



World Day of Prayer

“I Will Give You Rest: Come”

Matthew 11:28-30

Prepared by WDP Nigeria

March 6, 2026

Country Background

INTENTION

This program calls all to come closer to God and find rest in God. When we totally trust and have faith in God, our burdens become light, and we find rest. The program was written by a group of ecumenical Christian Nigerian women in response to the theme, *“I Will Give You Rest: Come”* (Matthew 11:28-30). We reflected collectively on this theme from the context of our experiences as Nigerian Christian women. We hope to inspire other women in the world to unite and pray as one people. As we trust God, our Burden Bearer, we become one body in Christ, receiving and bringing rest to the world.

I. The Tapestry of Nigeria

A. Threads of Geography: Land, Climate, and Natural Resources

Nigeria is located on the western coast of Africa, boasting a diverse geography that spans 910,770 km² of land and 853 km of coastline. The country's climate ranges from equatorial in the south to arid in the north, with a tropical climate in the central regions. Nigeria experiences two major seasons: dry and rainy (wet), contributing to its rich agricultural potential.

The nation's landscape is abundant, offering ample space for agricultural, industrial, and commercial activities. Nigeria's natural resources are vast and varied, including oil, natural gas, and a wealth of solid minerals. These resources have played a significant role in shaping the country's economy and development trajectory.

B. Patterns of People: Diversity, Ethnic Groups, Staple Foods and Occupations

Nigeria's population of over 211 million makes it the most populous country in Africa and the 7th most populous in the world. This rich demographic tapestry is woven from over 250 ethnic groups, each contributing unique cultural threads to the nation's identity.

The three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. The Hausa-Fulani predominantly reside in the northern region, the Yoruba are concentrated in the

southwestern region, and the Igbo occupy the southeastern part of Nigeria. Beyond these major ethnic groups, Nigeria is a mosaic of various other ethnic communities spread across different regions. These include the Ijaw, Tiv, Kanuri, Nupe, Itsekiri, Efik, and many more, each with its own distinct cultural practices, languages, and social structures.

The diversity is reflected in Nigeria's linguistic landscape, which boasts over 500 indigenous languages. Among these, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba stand out as the major local languages, while English serves as the official language, bridging communication across this multifaceted nation.

Nigeria's diverse geography and regional variations have influenced the cultivation and consumption of different staple foods across the country. In the northern regions of Nigeria, particularly the Sahel savanna, millet and sorghum are widely cultivated and serve as primary staple crops. In the southeastern part of Nigeria, cassava and yam are the primary staple foods.

In the Niger Delta region, where agriculture and fishing are prominent, seafood plays a significant role in the local cuisine. The consumption of these staple foods not only sustains the Nigerian population but also reflects the cultural diversity and culinary traditions across different regions of the country.

Traditionally, Nigerians have been known as skilled agriculturists and traders, with these occupations forming the backbone of many communities. The country's agricultural practices vary by region, influenced by local climates and traditions. This evolution of occupations reflects Nigeria's journey from a primarily agrarian society to a more diversified economy, while still maintaining strong ties to its cultural roots.

C. Weaving History: Ancient Roots and Colonial Threads

Nigeria's history is a rich tapestry woven from ancient civilizations, diverse migrations, and colonial influences. Long before the country's modern boundaries were drawn, the region was home to sophisticated societies that left indelible marks on its cultural landscape.

One of the earliest known civilizations in the area was the Nok culture, which flourished between 1000 BC and 500 AD. The Nok people, renowned for their terracotta sculptures, laid the foundation for iron smelting in West Africa. Their legacy can still be seen in the artistic traditions of modern Nigeria.

In the southwest, the Ife civilization emerged around the 11th century. Known for its naturalistic bronze and terracotta sculptures, Ife became a major center of politics, spirituality, and artistry. The Yoruba people, descendants of Ife, established several city-states, the most prominent being the Oyo Empire, which at its peak controlled a vast territory.

The north saw the rise of powerful Islamic empires. The Kanem-Bornu Empire, dating back to the 9th century, became a center of Islamic learning and commerce. The Hausa city-states and later, the Sokoto Caliphate, further shaped the region's political and cultural landscape.

