

## **CRIMINALITY AND VIOLENCE AS GROWING PHENOMENAIN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GLOBALIZED WORLD**

BY  
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Perhaps it is apt to begin this address by defining the two most important operative words: criminality and violence. This is necessary in order to have a common understanding of the words and the context in which we use them in this address.

Contextually, criminality is a behavior that is contrary to or forbidden by criminal law. **Criminality** is 'wrongfulness' in acting (Fletcher 83). Crime is an action or omission that constitutes an offense which may be prosecuted by government and is punishable by law. It is an illegal activity or action considered to be evil and shameful.

Both crime and **criminality** can be collective nouns for acts of unlawfulness and consequently, we can use the two words interchangeably. On the other hand, violence involves the use of physical force with the intention to hurt, damage, or kill. It is the unlawful use of physical force or intimidation inflicted specifically on a person by another.

It follows that criminality can be defined in many different ways, depending on place and time. In general terms, criminality or crime can simply be defined as the breach of laws that are laid down by constituted authority. Different causes of criminality and violence abound from many studies conducted around the world with a view to comprehend and combat the menace. It is the responsibility of constituted authorities in every place to stem criminality so that the world becomes a safer place to live in.

Despite the global dimension of criminality and violence, I would suggest that this Conference focuses attention on our immediate environment and jurisdiction, Nigeria. Indeed, given Nigeria's importance and influence in the comity of nations, it is expected that the findings and recommendations of this Conference will have far-reaching and world-wide implications.

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The security and welfare of the citizens is the primary purpose of government and governance. Without the security of lives and properties, of contractual agreements between various individuals, society cannot exist, neither can government. The practices and methods of perpetrating criminality and violence are global in nature. However, the consequences of criminality and violence on people and societies do vary, depending largely on environment, customs and time.

The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program defines violent crimes as those offenses which involve force or threat of force. According to the UCR Program, violent crime is composed of four offenses: **murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault**. A violent crime is also known as a crime of violence. However, violence itself can be considered a crime as in the case of **assault**. For **acrime**, there is both a **victim** and a violation of ethics or norms. Conversely, non-violent crimes are those **that do not involve the use of force or cause bodily injury to another person**.

According to a study on 'How is Crime Changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?' (Department of Justice, Canada 1), it is reported that changes in the practices and methods of committing violence and crimes should be expected in the twenty-first century. However, "barring some socio-economic catastrophe or major demographic shift", violence and crimes are unlikely to "pose any more of a threat to the legitimate economy or society than in the past" (1).

In another study sponsored by the World Bank Group, it is documented that:

- (i) Violence has increased sharply since 2010 and the victims are largely civilians (close to 90% of war casualties).
- (ii) Interpersonal and gang violence kill many more people than political violence. Thus, interpersonal violence and political violence tend to be increasingly interrelated, particularly where institutions are weak and social norms have become tolerant of violence.
- (iii) Gender based violence remains very high (1 in 3 women in the world have experienced physical or sexual violence) with negative consequences for both societies and economies.

- (iv) Ninety percent of the last decade's civil wars occurred in countries that had already had a civil war in the last 30 years and the poor are increasingly concentrated in countries affected by violence.
- (v) Prolonged conflict keeps countries poor. A civil war costs a medium-sized developing country the equivalent of 30 years of GDP growth and it takes 20 years for trade levels to return to pre-war levels.

Furthermore, in a study that x-rays criminality and reprisal attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt, it was suggested that farmer/herder violence is neither an ethnic nor religious conflict. Instead, it is a competition for resources playing out on ethno-religious lines in a fragile country characterized by impunity and corruption. Youths from farming and herding communities take advantage of growing insecurity, fear, and cyclical attacks to loot villages, engage in highway robbery, and rustle cattle for personal gain, causing lots of pains and despair.

It is not hyperbole to say that the rates of criminality and violence in Nigeria are alarmingly rising by the day. Violent crimes such as terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, rape, robbery, child abuse, murder, financial scam, and cyber fraud are a daily occurrence. And the perpetrators, mostly youths have continued to defy common prescribed solutions.

The leading drivers of criminality and violence include the following:

1) Family Settings and Societal Condition

The family, rather than the individual, forms the basic unit of human society. This means that the existence of healthy family life is sine qua non to the very foundation of human society. Healthy family life is one that is founded on sound moral values, love and marriage. The absence of sound moral values, love and marriage, creates adverse family settings which also result in poor parenting. Decades of studies suggest that children born into an adverse family setting are far more likely to become criminals than those born into healthy settings. It therefore goes without saying that adverse family setting is the first most potent breeder of criminality and violence-prone children into the society.

Apart from adverse family settings, there are other factors at the level of families that often cause people to go into criminality. These factors include neglect and lack of attention by family, desire on the

part of some youths to cater for their poor families, and abuse of children by family members during formative years.

At the home front, watching indiscriminate 'action' movies have influenced criminality and violence. Televised violence induces criminal tendencies especially among younger people that are unable to differentiate between fiction and reality.

