

**THE CEREMONIAL RECEPTION OF  
THE LAST BATCH OF THE NIGERIAN CONTINGENT  
(NGCON) IN ECOMOG OPERATION IN LIBERIA**

THE CEREMONIAL RECEPTION OF  
THE LAST BATCH OF THE NIGERIAN CONTINGENT  
AND ECONOMIC OPERATIONS IN LIBERIA

AN ADDRESS  
BY HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO  
ON THE CEREMONIAL RECEPTION OF  
THE LAST BATCH OF THE NIGERIAN CONTINGENT (NGCON)  
IN ECOMOG OPERATION IN LIBERIA  
ABUJA, 25<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 1999

**Protocol**

On behalf of the government and people of Nigeria, I proudly welcome you all back home, sweet home after your tour of duty in Liberia.

Your tour of duty was in pursuance of our foreign policy objectives. Since independence, successive Nigerian governments have consistently paid special attention to the plight and conditions of our brothers and sisters in Africa, indeed in West Africa sub-region. Your service with ECOMOG is a manifestation of our concern and regard for the need to give priority and clear expression to the value of the bond that is part of the history of all Africans who inhabit the West Coast of the continent.

Under very difficult and trying conditions you have acquitted yourself creditably. For us as a nation, we have made sacrifices in human and material resources. Counting the dead, those killed in action, and those missing in action, our losses amount to about 500 men. And that is not to mention the hundreds who were injured, some of them maimed for life. We will never know the number of Nigerian civilians resident in Liberia who lost their lives in the process of the Liberian conflict.

It will be recalled that in response to political events in Liberia in late 1989, Heads of Government of ECOWAS countries established the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990 to resolve the conflict. The ECOMOG operation in Liberia became known as *Operation Liberty*.

This Operation is a major one involving our troops outside our borders. The operation started in 1990 and ended in 1997 with the establishment of a democratically elected government in Liberia. The cost of this operation has been variously estimated. I will put the estimated cost to Nigeria at eight billion US dollars !

Presently our troops are still involved in ECOMOG Operations in Sierra Leone known as, *Operation Sandstorm*. With the recent signing of the *Lome Peace Accord* between the government and the RUF in Sierra Leone, our

Administration started the phased withdrawal of our troops in line with our new mandate.

The disposal of all the seized weapons and ammunition in Liberia and your return home signify the end of *Operation Liberty*. You can feel proud that you have significantly contributed to bringing peace and freedom to Liberia.

Now at home, you have returned to a new political climate of a new democratic dispensation that has been in place since 29th May. You have returned to a nation now governed according to the provisions of our national constitution. The era of military government is over. Gentlemen, you all have the responsibility of ensuring a lasting democracy by adhering strictly to your constitutional roles of protecting our territorial integrity from external aggression. I am sure that some of the experience acquired during your recent tour of duty will be useful for the roles which you are required to perform here at home.

As members of the Armed Forces you have a responsibility to improve the tarnished image acquired as a result of Nigeria's recent unpleasant experience of military rule. You are, as you have always been, part of the Nigerian society, and the onus is on you to bear that in mind in all dealings with the civilian population.

Our Administration aims to restructure the Armed Forces towards enhanced professionalism and inter-operability of the various services. This can best be achieved through training, military exercises and a regular updating of equipment and machinery. In this regard, the Government will look into your conditions of service, welfare packages and other incentives with a view to improving them so that you will all be adequately rewarded for your services. Already the Honourable Minister of Defence is touring all military formations in the country with a view to assessing situations as they are on the ground.

But let me remind the Armed Forces that the practices of the immediate past where standard, merit and discipline were jettisoned for who you know rather than for what you know, must stop. It is another form of corruption and malpractice which destroys efficiency, *esprit de corps* and performance in any human organisation, and more so in the military. I expect all officers at all levels to ensure fairness, justice, equity and discipline in the military.

Those who seek to procure unmerited and undeserved favour at the expense of their more deserving colleagues must see themselves as the enemies of their services. And those who succumb and give such unmerited favour do not deserve the trust which their ranks and positions imposed on them. The anti-corruption

crusade covers all aspects of our national life. While bad behaviour and malpractice will be punished, excellence in performance will be rewarded.

To the Past Force Commanders (FC) who are here today, I salute your courage, leadership, and discipline, without which today's memorable gathering could not have held. The medals I will present to you are in recognition of the able leadership you exhibited as commander to the troops in particular and the good image you earned for our Armed Forces and for our country in West Africa and indeed in the world. The nation is proud of you. And the nation is grateful to you and your families who at home bore the brunt of your sacrifices.

Gentlemen, I once more welcome you all back home and wish you a happy reunion with your families. As you go back to your units, put the lessons of the operation in Liberia into your training.

Thank you for a job well done.

God bless.

ARCO FORUM FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS, KENNEDY  
SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT, CAMBRIDGE  
MASSACHUSETTS, USA

