

THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE DAY DINNER  
AND AWARD CEREMONY

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**ADDRESS DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY  
THE PRESIDENT, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE  
ARMED FORCES, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA  
CHIEF OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, GCFR  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE DAY  
DINNER AND AWARD CEREMONY  
ON 23<sup>RD</sup> JUNE, 1999**

Your Excellency the Vice-President of the  
Federal Republic of Nigeria,  
Alhaji Abubakar Atiku,  
The President of the Senate,  
The Speaker of the House of Representatives,  
Honourable Chief Justice of the Federation,  
Honourable Senators and Members of the National Assembly,  
Honourable Ministers,  
The Secretary to the Government of the Federation,  
The Head of Service of the Federation,  
Chairman of the Federal Civil Service Commission,  
All former Secretaries to the Federal Government and  
Heads of the Federal Civil Service,  
Secretaries to State Governments and Heads of Service,  
Permanent Secretaries,  
Heads of Extra-Ministerial Department,  
Distinguished Invited Guests,  
Gentlemen of the Media,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy that Nigeria is, for the first time, joining other African countries to celebrate the Civil Service Day. I understand that the genesis of this celebration is the 1994 Tangier Declaration by the Biennial Conference of Ministers of Civil Service in Africa under the aegis of the African Training and Research Centre in Administration and Development that the 23rd of June every year should be commemorated as the Africa Day of Administration and Civil Service.

I note that many other African countries had been celebrating this Day since the Tangier Declaration and cannot find the reason why Nigeria, a leading member



of the organisation, waited for five years before doing so. However, it is fortuitous that this maiden celebration coincides with the commencement of our Administration. This Administration is committed to giving the Civil Service a new lease of life so that it can be a virile partner and an effective organ in the implementation of policies and programmes of government. With God on our side, we will restore the core values of honesty, impartiality, professionalism, transparency for which the Nigerian Civil Service was known as well as ensuring that Civil Servants regain confidence in themselves. This commemoration offers us the opportunity to reflect on the glorious past of the Civil Service and to embark on the restoration and regeneration of the Service so that it can once again play its role as an efficient and effective organ for the formulation, implementation, evaluation and review of government policies and programmes.

The Civil Service, however, requires large doses of restorative and regenerative therapies to bring confidence back so as to summon enough courage to advise faithfully and fearlessly, to refuse orders which are manifestly illegal and not supported by extant rules and regulations, and for the members to see themselves as the tool for generating socio-economic development and meeting the needs and aspirations of our people.

Our Administration, in realisation of the state of the Civil Service today, has already embarked on measures to sensitise the top echelon of the Civil Service to their duties and responsibilities in the current dispensation. In our first week in office, a ten-day special seminar was organised for Permanent Secretaries, where they deliberated extensively on the state of the nation, refocusing and redesigning the service as well as engineering attitudinal and mental re-orientation, in order to equip them for the challenges ahead. In my address to the seminar participants, I espoused my vision of the Civil Service which Nigeria requires at this time of our national life when everyone is yearning for a change. There is a yearning for genuine democracy and rule of law. There is a yearning for a change from poverty to prosperity, from scarcity to abundance, from distrust to mutual trust, co-operation and confidence in Government and change, from real or perceived marginalisation and exploitation to justice and equity.

With the hope and confidence which this Administration is bringing into governance, we are geared to the construction of the public service into a creative, information-based and productive change agent. A Civil Service that is modern, efficient and effective is critical to the performance of Government. The public service which will meet the challenges of the next millennium will be one that is people-oriented rather than self-serving, innovative rather than role-bound, capable



of forging constructive partnerships with outside groups rather than being insular. He is professionally competent and free from corruption. He constantly subjects programmes to relevance and effectiveness tests rather than being complacent ; and uses hierarchical control as a means of strengthening management accountability rather than as a device for stifling initiative and creativity.

