



PRESS STATEMENT

**BY
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NIGERIA HIGH COMMISSIONER
TO THE UNITED KINGDOM**

**ON THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY
OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA,
29 MAY 2009**

**Excellencies,
Gentlemen and Ladies of the Press,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I am pleased to welcome you to this Press Conference, to commemorate ten years of democracy in Nigeria, with particular reference to the Administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua which came to power on 29 May 2007. It is very easy to take for granted what has been achieved in the last ten years of democracy. For the first time in the history of our beloved country, we successfully transited from one civil administration to another, despite its imperfections that are widely recognised by the President himself. We have thus enjoyed uninterrupted democracy for ten years, having succeeded in putting the military and other anti-democratic forces at bay.

There is concrete evidence of growing democratic culture in the polity, exemplified by the restoration of the fundamental institutions of a democratic state such as the Executive, National Assembly and the Judiciary, all operating under the doctrine of separation of powers, checks and balances. Civil democratic rule has offered the Nigerian people ample opportunities for periodic elections, popular participation in the political process, respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, and the enhancement of potentials for economic choices. In addition, the opening of democratic space has allowed institutions of the State such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the

Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission (ICPC), among others, to function.

The present Administration, building on the democratic foundations laid by the previous its predecessor, has taken concrete steps on the following:

- i. Adherence to the rule of law and due process in the conduct of Government business, thereby reining in impunity.
- ii. Respect for the outcome of the judgements of various Election Tribunals, even in judgements that adversely affected the ruling party.
- iii. the establishment of the Uwais Committee on Electoral Reforms and the presentation of the seven-point electoral reform bill to the National Assembly for the enactment into law or amendment of the relevant provisions of the Constitution and the Electoral Act of 2006.
- iv. Enhancement of relations between the Executive and the National Assembly, through consultation, thereby stabilising the political system rather heating up the polity.
- v. Unfettered freedom of the press.

In the economic realm, the following measures are noteworthy:

- i. The consolidation of the gains of debt relief by deploying increased resources for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

- ii. improved macro-economic management, building on the efforts of the past Administration, such as the banking consolidation, relatively low inflation rate, monetary and fiscal policies and external reserves now at \$45 billion. Current fall in external reserves arises from the fall in the price of crude oil and production shortfalls as a result of the situation in the Niger Delta.
- iii. Prompt policy response to the global financial meltdown, on the basis of the fundamentals of the Nigerian economy. This has led to a relatively light impact of the credit crunch on the Nigerian economy.
- iv. Adoption of private-public-partnership in the construction of physical infrastructure including the establishment of the Infrastructure Concession and Regulatory Commission (ICRC). In this regard, the following major roads are being concessioned: Lagos-Ibadan Express Way, Benin-Ore-Shagamu, Kano-Kaduna-Abuja roads.
- v. Rehabilitation of major roads in the six geopolitical zones, the contracts of which have been signed and mobilisation paid for the work to start in earnest. Similar efforts are on-going to modernise the railways across the country.
- vi. reforms of the oil and gas sectors, particularly the NNPC and the operations of the oil companies, among others.

In the power sector, you will recall the recent conclusion of a major agreement with the General Electric of the United States, including similar agreements with other reputable companies elsewhere. The objective is to achieve the generation and distribution of 6000 megawatts of electricity by the end of 2009, and the attainment of 10,000 megawatts by 2011.

Anti-corruption

Government's commitment to combating the canker worm of corruption remains unshaken. In deed, it has been frontloaded by the present Administration which has shown zero tolerance to corruption practices. As you are aware, several cases are under investigation, especially those involving the electricity and power sectors, among others.

It is important to underscore the fact that the EFCC under its present leadership of Mrs Farida Waziri, has achieved in 11 months, more than one third of what was achieved by her predecessor in four years.

Niger Delta Situation

As you may recall, the present Administration has adopted a proactive policy towards the resolution of the challenge posed by the Niger Delta. This was illustrated by the creation of the Ministry of the Niger Delta, to channel more funds into the region and promote youth empowerment. The establishment of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta the report of which is being

considered by the Government. In addition, Government adopted a general amnesty for militants under which they are required to lay down their arms, be re-skilled and encouraged to enter into negotiation with Government. The Joint Military Task Force has been re-invigorated with a new mandate and unified operational command.

To tackle the challenge of criminality, illegal bunkering, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping and brigandage in the region, which are acts inimical to law and order and responsible governance, the Joint Task Force has had little option than to respond to these challenges in a robust and professional manner. In this regard, Government deeply regrets civilian casualties and displacement that have occurred as result recent military operations.

Foreign Relations

Government has remained faithful to the fundamental objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy, as contained in the Constitution. As we pursue these objectives, government has recognised the need to review and revamp the institutional machinery and policy direction in the sphere of Nigeria's international relations.

In this regard, Nigeria Missions abroad are being re-engineered and empower to respond more effectively to the yearnings and aspirations of Nigerian's abroad in line with Citizen Diplomacy. The overall goal of Government, in all these, is to make Nigeria one of the top twenty leading economies of the world by year 2020.

For us at the High Commission, you are aware of ongoing fundamental reforms, particularly in the area of Immigration, Consular and Information service delivery. Our objective in this regards is to ensure that we leave the High Commission, at the end of our tour, better than we met it. That is my vision as Nigeria's Principal Representative in the United Kingdom.

Gentlemen and Ladies of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen

Democracy is a long and tortuous journey. While the yearning and aspiration of Nigeria's for quick dividends of democracy are legitimate and understandable, I urge you, my country men and women to demonstrate a greater understanding of the matrix and complexities of the challenges that we face. The solution requires resources with which we are abundantly endowed; the capacity which we continue to seek and rigorous planning which is the hallmark of this Administration.

I thank you for your attention.