

GOODWILL MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

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**GOODWILL MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA
CHIEF OLUSEGUN OBASANJO TO OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS OF
THE NIGERIAN ARMY ON THE OCCASION OF NIGERIAN ARMY
DAY CELEBRATION ON 6TH JULY, 1999**

Officers and Soldiers of the Nigerian Army, I congratulate you on this occasion of your Army Day Celebration. I salute your loyalty to our great Nation. I equally cherish your dedicated service and your firm resolve to ensure that democracy was once more restored in our country. Your involvement in the body polity of this nation has no doubt had its side effects on your professional calling. I will like you to use this opportunity to shake off the past and approach the future with more determination that never again will you derail from your constitutional roles to venture into politics. Indeed, your choice of the theme "Meeting the Challenges of National Defence in a Democratic Setting, the Nigerian Army Perspective" is already indicative of a perceived determination to firmly establish your will-power to be more loyal and subordinated to a civil authority.

Your prime role as constitutionally enshrined, remains the preservation of the territorial integrity of Nigeria. This clear definition of your role puts your mission in clear focus having shed the political excess baggage you were forced to bear for so long. Now you are on familiar terrain for which you are best trained and adapted. You can now dust off your precis and Standard Operational Procedures and zero-in on true professionalism. This is the way our founding fathers planned it. This indeed, is the way all armies in all nations of the world are established to be under, and subordinated to civilian political control in order to defend the nation. I am happy to note that you all are relieved to be back to barracks doing the things soldiers do best working hard and training hard to prepare to defend their fatherland.

It is unfortunate that over the years, the super-glue that bonds service personnel *esprit-de-corps*—has suffered almost total abandonment. In the recent past, it was eroded by manipulation, intimidation and state terrorism organised at the highest levels. Officers who are trained to speak out their minds became muted by fear and were united in a conspiracy of silence. Conferences became avenues not to confer, but to issue verbal orders and threats. I urge you to use NADCEL 99 as the renaissance of a robust mess life. Endeavour to rediscover the camaraderie of *esprit-de-corps* and the joy and beauty of military traditions and conventions. The army thrives on tradition and conservatism and true professionalism.

True professionalism can only be achieved by constant and realistic training. Unfortunately, training was abandoned in pursuit of political and other extraregimental employment for too long to the extent that the Armed Forces lost focus. The government will provide the facilities and the wherewithal for retraining. You must, therefore, undergo a deliberate process of re-education, re-orientation and retraining. It is in furtherance of this process that officers who served in political capacity were recently disengaged from service. Let me restate here, once more, that the exercise was undertaken not to slight anyone or to show displeasure for a bad job, but to ensure that we approach the new dispensation in the spirit of mutual trust, respect, true professionalism and above all *esprit-de-corps*. The exercise was no doubt painful, but it should be taken as a national sacrifice. I am happy to note that your training institutions are still functional and with appropriate input of resources, they will resume full training curricula. Fortunately, democracy has spawned a renewed interest in friendly nations to give our officers and soldiers more vacancies for overseas training. I urge you to avail yourselves of these opportunities to attain professional excellence.

I want to commend, in a special way, the performance of our forces on peacekeeping operations around the globe. The Nigerian Army has been in the vanguard of these efforts that have yielded peace and democracy in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Be rest assured of continued support by government in these world-acclaimed endeavours. I hasten to re-affirm government determination to seek diplomatic and peaceful ways to settle the conflict in Sierra Leone so that we can begin to reduce our commitment there and bring our forces home. As we celebrate therefore, let us observe a moment's silence for the souls of our dear ones departed in the course of national and international service in ECOMOG, Bakassi and elsewhere.

Our administration will endeavour to provide the operational and logistic requirements necessary to make your quest for professionalism realisable within the shortest possible time. You are of course, aware of my deliberate efforts to be cost-conscious in resource utilisation. I can assure you that care will be taken to ensure that reasonable living and working conditions are not prejudiced thereby. On your part, I demand that you ensure prudence, probity and accountability in the management of resources placed in your care. You should spare no effort in punishing anyone found corrupt amongst you. We need to fight corruption in all its ramification if we must develop as a nation. I need you to join me in this crusade of stamping out corruption in our national life.

I note with satisfaction the renewed state of discipline in the Nigerian Army. There is, however, room for improvement. Commanders must be firm and fair.

Enforcement of discipline should be within the ambits of law as codified in the Armed Forces Decree (as amended) and the Constitution. Note, however, that though the Decree is a tool of command, military justice is expected to also pass constitutional tests. Commanders should not, however, be hamstrung by this but explore other regimental and creative ways to enforce discipline.

Finally, I demand of you as your C-in-C, loyalty and dedication to service to our beloved fatherland. Let us in the words of our National Anthem chorus :

Arise O Compatriots
Nigeria's call obey
To serve our fatherland
With love and strength and faith
The labours of our leaders past
Shall never be in vain
To serve with love and might
A nation bound in freedom
Peace and unity.

Let us together recite the National Pledge :

I pledge to Nigeria my country
To be faithful, loyal and honest
To serve Nigeria with all my strength
To defend her unity
And uphold her honour and glory
So help me God.

Happy NADCEL 99.

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