

Global Movement for Children: The Cry of the Nigerian Child

(Excerpts from Children's Rights with Taiwo Akinlami – a weekly column with Daily Independent Newspapers)

Taiwo Akinlami

Thanks

There is the only wise One,
Without whom you can do nothing,
He is God, the Father our Lord Jesus Christ,
And my own Father,
To Him be honour, praise and glory
For His call, inspiration, favour and mercy.

I have the crown and the glory,
She is my jewel, loving, sacrificial and enduring,
Oluwafunmilayo Lisa Folashade Akinlami,
My love,
My wife,
And my companion from youth.

No life, No noble cause,
Thank you, Ayoka and Usiola Akinlami,
The vehicles through whom I received life.

No Him, No life
They showed me the way to Him
They showed me the way to Life,
They also nurture me in Him
Thank you, Bimbo and Taiwo Odukoya,
My parents in Him.

Iron sharpens iron
To rare friends, brethren and mentors of inestimable value,
To whom I owe a lot,
OlakunleTiwalade.

A tree does not make a forest
I have friends, who keeps fanning the ember of a noble cause
Thank you, OlumideSade, DeleFunmi

No platform, No cause,
Thank you Omenuwa, my dear editor,
You make a way for us on the Daily Independent Law.

Charity begins and ends at home
Thank you, Joke, Akin, AlabaPepper, IdowuAkinOriginal, KehindeAtu
We came to the earth in the same vehicles.

You need the elders in the market,
They keep the head of the new born straight,
Teaching him the way he should go: EkundayoOlaoye, GbengaOnabanjo, Ayoolanrewaju,
Thank you for your labour of love!

Foreword

NOWAction!

Table of Contents

<i>Thanks</i>	2
Foreword	
<i>Prologue</i>	5
<i>Invitation to battle for the future</i>	6
Book One	8-66
Book Two	67-96

Prologue

"We, the grown-ups, have failed you deplorably... One in three of you has suffered from malnutrition before you turned five years old. One in four of you has not been immunized against any disease. Almost one in five of you is not attending school.... We, the grown-ups, must reverse this list of failures."

Kofi Annan
UN Secretary-General

(Opening statement to the United Nations' General Assembly Special Session on Children, held in May 2002.)

"A child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you're sitting, and when you're gone; attend to those things, which are important. You may adopt all the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. He will assume control of your Cities, States, and Nation. He is going to move in and take over your churches, schools, universities and corporations. The fate of humanity is in his hands"

Abraham Lincoln

"We have seen too much change to simply accept the way children are living. We have too much hope in the potential of children to leave things as truly are, and we have too much faith in our fellow human beings not to know that the Global Movement we are calling for can happen"

Dr Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel

"Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape to gather wealth and take so little care of your children to whom one day you must relinquish it all."

- Socrates

Invitation to a battle for the Future

What you are holding in you hand is an action document. It is an instrument dedicated to bringing to the very first burner of public consciousness, the protection of the rights of the Nigerian child on the platform of Global Movement for Children. Without mincing words, it is published with a view to recruiting you into the noble army of men and women, who are ready to defend the future of our nation Nigeria. That you are holding it right now is not an accident. It is the assurance that I have in my mind that you are going to stand up from where you are right now and say something for the Nigerian Child. It does not matter to whom it is said. It might even be to a friend, neighbor, spouse, boss, subordinate or co-worker; you may also decide to reach for your pen and paper or computer system and send a letter to a national daily. You may choose to employ the platform of the electronic media to push for the protection of the Right of the Child. My interest is to see you making an effort and as far as I am concerned, no effort is too small, at least for history and posterity to take note of.

Why should I speak for the Nigerian Child? You may ask. I will give two major reasons:

- 1. God ordained us the caretakers of the child. To watch their rights trampled upon or participate in denying them of their rights is to fail the Author of life.**
- 2. The child is watching to see where you stand in this time of moral crisis where his God-ordained rights are trampled upon by the same people, who are suppose to be the custodians of these right. The child watches with keen interest because he knows that that there is no consent more resounding that silence.**

I charge you today, make this document, the Bible of your crusade for the rights of the child. Chew it, digest it and translate it to concrete and consistent actions aimed at bringing the protection of the rights of the child to the very front burner of public consciousness. It is only this that is capable of justifying the time you will spend in reading it both now and before the impartial throne of your conscience, history and posterity.

God help us.

**Taiwo Akinlami
2003**

Book One

I bring to your living hearts, one-on-one that which I once wrote for all on the pages of Daily Independent newspaper (under the watchful eyes of my Editor, Onyema Omenuwa) that you may read it and speed with it. Now, I leave alone with and also with your own conscience. I hope to hear from you soon only in one language- genuine, concrete and consistent action.

1

In Defence of Global Movement for Children

“So long as there is one child who has failed to obtain the precise educational treatment his individuality requires; so long as a single child goes hungry, has nowhere to play, fails to receive medical attention he needs; so long as the nation fails to train and provide scope for every atom of outstanding ability it can find; so long as there are administrators or teachers who feel no sense of mission, who cannot administer or who cannot teach, the system will remain incomplete.”

-V.R TANEJA

In a laudable drive by some future-conscious entities (organizations, institutions, individuals and children) of the world to launch a final onslaught on every force that seeks to disrespect the rights of the child, the Global Movement for Children was launched in May 2000. It was a bold attempt to rekindle the fire of the struggle to the protection of the right of the child, which dated back to 1924,

when the first Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted in Geneva. It is actually an initiative, which “has brought together some of the world’s largest child rights organisations in a unique partnership to raise awareness of the issues facing the world’s children,” in the pursuit of the following objectives:

1. To activate a large global constituency of people and organizations to influence public opinion and organize collective action.
2. To promote and support child participation.
3. To influence and encourage political commitments and accountability.

Dr Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel whilst launching the Movement intimated the world as follows: ***“We have seen too much change to simply accept the way children are living. We have too much hope in the potential of children to leave things as truly are, and we have too much faith in our fellow human beings not to know that the Global Movement we are Calling for can Happen”***

By this historical declaration the couple as the patrons of the Movement dealt an intimidating blow on doubt and its pessimistic believers. They convinced us that there is hope for the child in the midst of a selfish world. They challenged us to actions that will make the world a blissful habitat for the child.

The Global Moment for Children is committed to ten cardinal principles:

- Leave no child out
- Put children first
- Care for every child
- Fight HIV/AIDS
- Stop harming and exploiting children
- Listen to children
- Educate every child
- Protect children from war
- Protect the Earth for Children
- Fight poverty: invest in children

To my mind, the foregoing covers effectively the rights of the child and gives clear direction to the Movement. The success of the Movement depends largely on how much we are able to ensure the protection of the rights of the child as set out by the principles.

In considering the principles that the Movement focuses on, I have tried to relate them to the Nigerian child. I believe that the Nigerian child has been neglected for too long and it is time for our nation to move in the direction the entire world is moving and give the Nigerian child hope as it relates to the principles of GMC.

For the next ten weeks, I will be discussing on this page the 10 cardinal principles as they relate to the Nigeria child and his peculiarities. We cannot afford to keep mute in the face of an opportunity to bring the plight of the Nigerian child to the fore for durable solutions.

I have come to the irresistible conclusion that the struggle for the protection of the child rights deserves the unbroken attention of all and sundry. Mandela and Gracia gave us a clue to the method that will work. It is the method of increased commitment to the welfare of the child; unwavering consistency to lift the child out of social-economic and political squalor; focused doggedness: a determination to put the child first in all that we do. Hear their words of wisdom: *" For every conversation we have had, we will have ten more about children, No matter what is first on a meeting agenda, or what reason we have been invited to a place, we will talk about children, their rights for healthy and nurturing families, basic health services, a quality education and the opportunities to be active participants in their communities .we would talk about their place as the pivotal link in the process of human development"*

Remember every other thing in the society can wait except the right of the child.

2

Leave no Child Out

“There is never a good reason for denying a child freedom and opportunity. ...Discrimination is a denial of that which we believe to be self-evident: that all children are born free and equal in dignity and rights. And how can we talk of human rights without starting with the rights of those who hold the greatest potential, yet are also the most vulnerable? These children who suffer discrimination have no choice. But we do. We can teach our children to be tolerant and live without fear or hate or prejudice. And words alone will not be enough. We must also act, by ensuring every child the freedom and dignity he or she deserves. We must leave no child out.”

- Global Movement for Children (see www.gmfc.org)

There are times when you choose to shut down your mind on every serious matter and leave yourself on the sprawling arms of relaxation. In normal parlance this is simply called retiring to ‘*refire.*’ Such was my mood on Saturday, October 02, 2004 as we journeyed from the city of Lagos to the ancient town of Ipoti, Ekiti State for a very dear brother’s wedding. This relaxing mood was however short-lived few minutes after we touched down by the sorry sight of neglected children.

The first thing we were greeted with was the seeming helpless and obviously hapless situation of the Ipoti Ekiti children. They were a personification of neglect and abject poverty. This much was palpable from their appearance, their engagement in child labour (hawking of goods) and their hunger, which was revealed by the fact that their eyes were glued to the food we were served. It was as if they were going to snatch our plates of food with their eyes. The proof of their backwardness was crowned with the fact that they frantically scrambled for helium balloon used for decoration at the venue of the event. It was a pitiable sight as they would not be bothered by the fact that they

were being caned to prevent them from reaching for the balloons. They came back at every opportunity to be beaten for a worthless balloon. Their state aroused the curiosity in me to see the kind of schools they attend. I was not disappointed visited two of their schools and saw dilapidating old mud sheds standing as classrooms.

As I looked at those youngsters, I saw a people without an ounce of self worth and human dignity. At least, nothing around them suggested that. I was moved to ask the question, what does the future have to offer for these children? As I meditated on this question, the greater reality of the state of things dawned on me as it occurred to me that the state of these children was a dismal index of the state of many third world children, particularly those in the rural areas.

The Ipoti Ekiti children, like many of their mates in other rural areas in Nigeria are not only neglected. They have been deliberately schemed out of the necessary things of life by those, small men and women in power, who have been given the responsibility to share our national recourses equally among the citizens without any form of discrimination.

The perfected act of our rulers (sorry, our leaders) of neglecting children, particularly those in the rural area offends against the Supreme law of our land, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which provides, “children, young persons and the age are protected against any exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect...” (Section 17(3) (f)). The foregoing is vociferously corroborated by the provisions of Article 3 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, “Every child shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognized and guaranteed in this Charter irrespective of the child's or his/her parents' or legal guardians' race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status.”

Today, I employ the platform of Global Movement for Children to denounce the neglect of children in the rural area. I call for equal right. This call is not to our rulers, (men and

women, whose hearts are seared with hot iron) who feed fat on the blood of the ruled, who relish in running the people hard and riding roughshod on our inalienable rights. The call is not also to their collaborators, small men and women without conscience, who for the benefit of their belly, major in defending the indefensible policies of their masters, damning the judgment of history and posterity. It is to you who read this column. It is to you, who have managed to keep your conscience intact in this perverted nation. It is to you, who respect and lay the right premium on the future our great nation, personified by the Nigerian Child. You are the one, I call to join me to say 'leave no child out.'

3

Put the child first

The state of humanity belongs to him

First things first,

Lets put him first,

A wise person,

Thinking parents,

Far- sighted people,

And a sane society put our tomorrow first

For in tomorrow lies

The life, the continuity of all endeavours

Tomorrow ensures unending existence of ideas,

Inventions, mission and visions

Without tomorrow humanity is today dead, buried and gone unsung.

