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## Human Rights and Governance in Nigeria, 2011-2015

### **Johnson, Idowu**

Department of Political Science  
University of Ibadan  
Oyo State, Nigeria  
Tel: +234-8028942735  
E-mail: [ibidjohnson@yahoo.com](mailto:ibidjohnson@yahoo.com)

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### **Salau, Jelil Olawale**

Department of Political Science  
Michael Otedola College of Primary Education  
Epe, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

Globally, it is generally acknowledged that every individual and a every citizen possess certain definite political, civil, economic and social rights, which are fundamental to his/her dignity and personhood. Theoretically, these presumptuous ideals hold sway in the constitutions of countries of the world, Nigeria inclusive. However, in reality and with respect to Nigeria especially, during the military era, can hardly be reconciled with constitutionalism as there are always cases of infringement upon citizens' fundamental rights. With successful transition to democracy in 1999 and the consequent stabilisation with the conduct of four successive elections as of 2011. This paper considered the state of human rights under President Goodluck Jonathan's administration (2011-2015). It appraised how human rights issues have been handled under Jonathan's administration in line with democratic considerations in the Nigerian polity. Nigeria continues to confront serious human rights challenges politically and socio-economically, including a culture of impunity where perpetrators are often not held accountable for their actions in forms of corrupt practices, extra-judicial killings by the police and Boko

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Haram insurgency. Moreover, no serious improvement in the socio-economic status of the Nigerian citizens as the increasing GDP growth is only on paper and not real in the economy. In protecting the rights and liberties of all Nigerians, the paper concludes that the Nigerian Government must be resolute in its commitment to ensuring security without compromising human rights. Strong and transparent institutions that deliver essential services must be built and sustained. The key now is to look internally with readiness to use political will in the right direction; to take significant actions to address critical human rights issues in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** Citizens, Human Rights, Security, Democracy, Governance

### **Introduction**

The history of human rights in Nigeria predates the advent of colonial rule. Human rights and fundamental freedoms were recognised in the traditional Nigerian societies. The idea of rights was not however conceived in the modern notion. Such values as right to family, kin and clan membership, freedom of thought, speech, belief and association, right to enjoy private property and right to participate in governance of the affairs of the society were jealously guarded. In areas where the Sharia legal system was firmly entrenched, especially in the northern part of the country, human rights and fundamental freedoms were specifically protected and guaranteed in accordance with the tenets of Islam which hold justice and equity in high esteem (NHRC, 2006). The imposition of European imperialism nevertheless eroded traditional values and liberties fundamental to the people. A major consequence of colonialism in Nigeria was the denial of political and economic rights of Nigerians. It was not until 1922 through the Clifford Constitution that limited franchise was introduced in the constitutional history of Nigeria by the British Colonial government. The struggle for better political participation by early Nigerian nationalists led to enhanced political rights in the pre-independence Constitutions culminating in the Littleton Constitution of 1954 (NHRC, 2006).

The entrenchment of fundamental human rights in Nigeria in the modern sense could however be traced to the 1960 Independence Constitution and those that followed. The Independence Constitution of 1960 and the Republican Constitution of 1963 have provisions for the protection of fundamental human rights catering for civil and political liberties. The 1979 and the 1999 constitutions went further by having bills of rights in Chapter IV which guaranteed Civil and Political Rights and providing for Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in Chapter II, which recognised Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The entrenchment of human rights provisions in our Constitutions was aimed at creating a society where there is political freedom, social and economic well-being of the people. However, despite the guarantee of fundamental rights and liberties in the Nigerian Constitutions since 1960, the country has had the misfortune of military interruptions. This had profound and far-reaching effects on the promotion and protection of democratic values and fundamental freedoms among Nigerians (NHRC, 2006).