In the southeast, the Igbo people developed a unique, decentralized system of governance. Their society, characterized by village democracies, stood in contrast to the more hierarchical structures of their neighbors.

European colonization further influenced the settlement patterns in Nigeria, as colonial powers established their presence and administered different regions.

The transatlantic slave trade significantly impacted Nigeria's population composition. Millions of individuals from various ethnic groups were forcibly taken from Nigeria and transported to different parts of the Americas, resulting in the African diaspora. The return of some descendants of these slaves, commonly known as Afro-Brazilians, Afro-Cubans, and Afro-Trinidadians, among others, has contributed to the cultural diversity in Nigeria.

The pivotal year of 1914 saw the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by British colonial administrator Lord Frederick Lugard, creating the entity known as Nigeria. This artificial creation brought together diverse peoples with distinct histories, cultures, and political systems under a single administration, setting the stage for the complex dynamics of modern Nigeria.

D. Spiritual Landscape: The Religious Mosaic of Nigeria

Religion plays a significant role in shaping the cultural and social fabric of Nigeria. The country is known for its religious diversity, with various religions coexisting and influencing the lives of its people. The major religions in Nigeria include Christianity, Islam, traditional African religions, and a small percentage of adherents to other faiths.

Christianity, introduced through European missionaries during the colonial era, has grown to become a major religious influence across Nigeria. Christian denominations, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal, and various independent churches, have established a significant presence. The impact of Christianity extends beyond spiritual practices, playing a vital role in the development of education and healthcare infrastructure through missionary schools and hospitals. Christian values have also influenced societal norms, family structures, and moral frameworks in many Nigerian communities. The Christian community in Nigeria has a diverse range of practices and expressions, incorporating elements of indigenous culture and traditions. For example, in some regions, syncretic forms of Christianity have emerged, blending Christian beliefs with traditional African religious practices.

Islam, particularly prevalent in the northern regions of Nigeria, was introduced through trade and cultural interactions with Arab and North African merchants. The majority of Nigerian Muslims are Sunni, though they belong to various Islamic sects and organizations. Islamic education, provided through Quranic schools (madrasas), plays a crucial role in imparting religious knowledge and moral values to Muslim children. Nigeria has witnessed the rise of Islamic movements and organizations that advocate for Islamic education, social welfare, and political participation. These movements seek to promote Islamic values and protect the interests of Muslims.

Traditional African Religions, predating both Islam and Christianity, encompass a wide range of indigenous beliefs and practices that vary among different ethnic groups. These religions involve the worship of ancestral spirits, nature deities, and the practice of traditional rituals and ceremonies. Despite the influence of Christianity and Islam, traditional African religions continue to persist in many communities.

In addition to these major religions, Nigeria is home to a small but significant number of adherents to other faiths. These include followers of African traditional religions specific to certain ethnic groups, such as the Yoruba religion (Ifa), the Igbo religion (Odinani), and the Efik religion (Abasi Ibom). Furthermore, Nigeria is also home to small communities of other traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Judaism. While numerically smaller, these religious communities contribute to the religious diversity and pluralism of Nigeria. They are primarily composed of expatriates, foreign residents, or Nigerians who have embraced these faiths through conversion or marriage.

Religious coexistence and tolerance are essential aspects of Nigerian society, as the country strives to maintain peace and harmony among its diverse population. Interfaith dialogue, religious organizations, and government initiatives have been instrumental in fostering understanding, promoting religious tolerance, and mitigating religious conflicts.

II. The Heartbeat of the Nation

A. Economic Rhythms: Industries, Challenges, and Opportunities

Nigeria stands as the largest economy in Africa, with a nominal gross domestic product (GDP) of \$448 billion. The nation's economic pulse is driven by a diverse range of sectors, with oil and gas playing a significant role, accounting for about 10% of its GDP. However, Nigeria's economy is not solely reliant on oil; the agricultural sector is a major source of employment, contributing about 20% to the GDP.

The services sector, including telecommunications, financial services, and trade, is rapidly growing and is expected to significantly contribute to Nigeria's economic future. Despite these strengths, the country faces economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, infrastructure deficits, and a need to diversify its foreign exchange sources.

