

**THE OCCASION OF THE GRADUATION CEREMONY
OF SENIOR EXECUTIVE COURSE No. 21
OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR POLICY AND
STRATEGIC STUDIES**

THE OCCASION OF THE GRADUATION CEREMONY
OF SENIOR EXECUTIVE COURSE NO. 21
OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR POLICY AND
STRATEGIC STUDIES

**ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE GRADUATION CEREMONY
OF SENIOR EXECUTIVE COURSE No. 21 OF THE NATIONAL
INSTITUTE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGIC STUDIES, KURU
6TH NOVEMBER, 1999**

KURU '99 : NATIONAL POLICY PERSPECTIVES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Protocol

A graduation ceremony is not only a time for celebration, but also a time for reflection and rededication to original ideals of an institution.

It is fitting that we rejoice with the graduands who have gone through the intellectually taxing Senior Executive Course at this apex training Institute in Nigeria. At the same time, we expect that they in their turn will reflect on their activities in the last nine months, on the contribution of the Course to their intellectual development in policy and strategic matters, and on the ways and means of applying those benefits to the development of critical national issues. Let this particular Graduation Ceremony, which, incidentally, is the last at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies this century and millennium, be an occasion for the rededication of our graduands to the advancement of Nigeria's national life in all its ramifications.

Today, as we stand at the threshold of the twenty-first century, we should all commit ourselves to the concepts, methods and indeed the ethos of a new era. I urge you to join us in assuming the position befitting our nation within the new global order. Twenty years ago, Nigeria was ranked among the first forty-eight nations of the world on the economic ladder. At the time, we reckoned that with all the potential in material and human resources, Nigeria should be among the first twenty today. Little did we know that misrule, and mismanagement would drag us down into 176th and among the category of least developed nations in which we now find ourselves. Let us thank God for this opportunity to fully realise our potentialities which can make us rise to be at the fore-front of the nations of the world. We have the means. And we now have the resolve and commitment. By the Grace of God, Nigeria, by the current trend, should find herself among the first eighty nations in a decade's time.

The new trend of globalisation, which has gripped the world, cannot be an excuse for acquiescence or dependence that would allow others take over our

destiny, technologically or culturally. Rather, it is a challenge to our innate capability for innovativeness and excellence needed for the global competitiveness, which, in truth, is the essence of the much vaunted globalization process. Countries that undertake the necessary manpower development and skills, install the requisite technological capacity and are infused with the moral virtues of industry, equity, justice and transparency will compete successfully in the new world order. Needless to add that those countries who cling tenaciously to outmoded ideas, attitudes and technology, or allow moral degeneration to corrode their national sense of purpose, will surely be sidelined. Such countries will be de-linked from the forward march of progress through development.

Efficient communication is a fundamental requirement of globalization. The graduands of Senior Executive Course 21 have recognised this by making available donation of computers to the National Institute. And I commend them. But the Government also recognises the need for a thoroughly modernised telecommunications system with access to the internet and other forms of communication, whether print or electronic. Let me assure you that our Administration is committed to making available this sort of support within the shortest possible time.

In promoting the merits of globalization, the argument often seems to imply that the adoption of a private-sector led economy renders national planning irrelevant. Without gainsaying the vital role which the private sector should and must play in our economy, we rather believe that planning remains an indispensable spring-board for national development in an unequal and rapidly changing world. For a developing nation like ours, the outcome of the uncertainties and the inequities of the global economy are too important to be left to the unseen hands of the market forces alone. For this reason, I want to use the opportunity of this Graduation Ceremony to formally set forth the major outlines of our policy intentions and perspectives for the 21st century.

The Role of the NIPSS

The National Institute occupies an important place in the fashioning of a cohesive national elite appropriately equipped for the task of national development. Permit me, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, as I refer to my remarks of twenty years ago at the formal opening of this Institute.

"I have in mind an Institution which opens its facilities ... to those individuals who aspire to high leadership roles in order that they can meet to learn from one another through exchange of ideas, and find solutions to national and international issues. It is therefore an institution in which all those who

have attained positions of responsibility in all professional fields, and on a national plane can bring their experiences and ideas to bear on all issues as they affect our ever-changing society, and the well-being of Nigerians. It should be an Institution where the best and most informed Nigerians are given the opportunity to apply their minds together in order to yield the best for our Society".

The National Institute has now attained the mature age of twenty-one years. In the course of its existence, it has made numerous significant contributions to the progress of the nation particularly in enhancing the leadership capabilities of top cadre Nigerians in various sectors of national life. NIPSS publications have contributed to the advancement of knowledge among executors of policy, politicians, academia and ordinary citizens. The *Nigerian Journal of Policy and Strategy* has taken up an ambitious position among learned journals globally. NIPSS books, monographs and numerous policy briefs to government on pressing national issues, have greatly enhanced the capacity of governance as a whole.

The National Institute has fostered better understanding of national problems through the Local Tours undertaken by successive Senior Executive Courses. At the international level, NIPSS has promoted good relations between Nigeria and foreign countries by means of the annual foreign tours. And, not least of all, as the ranks of the Alumni Association continue to swell, our nation stands to gain from the cross fertilization of ideas between individuals networked by mutual understanding that cuts across parochial interests, across professional preoccupations and across ethnic divides.

Although, I must point out here the tragedy of how some alumni of NIPSS have acquired the image of being destroyers and failing to live up to the ideals and objectives contained in the founding precepts of the National Institute. And I sincerely hope all efforts will be made to quickly remove the negative rendition of mni.