On May 29, 1999 Nigeria transited from military autocracy and absolutism to democracy. Before then, the country had been under firm military rule for all but twelve years since independence in 1960. Essentially, the militarisation of the Nigerian society and the supplanting of constitutional provisions by decrees of the successive ruling military juntas engendered a culture of what UNDP (2001) in its report called “executive lawlessness and human rights abuses” (Ojo, 2006). Not only were Nigerians denied their most basic political rights, their economic and social rights were also seriously truncated by the gross mismanagement and

looting of state resources by the military. It would be recalled that at the political level, disrespect for the fundamental democratic rights of the Nigerian people reached its apogee with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election by the regime of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. During the succeeding regime of Gen. Sani Abacha (1993-1998), the country was suspended from the Commonwealth in November 1995 for gross human rights' abuses and consequently, the country attained the status of a "pariah state" in the international community (Ojo, 2006). Without gainsaying, the military is indeed antithetical to human rights safeguard and observance.

The military demands submission, democracy enjoins participation; one is a tool of violence, the other a means of consensus building for peaceful co-existence" (Ake, as cited in Ojo, 2006). Therefore, with successful transition to democracy and the consequent stabilisation with the conduct of five successive elections as of 2015, it is not abnormal to consider the state of human rights as well as political rights (like Political Party formation and voting right) including the successful conduct of the 2015 general elections under Jonathan's administration (2011-2015) in line with democratic procedures in the Nigerian polity.

### **Conceptual Discourse**

The basic concepts defined and analysed within the context of this paper are democracy, democratic governance, human rights and civil society. They are taken in turn.

#### ***Democracy***

The principles of liberal democracy, which is often seen as a model for democracy in present day Africa, are rooted in the slogans from the French revolution of 1789 of "liberty, equality and fraternity" which built on the ideas of classical democracy of ancient Greece. This, was the prelude to modern liberal democracy (CEG, 2002). However, "because this ancient principle of egalitarianism threatened the interests of the emergent European bourgeoisie, they supplanted classical democracy and its French variant" with the liberal version. Many scholars have expanded on the concept of liberal democracy. One of such scholars is Georg Sorensen, who building on Robert Dahl's work, defines democracy in terms of "competition, participation and liberties". In spite of the differences in conceptualisation and practices, all version of democracy in the view of Osaghae (1992, p. 40), share one fundamental objective of "how to govern the society in such a way that the power actually belongs to all the people", while the liberal model emphasizes electoral competition (transition). In this study, democracy is seen fundamentally as entailing participation. Popular participation in turn is seen as the empowerment of the people. It means participation in all spheres of political and economic life, including meaningful participation in the important development of the environment in which they live (Gozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975).

#### ***Democratic Governance***

This paper sees democratic governance as a system of government where institutions function according to **democratic** processes and norms, both internally and in their interaction with other institutions. The main idea underscoring this is that under it, the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest as espoused in the idea of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), leader of India's non-violent struggle for freedom on the notion of democracy (CEG, 2002). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines democratic governance as "...that which ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus

in society and that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decision-making over the allocation of development resources."

### ***Human Rights***

The term human rights, does not lend itself to a precise definition. Indeed, there has not been an acceptable definition of 'human rights' amongst the jurists too not to talk of scholars and commentators. It is a concept that can best be described rather than defined (Ajomo, 1985 in Ojo, 2006). For the purpose of this paper, human rights are taken to be "laws and practices that have evolved over the centuries to protect ordinary people, minorities, groups and races from oppressive rulers and governments". The thrust of the above is that human rights are intrinsic to human existence. These rights are immutable and not capable of being abrogated or abridged by positive law. They are not claiming to law, brotherhood, parochial interests or charity. Rather, they are fundamental rights of human beings which are inherent and cannot be derogated. These rights are fundamental because they are making up a person's being. They are universal because they are applicable to people of all races and tribes, without discriminations. Human rights, when recognized and respected, enable an individual to fully develop and use all human qualities, intelligence, talents and conscience to satisfy both spiritual and material needs (Balogun, 2012, Fayemi, 2010, Sagasti, 2004, Williams, 1985, Dankwa, 1984). They protect the dignity of man as man.