Nigeria's economy is characterized by both opportunities and challenges. While the country possesses significant natural resources and a large, growing population, it also grapples with macroeconomic and microeconomic issues that need addressing to achieve sustained and inclusive growth.

B. Political Pulse: Independence, Governance and Civic Participation

Nigeria's political landscape has evolved significantly since gaining its independence from British colonial rule on October 1, 1960. The road to independence was paved by nationalist movements and political activism led by prominent figures such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Ahmadu Bello.

Prior to independence, Nigeria experienced a complex history of regionalism, colonial administration, and ethnic tensions. The country was divided into three major regions: Northern, Western, and Eastern, each with its own distinctive political, economic, and cultural characteristics.

The first President of Nigeria was Nnamdi Azikiwe, who assumed office on October 1, 1963, following the country's transition to a republican constitution. Azikiwe was a key figure in the struggle for independence and was associated with the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), a political party that championed the interests of the Nigerian people.

Other notable presidents since Azikiwe:

General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975): Gowon assumed power following a military coup in 1966 and was associated with the National Liberation Council (NLC). His regime was characterized by the Nigerian Civil War, which took place from 1967 to 1970.

Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983): Shagari, a member of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), became the first civilian president after a period of military rule. His presidency was marked by economic challenges, political controversies, and ultimately ended with a military coup led by Major General Muhammadu Buhari.

General Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985; 2015-2021): Buhari, a former military head of state, was elected as a civilian president under the All Progressives Congress (APC) party in 2015. He was re-elected for a second term in 2019. Buhari's presidency has focused on tackling corruption, improving security, and implementing economic reforms. His tenure as president ended on May 29, 2023.

Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007): Obasanjo, a member of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), served as the first civilian president after a period of military rule. His presidency was characterized by efforts to promote democratic governance, economic reforms, and infrastructure development.

Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015): Jonathan, also a member of the PDP, assumed the presidency following the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. His tenure witnessed challenges such as the Boko Haram insurgency, economic issues, and political controversies.

Bola Ahmed Tinubu (2023-date): Chief Bola Ahmed Adekunle Tinubu is the 6th and current president of Nigeria. He was the governor of Lagos State from 1999 to 2007; and senator for Lagos West in the Third Republic. Tinubu a member of the All Progressives Congress (APC), was elected to replace Buhari on February 25, 2023 after the national elections.

The political landscape in Nigeria has been marked by a multi-party system. Since 1999, Nigeria has maintained democratic rule, albeit with challenges including corruption, economic inequality, and security issues.

Women's participation in politics has gradually increased over the years, although significant gaps persist. Efforts have been made to address gender imbalance in Nigerian politics, including the implementation of the National Gender Policy of 2006. Additionally, the introduction of affirmative action measures, such as the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, aims to increase women's representation in political offices. However, challenges remain in ensuring transparent governance, equitable representation, and effective policy implementation.

C. Foundations of Society: Education and Healthcare

Education plays a vital role in shaping Nigeria's social landscape. Access to quality education equips individuals with knowledge, critical thinking skills, and a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Nigeria has made progress in increasing access to education, with efforts focused on achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of providing inclusive and equitable education for all. However, challenges remain, particularly in remote and marginalized areas.

The Nigerian government has made efforts to improve healthcare infrastructure, expand access to healthcare services, and address health challenges facing the population. The National Health Act of 2014 established a framework for universal health coverage and outlined the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in the healthcare system.

In Nigeria, several health issues require political attention and action. One of the primary concerns is the high burden of communicable diseases, including malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. Another area of concern is non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancer. Maternal and child health is another significant area where political commitment is crucial. Nigeria has one of the highest maternal and child mortality rates globally.

Nigeria has made efforts to expand health insurance schemes to provide financial protection and improve access to healthcare services. Transparent and accountable governance systems can help curb corruption, ensure the efficient use of healthcare resources, and foster public trust in the healthcare system.

D. Cultural Expressions: The Kaleidoscope of Nigerian Creativity

Nigeria's rich cultural tapestry is woven from the traditions of over 250 ethnic groups, each contributing unique elements to the nation's vibrant arts scene. This diversity is reflected in Nigeria's music, dance, visual arts, and theater, which have evolved over centuries and continue to influence global culture today.

