

Inaugural Address of Umaru Musa Yar'adua

This is a historic day for our nation, for it marks an important milestone in our march towards a maturing democracy. For the first time since we cast off the shackles of colonialism almost a half-century ago, we have at last managed an orderly transition from one elected government to another.

We acknowledge that our elections had some shortcomings. Thankfully, we have well-established legal avenues of redress, and I urge anyone aggrieved to pursue them. I also believe that our experiences represent an opportunity to learn from our mistakes. Accordingly, I will set up a panel to examine the entire electoral process with a view to ensuring that we raise the quality and standard of our general elections, and thereby deepen our democracy.

This occasion is historic also because it marks another kind of transitional generational shift when the children of independence assume the adult responsibility of running the country at the heart of Africa.

My fellow citizens, I am humbled and honoured that you have elected me and Vice President Jonathan to represent that generation in the task of building a just and humane nation, where its people have a fair chance to attain their fullest potential.

Luckily we are not starting from scratch. We are fortunate to have been led the past eight years by one of our nation's greatest patriots, President Obasanjo. On behalf of all our people, I salute you, Mr. President, for your vision, your courage and your boundless energy in

creating the roadmap toward that united and economically thriving Nigeria that we seek.

Many of us may find it hard to believe now, but before you assumed the presidency eight years ago, the national conversation was about whether Nigeria deserved to remain one country at all. Today we are talking about Nigeria's potential, to become one of the 20 largest economies in the world by the year 2020. That is a measure of how far we have come. And we thank you.

The administration of President Obasanjo has laid the foundation upon which we can build our future prosperity. Over the past eight years Nigerians have reached a national consensus in at least four areas: to deepen democracy and the rule of law; build an economy driven primarily by the private sector, not government; display zero tolerance for corruption in all its forms, and, finally, restructure and staff our government to ensure efficiency and good governance. I commit myself to these tasks.

Our goal now is to build on the greatest accomplishments of the past few years. Relying on the 7-point agenda that formed the basis of our compact with voters during the recent campaigns, we will concentrate on rebuilding our physical infrastructure and human capital in order to take our country forward. We will focus on accelerating economic and other reforms in a way that makes a concrete and visible difference to ordinary people.

Our economy already has been set on the path of growth. Now we must continue to do the necessary work to create more jobs, lower interest rates, reduce inflation, and maintain a stable exchange rate. All this will increase our chances for rapid growth and development. Central to this is rebuilding our basic infrastructure. We already have comprehensive plans for mass transportation, especially railroad development. We will make these plans a reality.

Equally important, we must devote our best efforts to overcoming the energy challenge. Over the next four years we will see dramatic improvements in power generation, transmission and distribution. These plans will mean little if we do not respect the rule of law.

Our government is determined to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies, especially the police. The state must fulfill its constitutional responsibility of protecting life and property.

The crisis in the Niger Delta commands our urgent attention. Ending it is a matter of strategic importance to our country. I will use every resource available to me, with your help, to address this crisis in a spirit of fairness, justice, and cooperation.

We have a good starting point because our predecessor already launched a master plan that can serve as a basis for a comprehensive examination of all the issues. We will involve all stakeholders in working out a solution.

As part of this effort, we will move quickly to ensure security of life and property, and to make investments safe. In the meantime, I appeal to all aggrieved communities, groups and individuals to immediately suspend all violent activities, and respect the law. Let us allow the impending dialogue to take place in a conducive atmosphere. We are all in this together,

and we will find a way to achieve peace and justice.

As we work to resolve the challenges of the Niger Delta, so must we also tackle poverty throughout the country. By fighting poverty, we fight disease. We will make advances in public health, to control the scourge of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases that hold back our population and limit our progress.

We are determined to intensify the war against corruption, more so because corruption is itself central to the spread of poverty. Its corrosive effect is all too visible in all aspects of our national life. This is an area where we have made significant progress in recent years, and we will maintain the momentum.

We also are committed to rebuilding our human capital, if we are to support a modern economy. We must revive education in order to create more equality, and citizens who can function more productively in today's world.

To our larger African family, you have our commitment to the goal of African integration. We will continue to collaborate with fellow African states to reduce conflict and free our people from the leg chains of poverty. To all our friends in the international community, we pledge our continuing fidelity to the goals of progress in Africa and peace in the world.

Fellow citizens, I ask you all to march with me into the age of restoration. Let us work together to restore our time-honoured values of honesty, decency, generosity, modesty, selflessness, transparency, and accountability. These fundamental values determine societies that succeed or fail. We must choose to succeed.

I will set a worthy personal example as your president.

No matter what obstacles confront us, I have confidence and faith in our ability to overcome them. After all, we are Nigerians! We are a resourceful and enterprising people, and we have it within us to make our country a better place. To that end I offer myself as a servant-leader. I will be a listener and doer, and serve with humility.

To fulfill our ambitions, all our leaders at all levels whether a local government councilor or state governor, senator or cabinet minister

must change our style and our attitude. We must act at all times with humility, courage, and forthrightness. I ask you, fellow citizens, to join me in rebuilding our Nigerian family, one that defines the success of one by the happiness of many.

I ask you to set aside negative attitudes, and concentrate all our energies on getting to our common destination. All hands must be on deck.

Let us join together to ease the pains of today while working for the gains of tomorrow. Let us set aside cynicism and strive for the good society that we know is within our reach. Let us discard the habit of low expectations of ourselves as well as of our leaders.

Let us stop justifying every shortcoming with that unacceptable phrase 'the Nigerian Factor' as if to be a Nigerian is to settle for less. Let us recapture the mood of optimism that defined us at the dawn of independence, that legendary cando spirit that marked our Nigerianess. Let us join together, now, to build a society worthy of our children. We have the talent. We have the intelligence. We have the ability.

The challenge is great. The goal is clear. The time is now.

-Inaugural Address of Umaru Musa Yar'adua, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Commander-In-Chief of The Armed Forces, May 29, 2007.