

END SARS RHYTHMS

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Society of Young Nigerian Writers (SYNW) &
International Human Rights Art Festival (IHRAF)
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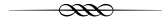
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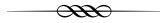


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EDITORS' NOTE



Literature and arts owe society the duty not just to entertain and educate but also to document the history of the people as well as mirror and x-ray the society. The collaborative efforts of the Society of Young Nigerian Writers, SYNW, and the International Human Rights Arts Festival, IHRAF, to harness the thoughts, feelings and responses of Nigerian artists and creative writers and the international writing community on the theme of police brutality, assault and battery by organizing a national poetry contest tagged #EndSARS National Poetry Competition, 2020 is indeed timely and commendable. The bold step to publish some of the outstanding entries is no doubt as important as that of collation, selection, recognition and award of very remarkable pieces from deserving participants in the EndSARS National Poetry Competition, 2020.

Globally, police are generally known for their corrupt tendencies such as bribery, extortion, high handedness, brutality and human rights abuses, sometimes leading to extra judicial killings and so on. The Nigeria Police has not been an exception to this global anomaly. In 2017, a Twitter campaign using the hashtag #ENDSARS by Nigerians to demand the disbanding of the Special Anti Robbery Squad, SARS unit of the Nigeria police by the Nigerian government started. The government responded by introducing some changes in the Special Anti Robbery Squad,

SARS such as the creation of the Federal Special Anti Robbery Squad, FSARS.

In October, 2020, there were renewed calls for the disbandment of SARS generally. This time, the online and social media campaign was followed by widespread protests, marches, demonstrations, online activism and civil disobedience in some cases. These took place in almost all cities of Nigeria with solidarity protests in other parts of the world as well. Finally, the federal government of Nigeria was compelled to dissolve the SARS unit on 11th October, 2020. The unit was however, quickly replaced with the creation of the Special Weapons and Tactics unit, SWAT. The protest was unique for its high patronage by mostly young Nigerians and later took the dimension of a movement that soon expanded to include demands for good and accountable governance amongst others.

Members of the Nigerian Army allegedly opened fire on peaceful protesters at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos state on the night of 20th October, 2020. According to Amnesty International, at least twelve protesters were killed in cold blood during the shootings even though some sources say the figure was higher. All these happened at a time when the global community was brought to its knees by the Corona virus, COVID-19 pandemic. Another intriguing part of the protest was the massive looting of warehouses across many states in Nigeria. Relief materials and palliative meant to be shared to the poor and venerable during the COVID-19 lockdown and restriction of movements were hoarded and stashed in various warehouses in many states. On the discovery of those undistributed food items in the midst of hunger, severe economic conditions and hardship, warehouses were broken into and large consignments of food items and palliatives were

carted away by the masses whom the authorities described as 'hoodlums'. One can therefore, imagine the emotional and psychological national and international atmosphere from which those poems in this anthology were written.

Working on entries received in the intriguing EndSARS National Poetry Competition as judges and subsequently as editors has been a journey on a cacophony of emotions and of torrents of harrowing and captivating experiences. As living witnesses to excesses of the Nigeria police, bad governance, decaying infrastructure and corruption, working on more than a hundred entries on the above theme was indeed emotion laden. It was a difficult decision, discarding any entry as everyone wrote evidently from horrible encounters and personal experiences with members of the Nigeria Police.

Selecting few entries for award out of more than a hundred beautiful entries from very creative and talented poets across international borders is by no means an easy task as earlier stated. The pain of having to eliminate some fine entries to arrive even at a longlist of twenty, let alone a shortlist is by far one of the most excruciating and unsung aspects of the job of a judge and editor of a contest whose central theme touches on a global and sensitive aspect of our shared humanity. It is therefore, a huge source of consolation to the judges and editors for the opportunity to publish additional pieces out of the vast pool of amazing entries received during the call for entries to the EndSARS National Poetry Competition in 2020.

We are happy therefore, for this unique opportunity to make available for your reading pleasure, a significant number of pieces out of the more than a hundred entries we received. It is also hoped that this modest gesture will placate and further console

an additional number of those who sent in entries for the competition. We also hope that this compilation provides a rich reading resource to every one of our readers.

Terseer Sam Baki
Wole Adedoyin
January, 2021