Nigerian music reflects the country's ethnic diversity, with each group contributing unique styles and instruments. The Yoruba are known for their talking drums, the Hausa and Fulani for the goje lute, and the Igbo for the ekwe wooden slit drum. Other traditional instruments include flutes, xylophones, and percussion instruments, all playing crucial roles in storytelling and cultural preservation. Contemporary Nigerian music evolved from 1920s palm-wine music and highlife, blending traditional and Western influences.

Dance in Nigeria is closely tied to music and often serves ritualistic or ceremonial purposes. Each ethnic group has its own traditional dances, such as the Yoruba Bata dance, the Hausa Koroso, or the Igbo Aladinma. These dances often tell stories, celebrate harvests, or mark important life events.

Visual arts have a long and rich history in Nigeria. The country is renowned for its bronze and terracotta sculptures, particularly those from the ancient kingdom of Benin, dating back to the 13th century. The Nok culture, which flourished between 1000 BC and 500 AD, produced some of Africa's oldest known terracotta sculptures. Nigerian visual arts also include vibrant textile traditions, such as Adire (indigo-dyed cloth) among the Yoruba, and elaborately decorated calabashes. In the 20th century, artists like Ben Enwonwu and Bruce Onobrakpeya gained international recognition for their paintings and prints that blended traditional African aesthetics with modern techniques.

Theater and storytelling have always been integral to Nigerian culture. Traditional forms include elements of dance, music, and drama. In the mid-20th century, playwrights like Wole Soyinka (who later won the Nobel Prize in Literature) and Ola Rotimi developed a distinctly Nigerian theatrical tradition that often addressed social and political issues.

Contemporary Nigerian arts continue to evolve, with artists across all mediums gaining international recognition. The film industry, popularly known as Nollywood, has become the second largest in the world in terms of annual film productions. Nigerian literature, from the works of Chinua Achebe to contemporary authors like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, has significantly impacted world literature.

III. Women: The Backbone of Nigeria

A. World Day of Prayer: A Testament to Women's Unity

The World Day of Prayer (WDP) movement in Nigeria stands as a powerful testament to the unity and strength of Nigerian women. Introduced in 1961, the movement has grown to encompass women from various Christian denominations across the country, fostering ecumenical cooperation and spiritual solidarity. Since its inception, WDP has provided a platform for addressing social, political, religious, and economic issues affecting families and communities.

1. Origins (1961-2018)

The World Day of Prayer movement in Nigeria began in 1961, introduced by Lady Eudora Olayinka Akanu-Ibiam of the Presbyterian Church. It was initially embraced by member churches of the Christian Council of Nigeria, including Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and others.

In 1962, the Interdenominational Christian Women (ICW) organization was formed in Lagos, which later became known as the Interdenominational Christian Women Association (ICWA).

This organization played a crucial role in the early development of the WDP movement in Nigeria.

The movement spread gradually across Nigeria, reaching different states and regions throughout the decades that followed.

2. Becoming a Writer Committee and Strengthening our National Committee (2017-2021)

In August 2017, at the WDPIC International Meeting in Brazil, WDP Nigeria was selected to be the Writer Committee for 2026, with the theme, *I Will Give You Rest: Come* (Matthew 11:28). Truly, grace found us in 2017, as WDP Nigeria was still in its early stages of national organization. Despite our fledgling status and organizational challenges, we were honored with the invitation to become a Writer Committee.

In May 2019, under the leadership of Mrs. Adejoke Backo (Mama Backo), a national committee for WDP Nigeria was formed. On May 28, 2019, representatives from various Christian denominations gathered to elect national officers, with Evang. Dame Florence Nnenna Uche elected as the first National Chairperson.

The inauguration of the elected pioneer national officers took place on March 6, 2020, at the Christian Ecumenical Center in Abuja, just as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to impact Nigeria. The ceremony was conducted by His Eminence Dr. Samuel C. K. Uche, then Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigeria, assisted by other prominent religious leaders from various denominations.

Shortly after this hopeful beginning, the world entered a period of lockdowns and restrictions due to the pandemic. For nearly two years, WDP Nigeria's activities were severely limited, with celebrations held quietly and in small groups. However, as the pandemic restrictions eased, the movement began to regain momentum and grow stronger.