### ***Civil society***

Civil society is seen as a public ethical community of free and equal citizens under a legally defined system of rule. Diamond (1994) defines civil society as the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bounded by a legal order or set of shared rules. Sometimes it is hard to separate civil society from the state, as the state and civil society are often intertwined. However, when we look at civil society that should be autonomous, there is that need to separate it from the state and political parties and make it vibrant without interference or control. It is distinct from "society" in general in that it involves citizens who express their interests, passions, preferences, and ideas, exchange information, achieve collective goals and make demands on the state. All this allows for improved structure and functioning of the state, and to hold state officials accountable (Akinosho, 2010).

### **Historical Overview of Human Rights in Nigeria**

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, human rights have not only acquired global status and importance but have grown tremendously both in conception and content (Dada, 2013). While the internationalization of human rights was energized and strengthened by a number of developments, the present status of human rights in Nigeria is also not without any historical antecedents. It is noteworthy that the present-day Nigerian society is a product of colonialism. Nigeria, as a nation-state, is unarguably the biggest country in African Continent and came into existence with the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914 by Sir Frederick Lugard. Before the advent of the British colonialists, the present-day Nigeria consisted of different tribes which ruled themselves separately in fragmentary communities without a central political union (Nwabueze, 1982). These included principalities and ancient kingdoms like Benin Empire, the powerful sultanates of Sokoto, the Emirate systems of Kano and Katsina among others. In the West, the Obas and Chiefs ruled

over their kingdoms. In the East, where there was no centralized system of government comparable with what obtained in the West and North, governance was essentially a collective responsibility of the Chiefs and elders. Consequently, reference to human rights in pre-colonial Nigeria refers to the state of human rights in the various socio-political formations which existed in the present-day Nigeria before 1914.

From October, 1st, 1960 till date, Nigeria has been under five different democratic governments while the sixth is ongoing. The former ones have been headed by Tafawa Balewa (October 1st 1960-January 15th 1966), Shehu Shagari (October 1st, 1979 to December, 31st, 1983), Olusegun Obasanjo (May, 29th 1999 to May, 29th, 2007), Musa Yar'Adua (May, 29th, 2007 but died in office in 2010 and was succeeded by President, Goodluck Jonathan) and the current President Muhammadu Buhari (May 29, 2015-tilldate). The imperative question now is: To what extent is the assertion true that human rights thrives in democracy? Put differently, can it be said that human rights protection under GEJ administration in Nigeria has been adequate? The worrisome cases of human rights abuse during the past administrations informed the succeeding government of Mallam Musa Yar' Adua to declare upon its inauguration, that its administration will be anchored on rule of law and due process. Unfortunately, and quite regrettably however, this professed commitment turned out to be mere rhetoric as cases of human rights abuse under the administration were not isolated but systemic.

It is to be noted that while civil and political rights have enjoyed varying degrees of protection since independence, successive Nigerian governments have done little in the promotion of social, economic and cultural rights. Which was why these rights have been described as “a neglected category of human rights” (Dada & Ibanga, 2011). The reason for the neglect of these rights is not just because of limited resources but partly because officials of the various governments have been guilty of reckless spending and stealing of public funds. Nigeria is a country which is blessed with abundant natural resources and is no plagued by the numerous natural disasters which have devastated many nations of the world and rendered them prostrate; yet, the nation has remained peripheral and buffeted by preventable social and economic crises (Dada, 2013). Majority of her people still live in sub-human conditions- dehumanized, depersonalized and ravaged by poverty and illiteracy. Yet, it is a truism that civil and political rights, social, economic and cultural rights are not only equally important but indivisible, interdependent and mutually re-enforcing. From the foregoing, it is irresistible to conclude that notwithstanding Nigeria's adoption of major international human rights instruments, the incorporation of basic human rights in her constitution, and the establishment of institutional infrastructure for their enforcement, human rights protection in Nigeria remains abysmal.

