

ADDRESS BY

HIS EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT CLAUDE L. BRANSON
AT THE 7TH GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE NATIONAL WAR
COLLEGE, ARDUA, SATURDAY, 24th JULY, 1967

I am happy to be here with you on the occasion of the 7th Graduation Ceremony of the National War College.

I am pleased to see the efforts of the current as well as past Staff of this College who have worked to bring about the objective of establishing this Institute of Military Studies. And I want to congratulate the 51 distinguished graduates who are graduating today.

Let me also welcome new graduates who are entering the service and encouraging them in the history of our nation. The training of their graduates is in line with the original objective of this Institute. "When a democratic government is called upon to manage the affairs of a free world, it must be able to do so with the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness. Symbolic words are needed, by the new generation,

THE 7TH GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

to give a new meaning to the words of our forefathers. The public will expect the military to lead the way in the development of a new and more effective way of life. The military must be able to do so with the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness.

To you graduates of this year, I have a special message. You must uphold the complete independence of the military as an institution with patriotic and professional values. The military must be able to do so with the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness.

In my message to you on 27th May 1967, I said that the military must be able to do so with the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness. The military must be able to do so with the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness.

A nation of government must be able to do so with the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness. The military must be able to do so with the highest standards of efficiency and effectiveness.

THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE
THE GRADUATION COURSE OF

**ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO
AT THE 7TH GRADUATION CEREMONY OF THE NATIONAL WAR
COLLEGE, ABUJA, SATURDAY, 24TH JULY, 1999**

I am happy to be here with you on the occasion of the 7th Graduation Ceremony of the National War College.

Let me commend the efforts of the current, as well as past Staff of this College who have managed to keep alive the objective of establishing this flagship of military training institutions. And I want to congratulate the 51 distinguished Officers who are graduating today.

Let me also welcome new graduates to one of the most exciting and challenging times in the history of our nation. The timing of their graduation is in tune with the original objective of this institution which says : "Within a democratic framework, to relate the higher management of defence to the broader national interest". Symbolic words, indeed, for the new dispensation.

Seven years ago, 1993, to be exact, the first graduates of this institution passed out into a Nigeria that had just been plunged into darkness. July 1993 would have been a couple of weeks after ignominious 'June 12', when the public image of the military suffered a dramatic drop into abysmal depths where it has remained odious until the recently concluded transition programme.

To you graduates of this year, I have a special message :

You must spearhead the complete redemption of the image of the military as an institution with patriotic men and women of honour, integrity and professionalism. The new dispensation demands nothing less. And I dare say, that is the expectation of Nigerians, and indeed the whole world.

In my inaugural address on 29th May, 1999, I made it clear that military incursion into government in post-independent Nigeria had ended in a complete disaster, for Nigeria and for the military itself. No matter how noble the intentions of the pioneer coup makers may have been, the prolonged involvement of the military in the administration and management of the state had aggravated the problems of political instability and deepened corruption within our society.

A succession of governments produced by undemocratic processes have severely stunted the nation's political evolution. Furthermore, military autocracy concealed certain societal grievances and cleavages that would have been more meaningfully addressed had they been properly aired within a democratic environment.

The consensus today is that, in the long run, the country's political development and her quest for lasting unity and enduring stability would be best achieved through dialogue and debate that are part of the democratic dispensation. The political class must be allowed to make its mistakes and learn from its failures, as is evident from the history of successful democracies elsewhere in the world.

The damage caused by military rule extends further than the stultification of political life.

We are all familiar with how it virtually destroyed the fabric of what used to be rated among the nation's most respected institutions. To start with, the very act of coup making made nonsense of the hierarchical order which is an essential element in the military.

Military incursion into politics also led to the withdrawal of many capable officers from purely military duties into political assignments, thereby exposing them to sycophancy and temptations that were antithetical to the ethics of the military profession. This deployment of officers in non-military roles, deprived the Services of the knowledge and experience of such officers, in their various areas of specialisations.

With some officers tied down to political assignments, the tempo of professional training and other important military activities was drastically compromised. Continuous involvement in politics also introduced into the Services the deplorable practice of officers actively lobbying and campaigning to be appointed to "visible" and "lucrative" positions. The perception, rightly or wrongly, that certain officers were unduly favoured by such appointments, while their equally competent colleagues were continuously neglected, only bred envy, suspicion and resentment among officers and men. With time, professionalism, cohesion and *esprit de corps* were severely undermined. Political appointment became synonymous with corruption and indiscipline.

This destruction of all the values that make the Armed Forces what it ought to be, has been continuously lamented by all those who knew what a glorious institution the Nigerian Armed Forces used to be. From 1990 to date, a number of top military officers, dead and alive, have decried the professional degeneration brought upon the Armed Forces by their meddling in politics. In particular, during the period from 1993 to 1998, the Armed Forces became more decadent than any of us could ever have imagined, propped up by an unprecedented degree of state terror on the one hand, and undisguised sycophancy on the other. Public respect for the institution, within and without the country, sank to an all-time low.

It was against this background that I indicated in my inaugural address that "a great deal of re-orientation has to be undertaken and a re-definition of roles, re-training and re-education will have to be done to ensure that the military submits to civil authority and regains its pride, professionalism and tradition". As a first step in these processes, the Administration accepted the retirement of those senior officers who sought to disengage from the services voluntarily. Then the Administration directed the compulsory retirement from service of other officers who had held political appointments between 1985 and 1999 and whose continued retention in the services was considered no longer conducive to the grooming of a new and truly professional Armed Forces for Nigeria.

