

The Nigerian Embassy as a Deportation Agency *Whose Ambassadors are these?*

Over the last few years, European governments have managed to tighten their immigration laws leading ultimately to the construction of “fortress Europe”. As a result, refugees as a rule are routinely denied asylum. According to Spiegel magazine (a leading German newsmagazine) only one in a thousand African refugees is offered asylum in Germany. Those whose asylum applications have been denied have to be deported back to their countries of origin, forcefully and against their will.

We would like to point out that all the countries in Europe and Africa are signatories to the United Nations Organisation (UNO) Declaration on Human Rights and the Geneva Convention on Refugees. This declaration recognises the right of Asylum as a fundamental human right. However, with the new immigration laws of the western European countries, especially Germany, this fundamental human right is being denied to refugees and other legal immigrants are also facing hard times. And the embassies of African countries, especially the Nigerian embassy, are playing a shameful role supporting this deportation policy:

While most asylum seekers do not have any travel or identification documents, it therefore becomes necessary for these refugees to be identified by their countries’ embassies so as to issue travel documents which will facilitate their deportation. Without this identification and issuance of a travel document, no refugee can be deported. It is one of the most shocking aspects of the treatment of African refugees in Germany that the embassies of African countries are collaborating in this desecration of fundamental human rights. The most prominent of these collaborators is the Nigerian embassy in Germany. In order to facilitate the quick deportation of Nigerian refugees living in Germany, the German authorities are conniving with Nigerian embassy officials by bringing these officials all the way from Berlin to different places all over Germany, where Nigerians are forced to attend so-called Identification hearings with these officials for the purpose of issuing travel documents for their deportation, against their will. It has come to an extent that such embassy hearings with the Nigerian embassy are taking place every month, each time in another region and another city of Germany. The Nigerian embassy officials were in Munich in August 2007, in January 2008 they were in Halberstadt, in February they were in Dortmund and in March they were in Ludwigsburg.

The aim of the German authorities is clear: Accelerating massive deportation of Nigerian citizens! And not only of Nigerian citizens: Even people from other African countries, like Liberia, Togo or Sudan, are forced to attend these hearings, with the aim to deport them to Nigeria as well. It seems as if the Nigerian embassy has become a central agency for the deportation of African migrants and refugees!

Why do the Nigerian embassy officials allow themselves to be used in this way? The answer is that for every refugee that is issued a travel document thereby paving the way for his eventual forceful deportation, the embassy is paid a certain sum of money by the German authorities: They receive 250 Euro for every interview and 250 Euro more for every travel document! This means a total of 500 Euros for every refugee that is invited and finally issued a travel document. It would be interesting to know what happens to the money these embassy officials receive from the German authorities. Does it go into the federal government account or into the pockets of the embassy officials?

The invited refugees are not informed about the purpose of these invitations and are even forced through various repressive means, including imprisonment, by the local German authorities to

attend these hearings. So the truth is that the embassy officials receive money to facilitate the denial of fundamental human rights by a foreign country to Nigerian and other African citizens living in this foreign country.

One common argument by the Nigerian government is that Nigerians disgrace the country by living abroad illegally and that they should all come home since there is no Problem in Nigeria. In terms of security of life and property, is Nigeria safer after Obasanjo's two terms as President? What is the current state of the Nigerian Police force? What is the current state of the Nigerian Prison system considering the fact that Obasanjo himself was a guest there shortly before he was handpicked by his political godfathers and catapulted into Aso-Rock?

On the political level, we all witnessed the last elections which ushered in our current President, Umaru Yar'Adua. Was it a free and fair election? Is it not shameful that the freest and fairest election in Nigerian history held on June 12, 1993 was annulled? Is it not shameful that during elections in Nigeria hundreds of people have to lose their lives and the last one was no exception? Have we found out who killed our former Justice Minister (whose wife incidentally was also a Justice of the Federal Appeal Court) Chief Bola Ige? Is there peace today in the Niger-Delta after two terms of "Democracy" in Nigeria? If an eminent international figure like Chief Bola Ige who was Nigerian Justice Minister to boot could be killed and nobody could be held responsible, then who is actually safe in Nigeria? Is it the common man on the streets who is safe?

The truth of the matter is that Nigerian leaders have been the most significant source of shame for Nigeria as a nation and not refugees who flee for political, economic or whatever reasons. Simply put, our leaders have failed us. It is therefore revolting, to say the least, for these same leaders to turn back and accuse refugees who are fleeing their inhuman and failed leadership adventures of bringing shame to the country. A classic case of the farmer who did not discover the thief on time thereby giving the thief the chance to accuse the farmer of stealing!

On June 9, 2007 a 23 years old Nigerian, Osamuyiwa Aikpitanhi was killed by Spanish police officers during a forced deportation. They handcuffed him, chained his legs, gagged him with his mouth completely closed with industrial strength rubber or duck-tape and put a twine-bag or sack over his head, once out of public view, they pummelled him, until he suffocated and asphyxiated. One does need to add that this kind of treatment is inhuman to say the least and negates all UN and EU conventions on human rights to which Spain and Nigeria are signatories. It also needs no saying that this deportation would not have been possible without the active co-operation of the Nigerian embassy in Spain. Till now, we are yet to hear of any official complaints for this dastardly act from the Nigerian government and the Nigerian embassy in Spain or even any explanation or apology from the Spanish side. We wonder how the officials who received money to sign for the deportation of this young man would be feeling now, assuming they have any conscience.....which we seriously doubt.

A recent study by an organ of the UN reported that the total annual development aid given by western nations to Africa was less than half of the total cash remittances to Africa by Africans living outside Africa. This means that Africans living in the western world actually contribute more to the economic stability of their countries than even the African governments and Western governments. There is virtually no Nigerian family that does not have a relative living abroad! This fact is of course lost to Nigerian embassy officials in Germany who as usual are only thinking about whatever money they can make from colluding in the deportation of fellow Nigerians against all known national and international human rights regulations.

This phenomenon is a sad reminder of the era of slavery when local chiefs and community leaders sold fellow Africans to European slavers. Now Africans who fled to Europe to escape hunger, wars and the irresponsible leadership of their elite are being deported from Europe by the same irresponsible elite who caused them to flee in the first place. It is indeed a shame that 200 years after the official end of slavery and 50 years after the official end of colonialism, the African elite is still being used as a tool by the West for the subjugation and oppression of the African people.

It is therefore with a great sense of shame and disappointment that we witness the recent flurry of visits by the Nigerian embassy officials to various German cities in order to collude with German authorities in facilitating mass deportations of Nigerians from Germany. We wonder how many Nigerians will have to suffer the type of humiliating death that Mr Aikpitanhi died before our embassy officials stop putting ill-gotten wealth ahead of their humanity and reason.

We hereby call on all Nigerians and other Africans to protest this atrocious action by embassy officials who are supposed to be representing the interest of their citizens in a foreign land but who end up signing the death warrants of these citizens. It is not a crime to be a refugee especially when you come from a country where visionless, callous and kleptomaniac leaders reign!

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