

**THE SWEARING-IN OF MINISTERS**  
**THE HISTORIC MISSION OF NATIONAL RESTORATION**

THE WEARING OF THE GREEN  
THE HISTORY OF THE IRISH RIFLE

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY,  
PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO  
AT THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY OF MINISTERS  
ON WEDNESDAY, 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 1999**

Vice-President,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Secretary to the Government of the Federation,  
Head of the Federal Civil Service,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I welcome you all to this swearing-in ceremony with great joy and hope that the work, which the people of Nigeria expect from this Government, can now move forward in full swing. By my election to the office of President, the good people of this great country have entrusted to me the enormous task of national renewal and national reconstruction. Their expectations are high and I have been under no illusions, whatsoever, that I alone cannot singularly execute the challenge of revitalising and rebuilding our nation. This is why I feel elated that I have a team of able and experienced men and women, of proven record of accomplishment being sworn in today.

I congratulate each and everyone of you on your appointment as Ministers and Ministers of State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. I should like to reiterate that you have all been chosen in recognition of your past contributions to society and on the basis of your ability to contribute positively to the great venture we are embarking upon at this critical juncture in our history. You must remain aware, at all times, that it is a rare privilege and honour to be called upon to serve one's country in such distinguished positions. This is especially so in Nigeria which is blessed with a large pool of eminent and distinguished people in all fields of human endeavour.

This occasion is significant because after this ceremony the inaugural meeting of the Federal Executive Council under the new democratic dispensation will commence. Similarly, our lawmakers have certainly settled down to business as so visibly demonstrated by your successful screening in the Senate. It is, therefore, evident that the institutions of democracy have begun to function in our country. We can take pleasure, therefore, in the fact that democratic governance is proceeding apace.

In my inaugural address on 29th May, 1999, I emphasised the enormity of the challenges facing this Administration. Our beloved nation had been



virtually on the brink of collapse. At least the past one and a half decades have been characterised by calamitous retrogression in almost every conceivable sphere of life.

Nigerians have, indeed, passed through harrowing times and watched their standards of living plummet drastically just as their human rights were steadily eroded. Life became almost "short, brutish and nasty". Those were surely the most difficult days for Nigeria since the end of the civil war in 1970. Consequently, our people yearned for the restoration of democracy and its promise of justice and freedom. They prayed for a rebirth of values such as integrity and moral rectitude. They prayed to be released from the iron grip of suffering and hardship of unprecedented scale. I, therefore, deem it of utmost importance to remind you again, as you assume office, that your conduct and performance must reflect sensitivity to the aspirations of our people and the best ideals of democratic governance. We should not allow the dark days of deprivation and misery to return.

Incidentally, I detect among our people, a feeling of cautious optimism in reaction to the measures we have taken in recent weeks. This is encouraging in view of past disenchantment and loss of confidence in Government. However, this Administration must not pause to seek applause for the new mood of hope that has been generated, but toil harder still in order to restore trust in government as a starting point for rebuilding and redeeming our nation.

The inauguration of this Cabinet is, therefore, no more than a first step in our effort to tackle the great challenges that face this country. There are many things crying for attention. Our battered national economy is certainly one of them. The consequences of past economic mismanagement are glaring. For instance, the poverty gap in our nation has widened during the years of misrule and millions of our people are ravaged by hunger and weakened by disease. Such people cannot be expected to be fully productive members of society. The grim condition of many of our citizens was worsened by the deterioration of public services whereby access to pipe-borne water and affordable healthcare became a pipe dream and the supply of electricity became epileptic and irregular. Communication networks are outmoded, expensive, and unreliable in an era in which globalisation has made such service ubiquitous and cheap. Agricultural production is a far cry from its actual potential while capacity utilisation in industry hovers around 30 per cent which is a waste of installed assets. Investment is not much more than the level for the replacement for depreciated parts, which amounts to de-industrialisation. All these ills have impacted negatively on employment opportunities for our youth.



This Administration, therefore, faces the urgent task of re-engineering our economy in order to induce growth and development. We must improve the welfare and living standards of Nigerians and restore smiles to the faces of all by evolving sound policies that will endure the test of time. Doing so would require that we harness all our resources, reduce waste and fight corruption to a standstill. Ours is a mission of national restoration.

In more specific terms, this Administration commits itself to bringing about an economic revival in which we seek to :

- (i) Re-invigorate the productive sectors of our economy, especially food production, agriculture and manufacturing ;
- (ii) Strengthen the education sector ;
- (iii) Revamp our social and economic infrastructure, such as power and water supply ;
- (iv) Revamp the healthcare system and provide affordable medical services ;
- (v) Alleviate poverty and provide jobs for our people, in order to reduce the army of unemployed youths, many of whom are graduates ; and
- (vi) Supply dignifying and affordable housing to our people.

All hands must be on deck in pursuit of these goals. As a Government, we should recognise that we do not have all the answers since we do not have a monopoly of wisdom. Besides, governance in this modern age has become more complex and intricate that it is not solely the preserve of politicians and public officials. The contribution, which can be made by the private sector, cannot be underestimated. In fact, about two weeks ago, I met captains of industry on the question of how to revive the economy. I see our Government, therefore, continuing to work closely with the private sector. We should seek their co-operation, ask for their advice, and use their services where necessary. We must do so, however, in a manner that does not compromise the public interest.