“Building a world fit for children” is the cardinal vision of the Global Movement for Children. Now, the point is, how do you build a world fit for children except the child becomes the first priority in our planning and implementation of such plans? The significance of this campaign point (Put the child first) of the GMC therefore lies in the fact that it is a major fulcrum upon which the entire gamut of the campaign stands.

The Global Movement for Children’s website shed ample light on this campaign point thus, “In 1989, the international community adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention states that all children, everywhere, have the rights to survival and opportunity, to protection from abuse and exploitation, and to have a say in decisions that affect them. It is a legally binding document and its fundamental principles are non-negotiable. The governments of the world have made these commitments to children, and they are obliged to meet them.

However, it is not only governments that must put children first. Everyone - including individuals, organizations, religious groups, and the private sector - must recognize that children's rights are a priority. And it is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that this is never forgotten." (See www.gcmf.org)

The perturbing thing however is the fact that as cardinal as this campaign point is, it is yet to catch the attention of the generality of our people. Not even our government is making any tangible effort to put the child first. From poor and directionless educational policies, poor healthcare delivery arrangement, discrimination against the child, exploitation through child labour, child trafficking and child prostitution, absolute lack of respect for the right of the child to life to other flagrant breeches of the rights of the child, it is obvious that our government and people have no plan for the Nigerian child not to talk of implementation. We are simply not GMC-complaint despite the fact that Nigeria is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The call to put the child first is to you, who are reading this page right now. You don't need to look too far; you can start by putting the child first in your area of influence. If you will put the child first today, then the child will soon be put first by all. Shalom!

Postscript:

Memo To Mohammed Sani

Dear Mohammed, you probably lived without access to education, health, shelter, food and other good things of life that a person of your age in a sane country enjoys without much ado. Even if that was your state, I am sure like every other suffering Nigerian child you had hope. You must have believed that, a living dog was better than a dead lion. But during the last NLC strike the State that could not provide for you the good things of life again sent you out on the street of Kaduna when you were suppose to sit at home. There you were exposed to the life-snuffing bullets of the trigger-tripped and

bloodthirsty Nigerian Police. Alas, the State robbed you of the last thing you had, it robbed you of life with which you hung to hope. The State robbed you of all. The State did not take away your sufferings, which it gave to you in abundance. Instead, it took from you one thing that it did not and could not give you, life. With curded blood, your body (and all its potentialities) was laid in the mug.

Mohammed, you were only 12 and you were innocent. You were not responsible for the state of the nation, you were a hapless victim of it. You did not increase the price of petroleum products, those who persecuted you from your mother's womb, did. The gun with which you were killed was bought by the tax collected from your parents. By that same tax the policeman that pulled the trigger is being maintained. Truly, dear Mohammed, our society has been most unfair to you and a legion of other members of your genre.

I, however find consolation in the fact that your angles are right now beholding the face of the Father of all spirits and making two demands:

1. That those (your fellow children) you have left behind be liberated from the soiled snare of fowlers, masquerading as leaders.
2. That your killers be brought to book by the full wrath of nemesis.

Extend my sincere greetings to Adeife and Akinola. Assure them that we will not rest until their killers and collaborators are brought to book. Rest in peace, dear Mohammed!

Care for every child (1)

I love the law. Not as it is been practiced in our land today. What I love is the concept of the law as a virile tool of social engineering. What I love is the traditional core value of the legal profession as articulated by Roscoe Pound, (1870–1964), the great American sociological jurisprudence exponent. He said, “there is more in the profession than the traditional dignified calling. The term referred to a group of men pursuing a learned act as a common calling in the spirit of public service, no less a public service because it may incidentally be a means of livelihood. Pursuing of the learned act in the spirit of public service is the primary purpose. Historically there are three ideas involved in the profession: organization, learning – pursuit of learned act, and a spirit of public service. These are essential.”

Today in Nigeria the law is crippled and it can therefore not fight the cause of social justice, as well as the cause of the neglected and persecuted Nigerian child. From keen observation there are seven groups of enemies that have ganged up to cripple the law and render it ineffective in aiding the cause of the Nigerian Child. I invite you to see my observation notes as they expose these enemies in details:

1. The ignorant: these are people who lack knowledge of the rights of the child. Now, this has nothing to do with formal education or illiteracy. It is basically a matter of interest. These are people, who do not know the value of the child and they do not see the need to know what he stands for and how he should be treated. The irony is that most of the people in this group are parents, guardians, teachers and other people who have been given the responsibility of custodian of the child.
2. The timid: these are people, who to a very large extent are aware of the rights of the child but they are not bold enough to speak for the child. They see people trampling on the rights of their wards, they are not bold enough

3. The Selfish: these are small men and women of thing only of today and not of the future. Naturally they don't see any reason why the boat should be rocked because of the child. It can be rocked about business deals and struggle for political power but not because of the child. There is no war in the world today being fought because of the child but there is no war today that the child is not a victim.
4. Enforcement negligent: most of these ones are kept by taxpayers' money. They are also called law enforcement agents. But in Nigeria, these one do not enforce the rights of the child. They watch heartlessly the rights of the child being trampled upon. I have a various times written them letters calling their attention to areas where the rights of the child are being trampled upon. They have never bat an eyelid. The danger is that their nonchalant attitude to the enforcement of the rights of the child has become a norm.
5. The Exploiter: these are wicked men are women who milk the child for pecuniary interest. They are the dull brains behind child trafficking, child prostitution, child labour and every other form of child exploitation; their hearts are seared with hot iron. Their conscience likewise is deadened. The only thing that makes sense to them is money. It does not matter to them whose ox is gored.
6. The Deceiver: these are people, who out of their search for food for the belly chose to preach the gospel of children rights crusade. They are often N.G.O merchants, who delight in robbing gullible donor agencies by presenting before them for funding shoddy projects that are not designed to

take off. These ones pretend to love the child but they have him. It is only someone that you use as a pawn in the trade of deception.

7. The psychopaths: these are the people who derive ludicrous pleasure from molesting the child. They sexually harass the child. They physically abuse him. Sometimes they are even the parents or guardian of the child. These are terrible men and women who introduce the child to all kinds of perversions. These ones are people of bare moral standard. People who the world should be very eager to exile to lower part of the earth. But the truth is these wolves are here among us clothed in the garbs of parents, teachers, lectures, guardians etc.

Having identified those who have crippled the law from serving the cause of the child, what is next? This is the question I shall be inviting you to join me to answer next week as I illustrate the answer with discussing another campaign point of Global Movement for children, care for every child. Shalom!

4^B

Care for every child (2)

Last week, in laying foundation for this very important topic which forms one of the cardinal campaign point of the Global Movement for Children, (Care for every child) I identified seven categories of enemies that are have sworn to ensure that the child does not receive the required attention.

Permit me this week to lay further foundation before I address the heart of the matter. Now, there is one thing I don't want us to pretend about here; the forces against the child are very formidable. As a matter of fact, you might have found yourself in one or two categories of the enemies listed last week. But in all these things, I remain undaunted. The Nigerian Child is destined to laugh last. For those who want to retrace their steps, there are still spacious rooms. They can today side with the cause of the Nigerian or continue on the ignoble path of riding roughshod on the rights of the child.

Now, why this copious foundation for the topic: care for every child? The Global Movement for Children is hinged on 10 carefully selected campaign points. I am most fascinated this one, 'care for every child.' The reason is that it is focused on the rights of the child to good health care. As far as I am concerned and as I have state several times on this page, the rights of the child to heath is very crucial because it is an extension of the rights of the child to life. My opinion is that life is of no value to a child, who held captive by ill health. A little wonder the saying that 'health is wealth.' To this truism, I add today, 'health is life.' Child rights to life, to my mind is the foundation every other right of the child, standing side by side with the rights t life. Thus to drive this all-important message home no foundation can be too copious. In fact the better our foundation the best the right of the child to health care will receive the deserved attention.

For you to understand my drift this week I invite you to a quick confirmation excursion to the site of Global Movement for children: www.gmfc.org:

“Despite impressive improvements in child health, nearly 11 million children under the age of five still die each year. The majority of these deaths could be prevented. Children are dying of measles and tetanus, both which can be prevented with a simple immunization. They are dying of pneumonia and malaria, without access to the medication that could save their lives. They are dying of diarrhoea, because the liquid solutions, which can prevent dehydration, are not available. The good news is that the number of deaths of children under five has dropped in recent years. The bad news is this trend is not reflected for children under the age of one month. To address this, to try to save newborn lives, we must begin caring for children as early as possible.”

What exactly is the state of health of the Nigerian child? The picture is blurred. The right of the child today suffers serious neglect. Let catch a glimpse as we pry into the following 2004 report released by World Health Organization. It states, “In Nigeria, malaria is responsible for the deaths of close to 300,000 children annually as it causes 30% of the deaths in under-fives, 28% of the deaths in infants and one out of ten deaths in pregnant women. It has devastated families, made the poor poorer and costs the nation about =N=132 billion ...annually. ” The foregoing is an index of the gory state of the rights of the child to health. An earlier report by UNICEF revealed, “200,000 Nigerian children die every year from malaria, diarrhoea, respiratory infection, measles, tetanus, malnutrition and exploitation ...47 percent of those below age one don’t ever get immunized.”

That the right of the child to health needs an urgent attention in Nigeria is fact that cannot be over emphasized. The countless naira question really is, who will bell the cat? The way we carry on, I will not be surprised if we do not know that the child is on the verge of extinction.

The question, I dare to ask today is, who is on the child's side? I mean, who is on God's side because the child is God's? For as many that are ready to defend the rights of the child to health, I beg to take you back to the site we visited earlier for direction on how to channel our resolution. The GMC site enjoined as follows, "We can start caring for children even before they are born, by caring for their mothers. Nearly 600,000 women die each year of complications during pregnancy - 99 per cent of them in the developing world. The death of the mother jeopardizes the life of the child. Children whose mothers have died are more likely to die themselves before their second birthday. If access to basic care is provided before, during and after delivery, and improved access to emergency obstetrical care is provided, these deaths could be prevented."

Shalom!

Fight HIV/AIDS

Outside the scourge of Malaria, the HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest migraines of the Nigerian Child. If the rich (that is, children in developed countries) also cry under the scourge of HIV/AIDS, how much more the poor (the children in disorganised Africa)? Here we even have leaders of nations, who still deny the existence of the dreaded pandemic.

My piece today is not about reeling out dreadful statistics of the cases of victims. I am sure we are all familiar with that. We are even belaboured by them. All I am trying to today is an advocacy targeted at reminding us about what we are already aware of. HIV/AIDS is more rampant here because of our level of development. I talk about the level of our education. In most communities we are slaves to Stone Age superstition. Do you know there is a superstition that sleeping with a child or virgin can cure HIV/AIDS. This belief alone has made a mess of the live and destiny of countless of children. A pathetic case was that of

Liketso reported in Africa Today Magazine of November 2004. "She is a 10-month-old baby that was raped by her mother's HIV-positive boyfriend, who believed the myth, not uncommon in southern Africa, that sex with a virgin, including a child or baby, can cure HIV/AIDS virus. It was an incident that damaged her for life. She had her womb removed." Another practice that makes the Nigerian child a unbridled victims of the scourge under the discussion is circumcision of children. There is this superstition among a particular tribe in Nigeria that except the girl child is circumcised, she will become a promiscuous adult. Now, circumcision is done a most crude way in these rural areas. Utensils that are used are not sterilised. Now, before one says, what on earth does circumcision has to do with promiscuity, you need to understand that this is a belief that is still so potent and being practiced. It is the reason why many children are subjected to the pain of primitive circumcision process.

