

## THE OPENING OF THE SEMINAR FOR NEWLY APPOINTED AMBASSADORS

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**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY  
PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO  
AT THE OPENING OF THE SEMINAR FOR  
NEWLY APPOINTED AMBASSADORS  
NICON HILTON HOTEL, ABUJA  
WEDNESDAY, 15<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 1999**

**NEW HORIZONS FOR NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

Let me say how delighted I am by this opportunity to make a few remarks on the occasion of the Seminar for the newly appointed Ambassadors.

You deserve to be congratulated on your appointments, especially as the process has provided for the Administration an opportunity to test the elaborate mechanisms for confirming our Principal Representatives, as provided for in our Constitution.

I am convinced that you possess the qualities requisite for your assignment. Within your ranks are former Ministers, seasoned career diplomats, scholars, retired senior military officers and eminent persons from the organised private sector, men and women who can be trusted to be our spokespersons abroad.

In my Inaugural Address in May, I affirmed our resolve to restore Nigeria fully to her previous position of prestige in international affairs. As principal representatives of our country, you will be playing a major role in the realisation of this objective.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are conscious of the linkage between a sound domestic policy and an effective foreign policy. For this reason, we have begun to take vigorous and purposeful measures to revamp our economy, sanitise our society and, generally, rehabilitate the Nigerian Nation. I am firmly convinced that this will lay a firm foundation for our country, so that we can quickly resume our active and constructive role in international affairs.

The current international situation poses many challenges for our diplomacy. The hope that the end of the Cold War would result in a better, more peaceful world has, regrettably, not been realised. There are too many flash points of conflict across the globe, particularly in Africa. Our sub-region is witnessing a resurgence of old conflicts, and seeking to resolve them is taking a heavy toll on the human and material resources of our various countries.

The challenge for us in Nigeria is to nip such crises in the bud or to seek to contain them as they erupt. Your task, in this regard, will be to employ all the tools at your disposal to ensure that we achieve this goal. I ask you to spare no effort in working towards the attainment of an era of peace, security, solidarity and sustainable

development in Africa in the next millennium, in conformity with the Algiers declaration of the OAU.

On the economic front, the much expected "peace dividend" arising from the end of the Cold War is yet to be reaped. Indeed, international resource flows still remain tilted against developing countries, resulting, in the case of Africa, in a situation in which we are now net exporters of capital. The heavy debt burden, unfavourable terms of trade, as well as the drastic decline in both Official Development Assistance and Foreign Direct Investment all constitute serious challenges for us. It will be your duty to devote time and diligence towards the resolution of these economic issues which is so important for our development and future prosperity.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, as we approach the new millennium, the question of regional co-operation and integration has assumed greater momentum. Africa cannot afford to be left out of this global trend. My Administration attaches great importance to the goal of regional co-operation and integration. We place great emphasis on Nigeria's relations with countries within the West African sub-region. And to us, ECOWAS remains a major pillar in the architecture of African integration, whose objectives would be realised as our continental initiative, the African Economic Community, becomes fully functional.

As Principal Representatives of our country abroad, I would expect you to help facilitate this process by encouraging interaction between all agencies of your host countries and their Nigerian counterparts. But this project should not be limited to government to government relations, but also people to people interactions. For ultimately, the aim of African integration is to unite all our peoples so that they can achieve their full potentials.

Nigeria's foreign policy interests today extends, however, far beyond our concern for the well-being of our own continent, Africa. The Debt Burden, for instance, is not an exclusively African predicament. Many countries in Asia, the Caribbean and South America are facing similar problems with it. It is imperative, therefore, that the countries of these regions harmonise their efforts in their search for a fairer deal from the industrialised nations of the West ; and this requires of us a more global approach to world affairs than was previously the case.

Furthermore, the last years of the 20th century have seen a spectacular rise in the significance of what might be called universal values : representative government ; world peace ; human rights ; international justice ; the war against drugs, to name a few. Since we ourselves endorse these values, it is clearly our duty to support and encourage every effort from diverse parts of the world to enshrine them as fundamental principles of all

national and international conduct. This also requires of us a posture in international relations which takes the entire globe, and not just Africa, as the canvass of our exertions.

And besides, our desire for rapid economic and technological development demands of us that we explore every nook and corner of the globe in our search, not only for state of the art technology but also for more appropriate technology from the industrialising nations.

Let me take a minute or two here, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, to outline for you what I consider to be the essential duties of our Missions abroad. As you all know, the past few years have been particularly difficult for our country. At the same time as Nigeria was experiencing serious cleavages at home, we began to lose our prestige and the respect with which we were previously regarded abroad. Nigeria was ostracised from the international community. Many countries severed relations with us, and some even imposed sanctions on us. This situation has had grave consequences for us, and even though things have begun to improve, I believe that a lot still needs to be done to retrieve our image. It will therefore be your primary duty to take all necessary steps to help clean up our image, and convince our foreign friends that we are well on our way to both ethical and economic recovery.

Needless to remind you that another essential obligation of our Ambassadors would be to attract as much foreign investment into Nigeria as possible. Yet an equally important assignment is for you to provide succour and comfort to all Nigerians abroad. In recent years, many Nigerians abroad have increasingly lost confidence and faith in the ability or even willingness of our diplomatic missions to come to their aid. And even if we concede that foreign-based Nigerians tend to have misplaced expectations of what our missions can do for them, the fact remains that in many cases, our various missions do not even have accurate figures of how many Nigerians live within their jurisdiction. I therefore expect that you will all see it as your duty to promote, defend and protect the rights and legitimate interests of all Nigerians in all circumstances.

I need not remind you that we do have a rich and vibrant culture. Our achievement in literature, sculpture, poetry, music and dance, in sports, as well as our eating and dressing traditions, are well known. I therefore expect that you will adopt innovative and effective approaches in employing this rich heritage as an instrument of our diplomacy.

I urge you to approach your assignments with your heads held high, with pride and confidence in a country that has undergone many crises, but is now poised to realise its full potential. You need no longer feel ashamed of your country. Indeed, I believe you can now afford to tell the truth about your country, emphasising that which is positive about us, while at the same time conceding that we still have a long way to go. It shall be your task.

Tell your host countries that our determination to wipe out corruption is a very strong one indeed. Educate and inform them on the steps we are taking to promote good governance, accountability, transparency and other democratic ideals. Convince them that we are working very hard to ensure the security and safety of all persons, property and investment within our borders.

I also expect you all to persuade all persons of African extraction in your host countries, whether they be Nigerians, or Africans or blacks in the diaspora, that Nigeria offers them an ideal environment for the domiciliation of black capital, and that we and they stand to gain a great deal from their investment in the future of this great country.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is obvious that the challenges we face in the coming years are numerous and daunting. To face them successfully, we must go beyond traditional approaches. The era of lack of accountability is over. And that goes for all public officers whether stationed at home or abroad. The misuse or misappropriation of public funds will no longer be tolerated. The success of your mission will in part be measured by how effectively you achieve the goals set for you. Each of you will periodically be assessed on the basis of specific objectives that will be set out in your Station Charters. These will include the prudent and efficient management of your missions, the stock of goodwill and investments that you are able to generate for Nigeria, and the extent to which you project a positive image for Nigeria. Your success will also be measured by your ability to promote and protect the interests of all Nigerians in your host countries. And in doing all this, you must at all times ensure that your conduct and comportment are beyond reproach.

I wish you all a successful seminar.

I thank you. God bless.