

Remarks by Dr. Paden:

Author of *Muslim Civic Culture and Conflict Resolution:
The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria.*

Let me welcome you all here this evening, and thank Brookings institution and the Saban Center for facilitating this book launch. In particular, let me thank Peter Singer and Rabab Fayad, who have worked tirelessly on the arrangements. I would also like to thank my Nigerian colleagues who have assisted in the launch, especially Ahmad Abubakar and Lawal Idris.

I am especially honored by the participation of the panel here tonight. General Muhammadu Buhari has flown in from Nigeria to be our special guest of honor. As former head of state in Nigeria, and as major political challenger of the current administration in Abuja, he has shown that it is possible to use the judicial system to seek redress of election grievances. He has also shown that it is possible to accept the results of the Supreme Court decision last July, out of respect for the judicial system, while still remaining critical of the process of elections in Nigeria. His respect for the principles of the Fourth Republic, and his leadership of the peaceful opposition parties in Nigeria, make him one of the great statesmen of contemporary democratic systems.

I am also grateful for the presence here tonight of Dr. Ibrahim Gambari, currently undersecretary general/ political of the United Nations, who has just returned from international travel and made a special point of coming down from New York for this occasion. He is one of my oldest friends in Nigeria, and a wise counselor to all who believe in a peaceful and democratic Nigeria.

Finally, Ambassador Princeton Lyman, who has been one of my heroes ever since I saw him in action in the late 1970s, leading an USAID response to the devastating drought

in Sahelian west Africa. Having served as US ambassador to Nigeria, he is currently the key policy adviser on Africa at the Council on Foreign Relations. He continues to be a keen proponent of a democratic and peaceful Nigeria.

In addition, we are all honored this evening by the presence of senior political and academic leaders who have flown in from Nigeria for this occasion. I would like to acknowledge the presence of three governors: Excellencies Attahiru Bafarawa of Sokoto State, Ahmed Makarfi of Kaduna State, and Peter Odili of Rivers State. Let me also acknowledge Dr. Tijjani Bande, who is the Vice Chancellor of the Usman Dan Fodio University in Sokoto. I am especially grateful to an old friend, Prof. Jibrin Aminu, whom many of you know as former Nigerian Ambassador to the US. He is current Chair, Nigerian Senate Foreign Relations committee, and a key contributor to better US-Nigerian relations. Finally, I am delighted that Dr. Rilwan Lukman is able to join us. As many of you know, he has served as Secretary General of OPEC, and also adviser to President Obasanjo between 1999-2003 on petroleum and energy. (Note: also introduce other dignitaries who may arrive.) Their presence here tonight, which crosses all political boundaries, is a tribute to the real efforts to take seriously the challenges of democratic federalism and conflict resolution in Nigeria.

My purpose tonight is not to say what is in the book being launched here, since, hopefully, many of you will be able to read the material for yourselves. I have tried to write for a general Western audience, including those with policy interests.

My purpose tonight is to try to facilitate a dialogue between cultures. I trust that some of this will emerge from the panel, and from the questions and answers following the panel. There is real urgency in the dialogue within the Muslim community, and between Muslim and other communities. There is also a critical need for better U.S.- Nigerian

understanding. Our format this evening will include some brief comments by myself and the panelists, and then, hopefully we can open up for general discussion.

My own remarks begin with recognition that it has been my privilege to have been a student, researcher, teacher, and observer in Nigeria for more than four decades. These periods have stretched from my graduate days, living in the old city of Kano in the midst of Sufi religious communities, to my teaching days at Ahmadu Bello University and Bayero University (Kano), to my intensive research efforts trying to create a portrait of the first premier of the Northern Region, to my election monitoring days in the 1999 and 2003 elections. What a pleasure it has been. And now the shadows of the post-9/11 world have created new imperatives for each of us. That is, to try to serve as international bridges of communication and understanding.

What I have found most instructive in these experiences has been the willingness of Nigerians from every point on the religious, economic and political spectrum to engage actively in the communication process. The monumental task of reconciliation after the Nigerian civil war is an inspiration. Subsequently, even in moments of great stress, many Nigerians have looked for ways of mediating and resolving conflict.

Often this has been done by experimenting with political structures and mechanisms. The idea of a three tier federalism is basic to this process, as well as the idea of "federal character" or equal access to executive power. The extreme pluralism of Nigeria is a challenge to the idea of "unity with diversity." Living in a country which is about half Muslim and half Christian and traditional is a 21st century test in cross-cultural tolerance. The experimentation with multiple systems of jurisprudence, including Shari'a law, would be a challenge in any national system. At present, Shari'a seems to be settling into a more normal

part of the far northern states, without some of the extremes of the early days after the return to civilian rule.

The need for the understanding of the Muslim world by the Western world, including those in government, business, and academia, is a major challenge of our times. We need to train our students to the need for appreciating languages and cultures other than their own. We need to encourage policy shapers and implementers to break out of a comfortable Washington consensus, and get a real sense of what is going on at the grassroots in Nigeria, and not just in the five star hotels in Abuja.

Our Brookings Institution book is part of a new series on U.S. policy towards the Muslim world. The book is not intended to make specific policy suggestions, but to contextualize the challenges that we all face in contributing to a peaceful and democratic Nigeria. The first step in that process is to try to communicate across cultural and political boundaries. Hopefully we can take that step here this evening.

Again, thank you for coming. Let me now turn the podium over to our moderators, Ambassador Princeton Lyman and Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari. After their comments, they will introduce our guest of honor, Muhammadu Buhari, for his remarks. I look forward to our discussions this evening.