I guess the point I am trying to make is that a Nigerian problem deserves a Nigerian solution. We cannot fight AIDS the way it is being fought in the developed countries. Yes, it is the same epidemic, but different issues when it comes to how it spreads from continent to continent. Some of the superstitions that make children victims of HIV/AIDS in Africa don't exist in the country we have patterned our own campaign after. This is not fair on the child. It is high time we take our own social and cultural peculiarities into consideration in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Only such effort will bring genuine results and gladden the heart of history and posterity. Anything short of that will amount to dancing the steps of hypocrisy on the mass grave of the African and Nigerian Child. We must focus the heat of our campaign on superstitions and practices that makes the child a cheap prey of the pandemic. Do you know that are parents who still share blades and toothbrushes. These are things that are abomination in developed countries. These nations don't need the emergence of HIV/AIDS to imbibe the sanity in healthy domestic practices. Our campaign must begin with a total reorientation of the masses of our people in the interest of the child.

The other side of the campaign is the care for children, who have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. It is common knowledge that there is a sound welfare system in developed countries. This is not the case in Black Africa. We have not evolved a system that takes the care of the child outside the corners of his home. It appears it is the sole responsibility of the parents and guardian to take care of their wards. As far as the State is concerned the child has nothing to offer the nation. Or how do you explain the fact that the government has abandoned the health care delivery system and education. It is either parents and guardians are buoyant enough to put their children in private schools or they (children) forfeit the opportunity for quality education. That is also the case with health. Successive governments have successfully delivered themselves from the responsibility to the people. In a county like ours, what becomes of orphans? Thus our campaign must be holistic in nature. We must go back to the root of the matter.

Governments must be made to be responsible to the generality of our people. The welfare system must be encouraged. Children who lose their parents to HIV/AIDS must not be allowed to also lose their future. Enough of armchair campaign it is time to rescue the Nigerian child from the dreaded pandemic, called HIV/AIDS by focusing on the real issues. Away with any campaign that is again hinged on colonial mentality. It is time to think African. It is time to think Nigerians.

With this call I bring to a halt the cart of Global Movement for Children. I beg you to make a manual for the defence of the Nigerian child. History and God watch closely those who will be faithful to this assignment for bountiful rewards. Catch you next week. Shalom!

Stop Harming and Exploiting Children

'Every child has the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. Yet children all over the world are being harmed every day. An estimated 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are working worldwide. Still another one million children every year are pulled into the multi-billion dollar commercial sex trade.

Child work and exploitation are not only the results of poverty – they also perpetuate poverty. Without an education, many children find themselves without better opportunities later in life. Many of them in turn will look to their own children to help supplement the family's income.' (www.gmfc.org)

My assignment on this page today is to reel out a stunning catalogue of how the child is harmed and exploited in Nigeria and leave the judgment to our conscience for the purpose of concrete actions.

Writing on this page under the topic: Sujit Kumar: This is also our Story, I submitted as follows: 'many Nigerian children today, who being abused one way or the other today and may never recover from it for the rest of their lives. Think about a child, who is being used as begging bait by the parents, what becomes of their self-esteem? What about those who are introduced to the culture of violence through child labour, what happens to their tenderness as human beings? Think also about those who are being used for prostitution, what becomes of their roles as future mothers and wives? What about those, who are crammed into a rickety cottage in the name of a classroom, what happens to their sense of self-worth? Think also of those who are not listened to by their parents, what happens to their self-confidence and poise? What about the little boy or girl brought from the 'village' as a house help by some shylock human merchants, what becomes of his future in view of the fact that he has every tendency to develop

slavery mentality?’ The foregoing makes it to this page again today because it sheds lucid light on the subject under discussion.

I beg to move a little farther into the archives to establish the relevance of the campaign point under discussion to the Nigerian Child. Thisday, February 4, 1999 has these reports “At 14, Fatima already has a son for a wealthy 40 year old business man, now the man has abandoned her. And after she was delivered of her son, Fatima had to content with the disease called Vesco Vaginal Festulae (VVF). Her reproductive system and genitals have lost their control velves. Fatima passes urine uncontrollably and worse, it comes with a very offensive odour.” The major challenge is not the story reproduced above, it is the fact that the situation remains the same if not worse six years down the line. One way by which the child is harmed in Nigeria, particularly in the northern part is early marriage.

Here is another diary of woe on the harmed and exploited Nigerian child, meticulously recorded by Dr. Biodun Ogunyemi, a lecturer at the Ogun State University, Ago Iwoye in the Guardian, Friday October 22, 1999 as follows: “the case of action against child sexual abuse (CSA0 cannot be made too strongly. If you are in doubt, consider these: “Raped girl, 16 jumps into river (Saturday Punch, July 5 1997) “Policeman kills daughter, after raping her: (Sunday Concord, July 27, 1997) “Nigerian jailed in London for selling small girls as sex slaves in Rome” (Weekend Concord: September 19, 1998) “Incest: man rapes daughter” (Tribune on Saturday October 31, 1998) Assaulted eight-year old still in pain (four years after)” The Guardian November 2, 1998).”

Dr. Ogunyemi concluded thus “The fall-out from abuse situation like these are well documented; life long psychological traumas; damage to reproductive organs; infection with diseases including the killer AIDS; lack of capacity to negotiate sex, initiation into prostitution and sundry secondary manifestations of a damaged personality.”

Mrs. Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi, the Executive Director of Women's Consortium of Nigeria observed about the pathetic state of the Nigerian child in The Guardian of Wednesday, June 16, 2004 as follows: "unfortunately, the treatment of the Nigerian children trafficked internally or externally is not much different from the Beninese children trafficked into Nigeria. They are all denied education, rights to care and minimum standard of living in negation of their rights as children. In addition, these trafficked children are victims of sexual and physical abuse some of which are to unimaginable degree. The widely reported case of the young girl trafficked from Niger State to Lagos to work as domestic servant and whose employer poured kerosene and set ablaze on the suspicion of having stolen meat is still fresh in our memories."

I believe I have been able to do justice to my assignment today. These kinds of Stone Age abuses enumerated above from different sources are direct attacks on the child and they must not continue. Now is the time to embark on concrete actions aimed at halting the ugly tide of harming and exploiting our own future-the child. Shalom!

Listen to Children

“ (1.) States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (2.) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.”

Article 12 Right of the Child Convention

There is no meaningful opportunity that comes on a platter of gold. In fact no opportunity can be golden except it is deliberately created through the fiery crucible of deep thinking, meticulous planning, deft implementation and above all the crowning help of the Almighty God. I therefore thank God for this opportunity to again advocate for the right of the child to be heard (particularly in matters that affect him) under the Global Movement for Children. I had earlier discussed this all-important right in two previous edition of this column. The right of the child to be heard (**Listen to children**) is one the cardinal principles to which the Global movement for children is committed.

In my humble opinion, the right of the child to be listened to is one right that the child cannot be denied of. To deny a child of this right is to make of him a jelly of a human being, who lacks self-respect and worth. The reason is, the right of the child to be heard goes to the root of his personal dignity and identity. When a child is not given a chance to express his opinions, he grows with the following defects:

- a) That he has nothing to say on issues, even those affecting him.

- b) When he has sound opinions on issues, he believes that are not good enough because those opinions are not requested by those he looks up to (parents, teachers etc) and they are therefore not tested.
- c) Since practice makes perfect, such child, who is not encouraged to express his opinion, will find it difficult to conceive, develop or implement ideas. And since ideas rule the world, such child is sentenced to mental, economic and social slavery.
- d) When a child is not heard, he a material that will not be fit for the corporate world. It is common knowledge today that to succeed in the workplace, you must be a team player and a child, who is not heard is brought up to be insecure and an insure person is always a lone ranger.
- e) The reason why a child wants to be heard most of the time is to ask questions about fundamental issues of life, such as challenges associated with biological growth, sex, religious believes, peer pressure etc. when he is not granted audience by his parents, he either keeps to himself or his quest to find answers to these burning questions drives him to take counsel from his either uninformed or misinformed friends. The end result is a child, who becomes a sorry victim of the same vices he had tried to avoid by seeking to ask questions.
- f) His confidence is seriously attacked as he adds no value to his own opinion and he becomes a forced introvert. He is therefore easily pushed around by his friend as he will never speak his mind nor contest what he believes is wrong.
- g) When a child is not heard and he somehow believes he has something to offer, he reacts in rebellion and proof a point to those, who have refused to listen to him by engaging in vices like cultism, smoking, alcoholism, robbery etc.

The most devastating thing about the foregoing defects is that they can be very difficult to repair, even when the child becomes an adult.

Now, I speak about the right of the child to be heard with matchless passion because I know what it means not to be heard as a child. Growing up, I cannot remember anytime my parents sought my opinion on anything, no to talk of issues that affected me. Every decision was foisted on me and I grew with many questions in my mind (about my self worth, personal dignity, sexuality, purpose in life etc.) to which nobody listened, not to talk of providing answers. The consequences of this were as stated few paragraphs away. It has taken rigorous self-improvement, persistent personal reorientation and relentless mind sterilization for me to be liberated and made whole as an adult.

Coming from this background I appreciate by experience, the Child Participation resolution of the United Nations' General Assembly Special Session on Children held in may 2002 and the campaign position of the Global Movement for Children, 'listen to children.' Today, I charge all and sundry, if you don't listen to any child and you will not advocate for this right, do the least, make your own child, listen to him. Shalom

Educate Every Child

“Children are born into the world eager to learn. All too often, though, they do not have access to education. Today, more than 110 million school-age children worldwide, mostly girls, are not going to school and millions more are receiving poor quality education. There are a number of reasons for this. Either there is no money, or the school is too far away, or the children are working to support their families. But a quality, basic education is every child’s fundamental right... Education is not only a child’s right. It is also a child’s responsibility, one of the most profound responsibilities a child can undertake. It is a responsibility that children want to undertake. We must ensure that they can.”

- (www.gmfc.org)

Thank you faithful readers for excusing me last week to take solidarity greeting to Russia Child. Well, we remain in vigilant solidarity until the war mongers in that land sheath their child-targeted sword, if not for anything but in the interest of the Russian child.

Now back to our series that had to be stopped to lend a voice to the cry of the Russian child for the protection of his rights to life. Today I am going to be discussing one of the campaign points of Global Movement for Children: Educate Every Child. The focal of this campaign point is summed up thus: “ if a child is good enough to live then he is good enough to receive adequate education.” In other words every child is entitled to education and no reason, no matter how tenable it may appear is strong enough to excuse any nation on the surface of the earth from carrying out this all-important responsibility to the child.

I choose to begin today's advocacy with some of the provisions of Article **11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child:**

“1. Every child shall have the right to an education.

2. The education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The promotion and development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) Fostering respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms with particular reference to those set out in the provisions of various African instruments on human and peoples' rights and international human rights declarations and conventions...”

I have decided to use the provisions of African Charter on the Rights of the child because it takes into consideration the peculiar need of the African Child. The truth of the matter is, if these provisions can be implemented to the letter, the African child will be home and dry in the area of education. With the state of things today in most parts of Africa, the African child is only fine on paper and lip service. His right to education as advocated by the Global Movement for Children is ridden roughshod on by the conscienceless powers that be.

