

Let's keep walking & talking

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The freedom of speech is so important in democracy, but in our case, we have not been able to refine the idea behind it, nor have we given it the time and careful nurture to make it meaningful.

Perhaps **Talking** has become the only viable industry that has come to define our country today. On a serious note, **Talking** is one of the major gains of our democracy and its constructive engagement is what averts war, puts food on the table, provides shelter and offers all that is required for the good life. The pursuit of the good life is the driving force of democracy. The question is what kind of talk are we engaged in? Who is talking and what is the content of the talk? Where are we holding the talks? All these seemingly trivial questions are very important in defining why **Talking** is so important for our future and our life.

The freedom of speech is so important in democracy, but in our case, we have not been able to refine the idea behind it, nor have we given it the time and careful nurture to make it meaningful. Freedom of speech is not freedom to speak nonsense or abuse or impugn others. It is essentially freedom to speak, be heard and hopefully help feed the notions of the common good. This is why, what we say, whom we say it to, where we say it and how we say it are all so important.

The difficulty with our situation in Nigeria has always been the fact that everyone is an expert in the problems of Nigeria and is also convinced of the fact that they possess the solutions. Years of subversion, intimidation and blackmail of the intellectual elite have had a devastating impact on our public policy. The idea that those who governed us were not interested in **long grammar** meant that the military mind which could not address consensus, privileged quick solutions, short term and short cuts, believing that all had to be done with immediate effect. They loved speed but forgot that speed injures or kills. We are where we are because we took a wrong turn and have continued to move on.

Now, we seem to be poised to a new dawn. Or at least so we think. There are new kids on the block who are inspiring confidence in our future. My good friends, Dr Ngozi Iweala, Dr Kayode Fayemi, Lamido Sanusi, Raji Fashola, Rotimi Amaechi, Adams Oshiomohle, Oby Ezekwesili, and a host of others have found their way into the main cabin of the bus. They remain a reference point of inspiration to many a young man and woman today. Our world will not change in a day. However, together we can begin a gradual process of building confidence in our nation.

We have secured freedom, the key to development and progress. How we use it is as important as having it. However, we need to move away from the spineless, effete, and visionless ranting by con-men and women who have seen politics as another phase of their brigandage. We must not mistake their grandstanding, *garrulousity* and demagoguery for statesmanship. So far, most of the sabre rattlers calling for one form of **Negotiation, Meeting, Conclave, Consensus, Conference, Dialogue**, and the *we-must-sit-down and talk* syndrome forget that if talking were all we needed, whether sitting, kneeling or standing, we would be el dorado today. It is clear that beyond the grandstanding, our nation needs imagination, vision, determination, courage and dedication. I hope we can find the courage to dream and dream big for tomorrow.

God bless you all.