### **Human Rights under Goodluck Jonathan's Administration**

Apart from the provisions of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution on human rights as outlined in section 1 sub section 2 and section 14 of chapter 2, various international charters and treaties to which Nigeria is signatory imposed similar obligations on the Nigerian Government. However, to what extent have these political, economic and socio-cultural rights been advanced and protected within the bounds of the scope of this paper, 2011- 2015. The assessment of human rights performance in this period was examined in the following order:

Promotion of Security during Jonathan's Administration  
Socio-Economic Rights  
Promotion of Political Participation

**(i) Promotion of Security during Jonathan's Administration**

It must be emphasized that the *raison d'être* of a government is the Security, welfare, wellbeing and happiness of the people or citizens residing in its territorial confines. Apart from the provision of the Nigerian Constitution which says the security of the citizen shall be primary responsibility of government, various international charters and treaties to which Nigerian is signatory imposed similar obligation on the Nigerian Government (Adetokunbo, 2013). As with every other obligation imposed by international charter or treaty, the Nigerian Government is not only bound to refrain from violating the Security and Safety of the citizens, it is equally bound to take positive, specific and clear steps/measures to address security issues once they emerge. It is no news that Nigerian is presently facing security challenges. This has been so for a long time and more seriously so at least since 2009 when the Boko Haram Insurgency became well-pronounced in the Nigerian Polity.

According to the U.S. Department of State,

The most serious human rights problems during ... [2011] were the abuses committed by the militant sect known as Boko Haram, which was responsible for killings, bombings, and other attacks throughout the country, resulting in numerous deaths, injuries, and the widespread destruction of property; abuses committed by the security services with impunity, including killings, beatings, arbitrary detention, and destruction of property; and societal violence, including ethnic, regional, and religious violence.

Consequently, 2012, 2013 and till present Nigeria continues to experience acute insecurity especially in Northern Part of the country. This assertion has been corroborated by US State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices of 2011, 2012 and 2013. The most insulting was the seizure of Gwoza in Borno in 2014 by the insurgents as their own territory of rulership through the declaration of a Caliphate. Though this has been reclaimed by the Nigerian Military, but it portends serious flaws to the capability of the Nigerian State to handle the issue. A State of Emergency (SOE) in the three northeast states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, began in May 2013 and its extension was requested for an additional six months to facilitate counter-insurgency activities in the northeast. However, Boko Haram continues to launch attacks in and outside of its stronghold in Borno State. The first April bombing in Abuja is the deadliest attack that Boko Haram has committed in the capital, killing 75. The attack in Cameroon's Extreme North region killed two and is the third such cross-border attack in as many months committed by the group. The May attacks on Gamboru Ngala village near the border of Cameroon killed over 300 people (OCHA, 2014).

Of global notoriety has been April 2014 kidnapping of over 300 girls- some 230 still missing- from a boarding school in Borno state. Boko Haram assumed responsibility for the attack and has threatened to sell the girls as slaves; reports indicate that many have already been forcibly married to members of Boko Haram. This kidnapping has sparked large-scale protests in Abuja and the international community, and launched an internationally-backed campaign entitled #BringBackOurGirls. And till Jonathan passed the baton of leadership to President Muhammadu Buhari, these girls are yet to be recovered from the insurgent sect.

### **(ii) Socio-Economic Rights**

The justification for these rights is on the basis of the fact that just as civil and political rights are being protected, the same thing must go for socio-economic rights of the citizens. There must be no dichotomy in the promotion and protection of these bundles of rights. In 2011, new national monthly minimum wage of 18,000 naira (\$111) was established by an amendment to the law in March. However, implementation of the act was slow, particularly by state governments, despite worker protests and warning strikes. Employers with fewer than 50 employees are exempt from provisions of the law, and the large majority of workers are not covered by the law (CRHRP, 2011). The Labour Act mandates a 40-hour workweek, two to four weeks of annual leave, and overtime and holiday pay, except for agricultural and domestic workers. The Labour Act does not define premium pay or overtime. The law prohibits excessive compulsory overtime for civilian government employees. The law establishes general health and safety provisions, some of which are aimed specifically at young or female workers. The 2010 Employees Compensation Act raised the amounts paid to workers who suffered job-related injuries. The act also extended coverage to women involved in work not previously covered. The law requires employers to compensate injured workers and dependent survivors of those killed in industrial accidents. The Factories Act provides for the protection of factory employees in hazardous situations, including the right of employees to remove themselves from such situations. The law did not provide other, non-factory workers with similar protections. The labour laws apply to legal foreign workers, but not all companies respected these laws in practice (CRHRP, 2011).

