

**THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FIRST EDITION
OF THE RE-ORIENTATION WORKSHOP FOR
DIRECTORATE LEVEL OFFICERS IN THE
FEDERAL CIVIL SERVICE**

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**OPENING ADDRESS BY
OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, GCFR
PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FIRST EDITION OF THE
RE-ORIENTATION WORKSHOP FOR DIRECTORATE LEVEL
OFFICERS IN THE FEDERAL CIVIL SERVICE
AT THE FEDERAL SECRETARIAT, PHASE II COMPLEX, ABUJA
ON TUESDAY, 16TH NOVEMBER, 1999**

Your Excellency, the Vice-President of the
Federal Republic of Nigeria,
Alhaji Atiku Abukakar,
Distinguished President of the Senate
Chief Evan Enwerem,
Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives
Alhaji Umar Ghali Na'abba,
The Chief Justice of Nigeria
Honourable Muhammed Uwais,
Honourable Ministers,
Secretary to the Government of the Federation
Obong U. J. Ekaette,
Head of the Civil Service of the Federation
Mr Abu Obe,
Chairmen, Federal Civil Service Commission
and other Statutory Commissions,
Permanent Secretaries,
Professor Adebayo Adedeji, Founder and Executive Director
African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies,
Distinguished Resource Persons,
Distinguished Participants,
Gentlemen of the Media,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I understand that this Re-Orientation workshop, like the one held for Permanent Secretaries in the first two weeks of our assumption of office, enjoys a number of names, one of which is "Mr President's baby". Associating me with God's greatest gift to mankind, i.e. baby, is a manifestation of the immense goodwill and love which fellow Nigerians have for me. The decision to organise this programme for the Directorate level officers in the Federal Civil Service is

predicated on the universal consensus that the public service is the core instrument and apparatus for formulating and implementing policies of government. During the intervening period between my election in February and my inauguration in May 1999, I initiated series of brainstorming and consultative fora to discuss core national issues and one of the striking and recurrent issues was the over-riding need to refocus and reinvigorate the civil service to match the stride of this Administration and meet the challenges of the next millennium.

Nigeria must be part of the global village in which nations are designing reinforcement and refining measures to provide the strategic direction needed in the area of development and meeting the needs of the people. As the experience of some countries has demonstrated, it calls for a strong State that invests heavily in the building of human and social capital. Emphasising this point, the general Assembly of the United Nations at its 50th Session, called for an administration that is responsive to the needs of the people, promotes social justice, ensures universal access to quality services and productive assets and creates an enabling, environment for sustainable people-oriented development. It also reaffirmed the importance of enhancing the quality of public administration and called for the creation and maintenance of an enabling framework without which citizen participation is like a football game on an uneven playing field.

The success of the seminar for Permanent Secretaries and its positive impact on the system has greatly encouraged me to request the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation to design a similar programme for Directors and the lower rank in collaboration with the African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies. I am pleased that the programme has been designed and is finally taking-off today.

As I had observed at another forum, this Administration assumed office at a time when morale was at its lowest ebb in the civil service and when it was functioning as a rudderless ship. There was clear evidence that the civil service had been severely decimated and that civil servants had even lost confidence in themselves. I must commend the great resilience of our civil service and the speed at which it woke up from slumber to respond positively to the realities of our time. Given the right political leadership and resources coupled with training and retraining, the Nigerian civil service can regain its lost glory. This Administration will continue to give priority attention to the development of the civil service to sustain its dynamism, responsiveness and relevance to the needs of the nation. We believe that the service will reciprocate this gesture through enhanced productivity and service delivery.

The catch-phrase today in development and modernisation literature is that under-developed countries should move away from the level of government-centred economies and embrace the private sector and market-driven economic development philosophy. The success stories of many developed countries lend credence to this school of thought. It must also be emphasised in the same breath that private-sector-led development will be a mirage without a strong and stable government rolling on the wheels of a virile professional civil service.

The mission of this Administration is to move Nigeria forward to become a strong, strategic and proactive State. We want to rebuild Nigeria into a democratic State that listens and communicates ; that actively seeks partnership with civil society actors ; a State whose public service is responsive and accountable, **and** whose decision-making processes are transparent and open to public review. **The** nature of this State also defines the profile of the new public service that is **required**. The values of this service, its knowledge base, career patterns and management must be re-assessed in the light of emerging needs.

Whenever I think of the issues of good governance, I recall a Swedish labour leader who once said "my experience of bottles tells me that the bottleneck is always at the very top of the bottle". This adage clearly illustrates the importance of having good managers at the higher levels of the public service. Without appropriate top managers, an organisation cannot achieve its optimum. With sub-standard managers at the top, the performance of an organisation will be poor and operations tend to get blocked. The bottleneck is also present in organisations which lack systematic mechanisms for delegation and for accountability. Although the performance of top managers is crucial, it is, of course, equally important to have corresponding quality of performance at all management levels. This Administration will accord very high priority to institutional and capacity building in the public sector in its effort to re-engineer and re-direct the public service to become more efficient, more confident more disciplined more people and more service-oriented.

Right from our first day in office, we have made a resolute commitment to fight corruption in all its virulent forms in all parts of the system. Although the battle is far from over, the signs are encouraging. The society at large has recognised that while inadequacy of resources is one of our problems, mismanagement of the little we have, largely through corrupt practices, is the more impactful. Our people have, as such, accepted that for us to get to the promised land as a nation, we must spare no efforts in carrying the battle to corruption. Corruption is dangerous to the very soul of the nation, and this Administration refuses to stay in bed with it.

When this programme was first being put together, the venue was supposed to be one of the major hotels in town. Somewhere along the line, there was a change of mind and the venue was shifted to this building. I have been informed that, as part of the infrastructural facilities put together for this programme, an Information Technology Centre has been established in this Complex. This has been done at great expense, and I hope efforts will be made to see to it that the Centre stays functional not only while the programme lasts but even for long after it might have been concluded.

In consonance with the policy and resolve of this Administration to chart a new course for good governance in Nigeria, a great deal of premium is placed on making the higher public service the vanguard of this effort. This was what informed putting the Ministers and Special Advisers through a retreat with Permanent Secretaries even before they were sworn in. I believe the time has now come, after about six months in office, to assess how well we have executed the responsibilities of our office. I have therefore asked the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation to plan a follow-up joint retreat for the Ministers, Special Advisers and Permanent Secretaries. The Head of the Civil Service of the Federation will be informing those concerned of the details once the arrangements are completed.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my pleasure to declare open this First Edition of the two-week Re-orientation Workshop for directorate Level Officers in the Federal Civil Service.

Thank you and God bless.