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Press Statement

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MESSAGE TO LAGOSIANS ON THE PROPOSED MASS BURIAL OF 103 VICTIMS OF THE ENDSARS RELATED PROTESTS AND VIOLENCE

The uproar that has arisen following the recent revelation that plans were apparently at an advanced stage for the mass burial of 103 unidentified victims of the violence that occurred during the ENDSARS protests is quite revealing.

This development raises many issues, of which I would like to highlight a few.

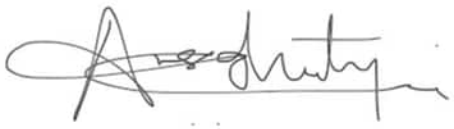
1. That the events of 2020 were tragic, unfortunate and in many ways a dark season in the annals of our history is not news. It is also apparent to all concerned that in managing the situation, mistakes were made and sadly, many lives were lost.
2. The specific point of divergence in the current version of the debate appears to be whether any of these 103 unidentified victims were killed at the Lekki toll gate, at the hands of the military forces that were called to that scene.
3. More generally, the finding of the ENDSARS Judicial Panel of Inquiry led by retired Justice Doris Okuwobi, that no less than 9 persons were killed in a massacre at the hands of the military forces at the Toll Gate was, and still is, rejected by LASG Government as documented in its white paper on the subject.
4. This controversial yet crucial point of difference, is the crux of the broken trust that has come to be a defining and persistent outcome of the events of 2020.
5. The LASG appears somewhat taken aback, if not puzzled, by the depth of feeling and reaction elicited by these recent revelations which were leaked and disclosed involuntarily. The fact that it views them as benign, is suggestive of a Government that is disconnected from the feelings, aspirations, mood and sensibilities of a large section of its people.
6. To make matters worse, the valid concerns that are now being raised by many Lagosians on this issue have been ascribed, in some Government circles, to politics and variously described as “mischief making” and “losers post election syndrome”.
7. The ruling party government should remember that opposition can also argue that the timing of this revelation and these actions, after a three-year hiatus, come rather too conveniently (and relatively harmlessly) in the aftermath of elections.
8. Rather than resorting to a defensive demonization of its critics, a forthright leadership seeking to act in good faith, should see this as a crisis situation that calls for transparent and open communications and involvement of civil society every step of the way, knowing that trust needs to be rebuilt and that this always takes time, patience and earnest, usually disproportionate, effort.

9. Ideally, this should have started long before this current episode by transparently and proactively engaging, involving and soliciting ideas from civil society on how to approach this delicate question of the unidentified victims including ideas on how to lay them to rest in a respectful, dignified and befitting way that positively memorializes the departed, promoting some comfort and healing for families and the wider community, while commemorating the watershed moment that EndSars has come to represent in the history of our Nation and Lagos State.

In addition to the above, two questions come to mind that are also worth examining:

1. Why is it that, according to Government's own statement, not even one single victim was identified or claimed by any family member in response to Governments public call and press announcements soliciting same? This should be of great concern to Government.
2. Beyond making announcements in the press and waiting for people to turn up, what efforts did Government on its own, using its investigative capacity, make to identify any of these victims, and their families?

Finally, the revelations in this matter bring to light another, fundamental question regarding the public sector contracting processes and the activities of the Lagos State Public Procurement Agency. However, this is more appropriately raised in a separate communication that will follow this one.



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