

40 Years after Funtua Declaration: Retrospection in Search of Lessons

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By Mahdi Garba

Evidently, in the world we live today, any event without even an iota of significance attached to isn't worthy of celebrating. This may not be due to our commitments and how our to-do list would always be filled up with frivolities but because we believe in religions that one day, we will surely account for everything we have given. From health, time, wealth and the list goes on.

If not for the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the world, a week or the whole of this month should be set aside to commemorate this day, April 5, 2020. It was on this day in 1980 that a young vibrant Ibrahim Yaqoub Zakzaky delivered a speech that had change and would continue to transform the lens through which many look at this world of from.

In his calm voice, Sheikh Zakzaky started with a hadith of the Holy Prophet narrated by Imam Ali (as) which said, "...whoever sees any government that takes injustice as her motto, that transgress the laws of Allah and despise the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah, that is oppressing the slaves of Allah, in such situation whoever fails to use his hands and mouth to fight this government, should know this, that Allah will make his abode same as that of the tyrant leader."

Afterwards, he linked the hadith with the Nigerian system of governance where he explained that the authorities in this country are transgressors and ruled cannot extricate themselves from the crimes of the former because they had made zero effort in confronting the unjust tyrants.

This lecture that has been tagged "Funtua Declaration" was greeted by mixed reactions. To some, what the revered Sheikh said was true but challenging the status quo is a herculean task. And to others, it is the opposite. While, some subscribed to all what had been said and were ready to implement it.

I don't want to dwell much on this. I gave the background to understand where and how the ideas of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria were officially pronounced. There is a need to underscore the fact that many activities related to the movement had been in place, prior to 1980.

Today, it is 40 years since this historic speech was delivered by Sheikh Zakzaky, then as an official of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN) but there are numerous lessons one can derive from that but it will not be imprudent to highlight the most obvious one.

First, since its inception, the Islamic Movement started with a clear objective, which is enforcing good and forbidding deeds. Four decades ago, Sheikh Zakzaky jogged the memory of friends, associates, and the entire Muslim Ummah on the need to reestablish the system of Islam revived by Sheikh Usman Danfodio which was perniciously abolished by the imperialists.

This brings us to the fact that, Sheikh Zakzaky didn't come with something alien to Nigeria, especially to the Muslims, whose ancestors had cloth and where lettered even before colonialism.

The message sounds too clear and simple, 'let the religion that took charge of ancestors' lives take control of ours'.

Second, doggedness of the leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria has further been revealed. The last four decades, for the Sheikh were characterized by different forms of dehumanization by authorities, including killing of his six sons, spending multiple of years under

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various detention facilities in the country, unjust killing of disciples and destruction of his and their properties among others.

Finally, four decades after, despite being subjected to forms of maltreatment, Sheikh has remained tenacious, never willing to give up on this cause. There's no gainsaying that after these years, Sheikh Zakzaky is becoming more popular among the masses as the man who would rescue them from the jaws of Nigerian draconian leaders. This cannot be unconnected with his stand in doing what he believes in and never seem to step back despite series of provocation.