3. The Writing Process and Continuing Growth (2022-2024)

As the time came to start the writing process, WDPIC provided crucial support through the Executive Director, Ms. Katie Reimer, who we affectionately refer to as our "angel." From April 28 to May 5, 2022, Ms. Reimer and Mrs. Queen Chisha (the WDP African Regional Representative) visited Lagos to conduct a workshop on writing materials for the 2026 observance. This seminar, provided free of charge, was instrumental in guiding our writing process and covering expenses for participants to join from across Nigeria.

The visit was marked by warm hospitality, and a highlight was the thanksgiving service held on April 30, 2022, at the Methodist Church of the Trinity in Lagos, presided over by His Eminence Dr. Samuel Chukwuemeka Uche and other prominent church leaders. This visit not only equipped us for our role as a Writer Country but also strengthened our connections with the international WDP community.

Since then, WDP Nigeria has continued to grow as an organization by establishing zonal structures across the country. The North-Central zone was created on May 5, 2022, with Pst. Deborah Adaji as coordinator. The South-West zone was inaugurated on November 30, 2023, with Mrs. Odejayi Taiwo as coordinator. The South-East zone was established on June 20, 2024, led by Mrs. Nneoma Mary Ugomma Onwukwe. The South-South zone was created on June 22, 2024, with Dr. Mrs. Patience Nwachukwu as coordinator.

Plans are underway to establish North-East and North-West zones, aiming to complete the national structure before the 2026 celebration. The movement has gained significant ground, with celebrations now occurring at national, state, and local church levels across Nigeria.

B. Pillars of Strength: Prominent Nigerian Women

Recognizing the achievements of prominent Nigerian women acknowledges their invaluable contributions to society, both within Nigeria and globally. Their successes serve as powerful testimonies to women's potential, breaking down stereotypes and challenging traditional gender roles. By highlighting these accomplishments, we provide role models for younger generations and promote gender equality across all sectors.

Torchbearers in Politics and Governance

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is a prominent economist, diplomat, and twice-serving Finance Minister of Nigeria who became the first woman and African to serve as Managing Director at the World Bank. In 2021, she made history again as the first woman and African to be appointed Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Her key achievements include negotiating Nigeria's debt relief with the Paris Club of creditors and advocating for global economic development, poverty reduction, and gender equality.

Amina Mohammed serves as Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, where she chairs the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Previously Nigeria's Minister of Environment, she has been instrumental in promoting sustainable development and gender equality worldwide. Her leadership in environmental conservation and climate change initiatives has earned global recognition, making her a powerful voice for African women in international governance.

Obiageli Ezekwesili, an economist and educator, has served as Vice President of the World Bank's Africa division and Nigeria's Minister of Education. She co-founded the #BringBackOurGirls movement, advocating for the rescue of the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram. Her work in education reform and transparent governance has established her as a leading voice for social change in Nigeria.

Trailblazers in Business and Entrepreneurship

Folorunsho Alakija, Executive Vice Chairman of Famfa Oil Limited, stands as one of Africa's richest women and a prominent businesswoman. Her leadership has driven Famfa Oil to remarkable success in Nigeria's oil industry, while her philanthropic initiatives focus on women's

rights and economic independence. Through her various platforms, she advocates for women's empowerment and provides opportunities for aspiring female entrepreneurs.

Ibukun Awosika, chair of First Bank of Nigeria and founder of The Chair Centre Group, has broken barriers in corporate governance and entrepreneurship. Her contributions to business leadership have earned her widespread recognition, while her mentorship programs have supported numerous young entrepreneurs. As an author and motivational speaker, she consistently advocates for women's leadership in business and corporate environments.

Toyin Tofade made history as the first black president of Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences in 2022. Her distinguished career includes significant contributions to pharmacy education and leadership roles in professional organizations worldwide. Her work on diversity, equity, and inclusion task forces has helped create more opportunities in healthcare education, while her service in the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy and International Pharmaceutical Federation has influenced global healthcare policy.