Closely related to the family setting is the behavior of people in the larger society. A lot of importance is attached to wealth without any regard to where and how such wealth is made. In fact, some families are erroneously in the habit of comparing their children to others and condemning them as failures because they have not measured up. This bad habit on the part of some families when added to peer group pressure, have pushed a number of youths who lack strong will to resist going into crime because they want to be accepted. Thus, many well-to-do individuals flaunt their wealth before the poor majority, thereby inadvertently pushing the gullible ones into crimes in a bid to make money.

## 2) Poverty and Unemployment

Poverty otherwise called economic deprivation is a major cause of crime in every society. Persistent economic deprivation leads to intense desperation and often drives citizens to take to crime to survive. Poverty in the midst of plenty abounds in a society where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Widespread poverty especially triggered by unemployment among youths is blamed as a major driver of the crime of kidnapping. Kidnappers are mostly educated youths of school and employment age who have become hopeless in finding gainful and sustainable employment opportunities. A situation where citizens go through school and end up jobless for many years is a clear recipe for criminality as well as violence.

Poverty and deprivation also induce depression, which is another driver of crime. People under depression or some other serious mental disorder can easily take to criminality and violence. Apart from depression, grave mental disorders also lead to committing of crimes.

3) Drugs

Drugs are a curse, no matter how we look at them. People addicted to drugs are unable to support their addiction and more often than not they end up in a life of crime to fuel their habits. All over the world, drug addicts end up committing crimes to raise money for their habits. Likewise, there are many criminals that are involved in the drug trade. Though the traders may not be drug users themselves, they lure others into use of drugs and crimes. Most violent crimes are carried out under the influence of drugs or other prohibited substances.

4) Politics and Regionalism

Political activities could degenerate into criminality and violence, especially if the actors are desperate and take politics as a do-or-die affair. Some scores of hate speech-induced crimes and conflicts, kidnapping and assassinations in Nigeria have been linked to politics in Nigeria. It is observed that political associations often use thugs to promote candidates during campaign rallies. Thugs and thuggery are used to manipulate voters and subjugate opponents. Political power is sometimes applied against citizens and the dissidence that rises from such situations often forces the victims to resort to crimes. Consequently, politics in Nigeria precipitate criminality and violence on a much larger and a much higher scale than anything else.

Regionalism is also a major cause of crime and conflicts. People that harbor regionalist feelings often go to great lengths to commit crimes against others. This reality usually goes unnoticed both on the part of the citizens and government as they too are caught up in classifications of people by region. Occasionally, victims of such regionalism are influenced into the world of crimes.

5) Religion

In Nigeria, a number of crimes and violent acts are committed along religious lines. Some preachers fuel the embers of violence and urge their adherents to see anyone who is not of the same religion as an enemy. Some of the unrest experienced in the northern part of Nigeria can be traced to religion.

6) Judicial System

Victims of unfair or incorrect rulings from courts may engage in criminality. For one reason or another, some people may falsely be accused of committing crimes, leading to conviction. The conditions of prisons in Nigeria are such that they are not conducive for prisoners' correction and rehabilitation. Prisoners being thrown into overpopulated jails, mingling with others who are either victims or perpetrators of crimes more serious than their own often come out of prisons more hardened.

7) Technology

The quantum leap being experienced in communication system and emergence of social media platforms helped to sustain a network of criminality and perpetrations. The global system of mobile communication (GSM) provides the avenue through which kidnappers reach out and negotiate with relatives of the victims on ransom amount and mode of payment.

The solution to criminality and violence requires collective resolve and efforts. In this regard, the following recommendations are considered cogent and critical:

1. Healthy family setting and good parenting should be taken very seriously. In fact, there is no substitute for this.
2. Sustained societal re-orientation at all levels of government should be introduced. Civic education should be optimized. Social vices and hypocrisy that foster criminal tendencies must be eradicated. Relevant stakeholders, including religious clerics, traditional and community leaders, civil society and other non-governmental organizations should be involved in this effort. Government and development partners should help communities at the local level to dialogue and reach an understanding to coexist, and resolve disputes amicably. In doing all these, government should also ensure community input into any policy initiative in order to achieve required buy-ins.
3. Job and wealth creation should become one in the same net. This will raise the standards of living and bridge the yawning gap between the

rich and the poor. And corruption should be appropriately tamed through adequate punishment for the guilty to serve as deterrent to many would-be criminals.

4. Security forces, especially the police, must continually be given adequate training and equipment to combat the scourge of criminality. Relevant technology should be deployed to help in prevention, detection and investigation of criminality.
5. The citizenry should be afforded social infrastructure such as good road networks, potable water, stable power supply, free and functional education at primary school level and comprehensive healthcare facilities.
6. The political system should be further democratized to involve the active participation of the youths not as thugs but as leaders at various levels. Politicians should evolve proactive public policy towards socioeconomic development that is focused on the youth.
7. There is also the need to reform judicial system in line with global best practices. Prison reform should be taken to the next level. Besides the legal measures of crime prevention, moral and spiritual elements should also be explored. For instance, under the Islamic principle, punishments relating to crimes like fornication, adultery and homosexuality are reformatory in the sense that they imply the spiritual purification of the offenders; the punishments for theft, robbery and treason are of deterrent character; and the punishment in respect of murder is based on retribution which may be tempered with mercy.

I pray that this Conference will provide the impetus towards a new and positive direction on how to deal with criminality and violence, particularly in Nigeria, and will be blessed with success all through.

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