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**HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE AND INTRUSION ON FREEDOM IN NIGERIA**

It is the duty of the Nigerian government to uphold the rights of its citizens. Nigeria has had a relatively poor record with protecting and upholding the rights of its citizens, human rights and the basic freedoms are regularly infringed upon by the government and non state actors. This study aims to cite some of the ethical issues surrounding the ongoing human right issues in Nigeria.

When it comes to human rights violations, the law enforcement and the military are by far one of the worst offenders. From infringement of citizens privacy to torture, their offences are often left unchecked due to poor accountability and ‘laws’ that enable such practices.

The Geneva convention of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977 contain provisions that absolutely prohibit torture and other cruel or inhuman treatment and outrages upon human dignity. Even though torture is considered such a horrid act that it is prohibited even in times of war. Nigerian military and law enforcement continue to employ these inhumane methods as means of extracting confessions and bribes from citizens. Former US President Abraham Lincoln once said’ “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him **power**.” The unchecked power of the Nigerian military and law enforcement over the citizens and feeling of being the enforcers of law, thereby making them *above* it is what makes the police act so entitled. But how does that explain the military? With the police the solutions seem simple enough, limit their authority and make them accountable to the public. The military on the other hand has no obligation to enforce laws. Their Job is to defend the country from external threats and insurgencies. In Ideal conditions the military should have little to nothing to do with the country’s citizens. But since the average Nigerian citizens have lost all faith in its traditional law enforcement, many consider the military as a “savior” from the incompetence of the police forces. This creates an even worse problem. The military officer now has power over the citizens AND the police. Depending on the military instead of the military is spells all kind of disaster because they are trained to respond to situations VERY differently from the police.

Prison is meant to be a place of reform. Yet even convicted criminals are not safe from abuse. Nigerian prisons and detention centres remain in life threatening conditions. Some of the issues that plague these prisons include, but not limited to overpopulation, shortage of food, poor medical care, unsanitary conditions due to infrastructural deficiencies and extortion by guards and prison officials. As of July 2018, the total designed capacity of the country’s prisons was 50,153, but at the time they held a total of 73,631 inmates. The effects of this gross overpopulation, coupled with the unmaintained 70-80 year old prisons and it’s not hard to imagine some consequences. Disease, malnutrition and death run rampant in a place meant to be a place of reflection and reform.

The importance of a free/independent press cannot be overstated in any independent republic. Yet the Nigerian government has, on multiple occasions ignored its established laws on freedom of expression, in attempts to silence or control the press. In Freedom House’s annual survey of media Independence, *Freedom Press 2018,* Journalists reported being subjected to threats and violence for critiquing the government. Security services such as the SSS and police sometimes detain or harass Journalists for reporting on topics like political corruption and security. One notable example is in the case of James Abiri, publisher for Bayelsa State based tabloid, *Weekly Source,* who was detained for over two years without trial, access to counsel, or family visitation. No official evidence was presented to back the charges held against him.

Libel/Slander is a criminal offence by Nigerian Law. Defendants are required to prove the truthfulness or value judgment in their news reports or editorials or face penalties. On the surface this may seem like a good way to prevent defamation. But after digging deeper, considering the subjective nature of “the truth” it can be argued that the laws only exists to protect the corrupt politicians and lawmakers.

According to the World Health Organization, one in every four Nigerians suffer from some sort of mental illness. It is therefore quit ironic (or fitting) that our mental health sector is one of the most poorly developed in the world. There are only eight federal neuropsychiatric hospital, all of which are plagued with the usual issues of massive budget cuts and under staffing. Thanks to all these factors combined with the crippling economy, societal expectations and the multitude of issues Nigeria has to offer, it comes as no surprise that Nigeria has the highest caseload depression, and ranks 15th in the world in suicide rate, according to the World Health Organization.

Mental health patients face a huge amount of societal stigma as a result of religion and tradition. When people are in dire need of professional mental support , friends and family will often seek help from unofficial rehabilitation centres. Thousands of Nigerians are chained and locked up in these “rehabilitation” centres, where they face all sort of abuse. Patients in the “rehabilitation” centres are chained, beaten and denied food and water in the name of fasting. The majority of these are Christian and Islamic “rehabilitation” centres. And thanks to the preconceived beliefs by many Nigerians that the causes of mental problems are spiritual, coupled with the failures of the countries mental health system, these “rehabilitation centres” are able to thrive.

Many of the people who run the traditional and faith based rehabilitation centres may genuinely care about the well being of the patients. But chaining and beating people strips people of their fundamental right to dignity and humane treatment. Physical violence and sexual abuse further damages the physical, sexual, emotional, mental, and social well-being of an individual and can amount to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Human rights are non-negotiable. The aim of this study was to identify some of the human rights violations faced by Nigerians in Nigeria. While it would be impossible to discuss all the human rights infringements in a 3 page study, the core message remains unchanged. Fundamental rights are what separates a sentient being from insentient life forms. Losing our fundamental rights means losing our humanity. Our humanity must be preserved if man is to survive on this pale blue dot and beyond.