity and high ethical standards are crucial to good governance within the framework of democracy and the rule of law.
11. The term ‘**meritocracy**’ itself is a historical and philosophical description of what a true and democratic leadership connotes. The term was first used in 1958 by a British Politician and sociologist Michael Young. By the term rulership or leadership on ‘merit’, Young conceptualized ‘merit’ in terms of tested ‘competence’ and abilities for ‘optimal results’ of an individual, which can be seen and proven within or in a related administrative system.
12. Meritocracy is the philosophy of governance via a system of holding



power by people selected, appointed or elected into public offices according to their individual merits (Collins Online Dictionary). According to the Google Dictionary of English words, ‘meritocracy’ connotes rulership by an educated and influential class of capable people who are not selected or voted into power because of their race, colour, tribe, political class, gender or strength of their material possession or economic achievements of any kind.

www.google.com/online/dictionary

13. British and American societies are among some of the most obvious contemporary examples of meritocratic states. The sustainable economic, social and political growth witnessed by the G8 (now G7) nations, cannot be separated from the obvious dominance of the leadership of those countries by people with the right skills, competencies and capacity for innovative socio – economic and political transformation. The philosophy guiding meritocracy and good governance suggests that only people who can make impact should be allowed to hold office. Leaders elected or appointed into offices through the principle of meritocracy must bring with them innovative thinking and an inspirational mindset that can be cascaded down to their followers and teams, which would ensure the implementation of policies into developmental strides across all facets of a nation’s social, economic and political sectors. Therefore, meritocracy should and will exclude all persons that would potentially shy away from real issues affecting the growth and development of a nation.
14. Singapore offers a contemporary model of a nation’s conceptualization of both integrity and meritocracy in political leadership. The country’s founding father and first Prime Minister,



Lee Kuan Yew, argued: *“If you want Singapore to succeed...you must have a system that enables the best man and the most suitable to go into the job that needs them...”* In 1965, the city-state was a small trading port with an unemployment rate of 14 percent. Fifty years later, its unemployment rate had dropped to 1.9%. In 1959 Singapore’s GDP per capita was \$510. Fifty years later it is more than 100 times that number. Singapore’s per capita income is now almost 50% higher than its former colonial master, Great Britain. Whatever else Lee Kuan Yew may have got wrong, on integrity and meritocracy, he was spot on.

He said, *“it has taken me some time to see the obvious, that talent is a country’s most precious asset... it is the defining factor. After several years in government, I realized that the more talented people I had as ministers, administrators and professionals, the more effective my policies were, and the better the results”.*

15. The United Kingdom’s political candidate selection process offers a shining example of meritocracy. The Conservative party has a tried and tested candidate selection process which looks specifically at competencies, skills and abilities which are most prevalent in successful candidates and effective Members of Parliament (MPs). Candidates are tested vigorously by a Parliamentary Assessment Board (PAB) for their communication skills, intellect, interpersonal skills, leadership & motivational abilities, resilience, drive and conviction. It is only the candidates who pass the PAB test that can then go onto the approved list of candidates for the constituencies that are electing candidates.
16. With our youths accounting for 65% of our population, and not enough white-collar jobs for most of them, investment in human



capital development should therefore be our most significant priority as a nation. However, the return on this investment may be very low if we do not have meritocracy within which they will be developed.

TESTIMONIAL

17. During my tenure as Governor of Ogun State (May, 2011 – May, 2019), my aides, were mostly talented, professionally qualified men and women, **majority of whom were not personally known to me previously, but who were headhunted based solely on competence and capability.** As a team, under our vision tagged “**Mission to Rebuild Ogun State**”, we were able to introduce various reforms, innovations and restructure the economic architecture of the State, which led us to become one of the most economically viable states in the country. Indeed, Ogun state became the industrial hub of Nigeria and the investor’s destination of choice amongst the States in Nigeria.
18. This class of professional political leaders were also able to bring integrity, a strong work ethic and accountability into the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies that they led. Public Service reforms changed the face of governance in the state and created awareness of the benefits of a system driven environment, while blocking leakages and corruption.
19. As a result of these strategies, our administration was able to increase Ogun state’s monthly Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) from a paltry N730 million monthly to about N7 billion monthly by the end of our tenure. In terms of fiscal sustainability, we moved



the State from the 29th position to the 1st position in the country, with our IGR at 65% of our total foreign and domestic debt. In addition, the latest Budget report ranked Ogun State as second in Per Capita Income to IGR, and we were consistently in the top 4 in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business ranking, after starting at the 35th position when we came into office.

20. At the national level, we are all witnesses to the rot in our national life before the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015. It was a government that was elected on the strength of the integrity of General Muhammadu Buhari. Before then, corruption had virtually become a way of life and the trust that the citizenry had in the political leadership had waned considerably. The integrity of President Muhammadu Buhari has given the country a new lease of life. In spite of numerous challenges in our nation, the integrity of the President remains a major source of hope that we can surmount all our problems as a nation.
21. Looking to the future, what we need to do as a nation is to attract more people of proven integrity to enter the political space and occupy positions of leadership based on merit. For instance, Chartered Accountants by their professional training are naturally geared towards being people of integrity, indeed the motto of the Institute is *Accuracy & Integrity*. We should develop models of headhunting for political leadership with emphasis on Character, Capacity and Capability. These must be established in the political spheres at all levels within our polity.
22. In order to enhance integrity and meritocracy, political leaders who exhibit these values must be encouraged, appreciated



and separated from the bad eggs. The current wholesome condemnation of the entire political class, will continue to produce negative consequences.

23. It is my belief and particularly building on my own personal experience, that the more professionals that we have in Politics or as I often say “people with second address”, who see political leadership positions as more of a call to serve than an avenue for personal aggrandizement, then the closer we will get to having a leadership that is based on Integrity and Meritocracy that will move this country forward to sustainable development.
24. Integrity and Meritocracy exist in the professional bodies such as ICAN and others. These institutions are self- regulated within the context of Integrity and Meritocracy. It is said “..... *that a stream cannot rise above its source...*”. Thus members of ICAN and other professional bodies should get involved in active politics to contribute their quota to the quality of political leadership in Nigeria. The framers of our Constitution (CFRN 1999 as amended), never envisaged that non politicians would be policy drivers. Indeed Section 147 (5) of the Constitution states *inter alia* “ *No person shall be appointed as a Minister of the Government of the Federation unless he is qualified for election as a Member of the House of Representatives.*” In order to qualify as a Member of the House of Representatives, you must belong to a political party (Section 65 (2) (b)). Similarly at the State level, Section 192 (4) requires a State Commissioner to have the same qualification as a Member of the State House of Assembly.
25. At this juncture I would call upon my fellow Chartered Accountants



to consider, just as I and many of our colleagues have done, to step out of their comfort zone into the public service space. Indeed all professionals should get involved to promote, nurture, provide Integrity and Meritocracy in the political space. It is only when men and women of high integrity who have proven themselves in various professions and fields of human endeavour involve themselves at all levels of governance that we can truly engage in the task of moving this great nation forward and take its rightful place among the comity of nations.

26. I thank you all for listening.

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