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Friday, July 26, 2024

His Excellency, Babajide Sanwoolu
Governor, Lagos State,
Secretariat,
Alausa, Lagos

Dear Mr. Governor,

OPEN LETTER ON POSSIBLE NATIONWIDE PROTESTS COMMENCING ON AUGUST 1, 2024

The animated conversation around the possibility of Nationwide Protests in the next few days is clear evidence of widespread discontent, borne out of the persistent and increasing hardship faced by most citizens. This cannot be wished away.

The right of citizens to protest is entirely legitimate, constitutionally guaranteed and must be protected. While it is true that well-meaning protests can be hijacked by some for nefarious purposes, this is a risk that exists anywhere in the world, including in the most developed nations.

In the past, I had cautioned that it is only a matter of time before Lagos State will be faced with another protest situation. I expressed the hope that in the intervening period, the State would have invested substantially in building the capacity for engagement and mitigation that would be needed for it to be more prepared for the next significant protest whenever it eventually came: Non-lethal crowd control equipment, protective equipment for security personnel, training in crowd engagement, operations, communications, ICT tools and equipment and so on.

Mr. Governor, the focus at this time should be on preparing to manage the situation that may unfold in our State in the next few days. This requires coordination with security agencies to develop a plan for engaging with protesters and deploying a well-resourced, multi-disciplinary, operations command center. The emphasis should be on de-escalation, while ensuring the right to protest is upheld, implementing firm but measured responses to deal with violent escalation and promptly addressing any casualties.

The current attempts to discourage the protest through moral suasion may ultimately fail, as there is a sense that leadership has, by its visible excesses, so undermined its own moral authority as to render such entreaties ineffective. On the other hand, threats and intimidation, including the recent hasty, curfew-like announcement that conveniently and disingenuously invokes community traditional beliefs like the Oro festival, (thereby demeaning them), may end up reinforcing the will of a people determined to make themselves heard through protest.

I use this medium to encourage us all, especially those in Lagos State that may choose to engage in the legitimate exercise of their constitutional right to peaceful protest, as well as security agency personnel, to remain law abiding and safety conscious.

Yours faithfully,

Funso Doherty