The civil servant administrator is the expert adviser to the political leadership of his Ministry. He must not be disloyal to this political leader. While the civil servant must carry out the decisions and policy laid down by the political leadership, he must resist illegitimate political demands or **pressures**. The civil servant must resist political encroachments on the internal **self-regulation** of the civil service system. There must be respect for the rule of law and **adherence** to the rules and regulations as enshrined in the Civil Service Rules, Financial Regulations and the Administrative Guidelines Regulating the Relationship between the Parastatals/ Government-Owned Companies and the Government. A comprehensive review of these documents has recently been undertaken and I am happy to announce that I have approved the revised documents. I have consistently emphasised that the affairs of the Public Service should be conducted in accordance with extant Rules and Regulations. I am aware that the environment in which the Civil Service operated in the last 15 years did not promote this ideal, but this Administration is determined to provide the enabling environment and protection for the Civil Servant to perform his duties without fear or favour.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let us put behind us the gory tales about the Civil Service of the past and look forward to a better future where the Service itself will be sufficiently empowered to play its role. As I have emphasised in some other fora since my assumption of office as President, I have a vision for the Civil Service which, for the avoidance of doubt, I want to restate briefly here :

(i) a competent, professional, development-oriented, public-spirited and customer-friendly Civil Service capable of responding effectively and speedily to the needs of the society ;

(ii) the restoration of core values of the Service such as political neutrality, impartiality, integrity, loyalty, transparency, professionalism and accountability ;

(iii) a Civil Service that is guided by equity, where things are done in the right way based on extant **rules and regulations** but with room for discretion, which should be exercised in public interest ;

(iv) creation of a suitable environment where civil servants are assured



of protection and job security in the faithful discharge of their duties and responsibilities ;

(v) a competitively well-remunerated and motivated Civil Service.

Reward will be based on merit and not on ethnic, religious or "old boy" consideration. I wish to reiterate my earlier warning during the closing ceremony of the Special Seminar for Permanent Secretaries on 10th June, 1999, that the practice whereby some Civil Servants used traditional rulers, clergyman and other powerful persons to curry favour in the past or to cover up misdeeds will not be tolerated by this Administration. The Civil Servant will be assessed by his performance ; no short circuiting ; no godfatherism.

At this juncture, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen ; while it is a bit early to pass any judgment, I am, however, happy to say that there are observable positive signs of a good start on the part of the Civil Service. For instance, I have observed that lateness to work which hitherto was the order of the day is now giving way to punctuality. This situation should not only be maintained but should be improved upon for meaningful productivity.

The Civil Service now has a "Head", a situation which has corrected the damage done to the Civil Service by the operation of the repealed Decree 43 of 1988. I hope the Civil Service will take advantage of the appointment of the Head of the Civil Service to foster the much needed *esprit-de-corps* in the Service and bring sense of direction to the Service once again as one body and one soul.

To our eminent past civil servants who are being honoured today, the awardees, I say hearty congratulations. It is gratifying that while many public officers lose their relevance immediately they leave office, you have continued to glow and blossom. This should be an inspiration to all officers who are still in service. I note with appreciation that most of you have continued to show interest in the activities on the service. As I have fondly referred to some of you as the "moving archives" of the Civil Service, I have no doubt in my mind that you will continue to enrich the service with your wealth of experience.

With the journey so far, I have a feeling that the confidence which this Administration has restored in the Service will be justified. There is a heavy burden placed on the Service to assist the government to implement urgently its policies and programmes. Among the immediate priorities of my government are the resuscitation of decaying infrastructures, raising the capacity utilisation of our industries, eradicating corruption from our national life and restoring the confidence of our people in government. None of these can be achieved if the Civil Service is

inept or corrupt. I, therefore, urge each and everyone of you in position of leadership in the Civil Service to make his Ministry an island of integrity and by so doing the value of a corrupt-free productive society will permeate the society at large.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish the awardees long life and prosperity and more fruitful years of service to Nigeria. Let us all be stakeholders in the political and socio-economic development and regeneration of our country. We must do it together. Join me in giving three happy cheers to the awardees, three hearty cheers to the Civil Service and five hearty cheers to the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Thank you very much for your support and encouragement. God bless you all.



