

**THE INAUGURAL SUMMIT OF THE GULF OF
GUINEA COMMISSION IN LIBREVILLE, GABON**

THE INTEGRAL ELEMENTS OF THE GOLF OF
THE AREA COMMISSION BY THE REV. J. L. GARDNER

**ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO
ON THE OCCASION THE INAUGURAL SUMMIT OF THE GULF OF
GUINEA COMMISSION IN LIBREVILLE, GABON
ON FRIDAY, 19TH NOVEMBER, 1999**

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. It is with profound delight that I welcome my brother Heads of State and Government to this inaugural Summit of the Gulf of Guinea Commission.

I would like to express, on behalf of the government and people of Nigeria, my deep thanks and appreciation to our host, President Omar Bongo, for the warm and brotherly reception accorded my delegation and to all other participants at this important Summit. By agreeing to host the first summit level meeting of our nascent organisation. President Bongo has once again demonstrated his abiding commitment to the ideals of African co-operation and integration.

Our meeting here today, in this beautiful city of Libreville, is a gathering of brothers and neighbours committed to strengthen the notion of good neighbourliness brotherhood, friendship and co-operation.

Today we are part of history, witnessing the birth of an organisation that, I am convinced, would contribute to the promotion of peace, security, economic co-operation and integration as well as the promotion of sound environmental policies in our sub-region. These will no doubt contribute immensely to the uplifting of the socio-economic conditions of our peoples.

The aims and objectives of our new organisation are also consistent with the spirit of our two continental organisations, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the African Economic Community (AEC). They are also in consonance with the global trend towards concerted regional action aimed at addressing common concerns.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. We are all very familiar with the long history of inter-action between and among our coastal peoples, inter-action which pre-dates the advent of colonial rule. This people-to-people inter-action has confined for years. Independent of governments and other artificial barriers that were later imposed by colonialism. We as Africans are the same people, notwithstanding the ravages caused by our common colonial experience. Let us therefore resolve once again, to break down these artificial barriers by making the formation of the Gulf of Guinea Commission a successful reality.

Nations cannot escape the destiny of being neighbours. Especially when they have been brought together inexorably by the fact of a common geography, a common history with strong cultural ties. We as governments must recognise the aspirations and yearnings of our citizens for closer people-to-people inter-action, for greater cross-border economic opportunities, and for a more stable national and sub-regional environment within which to carry on their legitimate pursuits unencumbered by artificial obstacles. We must therefore give our people the framework within which to realise their full potential.

We must also recognise the need for a concerted approach to problems such as environmental pollution that would otherwise not easily lend themselves to solutions pursued individually by one country. Above all we must not allow outsiders or outside interests in our natural resources to instigate us against one another.

This inaugural Summit of the Gulf of Guinea Commission is an affirmation of our collective belief in the potential benefits of the organisation to our peoples. The Gulf of Guinea is rich in fisheries, oil and other natural resources, the exploration of which we must ensure is harnessed for the benefit of our people. We must define a framework for preventing and resolving conflicts. Human inter-action has a way of generating friction but, like friction in machines, a lubricating process is necessary to reduce the heat and damage. We must succeed in preventing potential sources of conflict that unhealthy competition could very well engender among ourselves.

We must be determined to take full advantage of this historic opportunity. We owe this not only to ourselves as leaders but, more importantly, to our citizens who are at the centre and who stand to benefit from the process of development. Indeed, we owe it to Africa as a whole, the continent with the lowest level of regional co-operation and integration, to succeed, if our continued marginalisation is to be reversed in the next millennium. We cannot and should not fail in this venture.

I thank you all.