The Ministry of Labour is responsible for enforcing these standards. Enforcement did not occur in the informal sector. No citations or fines were issued for child labour during the year. The Ministry of Labour did not properly monitor and enforce health and safety conditions due to insufficient inspectors. The inspectorate division of the Ministry of Labour inspects factories for compliance with health and safety standards. However, this division was underfunded, lacked basic resources and training, and consequently did not sufficiently enforce safety regulations at most enterprises, particularly construction sites and other non-factory work locations. In addition, the compensation law was not enforced strictly. A revelation which emanated from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on the 13th of February, 2013 that more than two third of Nigerians- 112 Million individuals are leaving below poverty level is an evidence that there is overwhelming social and economic injustice in the land. There is continued high rate of maternal mortality as the country report still shows that there are about 487 deaths of every 1000 women that give birth. Unemployment rate put at over 20% at present. The education sector continues to have lower budgetary allocation put at 8.7% as against the UNESCO recommendation of 26% meanwhile the security sector continues to have close to 20% in a state where even at present the security of life of the citizens continues to be elusive (FRN, 2014).

Regrettably however, the Government has sought to improve health care system. Health spending in the Federal budget increased from 4% in 2010 to 6.1% in 2011 and 6.5% in 2012. Also, it was reported that in 2012, the Federal Government also released the total sum of N180 billion (USD 1.2bn) to the Petroleum Subsidy Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P) for intervention in some critical sectors of the economy that would touch the lives of Nigerians.

The money was spent on major road construction, rehabilitation of rail lines, investment in maternal and child healthcare services, job creation for teeming unemployed youths/graduates. Out of the 63,000 applications from unemployed graduates taking part in the SURE-P, about 3,000 are now in private companies for skills acquisition/internship. On youth unemployment, the SURE-P targets 5,000 youths per state annually under its women and youth empowerment scheme at the states level (FRN, 2014). Sadly however, majority of the improvement reported were only found on the white paper and never in real life. The government has always been having plans that will never see the light of the day. All these are tantamount to the fact that an average Nigerian citizen is still being denied of access to sustainable socio-economic life and with solutions to this derogation not in sight. Corruption is still deeply entrenched in the system. Section 88 2(b) of the 1999 constitution gave the legislature power to “expose corruption, inefficiency or waste in the execution or administration of laws within its legislative competence and in the disbursement or administration of funds appropriated by it”.

Sadly, none of these cases have been properly addressed till now and Nigerians cannot but bemoan the selfish nature of its elected representatives and the extent to which national interest had been sacrificed on the altar of wanton and insatiable greed. Suffice it to say that as the promise of common and equal Nigeria citizenship is unreal, so is the promise of human rights (Ewere, 2012).

### ***(iii) Promotion of Political Participation***

There is indeed a heavy dose of public policy content involved in election petitions and that is also why both the Constitution and the Electoral Act have made elaborate provisions to ensure that those who harbour criminal tendencies are not only excluded, but if discovered, prosecuted for even daring at all to pollute the system and steal the people’s mandate. So, where a candidate is alleged to have ‘stolen’ the people’s mandate, it is not sufficient for him to simply drop the mandate and scamper off, the law and the Society must still call him to account for his alleged criminality if any (NHRC, 2014). Against this backdrop, a good example of fair trial in election petition process under Goodluck Jonathan’s presidency is the case of Senator Iyiola Omisore vs Governor Rauf Aregbesola of 2014 gubernatorial election in Osun State. The Elections Petition Tribunal after all necessary investigations eventually dismissed Iyiola Omisore’s petition arising from the Osun State governorship elections held on August 9, 2014.