On Friday September 17, 2004 The Punch Newspaper on a front-page minor story titled: “Public schools in the throes of extinction” announced another cruel attack on the right of the Nigerian child to education. The main of the story has it that, “...Many public schools had no candidates for the new academic session kicking off this September due to loss of confidence in the system.” The report did not conclude without stating the implication of the present situation. It stated, “No doubt, the situation in Nigeria today is a threat to efforts by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization to ensure that education for all, including primary schooling for all, becomes a reality by 2015. Currently, UNESCO statistics show that one of three children

never see the inside of a classroom while there are 104 million children in primary age in the world deprived of access to education while a greater number of those who are educated leave school without having learned to read, write or count.”

Now, I am tempted to conclude that with the foregoing picture, that the educational destiny of the African Child, particularly the Nigerian Child is doomed. I am only restrained by two factors from falling for that temptation. They are:

1. My faith in God, who has definite plans for the Nigerian child to which He is committed.
2. My long-held philosophy that evil will not triumph over good.

I believe that these factors were active in Dr Nelson Mandela and Graca Machel, when they decided to throw their full weight behind the Global Movement for Children. A commitment they have pursued with uncommon zeal.

As I again lend a voice today, I am hope for the Nigerian child.

Meet you again next week as we continue on this path. Shalom!

Educate Every Child: Zamfara against the world

That the Nigerian child is troubled on all side of his existence has become a fact so profound that it is palpable to the blind and audible to the deaf. Speaking to the Pupils and teachers of Atlantic Hall, Lagos few years ago I borrowed the words of Kemi Faloun (as reported in The Punch, Wednesday, January 5, 2000 page 27) in painting the vivid picture of the troubled state of the Nigerian child. Hear her:

“Some children are being denied the right to survive while the killer disease, HIV/ADIDS is spreading and children die everyday. Because of non-availability of portable water children continue to die of water borne diseases, children of the nation lack adequate protection from armed robbers, from slave drivers and others, who engage in child abuse. Some perform under hazardous conditions in factories and homes like the case of a child who was chained for two or three months by her supposed guardian. For two or three months and nobody reported her until someone took the case to the News (NTA). People take children across the borders to sell, nobody stops them. Children are killed for rituals everyday to make money, children hawk along busy streets, yet nothing has been done. God forgive us.”

Four years down the line it is saddening that the Nigerian child is yet to be redeemed from a state of neglect and abuse. If there is any change, it is that the persecutors (of the child) and thier cronies are perfecting more efficient ways to ride roughshod on the rights of the child. It is in this light that one must view with all seriousness the onslaught on the rights of the child by the Government of Zamfara State. The Guardian, Sunday, September 5, 2004 on page 16 reports, "late last month, the state government introduced a new education policy that imposes higher financial demands on non-indigenes of the state in its schools." The Guardian, Sunday, September 12, 2004 in a front page lead story, captioned, "No Going Back on Fees" reported, "The Zamfara State

government says it has no intention of banning non-indigenes from its public schools. But it restates its decision to impose the payment of school fees on them in such schools in the state"

The foregoing decision of the State government is a direct breach of the rights of the child as follows:

- The right of the child against discrimination
- The right of the child to education

Section 42 (1) (a) (b) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria frowns at discrimination against any Nigerian citizen thus:

"A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person: - (a) be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions are not made subject; or

(b) be accorded either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any such executive or administrative action, any privilege or advantage that is not accorded to citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions."

On the right of the child to education, Section 18(1) of the Constitution provides

"Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels."

Now, it is important to also note that the decision of Zamfara State Government is in

direct breach of two of the cardinal campaign points of the Global Movement for children:

- Leave no child out
- Educate every child

Before we roast Governor Yerima and his cohorts alive in the fiery furnace of contrary public opinion and armchair criticism, an important point must be made that the entire society is guilty of a conspiracy to deprive the child of the right to live and grow in peace as ordained by his Creator. The Zamfara case is a reflection of a Nation that is ganged up against its own future. It is a case of 'he that has no sin against the child let him cast the first stone.' So as we point one finger to Zamfara, it important for us to realise that we have four pointing at us. And if we have cried this much at where a finger is pointed, it is only honourable to begin to pay adequate attention to where the remaining four is pointed.

It time for all hands to be at work, 'building a world fit for children.' Except this is our collective focus, we will just be a bunch of hypocrites beating the air and preparing the grounds for more Zamfaras. Shalom!

Protect Children from War

I once said at a UNICEF forum that the bitter truth is that never in the history of mankind has the rights of the child has been subjected to a global and intense siege. One fact that no sane observer can deny is that the world child is troubled on all sides and in all lands. From Darfur to Iraq and now to Russia there has never been a time so trying for the child. The disturbing trend is that the child has become the proverbial grass that suffers when two elephants fight. The child is made to pay dearly for the mistakes of adults, who are supposed to be his caretakers and custodians.” The foregoing assertions are still very true. In fact they depict the picture of adults that has failed in their responsibility to ensure that the child is protected.

The truth that a war-happy world has not paid adequate attention to is that there is no specie of human being, who suffers irreparable negative consequences in a war situation. The child is a four-fold victim in a war situation:

- He is killed.

When a child is killed, his destiny is cut short when the dew of his life is still very fresh on the grass of opportunities. Such child is not allowed to fulfill his God-ordained destiny. He not allowed experiencing the joy of taking his destiny into his own hands. When a child’s life is truncated the way it the world that loses and the most painful thing is that these are losses that are not quantifiable. According to UNICEF’s State of the World’s Children Report 2005, “about 1.6 million children have been killed in armed conflict throughout the world since 1990.” What a colossal waste of the future.

- He is orphaned

A cover story of BusinessDay Africa of December 20, 2004, titled, “ Children are condemned to suffer,” came with the following shocking rider, “United Nations

report says there is little hope that a millions of sub-Saharan Africa's suffering and exploited children will have a better life in the foreseeable future." The cover story further revealed on page 13: " the sad thing is that the worst is yet to come. We are estimating that the orphan population in sub-Saharan Africa is likely to be around 25 million by 2010, and we do not see, even in the best circumstances, that the increase is likely to taper off before 2015 or 2020." It is important to note that the African child is orphaned by HIV/ AIDS and armed.

When a child is orphaned, he is denied parental care, which is very important to his growth and development in life. In most cases, the child is not only orphaned, he also becomes a refugee at a very tender age. In this kind of situation the child becomes stark vulnerable to all kinds to bizarre breaches.

- He is made a child soldier

The UNICEF report earlier referred to in this piece further stated, "...Children are...the victims of wars and conflicts, in which they are forced to fight or subjected to abuse and slavery." When a child's fragile mind is exposed to violence at this very tender age, it will take a lot of rehabilitation to reposition that child for normal life. The story was told during Second World War of an adult German soldier, who lost his mind in the process of shooting thousands of Jews into shallow graves. His mind could not just contain the horror. If that could happen to an adult, whose mind was far from being fragile, how much more a child?

- His growth and development are truncated.

The BusinessDay Africa report referred to earlier also revealed, " ...Children were always among the first affected by conflict. Armed conflict affects their lives in many ways, and even if they are not killed or injured, they can be orphaned, abducted, raped and left with deep emotional scars from direct exposure to violence or from dislocation and poverty." Apart from this education, health care,

recreation and many other facilities that are important to the child's education are disrupted by war.

It is not too much for a world, which is conscious of the invaluable and prime place of the child to always discourage the war option basically because of its devastating effects on the child. Thus UNICEF insists, "No child should experience the horrors of armed conflict." This should also be a warning to those who are drumming the beats of war in Nigeria, particularly those in the Niger Delta. I beg them to seek all peaceful means to agitate for obvious acts of injustice against them by the Nigerian State. War or armed struggle is not an option, at least in the interest of the Nigerian child.

The Nigerian child will survive! The Nigerian child will live to eat the good of this good land! See you next week, Shalom!

Protect the Earth for Children (1)

We are back to our series on Global Movement for Children. We have four topics to go and I can assure you all of faithfulness and discipline at this yet another resumption of the long suspended series. I have had cause to suspend the series at various times because of pressing occurrences concerning the Nigerian child that pressed for the urgent attention of this page. That a series as important as this is suspended from time to time, not because I am off this page but because I am ambushed by cases of breaches, only shows that the Nigerian child is under serious siege and his rights has remained a pitiable victims. Well, as I prophesied at the beginning of this year, I see light at the end of the endless tunnel of neglect and deprivation in which the Nigerian child has been holed up by the negligence and insensitivity of an ignorant, forgetful and wicked world.

I beg to move from this lamentation to our topic for today, lest I am mistaken for Prophet Jeremiah, whose modus of operation in the Holy Script was melancholic lamentation.

Today I shall be discussing the effect of the environment on the child. This subject is the 9th campaign point of the Global Movement for Children. It is a call on all and sundry to “safeguard the environment at global, national and local levels” in the interest of the child. What exactly does the sponsors of Global Movement for Children have in mind by the word, ‘environment.’ A visit to the official website of the Global Movement for Children gives a clear answer to the question as follows: “We can still choose how we use our environment. When we use resources wisely, we honour the trust the next generation has placed in us. Environmental threats like global warming and the water crisis take their greatest toll on children. Water-borne diseases cause the preventable deaths and illnesses of millions of children. Environmental threats will continue to take

their toll, for the mistakes of today will continue to haunt the world tomorrow.”
(Www.gmfc.org)

I am afraid we may not be able to proceed beyond the introduction point this week as there is another very important matter pressing for attention and space. I therefore crave your indulgence break this piece here today to pay a little but well deserved tribute to a faithful and committed professional. I shall continue along this path next week.

Postscript

For Joseph Ayanfe Sesebo

I love the mass media. I am fascinated by the opportunity it provides for effective information dissemination. It is often said that the media is the watchdog, but I am quick to add that the media control the minds of the citizen of a nation. If ‘information is power’ then the media through which information is disseminated is the engine room of power.

I love some interesting personalities in the media, who have always given their best to humanity in ensuring that the people are armed with the right information in every situation to enable them take the right decision. Most of the time these personalities go out of their ways to ensure at great risks that the people are well informed. Such media personalities are rare and invaluable gems. They have at various times paid with their dear and daring lives. I make bold to say that without these exceptional and selfless personalities, the cause of the Nigerian child will remain in the doldrums of darkness and neglect. Such was Mr. Joseph Ayanfe Sesebo, the late Group Business Editor of the *Daily Independent*. I never met him but his unusual dedication to his profession is not only evident in his intimidating credential but also in the story of how he met his untimely death. F. Coker-Onita in his ‘Issues Today’ column of Thursday, January 13, 2005 reported it thus, “On the fateful day Joseph met his death, he was reported not to

be on duty. But for the love of his profession, he left home to catch a story. Unknown to him, It was going to be his last.” I commiserate with the Nation. I mourn with the Nigerian press. I sympathize with the big Daily Independent family. I send my deepest condolence to the family of the deceased. And to the deceased, I say that his lifestyle of dogged dedication to a profession that represents selfless service to humanity is well noted. It has become legacy he bequeathed to me. And this legacy has become an additional (and invaluable one for that matter) elixir for me in the pursuit of the protection of the rights of the Nigerian child.

Rest in perfect peace our dear Joseph Ayanfe Sesebo, even in the grave your works speak! Shalom!

