

REPORT OF THE COURTESY VISIT OF HIS EXCELLENCY, SVEIN BAERA, THE NORWEGIAN AMBASSADOR TO NIGERIA TO THE NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (NIIA) ON FRIDAY, 10 JANUARY 2025.



The first ambassadorial forum for the year 2025 was marked by the auspicious courtesy visit of His Excellency, Svein Baera, the Norwegian Ambassador to Nigeria. In his welcome address, the Director-General of the NIIA, Prof. Eghosa Osaghae referred to the new year as the year of breakthrough, remarking that Norway was helpful during Nigeria's independence struggles. He noted that there was a gap between research and policy in Nigeria and other states of the world and

he hoped for a closer collaboration between research and policy.

In his opening statements, the Norwegian Ambassador mentioned that Nigeria and Norway share common interest and also emphasized that policy should be based on knowledge and research and even in politics, business and other spheres of life. He raised certain global issues including the exit of some West African states from ECOWAS, the unending wars in the Middle East between Palestine and Israel and between Russia and China. Others areas of concern expressed by His Excellency were the competition for power between the United States of America and China and the current leadership of the G20 by South Africa.

During the interactive session, questions, comments and opinions passed from the Professors and other research fellows in attendance to the Ambassador and vice versa. Prof Femi Otubanjo, a renowned International Affairs Expert, inquired about how the non-membership of Norway in the European Union (EU) has influenced its relations with EU members. He also sought to know the exact areas of priorities of Norway in relation to Nigeria, while acknowledging that Norway is a leading nation in petroleum technology. The Ambassador, in his response, mentioned that although both Nigeria and Norway are oil-producing nations, Norway stashes up funds generated from the production and sales of crude oil in its sovereign wealth fund and uses it for solving

issues on pensions, the severe effects of climate change and so on. He indicated that there was an urgent need to move from fossil fuel to renewable energy because solar energy is cheaper for business than diesel and the use of generators. He however, mentioned that both countries are cooperating on renewable energy since it is necessary for Nigeria to move from greenhouse gas to renewable energy.

The depth of involvement of Norway in development cooperation, education, health and refinery business of Nigeria was the angle Assoc. Prof. Joshua Bolarinwa, the Director of Research, NIIA quizzed the Ambassador. He added that Norway has been helpful in the areas of financial assistance and expertise to Nigeria. Assoc. Prof. Godwin Ichimi, the Head of International Cooperation and Public Affairs at the Institute, raised the issue of the maritime sector gaining momentum, noting that Nigeria is a central member of the Gulf of Guinea Commission. He expressed the possibility of a collaboration between Norway and the Institute in that they could propose new models at the G20 for the maritime sector. He further explained that discussions on maritime issues are in progress at the Global Maritime Forum and there is a target for 2050. He advised the Ambassador to take the advantage of the maritime sector being Africa's greatest economy.

Prof. Efem Ubi, the Director of Studies at the NIIA, remarked that Norway is good at green economy and asked how Nigeria could benefit from the green economy by knowledge transfer since both states share a number of things in common. The Coordinator of the Gen. LEO Irabor Early Warning Systems Centre (GLIC) of the Institute, Dr. Tola Ilesanmi, was interested in learning about Norway's engagement in the Sahel and what Norway seeks to achieve there. Dr. Adesuwa Erediauwa, the Coordinator of the Bashir Adewale Centre for International Trade and Investment (BACITI) stated that oil production in Nigeria was falling and it therefore meant that Nigerian is not an oil-rich country. She also opined that both countries could collaborate on education since Norway runs a fully free education system while the education system in Nigeria is in crisis. Dr. Kester Onor, a research fellow, enquired about Norway's strategic interest in Nigeria in tangible terms, noting that Norway is the 8th largest producer of natural gas and 4th largest supplier in the world.

In response, Ambassador Svein Baera indicated that Norway is interested in African development and prosperity, and in stability and peace in the Sahel, recognizing that if the Sahel explodes, it would affect the European Union too. Concerning the G20 and maritime cooperation, a number of cooperation especially between private companies, Nigeria and Norway are in progress. He informed also that they have introduced Energy for Development (E4D), a program between Nigeria and Norway whereby Norwegian experts help Nigeria in other ways of building stable and clean energy. He advised that the Nigerian government should invest in education, being a beneficiary of 'Education Cannot Wait,' a global forum that is targeted at countries whose educational system is in crisis due to religious, social and political factors. There already exists an educational partnership between the University of Oslo and the

University of Lagos, Nigeria and there is the possibility of NIIA and Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) launching a new project. With reference to the enquiry on what Norway wants, Nigeria should use its position and power in West Africa to stabilize the region, ensure peace and security in the business and maritime sectors while maintaining friendship and cordial relations with Nigeria. He also tasked Nigeria on ensuring transparency in all parts of oil production system in order to ensure efficiency.

Specifically, the Ambassador was interested in understanding the most important aspect or angle from which Norway should relate with Nigeria. Dr. Kester Onor suggested ECOWAS and AU because of Nigeria's prime role in these organisations and Nigeria's affinity with the United Nations and other nations of the world. Assoc. Prof. Joshua Bolarinwa opined that considering the posture of Nigeria's foreign policy since 1960, Nigeria has excelled from the multilateral perspective- ECOWAS, AU, Commonwealth of Nations and the rest of the world- also, Nigeria employs the concentric circle thereby placing Nigeria's foreign policy on herself first, then her immediate neighbors. Mrs. Marlyn Akpofure pointed out the foreign policy direction of the current administration of the President of Nigeria, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, being the 4Ds while Prof. Efem Ubi chipped in that Nigeria's foreign policy remained the same since independence. However, Nigeria plays a pivotal role in military, security, peacekeeping, and internal security in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea and still retains



its non-aligned posture. Prof. Femi Otubanjo maintains that economic survival and security should take a prime position in all foreign policy positions.

Ambassador Svein Baera was keen about the military coups that had taken place in Africa and wondered what Nigeria was doing to prevent a further occurrence. He also wanted to know if there would still be sub-regional cooperation with the exit of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali from ECOWAS. To this, Prof. Ubi assured that since security is not a one-man's business, cooperation would continue in West Africa. Dr. Kester added that bad governance, poverty, corruption, and foreign influence are fueling factors for democratic reversals, therefore, accountability and the dividends of democracy should be improved on. Dr. Nzube Chukwuma added that democracy has not delivered the deliverables and that Nigeria should be a model of a working democracy.



On a final note, Ambassador Svein Baera inquired how Nigeria promotes democracy in the 4Ds of its foreign policy thrust. Assoc. Prof. Godwin Ichimi stated that the President expressed his commitment to zero tolerance for unconstitutional change of power within ECOWAS. The distinguished Director-General of the Institute clarified that positions expressed were unofficial, however, Nigeria has value for democracy and democratic ideals but it must live by example.

More so, collective security is at the fore of ECOWAS.



It was a largely engaging, enriching and enlightening session. As the souvenirs including books, a frame and figurine were presented to the Ambassador, he expressed his appreciation and remarked that he would pay another visit for another round of interactions. The DG took him on a tour around the Institute, particularly to see the Window to China library and the Gen. Leo Irabor Early Warning Systems Centre.

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