

Independence Parley: Undergraduates Differ on Calls for Restructuring

Divergent views have continued to trail calls for restructuring and agitations by certain groups for their regions to secede from the Nigerian state, as engineering and science students dominated the discourse at an 'Independence Parley' held at Covenant University to commemorate the nation's 57th Independence Anniversary.

The Monday, October 2, 2017 event saw students of the University, under the auspices of the Covenant University Literary and Debating Society, joining the fray in discussing the propriety and otherwise of a structural constitutional change in Nigeria.



A cross of debaters participating in the Independence Day Parley in commemoration of Nigeria's 57th Independence Anniversary

The debate, structured after the British Parliamentary System, featured students debating a motion: '*Should Nigeria be restructured for Better Governance?*' The team in favour of restructuring noted that the existence of the discourse itself is a pointer to the existence of a problem in the land. They were of the view that allowing for devolution of powers to federating states will avail them more powers to deal with issues that affect the wellbeing of the people in their states.

The lead debater on the team in favour of the motion, Stephen Belabo, argued that, "the current unitary-federalism continuously inhibits growth and development, and as a result it was time for the current arrangement to be revisited". He added that the present system, under the guise of federalism, only promotes what could be referred to as a welfare-federalism, making the people to totally depend on the Federal Government.

Belabo opined that the country's restructuring would not be complete without economic decentralization, as that is key to ensuring that Nigeria becomes a more viable state, allowing states and regions to build with their naturally-endowed resources. According to him, "True federalism will allow states and regional governments to develop at their own pace taking into consideration the depth of revenue the state or region could generate".

Those for restructuring also posited that taking away power from the center and granting states more autonomy could prompt the teeming unemployed youths to embrace agriculture, leading to improved agricultural output, thereby decreasing the ranks of unemployed youths.

Furthermore, they stated that the pandemic corruption bedeviling the nation would be significantly reduced, as the center will no longer be attractive for those going there to loot the nation's treasury. They frowned at a situation whereby "the nation is being governed with a defective constitution, as the constitution was not gotten through a proper Constituent Assembly representing the various interest groups and ethnic nationalities that make-up the Nigerian state.

In the area of accountability, they argued that the existing system has made those in government to take undue advantage of the electorate. "But with restructuring, the governments, at different levels, will become more accountable to the governed," they reasoned.

The supporting team concluded by stating that since the country, under the present experimentation, could not guarantee equal representation, the restructuring of the nation will avail minorities equal representation across all levels of government.

Responding, the opposing side to the restructuring call said that, "the proposed balkanization of the nation under the cover of restructuring will bring about more issues than solutions. One of such problem will be increase cases of corruption". According to the lead opposing debater, Anthony Azekwoh, with the current level of power that the federating states wield, corruption will simply become the order of the day if they are given the kind of autonomy they currently crave for.

Azekwoh averred that there was the tendency for the nation to witness the creation of a paramilitary state, thereby making each state's chief executive a demigod. He was also of the view that when the clamour by one group to secede is entertained by the Federal Government, many others states will come up with their own demands to secede. Azekwoh, in advancing his argument said that, "The proposed model of restructuring being peddled by those with ulterior motives, can only lead to chaos and splinter wars breaking out on many fronts".

The opposing team noted that under the current arrangement, many of the federating states are not viable to be called a state, but came into existence just to satisfy the desire of some political elites and as such, cannot under any circumstances qualify to be called independent nation(s).

On the purported claim that devolution of powers from the center to the states will boost the interest of the youths in agriculture for food sufficiency, the opposing side declared that the failure of defunct agricultural initiatives like the Operation Feed the Nation and the Green Revolution Programmes showed that many desire white collar jobs as against engaging in agriculture. "If we want to see improved participation in agrarian business, by the teeming unemployed youth, there is a need for reorientation and to create support for those who want to go into that sector," Ade Aderoju of the opposing camp, enthused.

Arguing in favour of the motion were Stephen Belaboh of Computer Science, Obinna Ihekona from Petroleum Engineering, including Ayata Tonye and Asher Essien of Mechanical Engineering. While on the opposing side were Anthony Azekwoh of Chemical Engineering; Ade Aderoju, Electrical Engineering; Jennifer Oghenerukwe of Accounting Department; and Douglas Leslie from Mechanical Engineering.

Other highlights of the Independence Day Parley were quiz on historical national events, literary presentations by the University's Literary and Debating Society, and a stage performance by the Covenant University Theatre Group.

This year's parley was jointly executed by the Students' Activities Centre of the Covenant University Student's Affairs Unit, in partnership with the Covenant University Literary and Debating Society.