When NIPSS was set up twenty-one years ago, it was our firm expectation that with the high calibre of operators we insisted on, excellence would be an everyday virtue in the environment here in Kuru. Now on the threshold of a new millennium, the hope which we invested in the National Institute is by no means diminished. Indeed, the formidable challenges and opportunities envisaged in the new global village make such an institution doubly relevant.

I am aware that the past 20 years have been like a roller-coaster ride for a fledgling institution. In the rapidly changing scenes of governance, fraught with

bewildering conflicts and swings in focus and priorities, an institution like NIPSS was liable sometimes to deviate from its noble aspirations and lofty ideals. But we live to learn. The next course will be the first since the inception of the present Administration, and we will do all we can to make sure the Institute renews itself.

It shall renew itself by first overhauling its admissions procedure so that nominees are selected on a wide competitive basis and to cover a broader spectrum of society and the principal facets of human endeavour. Those who are admitted to the Senior Executive Course must have a record which is attuned to excellence. For the pursuit of excellence must begin with excellent material.

The National Institute must also renew itself by ensuring that its course content reflects the inflexible resolve to promote in-depth research, on an inter-disciplinary basis, into the social, economic, political, security, scientific, cultural and other problems facing the country.

The experience of being at NIPSS must focus in greater measure on extending the horizon of knowledge, outlook and conceptual capacity of each participant. Above all, at the end of the course, each participant should have so enhanced his or her perspective as to become a more complete patriotic Nigerian. In a nutshell, henceforth all those who possess the acronym *nni* after their names must not only earn it but must be proven catalysts for the development of *A Better Society*.

I will now turn to some of the principal areas which characterise our vision for the twenty-first century.

Political Development

There is more than a little truth in the belief that in a modern society, political development is a pre-requisite for economic progress. Nations in which the citizens enjoy true participation in the affairs of state are more likely to maximise national cohesion, unfettered by narrow sectional conflicts. It is under such conditions that harmony and social peace are entrenched such that the people can pursue their economic activities freely, purposefully and with commitment.

In the 21st century, Nigeria should fully attain the goal of participatory democracy in which the people would determine their political leaders within an electoral system. Democratic practice will not only require voting rights guaranteed to the individual citizen from the age of 18, it will also provide the opportunity of participation in the political process by special interest groups and minorities that are very often ignored in national politics. Particular care will be taken of the rights and needs of women, youths, the elderly, the handicapped, the intelligentsia, and ethnic minority groups.

A social contract, as it were, will govern the relationship between the people and the government at all levels. Government undertakes to protect and enhance the quality of life of all citizens, with good governance through inspiring leadership that is totally devoted to upholding the national constitution, and strictly guided by the moral codes of justice, equity, and accountability in all manifestations of national policies.

On their part, the people's responsibility will include dynamic patriotism, commitment to realisation of national goals, hard work, and the performance of civil duties necessary for a civilized polity.

Economic Prosperity

The economic prosperity which we seek for the twenty-first century should be prosperity with a human face. The people should not be mere numbers in macro-economic statistics but the final objective of prosperity whose welfare should be paramount.

Government will come out boldly to provide the enabling environment for prosperity through development of infrastructure, appropriate macro-economic policies and humane welfare packages that will eliminate abject poverty and despondency at the lowest rungs of society.

We are confident that the anti-corruption campaign would have been carried to its logical conclusion by the time this Administration is through with all necessary actions.

The principles that will guide economic matters should include the following :

(i) Participation of the people in the formulation and implementation of plans, policies and programmes ;

(ii) Better co-ordination and co-operation between government, the private sector, labour and the academic/research community ;

(iii) Food security as the foundation of genuine economic prosperity ;

(iv) Capacity building in the forms of manpower development in new emerging skills ;

(v) Responsible membership of the international financial community ;

(vi) Utilisation of local materials for industrial production ;

(vii) Improved management of governmental and economic affairs ;

(viii) Conscientious support for local manufacturing ;

(ix) Rehabilitation and enhancement of infrastructure and utilities ;

(x) Regional co-operation and integration.

Combating Crime

The current crime wave is threatening to place the Nigerian society under siege. As we know, this situation has the potential of crippling the economy and scaring away foreign investment. But the perpetrators of this evil will not be allowed to succeed. The Nigeria Police will be re-orientated and substantially strengthened in the next few years.

In recent times, the unwholesome connection between the level of crime and the drug issue has been dramatically exemplified in a number of foreign countries. The present intensified campaign against drug trafficking and drug abuse will continue until victory is achieved.

Education

The recently launched Universal Basic Education Programme has been designed to constitute a reliable foundation on which secondary and tertiary education will be based. The run-down Educational infrastructure—material and human—will be rehabilitated and refurbished.

A Caring Society

This Administration has clearly stated its firm commitment to eliminating absolute poverty in our land. Looking at the sheer abundance of the natural and human endowments with which this nation has been blessed, truly, Nigeria should have no truck with poverty.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it appears I have turned a relaxed Graduation Ceremony into a brainstorming session on policy perspectives for the twenty-first century. Let me now address the graduands. As you graduate, you constitute the vanguard of a new brigade assigned the task of actualizing these policy perspectives. Others will follow you. As you make progress in the realisation of these goals, Nigeria will be transformed into, a great and dynamic nation. It would also become a caring nation marching confidently towards a better society.

Finally, I extend the best wishes of the Nigerian people to the graduands. The nation looks up to you to play leading roles in our transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. May God Almighty continue to bless all your endeavours.

I thank you. May God bless you all.