**NEVER AGAIN! - Text of SNG Press Conference**

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**TEXT OF A PRESS CONFERENCE BY SNG AND ALLIES ON THE CITIZENS ACTION AGAINST CORRUPTION AND BAD GOVERNANCE**

**TUESDAY 17TH JANUARY, 2012 AT THE SNG SECRETARIAT**



Gentlemen of the Press,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

*(1 minute silence in honour of all our fallen heroes, past and present)*

The general strike and citizens action which followed the January 1, 2012 on 117 percent increase in the pump price of Petroleum Motor Spirit (PMS) has proved a defining moment in the history of our country and one from which the correct lessons must be learnt and matters arising squarely dealt with in order to deepen our democracy and ensure that our country is never run again in the old way.

 That such an astronomical and unprecedented hike was done in a fell swoop was an audacious move that signalled the deep contempt by the government for the capacity of the Nigerian people to show righteous indignation over vicious attack on their living rights. Those in authority must have concluded that with the level of poverty inflicted on our people, especially in the last 13 years where poverty has risen in inverse proportion to the growth in revenue, the anguish of spirit has raised a totally docile citizenry who will only dig a hole to escape and continue running when pushed to the wall.

 This is the only explanation for the impunity with which all warnings from organized labour and the civil society were treated by the Federal Government whose officials were so arrogant and condescending in their public utterances on the issue of subsidy removal.

It was a shocked people who watched as the regime lampooned the resolutions of the two chambers of the National Assembly on the matter as "mere opinions" forgetting so soon that the "doctrine of necessity" which was invoked by the same National Assembly less than two years ago after Nigerians trooped to the streets against the "power hijack" by the then cabal was never ridiculed!

 Let it be emphasized that it does our democracy no good when the resolutions of the National Assembly are trashed by the Executive as we recently witnessed on the issue of subsidy removal. Neither does it show any appreciation for truth and consistency when the same beneficiary of our civil protests in the dying days of President Yar’adua’s administration who praised the civil societies eloquently in glowing terms in May 2010 now calls the same people unprintable names.

**DEMONSTRATION OF PEOPLE POWER**

The arrogance of officialdom got a humbling experience with the unprecedented popular actions that took place across the country during the strikes called by the NLC and TUC to protest the unpopular decision of government. The SNG and its allies were pleasantly surprised by the outpouring of millions of Nigerians to the Gani Fawhinmi Freedom Park in Ojota during the 5 days that shook Nigeria. Never in the history of our country has such a large crowd gathered on a spot for days in a peaceful and orderly assembly **with no untoward occurrence.** This is a loud testimony that given the right leadership, our people are mature enough to organize their lives and behave responsibly. It is the unruly leadership causing systemic dislocation in our country that has given the wrong impression that there is something wrong in the genes of Nigerians.

 Though we are very disappointed in the way the controlling leadership of the NLC and TUC have buckled in the knees without consulting the SNG and its allies and without achieving their resolution that "reversal to N65 per litre shall be the basis of any negotiation", we do not want our people to be disillusioned about their capacity to bring about change in the society.

 While we outrightly reject the unilateral fixing of pump price at N97 by the Federal Government upon which the controlling leadership of NLC & TUC threw a spanner in the wheel of peoples movement, it must not be lost on our patriotic people that the climb down by a government which had arrogantly declared that it's decision was final is the proverbial eating of the humble pie. So also are the administration’s pledges to investigate the oil subsidy cabal, ensure that the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) is passed and cut the cost of governance. These are issues the regime was not ready to address before the movement of the people. Nigerians must not give up on these issues until logical and conclusive actions are taken on them.

 While the conduct of the controlling leadership of labour at the peak of the movement does not engender much confidence in their fidelity behind closed door, we still enjoin them to bring all negotiations with the Belgore Committee to a close within a week and report back to the people who still reserve the right to resume their protests if the negotiators compromise the essence of this popular action.

**COURT ACTIONS**

As we are set to use all lawful weapons to bring about change in Nigeria, we shall be heading to the courts in the next few days on two major issues:

 1.      The violent violation of our rights to peaceful protests by the Federal Government through the deployment of troops and tanks to the Gani Fawehinmi Freedom Park at Ojota on Monday,16 January 2012. **THIS VIOLATION IS TOTALLY UNCALLED FOR**. Before we rallied at the Park, we sought the necessary permission from the Lagos State Government and wrote to notify the Lagos State Commissioner of police and asked him to provide protection. The police men deployed to the park were mostly idle throughout the five days we spent at the Park, as there was no breakdown of law and order.

 The Chief Security Officer of the state, Governor Babatunde Fashola(SAN) in rejecting the crude assault on our right to protest acknowledged our peaceful conduct throughout our activities. And we agree with him totally that if we had conducted ourselves otherwise, the police was the right body to deal with that and not soldiers who occupied the venue and subjected our people to harassment, corporal punishment and intimidation.

It is unfortunate that this brutal dictatorship is taking place in a civilian dispensation.

But we chose to be much more mature than the Federal Government by not allowing any ugly situation to be created at the Park.

 We shall definitely enforce our rights in court to teach the regime the basic principles of civilized conduct in a democratic setting.

2.      We shall also use the court to compel an investigation into how the Federal Government ended up spending N1.6trillion as against the N240b budgeted for subsidy in the 2011 fiscal year. We cannot sweep under the carpet the spending of over N1.3 trillion without appropriation by the National Assembly. We shall neither "move on" on this matter until the full weight of the law comes on all those involved in this illegal spending. Nor shall we fold our hands if the FGN through the EFCC becomes both judge and jury in a matter involving government officials and their corporate cronies.

**VICTORY RALLY**

As a mark of appreciation of the new found spirit of our people demonstrated in the 5 days of peaceful protest at the Gani Fawehinmi Freedom Park, we shall be holding a victory rally at the same venue on Saturday, 21st January 2012.

We must at this point appreciate all members of the Entertainment Community in Nigeria who added colour to the 5 days at Ojota without charging us a kobo.

Our gratitude also goes to good spirited Nigerians who without solicitation brought water and food to the crowd at Ojota as their own contribution to the nation building project.

And to the greatest heroes of the movement who trekked several kilometers daily to show their resolve; we give our thumb up. You have planted the "Never Again" tree that will ensure that the holidays are over for bad rulers in our land. That the Federal Government could not stop the peaceful rallies all over Nigeria especially in Abuja, Kano and Kaduna where millions of our people trooped out on the same day the military occupied Ojota Freedom Park and other parts of Lagos State on the order of the Federal Government is a complete demonstration of the indomitable Nigerian spirit. A new dawn of People’s Power against all forms of oppression is here. The will of people is surely stronger than the power of incumbency.

Meanwhile, our hearts go to the families whose loved ones were killed by the state during the days of citizens’ action. May the souls of all the dead rest in peace and May Almighty God comfort the families they left behind.

We strongly demand the prosecution of all trigger happy officers who cut down these innocent lives.

Thank you for listening.

God bless you all and God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.