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THIS DAY



## Nigeria: The Defeat of Imo Abortion Bill

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Lagos — With 13 against 1, the Imo State abortion bill euphemistically and craftily couched as women's reproductive right suffered a stunning defeat on the floor of the moderately-furnished Room 201 of the Imo State House of Assembly last Monday. It was a day every Imo citizen will live to remember. It was a day Ala Owerri rose up in unison to scuttle what they felt was a veritable monster threatening their rich cultural, traditional and religious heritage.

When the history of Owerri is re-written what happened in that city last Monday would be re-told as a victory of the superior Imo cultural values over the new global Western Cultural Revolution. It was a bright Monday morning. The commercial motorcyclists in Owerri having been banned by the government from plying Owerri roads the previous day, the roads were not congested that Monday morning. As early as 6.30 am all roads linking Wetheral road and joining Port-Harcourt road to the Imo State House of Assembly had already been encumbered by civil servants, traders, school children, market women, Pentecostals, Catholic priests, Anglican clergymen, religious sisters and community leaders defiantly marching to the Imo State House of Assembly chanting traditional and religious songs in one great act of solidarity.

Some of the protesters brandished placards that read: "Reproductive right is abortion", "children are our values", "Imo mothers love children" etc. Some of the protesters were non-citizens of Imo State who came all the way from Lagos, Anambra, Abia and Rivers States to witness what would have been the legalization of abortion, contraceptives and sterilization of women in Imo State.

Some prominent Imo citizens in the diaspora who could not come home telephoned early that Monday morning to vent their anger on the sponsors of the abortion bill. Seeing the crowd of peaceful protesters surging forward uncontrollably along Port-Harcourt road on that fateful Monday morning and ostensibly feeling that their political career was at stake, the members of the Imo State House of Assembly who appended their names to the vexed abortion bill drove straight to the residence of the Catholic Archbishop of Owerri Anthony Obinna, to sue for peace. Even though the Public Hearing on the abortion bill was slated for 12 p.m that Monday, as early as 7 am all the seats in Room 2001 had been completely occupied. Thousands and thousands of anxious protesters who could not gain entrance into the House of Assembly premises waited outside in prayers and solidarity songs.

The Imo abortion bill was heavily sponsored by the International Project Assistance Services (IPAS), a prominent abortion lobbying group in Nigeria. Prior to the defeat of the Bill, IPAS country representative in Nigeria, Dr. Ejike Orji was on air exuding confidence that the Bill would unstoppably sail through the House. In the last three years Dr. Orji and IPAS have been going round the nooks and crannies of Anambra and Imo States distributing instruments used in procuring abortion like Manual Vacuum Aspirators (MVA) and "Mama-Kit" to hapless Anambra and Imo women. Therefore it is no surprise that IPAS was behind the defeated Imo abortion Bill. IPAS sponsored the Bill in the Imo House of Assembly through Hon. Dr John Chukwuemeka Egbuchulam representing part of Mbaitoli Constituency, Imo State.

The most offensive section of the Imo abortion bill which, if passed, would have had effect of legalizing abortion in Imo State is section 6(1) (a) (b) (c) (2) (3) which states as follows: "The choice of the woman shall be paramount on matters of (a) control of fertility (b) Timing, number and spacing of their children (c) Choice of methods of fertility control and family planning. The Health of the woman shall be paramount to all considerations of reproductive right. The Commissioner of Health shall authorize medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest-and in all cases other where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the life of the mother"

To the uninformed, the above section 6(1) (a) (b) (c) (2) (3) may appear laudable, but for those conversant with the Western feminist sexual and cultural revolution and the anthropological cataclysm and deconstructions it has engendered, the coded words and euphemisms: "choice of the woman", "control of fertility", "timing, number and spacing of their children", "choice of methods of fertility control and family planning" in the said section 6(1) (a) (b) (c) (2) (3) have consistently and compulsorily been interpreted in all abortion countries as giving women the right to abortion and contraceptives. Section 6 (1)(a)(b) (c) was first articulated as an abortion right at the International Conference on Human Rights in Teheran. Since then it has consistently been interpreted as an abortion right in a number of Sub-International Conferences. At the International Conference on People and Development (ICPD), 1994, the phrase was hijacked and interpreted as giving women right to abortion. At the Beijing Platform for Action, 1995, it was again interpreted as giving women right to abortion.

In actual fact, section 6(1) (a) (b) (c) and (2), if passed, will give married pregnant women in Imo State the right to procure abortion throughout the nine months of pregnancy, with or without the consent of their husbands. The language of the section is substantially similar to article 16(e) of the controversial Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which also states that women are allowed: "to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children". Therefore both section 6 (1) (a) (b) (c) of the Imo abortion bill and Article 16 (e) of CEDAW guarantee any woman access to abortion throughout all the nine months of pregnancy.

But in his defence last Monday, Hon. Egbuchulam, through whom the Imo abortion Bill was sponsored, denied that the Bill had anything to do with abortion. He said that the word: abortion was never mentioned in the Bill and that he was being unnecessarily misrepresented and maligned. He said that the Bill was aimed at promoting the health of Imo women. He said that the Bill had merit and should be passed into law by the Imo House of Assembly.

In response, most of the pro-family and human rights organizations present at the Public Hearing adduced many evidence to fault Hon. Egbuchulam defence. For example, one of the human rights lawyer present at the Public Hearing submitted that even though the word abortion was not specifically mentioned in the Bill it was nevertheless an abortion Bill. He recalled that in 2006 Senator Daisy Ehanire-Danjuma (Edo-South) sponsored an Abortion Bill at the National Assembly under the euphemism: National Institute of Reproductive Health bill. Even though the word; abortion was not specifically mentioned in the bill, it was still dismissed by the National Assembly Health Committee for lacking in merit and for being incompatible with public morality. The lawyer also produced a copy of the publication of the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, New York, USA where section 6(1) (a)(b)(c) (2) (3) of the Imo abortion Bill was copied from. In the aforesaid publication the phrase: "on the number, timing and spacing of the children", was interpreted as requiring government to make abortion services legal, safe, and accessible to all women. According to the publications: "Abortion is a woman's choice", "Women are entitled to have access to all safe, effective means of controlling their family size, including abortion", "A woman has a right to make decisions regarding her own body", "Denying women access to abortion is a form of gender discrimination", "Safe abortions services protect women's right to health"

The only support which the Imo abortion Bill received last Monday came from National Council of Women Societies (NCWS). Led by their local President, the NCWS contended that the Bill if passed into law will liberate women from dissemination and oppression. But a dramatic thing happened after the Public Hearing. Some of the women in the entourage of the NCWS openly confessed that they were hired to come to Owerri and support the Bill and that they regretted supporting such an unworthy cause

The defeat of Imo abortion Bill last Monday is yet another triumph of reason. It is also a triumph of democracy and the popular will. In a democracy like ours sovereignty belongs and the people ought to wield that sovereignty from time to time in way that favours them.

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