

MOVEMENT FOR NATIONAL REFORMATION MNR-EUROPE

PRESS RELEASE

Chief Anthony Enahoro – The Departure of a Great Leader

17th December, 2010

It was with great sadness that I and the communities of Movement For National Reformation received the news of Chief Anthony (Tony) Enahoro's death on the 15th December, 2010.

He was old enough to have died, he came and left many positive marks and as such his departure is a celebration of a life well spent. Nevertheless, it has been very difficult to accept the fact that we will never see him again. Despite the gap in our age, he was first a friend before he was a leader to me. He was the most democratic Nigerian I have been privileged to associate with. He is one leader that will be greatly missed.



Chief Anthony Enahoro

He was one of the great leaders of the Nigerian independence movement, a core spirit in the drive for our independence. His first loyalty was to the freedom of humanity without any exception. Every other thing, be it his freedom, health, or even family came second. Thankfully, his rich mental ability ensured that if he had been born anywhere other than Nigeria he would still have been a leader fighting the same crusade. His genius was in his ability to observe and conceptualise his environment with great clarity, a rare quality among African intellectuals. On many occasions he would review his sadness about the African intellectuals who principally studied in abstract, and as such were unable to have strategic insight into how Africa could conquer its environment.

Born in the south western town of Uromi on July 22, 1923, he knew very early what he wanted in life. His enlightened father, a school headmaster wanted him to be a lawyer, but he chose politics and journalism - a choice which his father accepted. He became an ardent advocate of Nigerian independence from Britain at the relatively young age of 20. He was the president of the Nigerian Union of Students in 1943 and his political activities brought him into collision with the British colonial police who imprisoned him in 1946, 1947 and again in 1949.

He quite enjoyed his life as a journalist as it gave him a platform to continue his crusade for the emancipation of mankind. He indeed thrived under danger, as he once narrated rather animatedly of the four occasions when he escaped politically motivated assassinations – the type of danger that comes with journalism even in this modern era. Chief Enahoro became the editor of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's newspaper, the Southern Nigerian Defender, Ibadan, in 1944 at the age of 21, thus becoming Nigeria's youngest editor ever. He later became the editor of Zik's Comet, Kano, 1945-49; the associate editor for the West African Pilot, Lagos; and the editor-in-chief for Morning Star, 1950-53.

Principled, stubborn and a bloody risk taker, Chief Anthony Enahoro was hardly arrogant in spite of his enviable qualities. One often wondered how he blended the diametric qualities of a revolutionary mind with strong democratic values as well in addition to generally being a very nice human being. His mind was fertile enough to accommodate and spot good ideas irrespective of their origin. Age was never a barrier to him, if he thought you had a good idea he was always willing to listen. He would seek opinions and clarifications to ensure his eventual position on any issue was unassailable.

He was never afraid to take uncharted roads as he did when he left the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon, NCNC once he realised that the Great Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik), though still talking revolution, had succumbed to blackmail and had been forced to support the rather non forward looking Northern People's Congress (NPC). He unsuccessfully tried to seek his removal as party leader; some members said "there is no alternative to Zik".

The chemistry between him and Chief Awolowo (Awo) really clicked. He once told this writer that after his first meeting with Awo he was quite impressed by his power of administration and the strength of personal convictions; he concluded, based on that first impression that Awo would either succeed absolutely or be forced into political disaster.

In 1953, he moved the motion in the Federal Parliament for Nigeria's self rule which aimed at ending British rule. The self assured Anthony Enahoro had just returned from London during which time he also observed the British parliament in session. He was convinced that we in Nigeria could also do this without supervision from the British. He returned to discuss his aspiration for self-rule with Awo, and his able leader gave him

absolute support but with a warning "Tony ... realise the full implication of what we are getting into"

Subsequently, he became the Minister of Home Affairs and Information in Western Nigeria from 1954 to 1959. During the same period, he was also the Leader of the Western House of Assembly. From 1959 until 1963, he was a member of the Federal House of Representatives.

He served Nigeria's post-independence Parliament as Opposition Spokesman on Foreign and Legislative Affairs. In 1963, he was sentenced to 13 years imprisonment for his opposition to the British and the Caliphate's conquering agenda. The combination of British, the Caliphate and NCNC power had destroyed Action Group, his political base, and imprisoned among others Chief Awolowo and himself. Pardoned and released in 1966 their confidence was shaken. As he told me, Awo had been pressured to serve under Gowon, a major departure from their position and mission to provide for Nigeria a government that was as progressive as those provided by Prime Minister Nkrumah in Ghana. Chief Awolowo and the younger Chief Enahoro had become colleagues with mutual respect for each other; Awo had said he would not consent to any request unless Tony was ready to do the same. As soon as Tony was out of jail, many traditional rulers were deployed by the Federal government to put pressure on him to serve under the Gowon administration. Necessity forced him into that temptation; in spite of this he never changed his objectives. He served in a range of senior government positions, including Minister for Information, Labour and Culture. He was the Principal Federal Negotiator of the peace talks that ended the bloody 1967-70 Nigerian civil war and some of his behind the scene suggestions could probably have prevented the war.

