

Virtual National Workshop on “The War Against Terrorism in Nigeria”

WELCOME ADDRESS BY
PROFESSOR DR. MRS. EGODI UCHENDU
AvHF, FHSN, FRDA, MNAL
COORDINATOR, AFRICAN HUMANITIES
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CIRCLE (AHRDC),
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA,
NSUKKA

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WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE CONVENER OF THE NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON “THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM IN NIGERIA”

Protocols:

- Your Excellency, the Executive Governor of Benue State; Chief Dr. Samuel Ortom;
- The Vice Chancellor of University of Nigeria, Prof. Charles Arinze Igwe;
- The Chairman of this Workshop, Major General Hafeez Adewuyi (Rtd.)
Former General Officer Commanding the 82 Division of the Nigerian Army & Former Vice Chairman, Presidential Review Committee on Nigeria’s National Defense Policy;
- Our Special Guest, Brigadier General John Temlong (Rtd.),
the First Commander of the Multinational Task Force
- Fellow Professors and other colleagues,
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I

It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to this Virtual National Workshop on Terrorism in Nigeria.

First, permit me to wish His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Benue State, Chief Dr. Samuel Ortom, our highly esteemed guest, leader and father, a Happy Birthday. His Excellency marked his 61st birthday two days ago on the 23rd of April. May the Lord add more years to him and make him a fruitful vessel in his assigned duty post. Happy Birthday, Your Excellency.

We were originally to meet in Abuja, but the current realities of our lives in today’s Nigeria forced a change of venue on us. Having kept track of happenings across the nation since the turn of this year, we considered it sensible to move the workshop to a safer domain—in this case, to the clouds, with all participants linking up from across the nation and beyond.

You will agree with me that this is a better alternative bearing in mind that just last month insecurity in and around Abuja deteriorated to such a dismal state that residents of the Federal Capital Territory took to the

streets in protest. It was also this last month that both the Kaduna airport and a train from Abuja to Kaduna were attacked with scores of lives lost and many critically wounded, while others remain in captivity.

Such happenings pain the soul and shatter the composure of many astute characters. It is heart warming, therefore, to know that there are options to one-on-one meetings. From my perspective, and this should be yours, too, the virtual nature of this national workshop does not in anyway detract from its significance as a gathering of scholars and professionals, leaders and citizens, drawn together by the need to carefully reflect on the lived experiences of Nigerians in this critical crossroads in our national life.

II

When the call for this national workshop went out in July 2021, it was informed by the mounting reports of violence, anxiety and daily uncertainty over life in our sovereign nation. Terrorism, which is best encapsulated in its synonym, violence, appeared to have held all of us under bondage, not sparing citizens, not sparing government. Although we have, since our independence six and half decades ago, experienced episodes of violence, rebellions, insurgencies and various degrees of criminal acts that heightened our insecurity as citizens of this nation, but not once has any of these or an accumulation of them defined us as is currently the case. Hence, we chose the word “Terrorism” as our focal point because it brings to the fore the gravity of the situation we are in since 2009, but actually with antecedents that date back before then.

No sensible Nigerian will deny that the current spate of Terrorism in the country tops the list of critical issues that require urgent intellectual and stakeholders’ attention. We can say that we have left it for too long; only allowing it to surface during electioneering seasons, and leaving it at the discretion of politicians alone. The result of this approach is that it has widened so extensively in its scope and manifestations to the degree of changing the narrative of governance in the country and the social and economic outlook of our nation. We do not, by any means, gloss over the thousands of lives lost as a result, both civilian and military.

If we do not quickly contain this aberration, we cannot assure a peaceful future for ourselves, our children and their children. My mother taught me almost five decades ago that “a stitch in time, saves nine.” If this is true, then we must of necessity urgently address this national problem from all professional and disciplinary angles.

III

Without mincing words, we are here to reflect on that aspect of our national life that borders on a set of actions displayed in our private and public spaces, which fall under the caption terrorism. The goals of this workshop are as follows:

1. To review the state of insecurity in our country,
2. To identify where we—citizens and government or government and citizens—are not getting it right in controlling acts of terrorism in our country,
3. To articulate and suggest result-oriented steps that would help us—government and citizens—to domesticate excessive violence and bring them under control.

[With respect to this third point, I enjoin us to be ingenious and not suggest what America, United Kingdom, or any other nation in the Global North, did that we can borrow. Please, let’s be authentic and think out solutions from our own contexts.]

Our ultimate desire is for Nigeria to upgrade to a peaceful environment for her citizens and visitors alike.

The overarching question we are here to answer is simply this: “How best can terrorism be combatted so that we have this peaceful environment?”

4. Finally, as a testimony to this special April event, there will be a post-workshop documentation of our deliberations, ideas and suggestions to be encapsulated in an edited volume, which would be dedicated to all who lost their lives to terrorism in Nigeria.

IV

As I conclude my brief welcome address, I will like to introduce us to the organizers of this workshop. African Humanities Research and Development Circle (AHRDC), is one of the research groups in the

University of Nigeria. It was started in 2015 by a group of five scholars drawn from the disciplines of History and Philosophy.

We have since expanded our ranks to include scholars from Missiology, Sociology, Anthropology, Fine and Applied Arts, English and Foreign Languages. We also have associate members from Education and Engineering. Together, we pursue development-oriented research. We are particular about researches or projects that improve life experiences in our society. In our brief history of 7 years, we have held seminars, workshops and conferences annually and led debates with regional and national focus. We have benefitted from TETFund and other sponsors; and we have also tasked ourselves to sponsor our programmes when nobody comes to our rescue like in this workshop.

When in 2021, AHRDC came up with the idea for this workshop; it found a partner in the Department of History, College of Education, Zuba, Abuja, then under the headship of Dr. Moshood Bello.

Together, we use this opportunity to thank you for responding to our call for a national workshop on Terrorism in Nigeria. We are delighted that you made out time to honour our invitation to join us to examine the issues confronting our collective existence. I look forward to the rich feast of ideas and suggestions that this event will engender, by the special grace of God, for Nigeria's good. And I wish you a memorable experience.

Again, I welcome you to our April 2022 Virtual National Workshop.

Thank you!
Professor Egodi Uchendu