Why Nigeria Lost Bakassi

Contributed by Augustine Adah
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Akin Oyebode, former vice chancellor of University of Ado Ekiti, says Nigeria lost Bakassi to Cameroon because of its inability to engage the service of experts in international relations

The importance of engaging experts on international relations by policy makers to advise the government on foreign policies was the crux of the lecture delivered recently by Akin Oyebode, professor of International Law at the 2011 University of Lagos inaugural lecture series. Oyebode, who is the chairman, Office of International Relations, Partnership and Prospects Nigeria, University of Lagos, attributed the last humiliation Nigeria suffered at the International Court of Justice, ICJ, over the boundary dispute with Cameroon to its inability to engage the service of international relations and law experts. “The Nigerian ruling class should immediately jettison its obscurantism and anti-intellectual attitude that currently attend policy formulation and implementation on international matters,” Oyebode said. The former vice chancellor of University of Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, stated that Nigeria contested the ownership of the oil and mineral rich Bakassi peninsula with Cameroon at the ICJ and lost on account of what many international relations experts blamed on a host of reasons including poor brief and inadequate legal preparation. To avoid this and similar pitfalls in future, Oyebode, an expert on International Treaties, also recommended that nominations by Nigeria for appointment to important international bodies such as the International Law Commission, ICJ, International Criminal Court, African Court of Justice and Human Rights and the ECOWAS Community Court, should be drawn from experts in International Law “instead of the current practice of considering such appointments as ‘jobs for the boys’ or sinecures for political jobbers.” Given Nigeria’s rising profile in the world and the leading role it plays in Africa and beyond, Oyebode believes the time is now ripe to consider making International Law a compulsory course in the curriculum of Law Faculties in all Nigerian Universities. He said the University of Lagos should lead the campaign of putting Nigerian graduates at a better pedestal and help enhance the quality of legal expertise that would be available to drive the making and execution of the nation’s policies in its forays into the global scene. In the lecture entitled: “Of Norms, Values and Attitudes: The Cogency of International Law,” which could pass for a tour de force, Oyebode, now in his early 60s, delved into personal history including 38 years in the Ivory Tower, where he interacted with different sets of students many of whom have attained great heights in the legal profession. They include 40 Senior Advocates of Nigeria, SAN, 25 law professors, judges, state governors, members of parliament, ministers, commissioners and diplomats. Oyebode, an author of seven books and 100 learned papers, was appointed by the African Union, AU, in 2009, to lend his vast knowledge and experience in jurisprudence to the challenging task of assisting to draft a Continental Treaty on Trans-border Co-operation, which is now awaiting adoption by African heads of state and government.