Luminaries in Literature and Arts

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has earned global acclaim for novels like "Half of a Yellow Sun" and "Americanah." Her work masterfully addresses themes of feminism, identity, and Nigerian history, while her TED talks and essays have sparked important conversations about gender equality. Her storytelling has won numerous literary awards and established her as one of Africa's most influential contemporary voices.

Nike Davies-Okundaye has transformed Nigerian art through her work as a textile artist, educator, and curator. As founder of Nike Art Gallery, she oversees one of Nigeria's largest collections of African art, while actively empowering local artists and nurturing youth creativity. Her international exhibitions have brought Nigerian artistic traditions to global audiences.

Visionaries in Science and Technology

Francesca Nneka Okeke, a physics professor at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, has made groundbreaking contributions to understanding Earth's magnetic field and climate science. Her research earned her the L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Award, establishing her as a role model for women in STEM fields. Through her work and mentorship, she continues to inspire new generations of African scientists.

Ndidi Nwuneli combines social entrepreneurship with agricultural innovation as co-founder of Sahel Consulting Agriculture & Nutrition Ltd and founder of LEAP Africa. Her work focuses on transforming African agriculture and improving food security through innovative practices. She has successfully empowered smallholder farmers while developing sustainable solutions for nutrition challenges across the continent.

Champions in Sports

Blessing Okagbare has represented Nigeria in multiple Olympic Games and World Championships, specializing in sprinting and long jump. Her numerous African records and

international achievements have inspired young athletes across the continent, demonstrating the power of determination and excellence in sports.

Tobi Amusan made history in 2022 as the first Nigerian to become a world champion and world record holder in athletics. Her remarkable achievement of setting the 100m hurdles world record of 12.12 seconds, along with multiple gold medals in international competitions, has established her as a leading figure in global athletics.

Asisat Oshoala, playing as a forward for FC Barcelona Femení, has been named African Women's Footballer of the Year multiple times. Her success in international football continues to inspire young girls across Africa to pursue sports careers, breaking down gender barriers in athletics.

Voices of Change in Social Activism and Philanthropy

Hafsat Abiola-Costello, founder of the Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND), dedicates her work to advancing democracy and human rights in Nigeria. Through her organization, she empowers women and youth through education and leadership training, continuing her family's legacy of democratic activism.

Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi has championed gender rights as co-founder of the African Women's Development Fund and former First Lady of Ekiti State. Her campaigns against gender-based violence and authored works on women's empowerment have advanced women's rights across Africa, while her leadership has inspired numerous gender equality initiatives.

Amanda Azubuike achieved the rank of Brigadier General in the U.S. Army in 2022, breaking barriers for women of Nigerian heritage in military leadership. Her career in public affairs and strategic communications demonstrates excellence in traditionally male-dominated fields, inspiring women globally to pursue leadership roles.

Women of Faith

Foluke Adenike Adeboye ("Mummy G.O.") has significantly contributed to the growth of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) worldwide. Her Feast of Esther initiative empowers women across the globe, while her support of educational and healthcare initiatives has improved countless lives through faith-based action.

Funke Felix Adejumo leads the Funke Felix-Adejumo Foundation, combining her roles as pastor, author, and motivational speaker to empower women and children. Her dynamic preaching, published works, and conferences inspire women to fulfill their potential, while her foundation provides crucial support through scholarships and healthcare initiatives.

Evangelist Dame Florence Uche has revolutionized women's participation in the Methodist Church Nigeria and beyond. Her leadership in World Day of Prayer activities nationally has given voice to ecumenical cooperation among Christian women, while her continued activism in retirement demonstrates lifelong commitment to faith-based women's leadership.

C. Challenges and Triumphs: The Journey of Nigerian Women

Women and girls in Nigeria face numerous challenges that stem from deeply rooted gender discrimination and inequality. Despite progress in some areas, cultural norms, traditional practices, and societal expectations continue to hinder the full realization of their rights and potential.

Gender discrimination affects education and employment, and political representation. Girls often receive fewer educational opportunities than boys, leading to lower literacy rates and limited career prospects. In the workplace, women face discrimination in hiring, promotion, and pay, despite laws prohibiting such practices. As more women become primary breadwinners for their families, they bear the double burden of managing both household responsibilities and income generation without corresponding changes in societal attitudes.

