

Nina' Mba's Insider / Outsider's Account



Render therefore to all their dues; customs to Whom Custom; to fear to Whom fear honor to Whom honor (Romans).

The presentation of the award of national honors for 2001 was much tidier than that of October 1, 2000. The number— 235— may still be too high but it is sharply reduced from 330.

According to Special Duties Minister, Yomi Edu, the reduction is a deliberate attempt to confer on the national honors the dignity and respect it deserves.

This year there was no revision of the award made by a previous government (Abubakar). 751 awards were published in January 1999 one of which was received by Abubakar himself. The list of the awards was presented in order of the status of the honor. Last year the names were presented in random order. Though the bestowal of honors by any government is discretionary, it is to be hoped that henceforth they will be. Award of Nigerian national honors began in 1963, as an annual event celebrated on October 1 before 1963.

Nigerians received British honors for outstanding and distinguished contributions to national life in various fields. In 1962, Prime Minister Balewa appointed a national honors committee under the minister of Justice, Dr. Elias to devise a new system destined for the British. In 1963, two honors were created; the order of the Federal Republic, OFR and the Officer of the Order of the Niger OON; they were awarded to the Chief Judge and the Federal Attorney General.

Legislative backing was provided by the national honors, act No 5 1964 which took retroactive effect from October 1963,

As I noted in last week's column, October 1, 1964, was the first occasion on which national honors of the Federal Republic of Nigeria were awarded. In addition, to the OFR and OON, two higher awards were created; the Grand Commander of the Federal Republic GCFR and Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger GCON. The four regional premiers each received the GCON. Sir Louis Mbanefo, the chief judge of the Eastern region received the CFR and Brigadier Aguiyi-Ironsi got the OFR. Neither President Azikwe nor Prime Minister Balewa appeared on the list.

Before examining the 2001 honors list, it is salutary to note how few national honors had been awarded by the end of the First Republic apart from the aforementioned.

Louis Edet the first Nigerian Inspector – General of police (whom I discussed in a previous column) received the OFR but not his deputy, Kam Salem; Dr M.A. Majekodunmi, a senator and federal minister, was awarded the CFR, but not so the great majority of the other federal and regional ministers and top civil servants. Nor did the president of the senate from 1963, Dr A. A Nwafor Orizu received a national

Honor to whom

honour, yet in 2001, Senate President Anyim Pius Anyim, who has served only one year in the capacity, was awarded the nation's second-highest honor, GCON.

This seems premature and blurs the distinction between the office and the person. I am reminded of Machiavelli's dictum.

"For title do not reflect/honor on men but rather men on their titles."

The restoration of democracy implies a concomitant appreciation of the contributions of individuals from all

OFR as a loyal dedicated and courageous army ADC.

We do know why newspaper publishers, Alex Ibru and Sam Amuka were honored with OON. They and M.K.O. Abiola transformed the newspaper industry in Nigeria and helped create a viable fourth estate of the realm in Nigeria, in the 1980s.

It is impossible to visualize Nigeria without the Guardian and Vanguard. These honors are also belated but congratulations to them both.

Readers, I crave your indulgence to expand on our Uncle Sam. His achievement with the Vanguard is the most outstanding because he did not have the huge financial backing of the Ibru and Abiola conglomerates and because he is that rare species of journalist/publisher, not business person. Sam Amuka is passionate about his newspaper, but he is not partial or partisan and he does not interfere in the editorial policies of the Vanguard. He inspires his staff and clients' loyalty and commitment from them. Uncle Sam, as he is popularly called, recently won an award from the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) for his contribution to journalism and the newspaper industry.

Sam Amuka is fearless minded but sometimes eccentric. No other newspaper has had such a quixotic and variety stable of columnists— including yours truly. Several of them (myself excluded) write the very best commentaries in the Nigerian print media.

One novel twist to the presentation of the list is the category at the end for foreigners. Nine in number, non-Nigerians have received national honors before but have not been separately demarcated. In the U.K. honors list, which regularly features Nigerians and other nationalities, this differentiation is not recorded. Minister Edu explained the awards were given to those who have spent the better part of their years, energy and resources to contribute to the development and progress of Nigeria as the minimum recognition that this country can give for their contribution.

This is an apt description of the work of Rev. Father Dennis Slattery, founder of St Finbarr's College, Akoka and other schools and churches in Lagos since 1941. At age 85, this award is belated but mercifully not posthumous. I am also delighted that renowned missionary, Doctor Ann Ward and Nigerian wife educationist, Dolores Mohommed have been honored alongside the men of timbre and calibre, Faisal Elkhilil, Richard L. Kramer and A.P. Leventis, whose father was a close associate of the wordsmith, Minister K.O. Mbadiwe.

It is instructive that Mbadiwe never received an award in the First Republic (I believe he did in the second) nor did another federal minister then, Kola Balogun. It is fitting that Chief Kola Balogun, almost the last surviving minister of the national government of 1957, has been awarded the OON in 2001.

'In 2001, Senate President Anyim Pius Anyim, who has served only one year in that capacity, has been awarded the nation's second-highest honors GCON. This seems premature and blurs the distinction between the office and the person'

classes of society to the general good. At the presentation of the list of the awardees, Edu stressed that there were no geopolitical or federal character considerations in the choice of awardees.

However, he did not rule out consideration of gender; out of 226 Nigerian awardees, 25 are women which represent 11.3%. Only one, Ambassador Judith Attah, was bestowed with a CON (out of 29).

The 25 may be more than that of the previous years but is woefully unrepresentative of the talents and contributions of women in Nigeria. The female awardees include athletes, industrialists, judges, politicians, professors, religious leaders, as well as professional and business leaders. As usual, the national honors list includes some judges, top civil servants, vice-chancellors, traditional rulers and academics. This year belatedly, Nigeria honors its world-famous scientist, Col (Dr.) O. O. Ovadje, though equally famous Philip Emeagwali, who featured in President Clinton's speech in Abuja is conspicuously absent. Belated also, is recognition for 80 years old famous poet, Dr Gabriel Okara and novelist, administrator, academic and cultural activist, Professor V. Chukwuemeka Ike. Until the individual citations are released, we do not know the exact reason why Col. Sani Bello is honored but we do know that he served Major General Ironsi