

BY THE PRESIDENT IN EXECUTION OF HIS DUTY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
OF THE METROPOLITAN CLUB
OCTOBER 1958

The purpose of this program is to give you a glimpse of the
club's history and to show how it has grown over the years.
It is the hope of the committee that you will find this
program of interest and that it will give you a better
understanding of the club's past and its future.

The Metropolitan Club has a long and distinguished
history. It was founded in 1818 and has since that
time been a leading club in the city. It has
always been known for its high standards of
conduct and its excellent service to its members.

The club's success is due to the hard work and
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**ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT OLUSEGUN OBASANJO
ON THE OCCASION OF 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
OF THE METROPOLITAN CLUB, LAGOS
12TH OCTOBER, 1999**

I am pleased to be here with you today as you celebrate 40 years of the existence of the Metropolitan Club, Lagos. Indeed, you have not one, but many reasons for today's celebration. In the first place, 40 years of continuous peaceful association of like minds for the pursuit of agreed set objectives is testimony to the commitment of industrial members of your Club to some higher goal.

Secondly, it is well known that your members have been distinguished and eminent citizens who individually and collectively have made immense contributions to the development of Nigeria. There is every reason to suppose that the Metropolitan Club has been a source of inspiration and moral invigoration for the members who have so honourably served our country.

Thirdly, you are celebrating this anniversary in a democracy. Your Club was founded during colonial rule. You celebrated its first anniversary in our year of independence. Most of your anniversaries have been celebrated under military rule. But this major one is being celebrated in a democracy—indisputably the system of government that is most conducive for the thriving of free associations such as yours.

From the very beginning, you aimed to create a businessmen's club, a meeting point for the captains of industry and top calibre professionals. Like all good clubs you provided the milieu for like minds to network, share common experiences and cross-fertilize ideas. Your success is measured by how many others wish to join your company. And by all standards, you seem to have done extremely well, as I understand that there is a long waiting list of people wishing to join the Metropolitan Club.

It is interesting to note that as far back as forty years ago, when half of the members were non-Nigerians, the founders of this Club realized the need, even under a colonial government, for private citizens to fraternise in an atmosphere that had a backdrop of concern for the nation's prosperity and development. They realized the need to develop a partnership between the private and public sectors in order to move the nation forward. If that need was recognized at that time, it should be recognized even more so now. If it was feasible to see the need to be in partnership with unelected governments (colonial or military) in order to achieve

some socially desirable objectives, it becomes more desirable and even imperative now to forge similar partnerships with a democratically elected government to achieve similar goals.

Our Administration seeks to make private investment the engine of economic growth. Accordingly, we invite all captains of industry, in their individual and collective capacity, to share our commitment to this mode of fostering the prosperity of our society. We regard profit motive as essential to an economy that will be market-driven and private sector-led. At the same time we recognize the stark reality of the statistics that indicate the high level of poverty in our society. Poverty may not be indicated in the company's balance sheet, but it does show in the social account of equity and justice. This Administration thus seeks partnership with the business community in its unequivocal commitment to poverty eradication.

The private sector has a crucial role to play in the on-going crusade against corruption. Our economy is such that the government is the biggest spender, awarding the most lucrative contracts. Corruption is an evil two-edged sword of the taker and giver, the former invariably being private sector operator who wants the government official to help bend the rules of justice and probity. In the Anti-corruption Bill now going through National Assembly, any attempt to bribe officials is an offence. And with the Anti-Corruption Commission, the law will be provided with additional teeth to bite the bribe taker. We all must learn to recognize that the logic of corruption that allows illegal facilitation, short-changes the rest of the society, and that corruption in the long run is antithetical to development and national prosperity.

The success of your Club, I am certain, has much to do with members' rules and their strict application. For our Administration, there is one rule book : the National Constitution. In my oath of office I swore to uphold the Constitution. And there will be no deviation. The Constitution, as it stands, must be fully respected. The Constitution may have its limitations, as all human endeavours have. But it is as good a rule book as any can possibly be. And we must not forget that there is room and laid-down procedure for amendment so that we can adjust to circumstances that may have been omitted or to new societal developments.

There is no doubt that social clubs or associations have played important roles in various aspects of our national development. Some clubs are popular in outlook, with membership cutting across socio-economic strata. Others have carefully limited their membership to a select group. The ease with which membership is gained into a club determines how it is perceived by the public.

Clubs like yours, the Metropolitan Club, have generally been perceived as elite clubs. Unfortunately that perception has some negative connotation—the suggestion of a group that wishes to identify and separate itself from the common man. But elitism, especially when the definition coincides with being privileged, does not necessarily imply snobbery as in being anti-the masses. Indeed, some of the world's greatest revolutionaries have been privileged persons who readily fit into the social category of elites.

Your Club and its members can be part of the vanguard for the rebirth of Nigeria, a task we have committed our Administration to achieving. You can do this by continuing with the good works you have been doing. You can also do this by making it your responsibility to speak out whenever and wherever you see evil being committed in our society. You can further do this by resolving to work against all manner of anti-social acts and behaviour among yourselves, your neighbours, other citizens and those in offices of public trust. You can do this by offering advice to your neighbour. You can do this by making your neighbour's problem your concern. Not least of all, you can even do this by offering honest advice to the Government.

While commending you and members of other similar organizations for your role in national development, I would like to use this opportunity to reassure our citizens of the total commitment of our Administration to the pursuit of those goals that would uplift the standards of living of our people. We shall, in keeping with our oath of office, defend and protect the laws of Nigeria. We shall strive at all times to ensure honesty, probity, fairness, justice and equity.

We note with deep concern, the deterioration in the security situation in the country. I would like to reassure all Nigerians that government would not shirk its responsibility in this regard. We will do everything possible to check criminality and put all miscreants out of business. Life and property of law-abiding citizens will be safeguarded. We must not condone any act of lawlessness.

Let me once again sound a serious note of warning : democracy must not be taken as a licence for irresponsible and murderous behaviour. Any such act will be firmly dealt with. The culprits will have themselves to blame.

For us to succeed in our war against criminals, we need that partnership between the state and the ordinary citizens. Without the support and co-operation of the people, not much can be accomplished even by the largest and best equipped police force. The people know the criminals amidst them. They have a duty to inform the law enforcement agencies.

We must not allow anything to divert us from the path we have chosen to put the country back on track. We are irrevocably committed and we ask all men and women of goodwill to join us in our efforts. By the Grace of God, together we will not fail.

I wish the Metropolitan Club a happy fortieth anniversary.

I thank you. God bless you all.