Early marriage, particularly in rural and northern areas, forces girls as young as 12 or 13 into marriages that cut short their education and expose them to health risks. Marital violence and rape often go unreported due to cultural stigma and inadequate legal protections, while the absence of comprehensive domestic violence legislation in some states compounds these issues.

Widows in Nigeria face particularly challenging circumstances. Many are subjected to cruel and degrading traditional practices upon their husbands' deaths, including drinking water used to clean their husbands' corpse to "prove" their innocence. Property rights are frequently violated, with in-laws forcefully taking assets that rightfully belong to the widow and her children. Some widows are even "inherited" by their late husband's male relatives, a practice that disregards their autonomy and right to choose. During burial ceremonies, they may be forced to sleep on the floor, have their heads shaved, or wear specific mourning clothes for extended periods.

Addressing these interconnected challenges requires a multifaceted approach including legal reforms, education, economic empowerment, and changing societal attitudes. Progress depends on both government action and grassroots initiatives, with men serving as active allies in the fight for gender equality. Only through comprehensive, sustained effort can Nigeria create a more equitable society for all its citizens.

IV. Nigeria Through the Seasons

A. Spring of Independence: Birth of a Nation

Nigeria's spring of independence dawned on October 1, 1960, as the country emerged from British colonial rule. This period was marked by hope and optimism for the newly sovereign nation. Key figures like Nnamdi Azikiwe, who became the first President in 1963, led the country into this new era. The fresh national anthem, "Nigeria, we hail thee," echoed the spirit of unity and pride in the fledgling nation.

B. Summer of Growth: Economic and Cultural Flourishing

The 1970s brought a summer of economic boom, primarily driven by the oil sector. This period saw rapid development in infrastructure and a burgeoning middle class. Culturally, Nigeria experienced a renaissance, with the rise of Afrobeat pioneered by Fela Kuti, and the emergence of globally recognized literature from authors like Chinua Achebe. The new national anthem, "Arise, O compatriots," adopted in 1978, reflected the nation's growing confidence and call to service.

C. Autumn of Challenges: Confronting National Issues

The following decades brought an autumn of challenges. Nigeria grappled with political instability, including periods of military rule. The Biafran War (1967-1970) left deep scars on the national psyche. Economic challenges emerged with fluctuating oil prices and the need for diversification. Social issues like ethnic tensions, corruption, and inequality came to the forefront. However, this period also saw the rise of civil society movements and a growing call for democratic governance.

D. Winter of Resilience: Overcoming Adversity

The late 20th and early 21st centuries represented a winter of resilience for Nigeria. The country returned to democratic rule in 1999, facing the challenge of rebuilding institutions and fostering national unity. Despite obstacles such as the Boko Haram insurgency and economic recessions, Nigeria showed remarkable resilience. This period saw significant strides in areas like maritime, telecommunications, entertainment (with the rise of Nollywood), and technology start-ups.

E. The Eternal Cycle: Continuous Renewal and Hope

Today, Nigeria stands in a cycle of continuous renewal and hope. The country faces ongoing challenges such as climate change, economic diversification, and social inequality. However, it also boasts a young, dynamic population driving innovation in technology, arts, and business. The revival of the original national anthem in 2024 symbolizes a reconnection with the foundational values of unity in diversity.

As Nigeria navigates its present challenges, it draws strength from its rich history, diverse cultures, and the indomitable spirit of its people. The nation continues to evolve, striving to fulfill its potential as a leader in Africa and on the global stage. Through each season of its journey, Nigeria demonstrates an enduring capacity for renewal, adapting to new realities while holding onto the dream of a united, prosperous, and peaceful nation.

V. The Nigerian Spirit: Echoes of Identity in Anthem and Pledge

A. National Anthems: Evolving Voices of a Nation

Nigeria's national anthems serve as powerful symbols of the country's evolving identity and aspirations. Since independence, the nation has had two anthems, each reflecting the spirit of its time and the country's changing self-perception.

