

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE
19TH WORLD FOOD DAY CELEBRATION**

1901 WORLD FOOD DAY CELEBRATION
ON THE OCCASION OF THE

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
19TH WORLD FOOD DAY CELEBRATION, ABUJA,
16TH OCTOBER, 1999

'Youth Against Hunger'

I am pleased to be with you at this important occasion of the Agricultural Exhibition to mark the 19th World Food Day Celebration. Since 1981, the sixteenth of October has been globally observed as World Food Day, when a focal theme is selected for critical examination of national food problems. This year's theme, *Youth Against Hunger*, focuses attention on the efforts young men and women are putting into the fight against hunger ; and how much more these youths could achieve if their contributions and potentials were fully recognised and supported.

Agriculture and food production is a top priority for our Administration. We promised so during the election campaigns, and we have consistently maintained this in words and in deeds since inauguration. We will not relent because food is not only a matter of life and death for an individual, but also an issue of security for a nation.

There is no area in which sustainable development is more important in terms of human welfare than in the field of agriculture. Our goal is to attain food security for all citizens within the shortest possible time. Moreover, all Nigerians should have access to enough food at affordable prices. This Administration will encourage and facilitate investment in agricultural production, storage, processing, transportation and marketing.

I equally recognise the fact that most infrastructural facilities are lacking and, where they are present, they are mostly broken down. This unsatisfactory situation has contributed to massive migration of young people to the cities, and may even be a factor in the brain drain as many Nigerians have opted for what they believe may be greener pastures in foreign lands.

At the inception of this Administration, I promised a pro-active rural development scheme which the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and other relevant agencies have since been pursuing. In order to stem the scourge of illiteracy and to invest in young people for greater productivity, this Administration launched the Universal Basic Education, UBE. A Poverty Alleviation Committee is currently working on a blueprint for comprehensive government action. With a collective resolve as a people, we shall succeed in our fight against hunger and poverty.

As part of our efforts towards agricultural development, poverty alleviation and food security for the nation, I invited the Director-General of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to the country in July 1999. During his visit, five areas were identified for technical support and co-operation with FAO :

- (i) Water Resources Development
- (ii) Food Security Projects
- (iii) Animal Disease and Trans-Boundary Pests
- (iv) Agricultural Community Marketing and Food Reserve
- (v) Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture.

In addition to the above identified areas, the Government is also actively pursuing complementary programmes in the areas that include the following :

- (a) the National Accelerated Industrial and Perennial Crop Production Programme,
- (b) Plant Quarantine Services,
- (c) National Seed Service, and
- (d) Post Harvest Technology amongst others.

The National Rural Farmers Empowerment Programme Committee was set up on the 11th of August, 1999, to draw up a blueprint for a comprehensive package of assistance and support for the small-scale farmers who form the bulk of primary food producers in this country. The thrust of this programme is to provide farmers with enough funds to enable them procure vital inputs for their agricultural production and marketing activities, purchase of bulls, animal drawn ploughs and carts, backyard poultry production facilities, sheep, goats and other small ruminant animals and cattle for dairy production.

There is an urgent need to have a strong federation of farmers' associations to represent the interests of farmers. Such a federation would have as members associations based on product lines as in cereals, poultry, ruminants, tubers, food trees, just to name a few. This federation will derive from farmers' own wish to work together and will be free of government interference in any form. I am convinced this federation will be a better and more fruitful option to the current situation where farmers are politicised and squander much time and energy on issues irrelevant to agriculture. We will encourage the establishment of this federation but definitely not interfere in it.

The Federal Government has developed an extensive re-forestation programme covering all the ecological zones of the country, including the training

programme covering all the ecological zones of the country, including the training of personnel in communities for sustainability. State Forestry Departments throughout the Federation are being assisted to establish multipurpose forest plantations of suitable economic species to combat and or ameliorate environmental malaise such as desertification, soil erosion and land degradation. Some of the plantations are designed to produce forest goods such as timber, poles, fodder including non-timber forest products such as honey, gums, resins, edible fruits, nuts, etc.

About five million seedlings have been produced for these various purposes, in addition to one million seedlings that were raised for distribution during the 1999 National Tree Planting Campaign that was recently flagged off in Gombe State. A forest resources study of the country has been concluded and the evolution of a National Forestry and Wildlife law is at an advanced stage. The Federal Government has also directed the introduction of large scale planting of economic trees in commercial quantities for foreign exchange earnings. Under this programme, the planting of date palms, mangoes, citrus, gum-arabic, palm trees in areas outside forest reserves is being encouraged. It is also expected that there will be a long shelterbelt stretching from Birnin Kebbi in Kebbi State to Maiduguri in Borno State. This is a gigantic project and is expected to be handled with all the seriousness it deserves.

There is no doubt in my mind that with responsible governance, all these programmes would go a long way towards meeting the aims and objectives of World Food Day. Most of these programmes are already being implemented and would be pursued vigorously by this Administration. I have no doubt that these measures would definitely meet the critical points of the World Programme of Action for Youth in the Year 2000 and beyond, as adopted by the UN in 1995.

I wish to commend the officials of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture who have successfully put together the programme for this year's World Food Day. Let me also seize this opportunity to commend the efforts of the organisers of World Food Prize, the highest international award for food production. It coincides with World Food Day. This award has continued to buttress the image of farmers and food producers, giving them the level of prominence they richly deserve.

I thank you all and wish you successful celebration.

...in the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...
...the ... of the ...

...the ... of the ...