10^B

Protect the Earth for Children (2)

We kicked off this series again last week but we were not able to go beyond introducing the topic under discussion because duty and sense of history demanded we pay a tribute to a gentleman and professional (Joseph Ayanfe Sesebo), who died in line of duty.

Today, we pick up the topic from where we stopped last week. Before we anchored last week we were able to pry in the minds of the initiators of the Global Movement for Children to determine the focus of the call for the protection of the environment in the interest of the child.

Having successfully done that last week, I think the focus of the Global Movement for Children on the environment is a very important side to the environmental issues in Nigeria and beyond. In fact it is my blunt opinion that there are only few land where the call for environmental sanity should be made than Nigeria. It is common knowledge that we lack respect for the environment. The heaps of refuse that litter our major cities are eloquent evidence that we generally lack the will and the zeal to promote a healthy environment. Genuineness of purpose in governance is expected to all encompassing. But that is not the case in Nigeria, where immediate attention is not given to anything that does not seem to pose immediate danger.

Now, why should the environment be safeguarded fro the child? An expert explains as follows: “ the child is not in control of the environment, like many other things in his life. But the child’ s growth and development is largely tied to the environment, which he has no control over. To leave him to carry his cross in terms of relating to the environment is to leave him to commit suicide. Thus we have a responsibility to create a healthy and conducive environment for the child.”

How does the environment affect the child? The environment is very important to the health of the child. For example, an epidemics like cholera, which are common among children, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa is largely caused by environmental problem. Medical research has it that “the cholera bacterium is transmitted through infected food and water.” Malaria, (the number one killer of the African child) which according to World Health Organization is “In Nigeria, is responsible for the deaths of close to 300,000 children annually,” is “transmitted by the bite of anopheles mosquito. ” Mosquito also transmits yellow fever. It is common knowledge that without a dirty environment mosquitoes cannot survive. Research has it that “the eggs are laid on the surface of stagnant water.”

The foregoing depicts a major importance of the environment to the child, particularly in the area of health. For the child, as it is with every being, health is wealth. In fact health is life and life is hope. It goes without saying therefore that the hope of the Nigerian child is mainly sustained by good health. Health adds meaning and value to every right to which the child is entitled to. As I have once opined on this page, ‘what is the gift of life to a child, who is held inactive by ill health?’

This is the time for all hands to be at work to amplify this campaign point of Global Movement for Child both in genuine words and concrete actions. The children are tired of conferences that turn out to be talk shop for insincere and insensitive adults whose interest does not go beyond making names and fortune off the cause of the child. The destiny of the child is not that elastic to continue to accommodate empty rhetoric, which does not find unity in concrete action. Everyone who is reading this piece right now must be able to see into the heart of compassion and ask and find genuine answer to the question: what can I do to protect the right of the child to a healthy environment?

The Global Movement for Children enjoins all who have conscience, as thus, “we must act today. The world belongs to our children; we are its caretakers. We must preserve our natural resources even as we use them, to ensure our children’s rights to a healthy environment.” I simply hope that the message is clear. “A word is enough for the wise.” But here, under the watchful eyes of my editor, who once sent a text message to me resisting my seeming incurable penchant for overshooting my space allocation, we have more than seven hundred words. I fervently await your actions. Shalom!

Fight Poverty: Invest in Children

“Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape to gather wealth and take so little care of your children to whom one day you must relinquish it all.”

-Socrates

To keep a newspaper column that attempts to call attention to the state of the neglected Nigerian child is not an easy task. From time to time, you face pressure from all sides, internal and external. While the external pressure is easily shrugged off by the power of an immutable conviction, internal pressure requires special grace from God and rigorous efforts from you to abate. The fact is, no external pressure can weight you down until you bow to internal pressure. When your internal affairs (the state of your mind) are ordered, your entire system (spirit, soul and body) is impervious to legion of attacks and distractions.

The first pressure I face as I advocate for the right of the child is that of that of frustration. My internal antennal is today very sensitive and active to the seemingly insurmountable troubles of the Nigerian child. From time to time the signals of horror picked by my antennal from observing the child passes a debilitating currents to my entire being. The enormity of the woes that betide the Nigerian child and the nonchalance attitude of his enemies to his state have the potentiality to brew acute frustration at will. Thus I have at countless times jolted my soul back to active service by consciously queuing it behind the comforting words of the Psalmist, “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God...”

Another pressure that I face is that of my own mind trying to label me a pessimist. It is not an enviable task when you have to struggle with your own mind on the issue of your true identity on a fundamental issue lie this. Week in, week out I tell tales of woe of the Nigerian child. My mind, most times forgets that what I share on this page are not

‘cunningly devised fables.’ It forgets that these are true-life stories of the peculiar genre, created to be the ‘heritage of the Lord’ but has been disinherited by the very custodians of his delightful heritage.

The real pessimists are those, who have subjected the child to abject poverty. Like the leech, they only take from the Nigerian child either through Child Trafficking, Child Labour, Ritual Killing, Child Prostitution or any other means yet to be discovered. It is alien to their agenda to invest in the child.

These pessimists are those human vermin, masquerading as children’s rights advocates as they breathes on the necks of international donor agencies for funds that will never be disbursed to the cause of the child. The real pessimists are those corporate bodies, who know how to use the child to promote their products but passionately detest the wisdom to invest meaningfully in the destiny of the child. The real pessimists are the leaders (sorry, rulers) of our nations and their mean clique of political rodents, who lack respect for the future, which the child represents and subject him to sufferings too hard for his fragile frame.

On 25th of May 1997, Thisday newspaper catalogued some of the woes of poverty to which the Nigerian child is subjected thus, “Reports say there are 34 million of them (children) in Nigeria. But they are all these as thousands of girls leaving their provincial towns and villages to the cities to become house girls in affluent homes. As hordes of beggars, whose only hope for food is left-over they can scavenge from eateries and the little they can beg off people; from the motor parks of Kaduna to the markets of Onitsha and Kano and Lagos.

As a child prostitute hawking her young body so she can eat, ends up with incurable diseases. As school child whose only evidence of learning are their school uniform and bags; children who have to remain home for the greater part of a session either because

the teachers are on strike or daddy cannot pay or they have to leave school to “sell market” children herded together in a corner of a flooded classroom that has no roof or furniture. But these also are familiar stories.”

Seven years after, it is so sad the state of the Nigerian child, as pictured above has only grown worse. Thus the 10th campaign point of Global Movement for Children, “Fight poverty, invest in children” becomes relevant for this page today.

This is a call to the vigilant in the society. It is a call to those whose hearts are pure, men and women, who are conscious of the significance and relevance of the future-the child. To you I have two simply assignments, which I enjoin you to do to the best of your ability in the best way you can:

- Fight poverty in the interest of children
- Invest in children

Dear reading friend, be faithful to these assignments and to you also shall history and posterity smile. Shalom!

Corporate Citizens and the Rights of the Nigerian Child- A Call for Immediate Action

When few years ago I had the burden to speak for the rights of the Nigerian Child it took me time to give it the seriousness it deserved. This was basically because, I was not fully aware of the enormity of the disrespect and neglect of the rights of the child by the Nigerian society. Now, years gone by, one has come to discover that the Nigerian child is in a pathetic state. This rude discovery leaves one with only one painful conclusion: nearly everybody in the society is guilty of neglecting the child, who according to Gabriel Mistrel is the 'fountain of life.'

Keeping this column has not been a burden at the level of topics to write about. I have come to realize that the spate at which the right of the child is trampled upon unnoticed in Nigeria, a legion of passionate writers who are dedicated to reeling out commentaries at a supersonic speed would still need to submit to the special grace of God to make a difference in the circumstance. But as long as the entire society is committed to riding roughshod on rights of the Nigerian child, this column remains a vociferous, though minute voice in the wilderness defending the rights of the child as enshrined in national and international laws.

I am persuaded that a time is coming and it is soon when the rights of the Nigerian child and their protection will occupy the very first burner of public consciousness and debate; when it will be obsolete for our society to awkwardly derive pleasure from the 'sorrow, tears and blood' of the child. I have faith like Dr. Nelson Mandela and Graca Machel that one day those who today with seared conscience smile to the bank on the account of the exploitation of the Nigerian Child (either through Child Trafficking, Child Labour, Ritual Killing, Child Prostitution or any other means yet to be discovered) will have to stand manacled, spirit, soul and body before the unbiased court of history to receive their deserved judgment sentencing them to eternal disgrace and irremediable

condemnation. Not only them but also all who today stand aloof, passive and unconcerned, leaving our collective future-the child to groan under the jackboot of cruel neglect.

It was the fear of this judgment the precipitates my call from time to time to men and women of conscience to remove their names from the black book of history by first, refusing to be part of the bandwagon, who lack respect for the rights of the child and identifying with him in his quest for life as ordained by his Almighty Creator.

This brings me to the call I once made on this page. Writing under the topic, "Right to education (2)" on Thursday, February 12, 2004 I made a specific call on non-governmental (and corporate) bodies to embark on projects aimed at supporting the desire of the Nigerian Child for "...equal and adequate educational opportunities." It was in summation a call on the corporate world not to leave the business of education of the child to the nonchalant hands of the State.

Today, I renew that call in a deeper dimension. This call is particularly to the corporate citizens of this country to throw their moral and financial weight behind the protection of the rights of the Nigerian child. This call is predicated upon two major reasoning:

1. That the protection of the rights of the child is the responsibility of every citizen (individual and corporate), considering the fact that the child occupies an important place in the life of a nation.
2. That the Nigerian child has been a faithful partner with the corporate citizens in their desire to deliver to the bottom line. There is hardly any product in Nigeria today that does not use the Nigerian child for advertisements. Fairness simply demands that corporate citizens do some things tangible to better the lots of a faithful partner.

This call is however, without prejudice to pockets of support by the corporate citizens to the cause of the Nigerian child. Notable is the payment of Education Tax by corporate citizens. This is a two-fold call as follows:

1. Legislation by the national and state legislative bodies defining the scope and mandating the support of corporate bodies for the child.
2. An organized and consistent support for the child by the corporate citizens through sponsorship of children related projects.

The state of humanity is in the hands of the child and now is the time for those hands to be massaged and strengthened for the tasks ahead.

Child's right to life: In memory of Adeife and Akinola

A clarion calls for justice,
Justice for the Embattled Nigerian Child
Justice for the dead,
Justice for the living,
The dead to pacify innocent blood,
Shed on the morning dew,
The living
That this monster will no more rear its
Head so ugly.

I feel that there is no better time to make a case for the Nigerian Child than today, which has been set aside as the children's day in Nigeria. That the Nigerian Child is endangered specie is no more news to every man and women of good conscience in Nigeria. This fact may only be unknown to those, who have decided to play the ostrich. The need to move away from hypocrisy and pay serious attention to the seeming insurmountable plights of the Nigeria Child informed this piece, which is a on all to respect the most fundamental rights of the Nigerian Child-the right to life. The unbridled breach of the right of the Child to life in Nigeria is an enormous threat to the future of our great nation.

One major thing that suffered a major affront in the state of nature was human life. The sanctity of human life had little or no meaning to the inhabitants of the Stone Age. Little wonder Hobbes submitted that it was, "solitary, nasty, brutish and short."

The way and manner "Adeife and Akinola Sodipo-Akindeko's lives were cut short at their tender age on April 20, last year by the bullet of yet to be identified gunmen on their way from Ibogun, Ifo, Ogun State" reenacted nothing but the macabre horror that characterised the state of nature. The dastardly killing of these children was a direct

breach of the right of the Nigerian child to life. That their killers are yet to be brought to book is an indictment on the state.