1. First National Anthem (1960-1978, reinstated in 2024):

*Nigeria, we hail thee, Our own dear native land,
Though tribe and tongue may differ, In brotherhood we stand,
Nigerians all, and proud to serve Our sovereign Motherland.*

*Our flag shall be a symbol That truth and justice reign,
In peace or battle honoured, And this we count as gain,
To hand on to our children A banner without stain.*

*O God of all creation, Grant this our one request,
Help us to build a nation Where no man is oppressed,
And so with peace and plenty Nigeria may be blessed.*

This anthem, used from 1960 to 1978, emphasizes unity in diversity, pride in the nation, and a prayer for a just and peaceful Nigeria. Its lyrics highlight the country's commitment to brotherhood despite differences in "tribe and tongue."

2. Second National Anthem (1978-2023):

*Arise, O compatriots,
Nigeria's call obey,
To serve our fatherland
With love and strength and faith.
The labour of our heroes past
Shall never be in vain,
To serve with heart and might One nation
bound in freedom, peace and unity.*

*O God of creation,
direct our noble cause
Guide our leaders right
Help our youth the truth to know
In love and honesty to grow
And living just and true
Great lofty heights attain
To build a nation where peace and justice shall reign.*

The second anthem, used from 1978 to 2023, calls Nigerians to service, patriotism, and nation-building, highlighting the sacrifices of past heroes and the aspiration for a country guided by truth and justice.

In 2024, under the leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Nigeria made the decision to revert to the first anthem.

Both anthems continue to play crucial roles in Nigerian national life, sung in schools, at official functions, and during national celebrations. They serve as daily reminders of the country's history, diversity, and shared goals, aiming to foster a sense of unity and purpose among Nigerians, despite the challenges of nation-building in a complex, multicultural society.

B. The National Pledge: A Commitment to Unity and Service

Composed in 1976 by Professor Felicia Adebola Adedoyin, a respected Nigerian academic and linguist, the National Pledge reflects Nigeria's post-civil war aspirations for unity and patriotism. The pledge reads:

*I pledge to Nigeria my country,
To be faithful, loyal and honest,
To serve Nigeria with all my strength,
To defend her unity,
And uphold her honour and glory,
So help me God.*

Recited daily in schools and at national ceremonies, this pledge serves as a unifying force, providing common values that transcend ethnic, religious, and regional differences. Its enduring relevance speaks to its success in capturing fundamental national aspirations and fostering a shared sense of commitment to Nigeria's welfare.

VI. Facing Tomorrow: Nigeria's Challenges and Hopes

A. Climate Change: Adapting to a Changing World

Nigeria faces significant environmental challenges due to climate change. Rising temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns affect agriculture and water resources, while sea level rise threatens coastal communities. In the north, advancing desertification leads to loss of arable land and increased competition for resources.

In response, Nigeria has developed comprehensive strategies, including ratifying the Paris Agreement in 2017 and implementing a National Climate Change Policy. The country focuses on renewable energy development and participates in the Great Green Wall project, to combat desertification. Through these initiatives and climate-resilient agricultural practices, Nigeria works to protect its environment and ensure food security for future generations.

B. Economic Tides: Navigating Global Markets

Nigeria, while maintaining Africa's largest economy, faces complex economic challenges. Though oil exports have traditionally driven growth, this dependence has created vulnerability to global price fluctuations. The nation actively works to diversify its economy through agriculture, services, and manufacturing, while addressing significant infrastructure deficits in transportation and power supply.

Despite economic potential, widespread poverty and youth unemployment remain pressing concerns. These challenges call for continued focus on sustainable development and job creation to ensure Nigeria's economic growth benefits all its citizens.

C. Social Evolution: Bridging Divides and Fostering Unity

Nigeria's diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural landscape creates both challenges and opportunities for social cohesion. The nation continues to work towards fostering unity among its diverse population while addressing critical needs in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Efforts to promote gender equality and increase women's participation across all sectors of society remain crucial to this evolution. The rapid growth of urban areas strains existing resources, while security concerns, particularly in the northeast, impact social stability and development.

Yet Nigeria demonstrates remarkable resilience. With Africa's largest youth population, abundant natural resources, and vibrant growth in technology and entertainment sectors, the country shows great promise. Through continued focus on good governance, economic diversification, and social inclusion - including women's empowerment - Nigeria moves steadily toward realizing its potential as a more prosperous and unified nation.

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