

**NIGERIA: LORD WALLACE SPEECH AT DINNER FOR GOLDEN
JUBILEE, PARK PLAZA HOTEL, 1 OCTOBER**

Thank you, your Excellency, for your warm words and for hosting this splendid event this evening.

May I firstly say on behalf of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, who deeply regret not being able to attend in person, what a pleasure it is to be here tonight to represent them and to celebrate the golden jubilee of Nigeria's independence with you all. It is also my sad duty to send the condolences of the Foreign Secretary, and the Prime Minister to all those affected by today's explosions in Abuja. The bombers' cowardly actions deserve nothing but condemnation. The UK stands side by side with Nigeria in determination to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The Foreign Secretary has told me how pleased he was to have met His Excellency Foreign Minister Ajumogobia here in London on Tuesday, when the two Ministers discussed how we as responsible nations can best work together through international fora to face issues such as the scourge of terrorism. The two Ministers had just hours before returned from New York, where they had dined together at a meeting of

Commonwealth Foreign Ministers. Nigeria, as a leading member, will be a key partner as we work to strengthen the family of nations.

In our celebrations tonight, I would like to recall the words of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigerian Prime Minister at independence. On 1 October 1960, the day that Princess Alexandra of Kent, representing Her Majesty The Queen, delivered the Constitutional Instruments that declared Nigeria an independent nation, Tafawa Balewa spoke of “laying the foundations of a lasting friendship between our two nations”. I am glad to say that tonight’s event stands testament that those foundations have held firm for half a century.

I want to speak a little about the fifty years of friendship that we have built. Your decision to mark such an important anniversary in London, is a significant demonstration of the importance which both our countries attach to our partnership. But ours is not just a relationship driven by politicians. Instead, it is defined by our shared cultural links, our history, our willingness to work together to shape the future, and by the many links between our citizens.

In January this year, British and Nigerian Ministers held an event here in London to celebrate the achievements of the Nigerian Diaspora in the UK. I see in this room tonight many luminaries of the Nigerian community who have enriched British society, through their achievements in the fields of law, business, sport, politics and the arts.

And, I'm glad to say - in these troubled economic times - that the Nigerian Diaspora has played a huge part in the trading relationship between Nigeria and the UK, which continues to grow from strength to strength. British investment in Nigeria amounts to some £1billion per year, and Nigeria is the UK's second largest export market for goods in sub-Saharan Africa.

Many of the people here tonight are a part of that story, and will work to improve those trading links, as well as the exchange of experience and skills, yet further. As the Prime Minister has made clear since taking office, Britain is open for business and we believe we should remain Nigeria's natural gateway to the globalised economy. Both our governments need to continue working hard to improve the business

environment in our countries, so that entrepreneurs and companies can thrive.

The world has changed a great deal since 1960 - what came to be known as 'the year of Africa'. That year, the eyes of the world were on the continent, as 17 nations left colonial pasts behind them. In 2010 the same is true, as the world watched the first football World Cup held on African soil, in an expression of the exuberance, hospitality and creativity of all Africa.

Like the UK, Nigeria herself has come a long way since 1960. It has not always been a smooth journey. Nigeria bears the scars of civil war, periods of military rule, and has seen both the blessing and the blight of her own abundant natural resources.

During those times, as with all friendships, there have been disagreements between us. We may not always have seen eye to eye, but the ability to be honest and speak frankly to one another – as so often among Commonwealth partners - has meant that our relationship has endured, and flourished.

Nigeria now stands at another critical juncture in her history. The great Nigerian author, Chinua Achebe, once said that “Democracy is not something you put away for ten years, and then in the 11th year you wake up and start practicing again”. It is 11 years since Nigeria’s return to democracy. Next year, Nigerians will again return to the polls. President Jonathan has a great opportunity and responsibility to deliver the best elections in Nigeria’s history. The people of Nigeria, to their eternal credit, have shown that they have no wish to ‘put democracy away’. And I can promise Nigeria that the UK, and our partners in the international community, will offer our support and encouragement to help Nigeria continue along her democratic journey.

The global political climate of 2010 is very different from that of 50 years ago. Five decades after the ‘winds of change’ blew through the continent, African nations have taken their place as full participants and shapers of global institutions. I am glad that the UK has such a close friend in Nigeria, to face the range of today’s global challenges: the economic downturn which has threatened the stability of economies across the world, nuclear proliferation, the scourges of international crime and terrorism, climate change, conflict and poverty.

Nigeria has a particularly crucial role to play in the shaping of international affairs, as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. The United Kingdom stands ready to work closely with Nigeria at this important time.

Nigeria, as Africa's most populous country, and one of its most influential, needs to set an example of strong and measured leadership. Its continent and region expect it. Nigeria has often provided the will and authority to help address some of the toughest challenges in West Africa: most recently in Guinea and Niger, but since 1960 Nigerian peacekeepers have carried out over 20 missions, ranking 4th among the UN's troop and police-contributing countries. They continue to carry out hugely important work in Liberia and Darfur. This is an achievement of which you should be rightly proud.

Nigeria, the economic powerhouse of West Africa, is also showing its leadership as an emerging economy, which continues to grow. Nigeria's attendance at the London Summit in 2009 with the nations of the G20 is a demonstration of the country's economic importance.

Here in the UK we are learning the lessons from the financial crisis, and are restructuring our regulatory systems to make sure that we do not lend, live or borrow beyond our means. Through the reforms Nigeria is making, for example in the banking system, it is showing leadership and responsibility. It will be ever more important for Nigeria and the region that the Nigerian government maintains the drive to ensure fiscal discipline.

I have spoken this evening of the values which characterise the new Nigeria and its role in the world of 2010; of leadership and of responsibility. These qualities are what I believe the United Kingdom and Nigeria offer to the world, as equal partners and friends within the Commonwealth of Nations.

While today was a moment for reflection and remembrance, tonight we also celebrate not just 50 years of Nigerian independence, but fifty years of friendship between our two countries. I would ask you now to raise your glasses, and a toast, to the next 50 years.