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Egbetokun, Cybercrime Act and the Sham Tr

By **EditorialBoard** - March 6, 2025



The repressive machinery of the Nigerian state has once again barred its fangs at Omoyele Sowore, leader of the Take It Back global movement (TIB). The Nigeria Police Force slammed Sowore, who is also National African Action Congress (AAC) with a **17-count cybercrime charge** at the Federal High Court granted bail to the tune of ₦10 million, but his passport was seized. The substantive case on his application for the release of his passport towards enforcement of his right to freedom of movement was dismissed by the Federal High Court, Abuja.

Several governments since the military dictatorship have wielded the state's instruments of repression over the years, to no avail. This has gotten more intense since 2019 when he launched the Take It Back movement the time and illegally held for four months on treason charges.

He was released from this illegal detention only due to sustained nationwide and global protests just before the 2023 elections, when he was allowed to travel to other parts of the country to attend to AAC.

The bone of contention with the current travail he faces has to do with the illegitimate extension of the Inspector General of Police. According to the Nigeria Police Force, Sowore's **description of the "handle account"** on "the 13th day of December 2024", "was intended to cause a breakdown of the police force under Section 24(1)(b) of the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc.) Act, 2015, as amended (2024)." This is a clear violation of the law.

President Bola Tinubu, Mr Egbetokun and the Nigerian police may have dragged Sowore to court to defend themselves to the court of history where they sit in the dock of infamy. There are a number of charges on a level against them.

These include the use of a so-called cybercrime prohibition and prevention law to repress victims of those in power, the very question of the illegitimacy of the continued stay of Mr Egbetokun at the top of the underlying interests of the presidency in going down this dark road.

Cybercrime Act: an instrument of "suffocating repression"

The Cybercrime Act has been "a tool for repression, not protection". As the *Punch* stated its activist and publisher Omoyele Sowore by the police once again underscores the growing use of the law for repression." The national daily added that Sowore's arrest "is far from an isolated case", pointing to the legislation "against activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens for expressing dissenting views."

It would appear that members of the Take It Back movement are being particularly targeted at the status quo.

Comrade Olamide Thomas, a rank-and-file nurses' leader and member of the Take It Back movement, was arrested by Tinubu, president Tinubu's son in December.

Olumide Ogunsanwo (aka SeaKing) a popular TikTok star who is also a Take It Backer was arrested for making disparaging statements about Enoch Adeboye, General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God worships in this church and appears to be an ordained pastor there.

The Act has been used to prosecute at least 25 journalists over the last ten years. These include the Take It Back movement, such as Agba Jalingo, publisher of the *Cross River Watch*. He was charged with the crime of misappropriation of ₦500 million and pointing out that the then governor's sister-in-law had stolen the money. After spending 179 days in jail in the first instance, and then another six months, he was charged with cybercrime and terrorism levelled against them.

The Cybercrime Act is antithetical to citizens' enjoyment of democratic rights won through the struggle against military dictatorship. It must be scrapped. TIB has rightfully condemned the Act and called for its repeal.

The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has also **dragged the federal government** to the ECOWAS Court over "the repressive use of the Cybercrimes (Amendment) Act of 2020 against dissenting views.

It will be recalled that the ECOWAS Court "ordered Nigerian authorities to stop using section 39 of the Cybercrimes (Amendment) Act to prosecute anyone on the grounds of insulting or stalking officials online" in a landmark judgment on 25th May 2023. The Act that Omoyele Sowore is being charged with is a

Egbetokun's tenure: history, legality, legitimacy and the 2027 elections

The issues at stake which the government does not want Sowore and critical minds to unpack are the history of IGPs tenure elongation before now, the peculiarities of this particular case and the amendments to the law to enable Egbetokun stay as IGP till September 2027.

The police is the most visible and publicly used repressive apparatus of the state. The nature of the police (and its related economics of corruption) have underscored the importance of those in the top echelons of the state. In recent years, controversy in one form or the other around the tenure of the IGP has been the norm. It is in the interests of the government in power and desires of serving IGPs to continue "chopping" But this is not an earlier point.

Public outcry made President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Major general Muhammadu Buhari extend the tenures of IGPs Mohammed Abubakar and Ibrahim Kpotun Idris in 2013 and 2015 respectively.

Then in 2021 Major general Buhari extended the **tenure of Mohammed Adamu** as IGP by the Nigerian Bar Association. Again in 2023, he also elongated **the tenure of Usman Alkali Baba**, but he insisted that it was against the spirit and letters of the law. Condemnable enough as Buhari's actions are, the tenure elongations -in relation to when those IGPs were to leave office - anywhere near Egbetokun.

Section 18(8) of the Police Act, 2020 clearly stated that "every police officer shall, on recruitment, be appointed for a period of 35 years or until he attains the age of 60 years, whichever is earlier". But the law was amended in 2024 when he would be 60 years old.

Section 7(6) of the Act equally says "the person appointed to the office of the Inspector-General of Police shall be a police officer. But, considering the fact that the person so appointed is first and foremost a police officer, the tenure of the person shall be four years or until he attains the age of 60 years, whichever is earlier".

elongation of service. Tinubu wanted no ambiguity in pursuit of his nakedly self-serving agenda.

Mr Tinubu appointed Egbetokun as IGP within a few weeks of being sworn-in as president. A year later, in July 2024, barely two months before Egbetokun's sixtieth birthday. Like his predecessors, (retired), Bola Tinubu wants an IGP who is loyal to him. But even more than them, he wants someone who will do his bidding, if need be even before loyalty to the state; especially for the 2027 presidential election.

We must recall that Egbetokun, who was a deputy superintendent of police at the time, was appointed in 1999, even before he was sworn in as governor of Lagos state.

They do not only have a long history, Tinubu can also be rest assured about the ruthlessness of the squad's principal's interest. He was at different times Squadron Commander of the anti-riot MOPOL and the Rapid Response Squad (RRS) in Lagos state.

The RRS was created as Operation Sweep by Colonel Buba Marwa who is currently chair of the National Defence Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). At the time he was governor of Lagos state after serving as governor of Borno state, he delivered the parcel bomb that killed the *Newswatch* editor, Dele Giwa, on 19 October 1986, under the leadership of General Abdulsalam Abubakar Babangida, the military president.

Tinubu changed the name of Operation Sweep to the Rapid Response Squad, because of the brutality of Operation Sweep made the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) seem like the spirit change.

It is an Egbetokun from both the traditions of this blood-soaked monstrous squad and the "black and white" to have as the chief police man for the rigging galore we should be expecting in two years' time.

Conclusion

The All Progressives Congress has shown itself no better than the PDP. And with each successive election, it has become more authoritarian, as it makes living more challenging for the vast majority of the people. It is a shame that the APC is not more committed to the people's interests.

Speaking the truth to power and challenging the illegitimacy of the regime's actions such as the cybercrime act to suppress contrary views are essential. These are crucial for defending the people with blood from the jaws of military dictatorship. That is the significant of the politics of Omoyele Sowore for our liberation.

Working-class people's organisations and the radical left must demand that Egbetokun step down. The APC's strategy towards the 2027 elections is to serve as Tinubu's bulldog for re-election. It is a shame that the APC Party would rather condemn critics of the extension instead of standing up against it.

The cybercrime act must also be done away with. It must be jettisoned in line with the ruling against Omoyele Sowore must be dropped forthwith, and his right to enjoy the constitutional rights of free expression and conscience. duly respected by the Nigerian state.

by Bàbá AYÉ

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