Section 33 (1) of the 1999 Constitution protects the right of every Nigerian citizen (including a child) to life as follows: “Every person has a right to life, and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life, save in execution of the sentence of court in respect of a criminal offence of which he has been found guilty in Nigeria. ”

This Constitutional provision, which is regarded as a fundamental human right has an ample corroboration in particular reference to children in Article 5 (1) & (2) of The African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child as follows: “1. Every child has an inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. 2. State parties to the present Charter shall ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the survival, protection and development of the child.”

That the state has a responsibility to ensure the safety of life of every citizen is one thing that becomes noteworthy from the couching of the foregoing provisions. This is not a responsibility that calls for impotent rhetoric; it requires decisive actions.

This responsibility thrust on the state by law only becomes a huge mirage where the following factors are not taken into consideration:

1. Practical and effective measures aimed at protecting the lives of citizens.
2. The equipping of the police and other law enforcement agencies to effect arrest of suspected offenders with the aim of prosecution under the law.

Speaking at the launching of the N500 million Adeife Akinola Sodip-Akindeko Memorial Child Foundation held on the 30th of January 2004, President Olusegun Obasanjo stated, “The greatest support which could be given to the departed children is prayers and sustenance of the good ideals they stood for.” With this position of the president, I

beg to differ a bit. I strongly believe that the greatest support, which could be given to the departed children, is to bring their killers to book. Until the state spreads its dragnet within and beyond the country to bring the killers of these children under the full wrath of the law no justice has been done to departed souls and the right of the Nigerian child to life remains in jeopardy.

One of the aims to criminal punishment is deterrence. Criminal justice only makes sense when those who perpetrate heinous crimes know that no matter how fast and far they run the very long and patient arms of the law will catch up with them. But when the arms of the law are shortened by insensitivity, incompetence and insincerity of the state, life becomes “solitary, nasty, brutish and short,” as unbridled criminal activities become synonymous with the state of the nation.

It is the foregoing line of thought that adds credence to the admonition of General Yakubu Gowon at the launching of Adeife and Akinola’s Foundation earlier referred to, when he said that what happened to the children must not be allowed to happen to any child anywhere. He called on the government to give children the opportunity to grow and develop in an atmosphere where insecurity would be checked.

I therefore use this season of Children’s day to call for seriousness on the side of the State. It is time to bring the killers of Adeife and Akinola to book. It is time to guarantee the sacred right of the Nigerian Child to life.

Any other thing in the society can wait but one thing that cannot wait is the right of the child to life. Happy Children’s Day celebrations. Shalom!

The Nigerian Child's Right to Life: Action before Extinction

"We have seen too much change to simply accept the way children are living. We have too much hope in the potential of children to leave things as truly are, and we have too much faith in our fellow human beings not to know that the Global Movement we are calling for can happen"

Dr Nelson Mandela and Graça Machel

The case for urgent and decisive action against the unbridled abuse of the right of the Nigerian child to life cannot be made too strongly or over flogged. If you are in doubt, consider these:

1. "According to report: NEPA officials allegedly carried out mass disconnection exercise in Keke Agege area of Lagos and left disconnected cables, 10 year old Ifebuchi Okoro, playfully touched one of the live cables and was instantly electrocuted. (The editorial comment of **Thisday**, Wednesday May 31, 2000)
2. In a related development in another area, live cables severed the previous day by NEPA officials electrocuted Shiatu Rasheed and Tobi Oyekanmi. (The editorial comment of **Thisday**, Wednesday May 31, 2000)
3. The case was reported of a child who was chained for two or three months by her supposed guardian. For two or three months and nobody reported her until someone took the case to the News (NTA). (The **Punch** Wednesday, January 5, 2000 page 27).

4. Adeife and Akinola Akindeko (from the same parents) were killed at Ibogun, Ifo Ogun State by yet to be identified gunmen on April 20,2003 (Daily independent, Thursday, April 22, 2004, page B7)
5. A day old baby was found in a refuse dump by scavengers somewhere in Lagos at about 7.00 A.M on October 1, 2003. Residents of the area testified in that report stated that the incident had become a normal occurrence. (Saturday Punch, October 4, 2003, Page 5)
6. Taiwo Ilesanmi, 16, was a Junior Secondary School student, killed by police officers, who teamed up with armed robbers. Robbers attacked Taiwo and his friends. They escaped and later found some police officers to whom they reported their plight. To their shock the police teamed up with the robbers to open fire on them. Others escaped but Taiwo was unlucky. He was killed and his corpse dumped on the express road to make it appear as if a vehicle knocked him down. (Sunday Punch, March 28, 2004, Pages 7-9)
7. One-month-old baby's copse was found in a polythene bag along a major road at Surulre (A Lagos Suburb). (City Post, Wednesday, May 26,2004, Page 3)
8. Kehinde Awolesi, the only son of his middle-aged parents was a pupil of Remo Secondary School, Shagamu, in Ogun State. "The unexpected happened at 3.00 p.m. on March 15, as a strange storm took over the school campus...The storm caused an object to hit Kehinde's head. The head injury he received as a result of the led to his eventual death..." (The Guardian, Friday, April 2, 2004, page 11)
9. Emeka Ikeora, 8 a Pupil of Gwagwalada Primary School was found dead in a sack with his eyes plucked out. "He is one of many victims of ritual murderers, who

seem to be running riot in Yola, with their eyes on young male children.”
(Saturday Sun, July 3, 2004, page 10)

10. 11 pupils of Class 1(c) Okera Grammar School, Ogba, were seriously injured when their classroom collapsed on March 22, 2004. Masters Abdulsallam and Alexander were the most affected. Abdulsallam had a deep cut on his forehead, which defiled doctor’s plasters. Alexander also had a deep cut which nearly, cut off his left eye with another cut at the back of his head. His left hand was also severely fractured (The Punch, Tuesday, March 23, 2004, page 3)
11. The headless and limbless torso of a Nigerian Child (Adam) was found floating in the river Thames, London's Tower Bridge in September 2001. (Yahoo News, www.yahoo.com)
12. Wasiu Raimi, a year four pupil of Alapere Primary School, Ketu (a Lagos suburb) was with a horsewhip beaten by his guardian to an inch of his life and his head were left with several cuts. “...He was tattered, unkempt and very weak. Marks of fresh wounds inflicted on him by the beating were very visible” (Daily Sun, Thursday, January 8, 2004, page 13)
13. “No fewer than 11 children were crushed to death while about seven others were critically injured during a procession...to mark eclipse of the moon at Muduru, near Katsina.” The report further has it that the vehicle ran into the procession due to brake failure. (The Sun, Monday, May 10, 2004, Page 8)
14. “After using hot knife to inflict multiple deep cuts on the body of her niece, a 22-year-old house wife says she did it to teach the little girl a bitter lesson.” (The Sun, Saturday, June 26, 2004, Pages 1, 8 & 33).

15. "A driver has given parents in a Delta State community a taste of terror, as he ran his car over 10 children, killing three, inside their school compound. The driver however blamed the accident on brake failure. (The Sun, Tuesday, July 6,2004, Pages 1&6)

16. " A kidnapper in Lagos has been caught while trying to steal a six-month old baby from the parents' home in Bariga" (The Sun, Thursday, July15, 2004, Page 18)

17. "Merciless mistress, Ms Unuoma in a fit of anger pounced on her seven-year old maid, Ijeoma, and left the girl with badly lacerated body, bloodshot eyes and bloody buttocks. And she refused to give reasons for her action. (The Sun, Wednesday, July 21 2004, Page 3)

18. "United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has said that Nigeria records infant mortality of 187 per 1000 live births and that mortality of children under five years was still as high as 112 per 1000 live births." (Thisday, The Sunday Newspaper, July 25, 2004, Page 2004)

The foregoing cases are few (but major) of the present unchecked or even unnoticed onslaughts against the right of the child to life.

Please join me in the next few lines as I discuss in details the terrible social implications of the present situation where the rights of the Nigerian Child to life is under prehistoric siege.

Article 5 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child provides, "Every child has an inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. States Parties to the present Charter shall ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the survival, protection

and development of the child. Death sentence shall not be pronounced for crimes committed by children.”

I began this piece with a very heavy heart. The blood-curdling catalogue of the deliberate actions of the Nigerian society against the right of the child to life is enough to make even the heart of Adolph Hitler heavy not to talk of my own fragile mind. .

I make bold to say today that contrary to what many may think, the right of the child to life is the most breached in Nigeria. The catalogue published last week was just a tip of the tales of woes that the Nigerian child has to tell when it comes to the breach of his right to life. As I have always stated on this page, the right to life is the foundation of every other right the child has. In fact every other right of the child is fulfilled in the protection of the right of the child to life. Thus when the child’s right to life is breached with impunity, as it is in Nigeria today, every right is breached.

One major reason why the Nigerian child has become cheaply venerable is that we live in a society where the hands of the law are too short to catch up with those who have ganged up against the rights of the child to life. Now one thing that shortens the hand of the law is the failure of the society to see the child as Abraham Lincoln aptly described him, “the state of humanity is in his hand.” If our society is aware that the child is the future and it respects its future then it will not allow anything to hurt the child not to talk of simply refusing to bring to book those, who derive inordinate pleasure from hurting the innocent child.

For example of all the cases state last week only Taiwo Ilesanmi, Adam and Wasiu Raimi’s cases were investigated to an appreciable end. As a matter of facts some of the cases are long forgotten, even by the immediate families of the victim. What hope is for a society and the child when only two percent of the cases against the right of the child to life receive the attention of law enforcement agents?

I believe that our society has a lesson or two from Adam's case. Adam, as it was revealed last week was a Nigerian child found floating in the river Thames, London's Tower Bridge in September 2001. From the facts of the case it seemed it was impossible to trace the killer. But one major difference between Adam's case and the others listed last week is that they occurred in two different societies. The British police immediately swung into action with a determination to bring the killers of Adam to face the full wrath of the law. They have between 2001 and today refused to sweep the issue under the carpet.

Between September 2001 and July 2003, the search for Adam's killers took officers to Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, South Africa, West Africa (including Nigeria, Benin City), Scotland and Ireland. Their determination to find the killer of the child, who was determined by detectives to be between 4 and 7 yielded result when 19 people - mostly Nigerian were arrested by the British police. As at October 2004 the British police was rounding up a three-year rigorous investigation into the killing and were ready to charge suspects for the crime.

Attorney General Lord Goldsmith, who said he would like to lead the prosecution team declared to the BBC News on Thursday, 16 October, 2003 the motivating force of the British society thus: "a clear message to those who deceive, coerce or force vulnerable people to leave their homes for a life of exploitation and misery - or worse - that they will not escape justice".

I have taken time to dwell on Adam's case because the doggedness with which the British police pursued the case shows a society that respects the right of the child to life.

This is therefore a most desperate call on all men and women of conscience to vociferously speak up for the right of the child to life. It is a call we must make before the final extinction. If you think extinction is impossible, then know that when the heartless agents of Stone Age take over a land as we have in Nigeria today, anything can happen. Yes anything!

Protect the Nigerian child from extinction. The next victim may be your child, so now is the time to act fast. Popularize the campaign for the right of the child to life.