Moreover, democracy and therefore elections are grounded in the right of citizens to effectively participate in their government. This right encompasses both the right of Nigerian citizens over the age of 18 to vote and the right of qualified Nigerians to be duly elected to public office. In Nigeria, however, elections have historically been akin to organised crime. This is because during Nigerian elections, multiple actors pursue pre-determined outcomes through common enterprise rather than allowing the people’s vote to determine the country’s political leadership. This behaviour is unlawful, criminal and unconstitutional. Such enterprise violates the constitutional rights of Nigerian citizens to participate in their own government and to determine who governs them by casting their individual ballot. Yet, the country has historically condoned such behaviour; indeed, the political, judicial and legal authorities have been both unwilling and unable to ensure accountability for them. This habitual failure of accountability for the violation of the right to participation in Nigeria in turn undermines the rights to fair trial and to a legal remedy, entitlements that are entrenched in Nigerian law. It also compromises the credibility of elections as the most acceptable means of conferring legitimacy to those who

govern. Additionally, it damages the credibility of the judiciary and legal process, resulting, as concluded by a Presidential Panel in 2011, in a clear “loss of confidence in justice administration” relating to elections. The lack of lawful remedies for electoral violations and manipulations has resulted in unrelenting impunity. Modern elections in Nigeria are synonymous with insidious violence and political office-seekers are expected to “embrace or resort to self-help and vengeful tactics in settling their grievances” (FRN, 2011).

Thus, of about 870,000 persons apprehended for offences connected with the 2011 voter registration and general elections, only about 200 persons, or about 0.02 per cent, were successfully prosecuted. Current INEC Chairman, Attahiru Jega, attributes this abysmal number of prosecutions to lack of funds and personnel (Jega, 2012). This Initial Report by NHRC provides evidence from official judicial records of electoral impunity in Nigeria. It explains electoral impunity as a series of steps or omissions that facilitate the unrestrained stealing of the peoples’ sovereign will without any fear of punishment. Understood this way, there is a clear and overriding policy rationale why electoral impunity needs to be addressed as a threat to Nigeria and its fledgling democracy: those who steal the will of the people without consequence destroy mechanisms of administrative, legal and political accountability. They can only govern in violation of the right of the people to determine who governs them. The Nigerian judiciary has created the impression that there is one law for poor people and another for the big men and women who put themselves forward for elections. As a result, the courts not only facilitate the violation of citizens’ rights to effective participation in their government, they also aid the culture of impunity that has become the hallmark of elections in Nigeria (NHRC, 2014).

### **Challenges to the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Nigeria**

Fundamental human rights were first entrenched in the Constitution of independent Nigeria in 1960 as recommended by the Sir Henry Willink Commission of Inquiry. Today the 1999 Constitution in its chapter iv, provides for fundamental human rights, Right to life, Right to dignity of human person, Right to personal liberty, Right to fair hearing, Right to private and family life. Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Right to freedom of expression and the press. Right to peaceful assembly and association, right to freedom of movement, right to freedom from discrimination, right to acquire immovable property anywhere in Nigeria and Compulsory acquisition of property. Also, the chapter ii spoke on socio-economic rights of citizens (Ewere, 2012). In spite of these provisions, Nigeria confronts quite substantial problems of values, governance, citizenship and institutional capacity that together define the challenges for the realisation of human rights in the country. Nigeria’s human rights problems are also challenge of renewing the norms, institutions and processes of government. But this will be practically difficult because the government has been badly compromised by official corruption, indifference, cynicism and abuse of power which afflicts all echelons of governance, including those charged with ensuring accountability for such misconduct.

