

Gowon faults setting up of Oputa panel



By Austin Ogwuda

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ASABA—FORMER Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon yesterday in Asaba faulted the setting up of the Oputa panel saying that only God could bring about the much-needed reconciliation in the country. He also once again tendered a public apology to the people of Asaba for the mass killing of their kinsmen during the civil war, pointing out that he did not approve of the killings. Gowon who spoke with newsmen shortly after the South-South Zonal national prayer rally said "I don't know why you (Nigeria) went to Oputa panel." But he expressed confidence that the programme which he is currently championing - "Nigeria Prays" would eventually bring about the needed true reconciliation.

An emotional Gen. Gowon also tendered another public apology over the massacre of Asaba indigenes during the pogrom at the Asaba Township Stadium, venue of the rally.

His words: "It came to me as a shock when I came to know about the unfortunate happenings that happened to the sons and daughters of this state especially of this (Asaba) domain. I felt very touched and honestly I referred to it (killings) and ask for forgiveness being the one who was in charge that time. Certainly, it is not something that I would have approved of in whatsoever. I was made ignorant of it, I think until it appeared in the papers. A young man wrote a book at that time."

It just happened seven hours ago when I was visiting the state for our nation prayers, I took the opportunity of being with his Royal Majesty (Asagba of Asaba) to make this public apology on behalf of myself and government of Nigeria at that time and to ask for forgiveness as we have to look at the future. I feel very touched when we came this time to hear his majesty refer to it again."

Bishop Noel Ikeakanam of Faith Liberation Church Asaba gave the exhortation and called for total repentance among the church leaders, the political class and the ruled to enable God forgive the nation. Many men of God attended the rally among them is Pastor Ayo Dritsejafor of word of Life Bible Church Warri.