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Law

19/law01/102

GST203

CHAPTER 8- CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY

A democracy can be defined as the government of the people, by the people and for the people according to Abraham Lincoln. It has been etymologically established that the word democracy is derived from the Greek word “demos” which means people and “kratos”” which means rule, together, the two words mean rule by the people. ‘The people’ is the basic element in a democracy it is the machine in which democracy works. Without the machine, there can be no democracy. That is, there can be no democracy without the involvement of the citizens which is why citizens are urged to participate in government to foster the growth of democracy. Sovereignty resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. They have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. Democracy assures basic fundamental rights for citizens like the right to vote, right to liberty, right to practice any religion or be irreligious, right to information etc. citizens must participate in in every event in democracy with full enthusiasm to ensure the survival of democracy

Citizenship is a formal legal identity (status) that the individual person inherits through a collection of legal rights and obligations controlling access to the scarce political, economic and cultural resources of the society. A citizen is a legally recognized subject of a state. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. Citizenship of a state may be acquired either by birth or by naturalization.

Chapter 111, section 25 1(a) of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria define citizenship as:

1. Every person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs to or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria
2. Every person born in Nigeria after the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria
3. Every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria

The relationship between the citizens and democracy is a symbiotic one. The citizens work hard to ensure democracy. Whereby, democracy also benefits the citizens in return.

The basic features of a democracy include

1. Guaranteed fundamental human rights
2. Freedom of the press
3. Existence of the rule of law
4. Independent and impartiality of the judiciary
5. Free and fair periodic election

All citizens are meant to understand that they have duties to the state especially to the development of democracy. They must recognise that democracy requires an investment of time and hardwork. A government of the people demands constant vigilance and support by the people. There is a saying in free societies that “you get the government you deserve”. for democracy to be successive, citizens must be active, not passive because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility and no one else.

Citizens in a democracy should understand that they have duties in which they must fulfil. They include:

1. A duty to vote: there is no point in a democracy in which citizens do not participate. voting is a way in which citizens choose the best and their preffered leader to the lead the state. citizen are meant to actively participate in elections at various levels of government If people are unhappy with their leaders, they are free to vote them out at an established time for election
2. A citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms that don’t promote a good image of the country but rather engage in constructive alternatives to public policies. He should not stir up racial or classs division within the state which may lead to bloodshed or chaos. He should not also cook up lies that will lead to chaos in the country.
3. A good citizen must desist from interference with the right of another person. His rights are limited to the rights of other people. He must be ready to contribute to the advancement of the nation such as joining the military to protect the nation or showing up in court when subpoeanead
4. 0A citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes, to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy. A democratic government makes provision for its citizens through the taxes they pay
5. A good citizen must obey the law. A democracy cannot exist in a lawless society. When citizens disregard the law, there will be anarchy and chaos in the community and with that, democracy cannot thrive. Therefore; it is the responsibility of the citizens to obey the law and cooperate with law enforcement officers to ensure a lawful society