However, beyond mere institutional frameworks, which both scholars and commentators may wish to focus on, it is equally fitting to demonstrate that there are a number of constraints in the bid of the country to safeguard the inalienable rights of man. First, a society with an embarrassing literacy level cannot easily safeguard human rights. Nigeria has between 39% - 51% literacy level and budgetary allocation to the education sector continues to remain insignificant. While most developed democracies have 70% and above. With this large chunk

of the citizenry being stark illiterates, mass mobilization of the civil society becomes more tasking. Similarly, media readership is low with the concomitant lack of media efficacy. A system where citizens are not aware or conscious of their rights, how do they claim them? Even when such rights are infringed upon the institutional processes for redress is unknown to them. It is for this reason that the masses of the people do resort into spontaneous violent reactions, venting their anger on the polity to seek redress. Considering the nexus between literacy, human rights abuse and democratic sustenance, Ojo (2006), averred that “democracy is not safe in a country where a large minority of the population is illiterate”.

Though some achievement have been recorded such as: the most free and fair elections in our nation’s history in 2011 and subsequently, 2015; committed efforts at reconciliation in the North; the signing of the Freedom of Information Act; unprecedented promotion of the political rights of Nigerians to create and join political parties of their choice; and welcome efforts by the House of Representatives to manage issues of security and corruption, including its ordering of an investigation into rising cases of extra-judicial killings by the police. But despite these positive actions, Nigeria continues to confront serious human rights challenges, including a culture of impunity where perpetrators are often not held accountable for their actions in forms of corrupt practices, extra-judicial killings by the police and JTF in the North East (Baga massacre). The story within the bounds of the scope of this paper is not different from what holds in the past administrations. Even no serious improvement in the socio-economic status of the Nigerian citizens as the increasing GDP growth is only on paper and not real in the economy. Also, inflation remains high and unemployment rate above 20% (FRN, 2014). These abnormalities underscore the Occupy Nigeria of 2012 in protest against the Oil Subsidy removal by the government. Citizens thronged Gani Fawehinmi Square in Lagos protesting government policy but in defiance to citizens’ rights to peaceful protest and fair socio-economic conditions, the Federal Government militarized the streets and tear gas was used on citizens in a peaceful protest. In fact, the media was restricted in broadcasting the ongoing protest to the international community. These instances are clear derogations to citizens’ fundamental and socio-economic rights in a democratic system as supposedly claimed by the Nigerian Government. They are a reflection and perpetuation of military ethos in a democratic dispensation. All these constrain citizens’ rights to sustainable political and socio-economic wellbeing.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has revealed that the fight for human rights is a fight not only against political repression but also against social deprivation and economic exploitation. This applies to countries as well as people. From the foregoing, it can be concluded that every state has the duty to: (i) eliminate all obstacles that hinder the economic, social and cultural development mobilization of its people; (ii) implement progressive, economic and social reforms; and (iii) ensure the full participation of all its peoples in the process and benefits of development. It is when efforts are made to confront these highlighted problems that the country can begin to safeguard ‘human rights’ beyond the mere ‘Fabian rhetoric’s’ presently. This becomes imperative in the sense that a political system that abuses human rights cannot make her citizens catalyst to democratic substance. This justifies Harold Laki’s position that “a state must give to men their due before it can demand at least with justice, their loyalty”.

At all levels of society, we must seize upon “the fierce urgency of now.” In protecting the rights and liberties of all Nigerians, the Nigerian Government must be resolute in its

commitment to ensuring security without compromising human rights. And these rights must be extended to all, regardless of class, creed, ethnicity, gender, political views, tribal affiliation, or sexual orientation. Nigerian government must honour her citizens by building and sustaining strong and transparent institutions that deliver essential services to the nation and setting a standard by which all federal, state, and local government entities hold themselves publicly accountable. By enshrining these rights, Nigeria will be poised to achieve its potential and, most importantly, to give its citizens the peace, stability, and prosperity that they deserve. The recent peaceful democratic transition by the immediate past President of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan has been applauded internationally as a giant step towards enshrining good governance in Nigeria. This also has obvious lesson for other African leaders to imbibe the spirit of sportsmanship and shun despotism in order to enhance the human rights records of Africa and thereby promoting good governance across the nook and cranny of the continent. The key now is to look internally with readiness to use political will in the right direction, to take significant actions to address critical human rights issues in Nigeria.

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