The following are the five action points of the 'Save the Child's Life Campaign':

- I. Pay close attention to the safety of your child
- II. Write articles in community and national newspapers and magazines.
- III. Start an independent justice for the child campaign in your community. The focus of this is that all the people that have perpetrated an injustice against the child must be brought to book. You can begin such campaign with collection of signatures in your area, which will be presented to your Local Government with the knowledge of the press.
- IV. Make or sponsor car stickers with slogans like: 'I am for the right of the child for life', 'protect child's right to life', 'save the child, save the future', 'Child's Right to life is now' etc.

To the Press, also a Charge

“States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.”

Article 17 Rights of the Child Convention

The press is referred to as the Fourth Estate of the Realm because of the watchdog role it plays in the society. By the press here I refer to the entire gamut of the print and electronic media. If it is true that information is power, then the entity that disseminates information must be the engine room of power. It therefore goes without saying that when a nation lacks a vibrant press, it lacks information, it lacks power. The truth is that, without the press, what we call public opinion remains private opinion that does not exist beyond the roof of its owner. Thus no cause succeeds except the press actively supports it. The cold reality is, when the press is compromised, the collective mind of the society is compromised. And when the collective mind of the society is compromised, social, economic and political stagnation becomes the sole beneficiary of the situation.

A Government or organization that has something to hide; either bribes or suppresses the press. This explains why the press was the most oppressed and vilified during our chequered period of military misrule.

Writing about the Nigerian press during the trying period of military misgovernance, renowned essayist, Adebayo Williams expressed the superiority of the pen over the gun thus “A properly educated mind will refuse to accept crude tyranny, for to accept tyranny is an act of intellectual self-dispossession, long after the guns have been

silenced, the supersonic boom of ideas, the thunderous artillery of thinking will continue to echo.”

The foregoing introductory notes become necessary to express the invaluable relevance of a vibrant press to any noble cause. It is also a historical fact that one enemy which any ignoble cause cannot survive is an upright press built on the unshaken bulwark of unimpeachable integrity.

Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gives a clue to the role of the press in a civil society thus: “The Press, Radio, Television and agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.” The chapter referred to in the above provision is the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy (Chapter II of the 1999 Constitution).

Now, I will like to reproduce below some of the provisions of the Chapter of the 1999 Constitution in focus:

- I. “Accordingly, national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited.” (Section 15(2))
- II. “Children, young persons and the aged are protected against any exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect.” (Section 17(3) (f)).
- III. “There are adequate medical and health facilities for all persons.” (Sections 17(3) (d).
- IV. “Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.
Government shall promote science and technology

Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end Government shall as and when practicable provide

- (a) Free, compulsory and universal primary education;
- (b) Free secondary education;
- (c) Free university education; and
- (d) Free adult literacy programme.” (Section 18(1) (2) (3) (a) (b) (c) & (d))

The fact that the above provisions focus more on the child than any other member of the society, it means that the media has a major role to play in creating awareness about the rights of the child.

In my humble opinion, the Nigerian press has to a large extent been faithful in reporting cases of injustice against the child. But the press, I believe, beyond reporting needs to actually move to holding public officers responsible and accountable to the people, particularly as it pertains to the rights of the child. For example, two weeks ago on this page, I made available a list of unresolved murder cases perpetrated against the Nigerian child. One bitter truth is that except the press plays its watchdog role, these cases will forever remain under the carpet, where it has been swept by a society that has reminded insensitive to the rights of the child.

That all hands must be at work to see to the protection of the rights of the Nigerian child is a fact that the society and the press as the watchdog can no more push aside, at least in the interest of good conscience and history.

Book 2

A word may not always be enough when you are trying to wake a deaf world from the slumber of irresponsibility to the child. You may need to speak all the words you know. Thus haven spoken in the previous pages in prose, I speak now in the next pages in poetry

In The Beginning

I'm not a poet,
Nor an aspiring one,
I'm not an NGO personality.
Never do I intend to be one;
I seek no funds from any quarters
For my own Father supplies my needs.
Mine is a voice from the fringe.
The voice of a Conscience,
A healed Conscience;
A true son of his father,
Christopher Alexander Sapara William,
Who in bold print inscribed
These notes of instruction on my mind:
"The legal practitioner lives for the direction
of his people and the advancement of the causes of his country"

I've a heart so tender,
Incubated by a conscious conscience
And my sight is so far
Above my nose
That I see our future as a people,
Our children,
Our hope,
Our tomorrow.
And our treasure on earth.
Their plights, woes and pains,
So excruciating
Oh, so unbearable.
And because I see,
I speak,
I speak solutions
From the womb of practicality,
I speak deliverance of our future
From doom,
Deliverance built on action,
Less on words.
Mine is a life crusade

Folded into two:
To put strength in the hands of children
Through enlightenment
That they may become a conscious army
In their own battles;

To raise soldiers, committed
Spirit, soul, and body
To the service of children,
The world over,
On the unshakable fulcrum
Of this understanding:
“Without children, there is no future”

This is a Bible of action
I speak for real action,
I speak against faith without work
I speak for action before extinction
Of hope,
Before the final eclipse
I speak for urgent actions,
For the children die.
The future die,
We die.

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1

Say Yes For Me

Oh you inhabitants of the world,
Men and women of conscience,
People of sight and ear,
Lovers of the future,
Investors in tomorrow
Wisest of all men,
Leaders of Nations of the earth,
Ordained by the Almighty,
Hear me,
I'm posterity,
Don't keep quiet
Concerning my matters
Do not rest until I find rest,
Say yes for me
That I may fulfill
The reason for which He
Purposed me before the world began

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Leave No Child Out

I'm a shepherd of a hundred sheep,
 Ninety- nine I've brought from pastures,
 One, I've found out is missing.
 The ninety- nine I've brought from pastures,
 I shall leave behind
 And go after that missing one.
 I know also that I shall not be back
 Until I've found the lost,
 For that missing one
 Is as important as all,
 I leave no one out
 And for all you know,
 The missing one may be a child,
 The child may be that neglected boy or girl
 In the village or orphanage
 And that neglected child may be
 One of those youngsters in Charles Loring Brace's
 Orphan Train,
 And any of those youngsters in the Orphan Train
 May become Governor, Congress Man and Supreme
 Court Justice.
 Leave no child out
 Do not leave that child out
 God has a plan for his life before the
 Creation of the whole wide world.
 See as God sees
 Leave no child out.

2001 Copyright.

3

Put The Child First

“The state of humanity belongs to him”
First things first,
Lets put him first,
A wise person,
Thinking parents,
Far- sighted people,
And a sane society put our tomorrow first
For in tomorrow lies
The life, the continuity of all endeavours
Tomorrow ensures unending existence of ideas,
Inventions, mission and visions
Without tomorrow humanity in dead today.

The child is tomorrow
He is the future
Teach him to know he is the hope to come
Train him to carry on what you have started
Empower him to rule his world.

Put him first,
Put the future first
Put tomorrow first
Put the child first.

Is there any wise among you,
Whose eyes are fixed on history
And posterity for sweet stories,
Then I say put him first now,
Put the child first now.

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Care For every child

Hear the call
 Governors, leaders of my people,
 Caretakers, parents of my chosen
 "Every" and "man" born of a woman,
 The call is from me,
 It is a call in cry,
 The crying call
 The loudest I've ever shouted,
 From the depth of my heart
 It is a call on my mind
 Concerning him,
 My own treasure on earth
 That you may know his care,
 The care of an egg.
 Now here in the call:
 "He is not an accident of creation
 Before he was formed in the womb
 I knew him,
 I purposed his birth for a purpose
 He's an arrow in my quiver,
 In his mouth I ordained praise, might,
 In my battles against the avenger,
 My kingdom belongs to him,
 And his likes;
 My trust I demonstrated in him
 Kings, prophets and leaders
 Of a peculiar people I ordained
 Him in the days of my word.
 In his hand I put tomorrow.
 And he is tomorrow.
 My own,
 I called out of the manger
 Through a birth buried in controversy
 In a harlot - featured genealogy
 To a carpenter's shop.
 Yet he's my own
 Through whom I saved the world.
 Watch it,
 Watch, world

Be wise,
See as I see,
For I made you

I'm the only wise One
Push no one aside,
Abandon no one,
Let none suffer neglect
Care for every one,
Care for every child,
For I still call saviours out of the manger
Even from the sty.

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Fight HIV /AIDS

Here is he,
 A monster,
 A creature more subtle,
 Than that serpent in the beginning,
 Without pomp,
 Oh, no pageantry.
 He crept into a slumbering world,
 Snoring Africa.
 On his right hand
 Are men, women, children
 Like sea sand
 Six feet down
 Even Nkosi in Johannesburg.
 On his left hand
 Are the living dead,
 Whose blood he virused
 Without cure.
 His feet are flooded,
 With a river, so mighty
 Mightier than red sea;
 The tears of Growing Ones;
 Whose Last breathe
 He has secured
 From their winners of bread

He is not at rest yet,
 A monster,
 A creature more subtle
 Than that serpent in the beginning
 He reigns the world over,
 He is resident in Africa,
 He is resident in our ignorance:
 Healthless practices of our culture;
 (mutilation of genitals making of
 tribe's marks, covenants of blood etc)
 He is resident in our foolishness.

He wraps himself in a sack
Freely given to us by his collaborators
Masquerading as friends.
At the peak of that act,
He bursts his way forth
And more men obtain membership
Into his victims' club,
He escapes through pores.

In the sack,
A voracious killer of men,
And the speakers for the sack
Say to our foolishness: "safe in sex"
Until our minds
Be purged of costly ignorance
And our foolishness
Be replaced by abstinence,
We are down at his feet.
And below his feet,
The whole wide world is down
Africa is down
The child is down,
The African child is down,
Down at his feet,
And six feet below his feet.

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Stop Harming and Exploiting Children

This giant cock you see,
 Was once hidden in a yolk,
 Housed in a fragile shell.
 The mighty tree,
 Upon which birds in their countless
 Now seek succour
 Was in the womb of a mustard seed,
 The smallest among his brethren.
 Even the heads of your corporations,
 The lords of your land,
 Were carried in breakable testicle.

My own Lord,
 Whom I serve,
 Whose I am
 Lived in the belly of a virgin

Today my heart sheds blood
 And from my eyes roll out tears
 In their torrents
 For I see an evil in our land
 An evil of small men,
 Whose sight are shortened by their
 Nose:
 The yolk they trample under foot;
 Roughshod, they ride on the mustard seed;
 At the testicles they deal bitter kicks.

Here is a call
 From a powerless conscience,
 A bloody heart,
 To powerless conscience,
 To powerful conscience
 The noble among His creatures,
 Those, whose sight is far beyond their nose,
 Preserve the yolk,
 For in it is hidden tomorrow,
 Guard the seed,

For mansions of hope are in it built
Protect the testicles
For without them the future is a mirage.

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Listen To Children

A culture I've seen,
Among our people,
Very common among them
He is not seen,

Nor heard
Even in matters that concern him?

Yes;
Only the grey – coated head speaks wisdom
And only un-young minds
Understand the ways of a matter.

Wisest of men,
The world over gathered
And birthed him rights,
Right like blood:
Strengthener of the gift of life:
"Though you call him minor,
To the words of his lips,
Give ears,
More in matters that his life touches
For unto him is given by the creator
Solutions to issues of life,
Wisdom for a dying Nation"

The only wise God
Draws him to himself
And says:
" Pay praise to me,
And speak strength to the people
The weakest of them.
In you I've ordained strength,
You're my heritage,
The heir to a great kingdom.
And in your mouth
I've put a word,
A word in season,

A word of hope”

A culture I’ve seen
Among our people,

Very common among them:
He is not seen,
Nor heard
Even in matters that concern him?