As this Administration endeavours to promote the material well-being of the masses, it cannot ignore the need to ensure an atmosphere of peace and security without which development can hardly take place. Foreign investors need such guarantees. The people of this country also deserve to live in security of their lives and property. This will entail strengthening the capacity of law enforcement agents to combat crimes and make our neighbourhoods safe.

As I implied in my address at the retreat held over the weekend, and this bears repeating : the end of government is the promotion of the public good. It is



a call to duty, indeed, selfless and patriotic service. Let us, in fact, focus on the ordinary meaning of the word, Minister. In reality, we are all servants of the people and I am quite convinced that if we can behave as such, the success of this Administration will be assured and our nation will be the better for it.

A corollary of this is that governance is too serious a business to be trifled with. Ministers and, indeed, all public officials, have an obligation to see public office as a sacred trust. It should not be viewed, if I may emphasise once more, as an opportunity for self-enrichment but for selfless and devoted service to the nation. Public office should not be used as a prebend, or for the practice of nepotism and godfatherism. Rather, it must be utilised as an opportunity to contribute to the common good and protect the public interest.

This brings me to a recurring theme in all my recent speeches in which I decried the extent to which corruption has eaten into the fabric of our society. The recklessness with which public officials resorted to bribery, extortion, and other forms of corruption has done incalculable harm to Nigeria. Serious damage was done to the economy as investors, both domestic and foreign alike, were put off by the cost of doing business and the dangers of confronting rapacious officials. Most painful was the global association of our country with morally reprehensible and grievous acts, which have done incalculable harm to our self-esteem as a nation.

This Administration has declared a war on corruption, which must be taken seriously by all members of this Government. The pervasive licentiousness in our society about the use of state resources for personal ends cannot be allowed to continue, for it rewards swindlers, demoralizes honest officials and acts as a lethal poison in the body politic of the nation.

There are cynics who try to reduce our posture to a case of *déjà vu*. We must prove them wrong by not merely sloganeering but taking firm and effective measures to prevent or punish corrupt practices. You have a responsibility as Ministers to plug loopholes that allow for the bending of rules and pilfering of state resources. You must not allow any act of corruption in your respective Ministries and Departments to be condoned.

As you are aware, I have sent an anti-corruption bill to the National Assembly for passage into law. I have also directed re-issue of the "Civil Service Rules" and "Financial Regulations" for immediate distribution to public servants. You should ensure compliance with these within your respective Ministries. You, as well, should become fully conversant with the rules and regulations that guide the day-



to-day conduct of government business as observing them will reduce the danger of making grievous errors of judgement. Moreover, I expect you all as Ministers to be above board in your personal conduct. You should live by example and conduct yourselves with integrity and decorum at all times. Transparency and accountability must be your watchwords. The eyes of Nigerians and the world are on you just as they are on me. We are exposed and we cannot hide.

Governance can be enriched not only through tapping the resources and skills of the private sector but also by reaching out to the public at large. A basic feature of democracy is freedom of speech. You ought, therefore, to be tolerant of criticism and should expect close scrutiny of all your actions and decisions. Equally, you should remain open to ideas irrespective of their origin. Such ideas, particularly from experts outside the public service can engender improvements in the articulation and implementation of public policy. We should be innovative and blend ideas from all sides in order to promote efficiency. Maliciously motivated criticisms may be hurled at you. Never you be discouraged. But like Ceasar's wife you must always be above board.

In the same way that members of this Administration should be receptive to ideas from the public, so is there advantage in being tolerant of views within the Cabinet itself. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Members of this Government must operate as a team. In that way, we can achieve a great deal, since we can profit from each other's special talents. In fact, I look forward to constructive debates in Council meetings. For me, the harmony of our team does not mean that we share only one view. No, I expect that there will be a variety of views. Members of this Government should feel free to air genuine differences of opinion from which we will be able to hammer out sound policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there is so much to be done and so little time available. We must at all times, therefore, aim at reaching profound decisions, which are needed to address stubborn problems. Consequently, I am going to be hard driving and I crave your understanding. We have to move at a gallop and not at snail speed if this country is to attain true greatness in accordance with our manifest destiny. This Council, will, therefore, be meeting regularly—weekly, every Wednesday.

It is clear from the goals being set that this Administration will be doing things that will make us tread on toes but we must not shy away from doing those things because they are in the best interest of our people. Leadership is not only about providing a vision for a people but also about showing the courage and resolve to forge ahead in the face of daunting odds. I believe that you are all people who will be able to resist pressures intended to deter us from our goals.

This Government has been put in place by the mandate of Nigerians. We cannot afford to let them down. We equally cannot afford to disappoint the world that is watching us, and whose partnership we need. The new dawn must be converted into ensuring prosperity and happiness for the people of Nigeria.

Accordingly, I ask your co-operation to make this Council an effective body. I exhort you to fire the spirit of the new dawn in the discharge of your responsibilities. I urge you to motivate and inspire your staff and set them an example of dedication and discipline. I implore you to be result-oriented, by working with imagination and innovation. Finally, I charge you to gird your loins so that our beloved nation, Nigeria, can under God, have a new lease of life of happiness and plenty for our people.

May God help us. May Almighty God continue to bless Nigeria.