The challenge of nurturing the new Armed Forces, however, goes far beyond the retirement of a few officers. This exercise must also be accompanied immediately by a new doctrinal orientation on the part of officers and men, by a sustained commitment to funding, equipping and re-training of Services and by scrupulously observing the norms of good governance which constitute the most effective bulwark against both military intervention and civil anarchy. Only by meeting these three conditions can we begin to assume that we have effectively outgrown any possible relapse into authoritarian misrule.

First, as you prepare to confront the challenges of the 21st century, you must embrace in its totality, the fundamental doctrine of military subordination to civil authority. This doctrine, in its simplest terms, involves the following :

- (i) *acceptance* of the Constitution as the sole and supreme document defining the role of the Armed Forces ;
- (ii) *acceptance* of the elected civilian Chief Executive as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and of the supremacy of elected officials of state over appointed officers at all levels ;
- (iii) *acceptance* of civilian headship of the Ministry of Defence and other strategic establishments ;
- (iv) *acceptance* of civilian or legislative deliberation and decision-making over the military budget ;
- (v) *acceptance* that the decisions regarding the goals and conduct of military operations must serve the political and strategic goals established by the civil authority ;
- (vi) *acceptance* of the application of civilised principles to all military investigations and trials ; and
- (vii) *acceptance* of Civil (Supreme Court) authority to review any actions or decisions taken by military judicial officers.

The implications of these principles must be brought home to all officers and men. They imply, to start with, that all officers and men must understand their constitutional duty as no more than defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Nigerian state under the terms of administration defined by the Constitution and the laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and with utmost respect for democratic values.

The Armed Forces must consider itself as a servant of the nation, and must therefore be obedient, professional, non-partisan and respectful of the political order established by the sovereign will of the electorate and every change resulting therefrom. Furthermore, in performing its primary role of guaranteeing the territorial integrity of the Republic, the Armed Forces must ensure friendly relations with the civilian society, and the continuous conduct of healthy dialogue on national defence and security matters.

At this critical stage of our national development, when all citizens have been invited to join hands in consolidating the foundations of our new democracy, the military must not be left out of this historic challenge. Officers and men of our Armed Forces must be prepared to respond effectively whenever they are called upon to assist the civil authority. Such assistance may involve the conduct of search and rescue operations, internal security activities or counter-insurgency operations. In preparing for such eventualities, officers and men must be properly educated on the correct principles for such operations in civilised societies and on the need to strictly adhere to such principles whenever they are called upon to assist the civil authority.

As I mentioned earlier on in this address, the second ingredient in the fostering of a truly professional Armed Forces is adequate funding and proper equipment. I wish to assure you that this Administration is taking the necessary steps in this regard. Indeed, as we usher in the 21st century, the Nigerian Armed Forces cannot afford to be left behind in its quest to be an efficient fighting force that will be proud of its training and inventory and adequately responsive to challenges and opportunities presented by higher military technology in the new millennium. In this regard, every effort will be made to enlist the co-operation of our traditional friends abroad, in enhancing the nature, scope and quality of training available to members of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

Training programmes for military personnel will be effectively upgraded with regard to the use of modern weapons technology. Programmes will also be formulated for the training of specialised units for counter-insurgency operations, search and rescue operations, peace-keeping duties and so forth. Computer systems will be adopted and integrated within all levels of the Services, with a view to enhancing speed and

flexibility in the chain of command and in various decision-making processes.

We are in no doubt, whatsoever, that in spite of its shortcomings in the recent past, the Armed Forces remain one of the most important institutions of the Nigerian state and must therefore be properly equipped to play its role both as a guardian of the nation's sovereignty and as an instrument for the furtherance of international peace and stability.

Distinguished officers, ladies and gentlemen, the present Administration recognises fully that the most potent tonic for democracy and the most effective armour against military incursion into politics is good governance. I wish to assure you, as I swore on oath publicly at the Inaugural Ceremony on May 29, 1999 that I will apply myself relentlessly to the norms of good governance. Under this Administration, all public officers, both elected and appointed, will stick to a strict code of accountability in their allocation and application of funds, promotion of economic well-being of society and provision of safety and security for citizens.

The actions of government will be transparent in all matters relating to public procedures, processes, investments and acquisitions, contracts, leases and appointments. Every effort will be made to ensure wide participation of citizens in respect of government policies and programmes. The rule of law will be respected, and rules and regulations will be applied evenly, without preference or prejudice, to all members of society, at all times. These are the minimum irreducible terms of the contract with the Nigerian people. And I expect that these terms will not only be honoured for their intrinsic worth, but must also be upheld in order for our nation to march forward in unity, justice, equity and prosperity.

The 21st century will be characterised by a number of trends which are already evident all around us. Notable among these are : the global acceptance of democracy as the best system of governance ; the acceptance of collective security arrangements and pre-requisite for regional economic integration ; improvements in the sophistication of armaments ; and an upsurge in peace-keeping operations around the world. In order for us to respond effectively to these developments, we must evolve, through intensive training and vigorous manpower development, highly professional Armed Forces. I urge you all to join hands with this Administration in ensuring that we realise this goal.

In conclusion, I must once again congratulate the officers who are graduating today. This is an exciting period of history. I wish each and every one of you a fulfilled career in your respective countries, Services and Organisations.

I thank you all. God bless.

