If I Were President Jonathan

Contributed by Mike Akpan
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Jonathan needs neither the Edwin Clarkes, nor the former militant leaders or any group to campaign for him. He should allow his first term performance to speak for him

Jude Eghosa, (not his real name), is one of the several millions of un-employed graduates roaming the streets of Nigerian cities in search of jobs. He has been on the streets for the past ten years looking for job opportunities that continue to elude him. Since last year, he has continued to place high hopes on President Goodluck Jonathan’s transformation agenda because, according to him, it has the capacity to transform Nigeria economically as well as create wealth and job opportunities for millions of Nigerians if it is implemented transparently and faithfully. But today, Eghosa is thinking differently. He is worried because his hopes in the transformation agenda seems to be fading fast. His worry stems from the fact that the agenda and its laudable goals may be sacrificed on the altar of 2015 general elections which are more than three years away. He argued: “When politicians begin to talk about the next general elections, development stops because nobody will be talking about it. What takes the centre stage is corruption because politicians must look for money one way or the other and hoard it for the next elections.” He is right. The framers of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria were fully aware of the potential danger of such a situation to national development. For this reason, both the constitution and the Electoral Act clearly specify when to start political meetings preparatory to the next general elections. The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, is empowered by law to make the necessary declaration at the appropriate time. That has not been done yet but already many politicians have hit the road openly canvassing support for individuals aspiring for certain positions in 2015. President Jonathan is not comfortable with this development and has openly said so on various forums. One of such forums was the national executive committee, NEC, meeting of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, which held on February 20, this year in Abuja. In his “ No 2015 Campaign Directive” issued at that forum, Jonathan said: “Let me plead that those who are interested in the general elections in 2015 should follow the rules. I have noticed that some people have just started some political meetings; it is too early to hold such meetings. The electoral laws and the constitution speak on this. The INEC normally declares political meetings open”. Acknowledging that such meetings are, by their nature, distractive, the president warned: “ There must be time for work at the federal level: if you are holding a political office and if I notice that you are involved in meetings for 2015 elections, I will ask you to leave and go to hold your meetings because such meetings are too early.” The president also repeated the warning at the national convention of the PDP in Abuja on March 24. Unfortunately, while Jonathan insists that his directive must be strictly enforced within and outside government, he has turned a blind eye to the political activities of Chief Edwin Clarke, a prominent Ijaw son and former federal commissioner for information, and those of the former Niger Delta militant leaders, who have already started a campaign to drag him into the 2015 presidential race. His critics see this as a hypocritical posture that is not even helpful to his government which will surely face a lot of bashings and distractions from political opponents. This is already happening. To Eghosa, Jonathan’s ambivalence on the issue is a case of “do as I say but not as I do.” Expectedly, the ambivalence has become the subject of various interpretations in certain political circles across the country. While some politicians regard the “No 2015 Political Meetings” order as the president’s strategy to checkmate potential contenders for the presidency, others have accused him of scheming for a fresh seven-year tenure. Specifically, the Coalition of Northern Leaders has already raised the alarm that the president is scheming to amend the constitution on the basis of the recommendations of the yet-to-be- submitted report of a 21-man Constitution Review Committee headed by Alfa Saliu Belgore, former chief justice of Nigeria. Allegations like these have their drawback effects. Apart from creating an unnecessary political tension, they have the potentials of keeping the president and his government permanently on the defensive. That is exactly what Reuben Abati, special adviser to the president on media, and others in government are doing by spending their time refuting one allegation after the other. It appears to me that Jonathan does not realise the great advantage he has, as a sitting president, over potential contenders for the presidency should he decide to enter the race again in 2015.As a sitting president, he should have concrete projects to show the people as evidence of his capacity to perform if given another mandate, while his opponents would only rely on promises which many voters always dismiss as doubtful. For now, Jonathan needs neither the Edwin Clarkes, nor the former militant leaders or any group to campaign for him. He should allow his first term performance to speak for him. If he does well, the people will root for him in 2015 because Nigerians readily acknowledge a leader who performs well in office. The PDP, which wants to continue to be in power at the centre, will not want to change, for the sake of change, any candidate who can make things to happen. As the saying goes: Who wants to change a winning team? All that the president needs to do now is to ignore politicking and focus his attention on his transformation agenda so that it does not end up as an electioneering slogan at the end of four years. It may be advisable for him to closely study the developmental strategies adopted by governors Godswill Obot Akpabio, Babatunde Raji Fashola, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi and Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole to successfully transform Akwa Ibom, Lagos, Rivers and Edo states respectively within their first four years in office. If he is able to replicate such spectacular transformation at the centre, he does not need the campaign of the spin doctors to be re-elected. 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