In the 1980's and 1990's, Chief Enahoro emerged as a major critic of military rule in Nigeria and led the campaign for the restoration of an elected civilian government. He went beyond that when he became National Chairman for the Movement of National Reformation (MNR) on 5th December 1992 an organisation campaigning for the recognition of equity and justice amongst the nations which are the principal stakeholders in the Nigeria conglomerate. Having been the ultranationalist in the fight to get the British out of Nigeria; once again, he displayed great courage in calling for a restructuring of Nigeria along viable social, economic and cultural lines. He was informed by his strategic insight to the reality that the ethnic overbalance of political power to the advantage of the reactionaries would not allow Nigeria to make progress amongst the community of nations. Many people saw a contradiction here, but not me. His love for Nigeria and humanity was consistent. His first strategy which he pursued with zeal was that the nationalist agenda could easily be achieved at the centre, if a progressive regime could lay the foundation for progress and unity to flourish in a federated Nigeria. Once the place was occupied by reactionary forces who employed negative competitive strategies of cashing up with the internally conquered nationalities; first by slowing down their progress and then destroying their advantages, a strategy which is equally applied in Sudan with the support of the same colonial administrators such as Margery Perham, Lord Lugard and Governor Robinson; he realised that this

strategy had to change. He sought containment of the reactionary elements that were against progress in education, health, industrialisation and federalism by seeking a formula which allowed the conquered nationalities that sought progress to do so at a speed different from those of the reactionaries; a factor which could force the reactionaries to embrace progress. Posterity will one day appreciate the extent to which this thinking will help to prevent future and greater dangers to the existence of Nigeria, and prevent us from reaching the disastrous position which the activities of the Sudanese northern reactionaries place their country in today. Before his intervention, the Southern intelligential and the left movement who had abandoned ethnic influence on the belief that such power was being used to reinforce Nigerian nationalism, did not realise that they were actually empowering the Caliphate hegemony, thereby compounding the problem of an over balanced power and obstacles to progress and development. It took the effort of this great teacher in the school of life to re-educate and reorient our less conscious professors of political science, history and philosophy, whom, because of the gap between their knowledge and understanding, were capable of self destruction. It is a case that knowledge can be as dangerous as ignorance but the illusion of understanding is the most dangerous.

Following the annulment of the 1993 Presidential elections and seizure of power by army chief of staff, General Sani Abacha, the widely respected Chief Enahoro was named co-chair of the National Democratic Coalition of Nigeria, a leading pro-democracy organization. Now in his 70s, Chief Enahoro was detained and imprisoned without trial three times by the Abacha dictatorship before he made a daring escape from the country in 1996. Chief Enahoro, exiled, arrived in the United States, as the British authority would not grant him an asylum visa because of his previous extradition to Nigeria on felony charges on the basis of the outdated „The Fugitive Offenders“ Act of 1881 which had to be changed following his extradition.

I was the chairperson of the Campaign for Democracy in Europe at the time. Chief Biodoun Sowunmi who was the secretary and who had read my work on the analysis of the balance of power in Nigeria had suggested that I should meet with Baba Omojola, who was interested in having MNR established in London. It was on the basis of this that I first met with Enahoro. We got on really well after our exchange of ideas on the nature of the problem with Nigeria and the way forward. We developed a close relationship based on ideology. We both cherished this relationship to his end. The earlier announcement of his death a month back was met with relief when Mama, his wife called me to say she was in London and told me what had actually happened.

In March 1997 Chief Enahoro, together with Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka and other key leaders of the Nigerian Democratic Movement, were charged in *absentia* with treason by the Abacha dictatorship. After 3 years and 7 months in exile; after turning down the advice to come and stand for the leadership under a yet to be specified constitution and long after the NADECO senior members in exile had returned to take part in politics against his advice; he and his wife, Mrs Helen Imayuse Enahoro, returned to Nigeria.

Convinced that democracy as it was currently practiced in Nigeria could not provide solutions to the problem facing Nigeria, he encouraged the formation of Pro-National

Conference Organisation, PRONACO, as a platform on which to nationally sell the idea of the MNR.

Enahoro was never affected by vanity. He has no house overseas, in Lagos or Abuja. He never at any time abandoned his dream, not even when he served the Gowon Government or during his short time in the NPN when he wrongly thought as the Late Bola Ige too later did, that the Caliphate which did not trust Chief Awolowo could trust them with power. His refusal to be absorbed in Edo politics, to show absolute loyalty to Afenifere, to align MNR to have a working relationship to support Obasanjo in the PDP in order to organize a conference, were also not well understood even in the progressive camps. Some senior members of Afenifere would later claim that he supported Bola Tinubu against them. This is not what happened. He realized that while the senior Afeniferes became relatively weak after Chief Ajasin passed on and Bola Ige was no longer working with them, Tinubu, still with a degree of „bole kaja" attitude though not a leader, showed commitment and ambition. He never instigated him, though he must have been pleased with the improvement he made.

Chief Enahoro was never a happy man in his last years; he was saddened by the fact that his dream for a better Nigeria – a dream which he lived for at great cost, was never realized, and that things had deteriorated. He has left a great vacuum which will be very difficult to fill. However his ideas and values will live on. The best way to honour his memory will be to continue his great work. Given that both the south and the north now realise the importance of zoning, the coming elections present the opportunity to address the nationality question through a Sovereign National Conference. We must all work towards this achievement.

Adieu, the great one.

Chief Enahoro is survived by his amiable wife, Helen, and five children - Kenneth, Eugene, Bella, Victor and Gabriel. May they and we all have the heart to bear the loss of a father, a friend, and a great man.

All future announcements with regards to burial arrangements and the celebration of his vision will be announced on www.anthonyenahoro.org .

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Taiwo Akinola

Secretary

Taiwo Akinola was the Secretary of the Movement for National Reformation, Europe Chapter 1996-2010. Before then he was a former Chairman of Campaign for Democracy, Europe.