Yes.
Only the grey –coated head speaks wisdom
And only un-young minds
Understand the ways of a matter

A culture soaked in foolishness,
I make bold to say.
Why?
It sees not as the wisest men see
And sees not as the only wise God sees.
The wisest of men say:
“There is something on his lips”
“On his lips I sealed strength”,
the only wise God proclaims.
Will you give him your ears now,
You’ve kept him silent for too long
So long,
Now, see as wisest men see,
and see as the only wise God sees
listen to the child.

2001 Copyright.

Educate Every Child

Hear my story,
 The most miserable of all stories on earth
 Told by the foolishhest of men,
 The saddest of them:
 A man of means I was
 Mighty in wealth,
 Mansions, corporations and structures
 I built,
 The child I did not build,
 The child I did not educate,
 Even those under my very roof.

Now that I'm gone.
 In peace I cannot rest in this place,
 Why?
 My woes are many.
 Mansions, corporations and
 My structures are in great ruins,
 Even my name is soaked in muddled mud.
 A caretaker of my inheritance
 My child was not built to be
 My child is also without power,
 Since knowledge, they say, is power.

A song of joy,
 I hear from my neighbour here.
 When he was there with you,
 Though with a means lower than mine,
 He built no mansion, corporation
 Nor structures,
 He built the child,
 The child, he educated.
 Now that child
 Has fixed his name in a hall of fame,
 Mansions, corporations and structures
 Mightier than mine he has built
 In the honour of him that built the child

People, lend me your ears

Your inner ear,
Angel, please let them hear this
The rich among them tell,

Into the poor, drum it

And to those who govern them, shout it loud:

“A child that is not built
Will any day sell off, the house built
Empower the child,
Educate him
Educate every child”

2001 Copyright.

Protect Children From War

A song I've today
 To which no man prances
 Sobriety leads my drums,
 It is a song themed in warning,
 Sorrows of a concerned heart;
 I do it,
 Not without a witness,
 Even my conscience bears me witness.

Mine is a song of peace
 Woven in a troubled womb,
 Issued by painful lips,
 For it is not just another song,
 It is from God's heart.
 The maker of men
 Has his hand in it.
 It is shorter than your nose,
 But longer than Mississippi.
 So, your ears give to it
 For it simply says:
 "Drop the gun,
 Drop the arrow
 Return the sword to its place,
 Take the bomb back to its maker
 They've been with you for too long,
 Before you pick them up again
 Think about the child
 The future of a cheated continent
 The hope of a deprived people
 The tomorrow of an exploited today.
 Africa,
 Before you pick them up again
 Think about your child,
 For he cries for peace,
 Your future cries for peace,
 Your tomorrow cries for peace.

2001 Copyright

Protect The Earth For Children

The earth is the Lord's
And its fullness,
Its dominion, protection
He gave the sons of man,
To bear fruits and multiply.
How shall the earth bear fruits
If he is unprotected?
How shall he multiply
If he is polluted?
For fruit
Is not today,
We are,
He is tomorrow
He is the future
He is the hope
He is the fruit
He is the child
The earth is blessed because of him
For in his hand is the state of humanity
Protect the earth,
Protect the child,
Protect the fruit
That he may multiply on the earth
In accordance to His plan,
Who made all things.
That the fruits
May be well and grow
In stature, knowledge and wisdom.

2001 Copyright

Fight Poverty: Invest In Children

In your belly,
Yes, in your god
In your self,
And in your bloods,
Against your mandate,
Your good people,
Against history
Have you kept
The ingredients of my growth:
The milk,
Which from the creator flows on our land
I'm posterity,
Whose future your belly keeps.

Today, I come in words:
Words of repentance,
Tomorrow, in the face of your deaf ears
I shall come with the sword:
The sword of vengeance.
History watches
I, too I watch.
Will wisdom preserve you?

2001 Copyright.

For Nkosi, A Tribute

He came,
The morning dew fresh on his head,
But while the dew was wet on the grass, he left:
A peep so painful,
Hastened by a virused womb.
He went,
Well – honed Sword in his hand,
Until his breath betrayed him,
His budding but bold bones
Resisted his cureless adversary:
A sizeless octopus
At whose feet
The whole wild world;
Its high and mighty
Crumble in fears and tears.

He, won,
One of the boldest of the sons of men won,
Even the very heart of Mandela
In joy of hope
Sang his elegy
Thus:
“He was exemplary in showing
How one should handle a disorder
Of this nature.
Let his life and example
Spur us on to be strong,
Resilient and vigorous in our
Fight against the dreaded infection
He has earned the right to
Be accorded all honour,
Dignity and respect.”

2001 Copyright.

Breast Is Life

Breast is life,
Life is health,
Health is wealth.
Milk is life,
Life from mother's heart.
From the heart of the earth,
The heart of nature,
Is a fountain of life,
To nurture your budding bones
With strength, Oh child,
The strength of a man:
A man who does exploits,
That causes history to fear,
Men to tremble.
And the world loudest of
To stand in Ovarions.

2001 Copyright.

Of The Child And Sexuality Education

Ignorance of purpose begats abuse,
Abuse begats pains,
Pains begats death.
He is in pains:
HIV/AIDS,
STDS
Unwanted pregnancies,
Aborted visions,
Ruptured psyche. He is at the claws of death.
Purge him of his ignorance,
Too costly.
Teach his heart purpose,
The purpose of his sexuality
Save him from perversion.
Of the enemies of his soul,
That he may profit
From a purpose ordained
By his maker for a purpose
So close to is own heart.

2001 Copyright.

Back To The State Of Nature

*For **Sunday** and **Chiegozie**
(four years old boys,
detained by the Nigerian*

Police for two nights
At *Oko- Oba Police Station,*
Agege, Lagos
on Friday, July 13, 2001).

Welcome back,
This is the state of nature,
The very stone age,
Only the fittest breathes survival
The brutish, the nasty enjoy life,
Though short,
Too short.

Even their seeds
Their own future
Are not spared in this barbarism,
That curdles like cold blood

It is a nightmare,

Yes,

Life in Africa,

Nigeria,

Lagos,

Oko-oba Police net,

There, was tomorrow caged in two

For days,

For reason that rejects water.

Then screamed their heralds:

“Enter the youngest caged in the land”

Were I their editor,

I should sing a dirge

Vociferous in melancholy:

“Horror in the Land,

Tomorrow is caged

Oh the future is manacled

What hope for a people

Who have no respects for their own future?

Doom,
Gloomy doom, I see

For a Nation inebriated by high ignorance

That gives no place

To the ones in whose hands
Lie the state of humanity.

2001 Copyright.

Beware Of Death (About Children And Smoking)

Beware of snake,
 The serpent,
 His subtlety,
 His poison,
 Insidious in nature,
 Deadly in the end.
 Beware of carries of strange fire,
 Merchants of dead in installments,
 Unrepentant enemies of
 Your spirit, soul and body,
 Wicked adversary of your life.
 Beware for they are here for you,
 They are there for your mind,
 Your very psyche to enslave,
 For no weapon is so potent
 In the oppressor's hand
 Like the oppressed mind.
 Why do they say these things:
 "see you soon",
 "Simply the best",
 "Taste of success",
 "Savour it",
 "Welcome to London"
 "Be gold",
 "Peace and harmony."
 "Just say Yes"

Beware, for you're the future
 The tomorrow of a Nation,
 Hope is your name,
 For the state of humanity lies in
 Your hand.
 You're the target
 Of these small men
 In business against humanity,
 And posterity.

Today the choice is yours
But know this
"Only the living SEES SOON
No hope for the BEST in the grave,
The grave issues no visa to LONDON
There's nothing to SAVOUR below six feet
SUCCESS answers not to the dead
PEACE and HARMONY is for the living

GOLD is far above the tomb.
No tongue SAYS YES except it lives.
Beware of a death,
Beware of them,
Small man,
In business against humanity
And posterity.

2001 Copyright.

A Word Against Child Labour

Woe unto you Oh land,
 When you tomorrow,
 Your own hope,
 Sweat it out in the field
 When your future
 Are on your streets,
 And factories in hard labour
 In the morning
 When her love, affection and care
 His maker commanded
 That he, might receive
 His for his bones and mind
 From your bosom
 For a life full of fruits

Woe unto you oh land,
 When weak bones
 And fragile minds
 You put to labour,
 When your kings
 Eats unit their ten fingers
 The delicacy prepared for all

Hear oh Land,
 Repent and cry unto the maker of him
 Whom you destroy,
 Labour not the child
 For everything under heaven
 There is time,
 His time shall come for labour
 But today
 Keep him in your bosom,
 Give milk to his bones for strength
 To his mind give light for might.

2001 Copyright

Evil Of Juvenile Prostitution

A body has He prepared unto her
That she might do His will:
Mother of many generations,
A helper of home
When her man is great at the gate

But today at Egan,
Her body is trapped in abuse:
Harlotry, maximum sexual exploitation.
How would she be a mother of generations?
Whose womb is virused,
Whose spirit and soul is damaged
Whose body is burdened with scars indelible?

How shall she help who is helpless
Spirit, soul and body

Pity,
Oh pity
It is mission unaccomplished
It is the intention of the Creator defeated
By men, sold to wickedness
Enemies of our future

I cry again
Man of many tears
Who will save the child
From the devil in Egan,
The killer of our future,
The most heartless of all women,
A woman without a womb.
In a Nation with a womb
But without breasts.

2001 Copyright.

The End

Yesterday is on the tomb,
Tomorrow in the womb,
Today is in the hand,
Today is the day of salvation.
Salvation for our future,
Salvation for our hope
Salvation for our children.

Dear children,
This is a call to battle,
Life battle
A call to a solemn pledge
To stand
Like Gilbratha for your rights

Men or conscience,
This is a call to fight,
A fight for our future
For the state and entirety of humanity

See you soon
Faithful soldiers
In the narrow hall of fame
Of history.
On the memorable day of fighter- for- our – future awards
Presented from generation to generation
On the plaque of honour,
Eternal honour.

Even by the King of glory,
My own father.
And for those, who shall
harden their hearts
Both children
And men without conscience
It is a bad bye,
A very bad bye,
To the other side,
The hottest place
In the other side,
For we are in a time of moral crisis.

“The 6 billionth child born at
the turn of the century is
likely to have begun life
Marked by malnutrition,
Or no schooling, poor sanitation
Unsafe drinking water-gender
Discrimination and abuse. That child is endured with fundamental
Human rights.
Together we must build a global enhance to ensure those right – in the knowledge that
to serve the best interest of children, we serve the best interests of humanity”
Carol Bellamy.

2001 Copyright.

About the author



Taiwo Akinlami is a legal practitioner, national newspaper columnist, social entrepreneur and crusader for social, political and economic rights, who sees his profession as a platform for social engineering.

Having been liberated and made whole from of the dire effects of personal experiences of child abuse through rigorous self-improvement, persistent personal reorientation and relentless mind sterilization, Akinlami discovered that resident in his adult mind is an unquenchable passion for the creation of an enabling environment for the development of children, spirit, soul (mind, will and emotion) and body. The foregoing explains why his activity in the area of children rights protection in the last one decade (which is mainly advocacy in nature) is simply summed up in the following mission statement: 'crusading for the complete child.' He is a consultant to UNICEF. He is married to his sweetheart, Oluwafunmilayo. Meet him thought-for-thought on his blog, crazyaboutsocialworks.blogspot.com