

THE NEW DAWN

Inaugural speech by His Excellency, President Olusegun Obasanjo following his swearing-in as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria yesterday, May 29, 1999.

FELLOW Nigerians, we give praise and honour to God Almighty for this day specially appointed by God Himself. Everything created by God has its destiny and it is the destiny of all of us to see this day.

Twelve months ago, no one could have predicted the series of stunning events that made it possible for democratic elections to be held at the Local Government level, the State level, and culminating in the National Assembly Elections. Thereafter, you the good people of Nigeria elected me, a man who had walked through the valley of the shadow of death, as your President, to head a democratic civilian administration. I believe that this is what God Almighty has ordained for me and for my beloved country Nigeria and its people. I accept this destiny in all humility and with the full belief that with the backing of our people we shall not fail.

I wish, at this point, to thank all you good Nigerians for the confidence reposed in me. I wish to pay tribute to the great and gallant Nigerians who lost their lives in the cause of the struggle for liberty, democracy and good governance. They held the beacon of freedom and liberty high in the face of state terrorism and tyranny. We thank God that their sacrifice has not been in vain. We will always remember them.

Our thanks go also to the friends of Nigeria in many lands for the commitment and unrelenting support they gave throughout the dark, ominous days of the struggle.

Nigerians living in foreign lands deserve special tribute for not forgetting their fatherland and for making their voices heard persistently in defence of freedom. And I must commend you my home-

based fellow Nigerians for the way you bore unprecedented hardship, deprivation of every conceivable rights and privileges that were once taken for granted.

I commend General Abdulsalami Abubakar and members of the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) for the leadership they gave the country in the last eleven months and for keeping meticulously to their announced timetable of handing over to a democratically elected government today. As officers and gentlemen, they have kept their word.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) also deserves the thanks of all of us. In the face of doubt and skepticism and great time constraints, the Chairman and his commissioners conducted elections right from Local Government level to the Presidential level. They acquitted themselves creditably and they deserve our gratitude.

Nigeria is wonderfully endowed by the Almighty with human and other resources. It does no credit either to us or the entire black race if we fail in managing our resources for quick improvement in the quality of life of our people. Instead of progress and development, which we are entitled to expect from those who governed us, we experienced in the last decade and a half, a particularly in the last regime but one, persistent deterioration in the quality of our governance, leading to instability and the weakening of all public institutions. Good men were shunned and kept away from government while those who should be kept away were drawn near. Relations between men and women who had been friends for many decades, and between communities that had lived together in peace for many generations became very bitter because of the actions or inaction of government. The citizens developed distrust in government, and because promises made for the improvement of the conditions of the people were not kept all statements by government met with cynicism.

Government officials became progressively indifferent to propriety of conduct and showed little commitment to promoting the general welfare of the people and the public good. Government and all its agencies

became thoroughly corrupt and reckless. Members of the public had to bribe their way through in ministries and parastatals to get attention and one government agency had to bribe another government agency to obtain the release of their statutory allocation of funds.

The impact of official corruption is so rampant and has earned Nigeria a very bad image at home and abroad. Besides, it has distorted and retrogressed development.

Our infrastructures - NEPA, NITEL, Roads, Railways, Education, Housing and other Social Services were allowed to decay and collapse. Our country has thus been through one of its darkest periods. All these have brought the nation to a situation of chaos and near despair. This is the challenge before us. Fellow Nigerians, let us rise as one, to face the tasks ahead and turn this daunting scene into opportunities in a New Dawn. Let us make this the beginning of a genuine Renaissance.

Fellow Nigerians, the entire Nigerian scene is very bleak indeed. So bleak people ask me where do we begin? I know what great things you expect of me at this New Dawn. As I have said many times in my extensive travels in the country, I am not a miracle worker. It will be foolish to underrate the task ahead. Alone, I can do little.

You have been asked many times in the past to make sacrifices and to be patient. I am also going to ask you to make sacrifices, and to exercise patience. The difference will be that in the past sacrifices were made and patience exercised with little or no results. This time, however, the results of your sacrifice and patience will be clear and manifest for all to see. With God as our guide, and with 120 million Nigerians working with me, with commitment, sustained effort, and determination, we shall not fail. On my part, I will give the forthright, purposeful, committed, honest and transparent leadership that the situation demands.

I am determined with your full cooperation, to make significant changes within a year of my administration.

Together we shall take steps to halt the decline in the human development indices as they apply to Nigeria. All the impacts of bad governance on our people that are immediately removable will be removed, while working for medium and long term solutions.

Corruption:

Corruption, the greatest single bane of our society today, will be tackled head-on at all levels. Corruption is incipient in all human societies and in most human activities.

But it must not be condoned. This is why laws are made and enforced to check corruption, so that society would survive and develop in an orderly, reasonable and predictable way. No society can achieve anything near its full potential if it allows corruption to become the full-blown cancer it has become in Nigeria. One of the greatest tragedies of military rule in recent times, is that corruption was allowed to grow unchallenged, and unchecked, even when it was glaring for everybody to see. The rules and regulations for doing official business were deliberately ignored, set aside or by-passed to facilitate corrupt practices. The beneficiaries of corruption in all forms will fight back with all the foul means at their disposal. We shall be firm with them. There will be no sacred cows. Nobody, no matter who and where, will be allowed to get away with the breach of the law or the perpetration of corruption and evil.

Under the administration, therefore, all the rules and regulations designed to help honesty and transparency in dealings with government will be restored and enforced. Specifically, I shall immediately reintroduce "Civil Service Rules", and "Financial Instructions" and enforce compliance. Other regulations will be introduced to ensure transparency.

The rampant corruption in the public service and the cynical contempt for integrity that pervades every level of the bureaucracy will be stamped out. The public officer must be encouraged to believe once

again that integrity pays. His self-respect must be restored and his work must be fairly rewarded through better pay and benefits, both while in service and in retirement.

Restoration of Confidence in Government

I am very aware of the widespread cynicism and total lack of confidence in government arising from the bad faith, deceit and evil actions of recent administrations. Where official pronouncements are repeatedly made and not matched by action, government forfeits the confidence of the people and their trust. One of the immediate acts of this administration will be to implement quickly and decisively, measures that would restore confidence in governance. These measures will help to create the auspicious atmosphere necessary for the reforms and the difficult decisions and the hard work required to put the country back on the path of development and growth.

The issue of crime requires as much attention and seriousness as the issue of corruption. Although the Police are in the forefront of fighting crimes and ensuring our security, it is our responsibility to help the police to be able to help us. The police will be made to do their job. All Nigerian citizens and residents in our midst are entitled to the protection of life and property. A determined effort will be made to cut down significantly the incidence of violent crime.

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Priority Issues

I believe that this administration must deal with the following issues even in these difficult times of near economic collapse:

- (I) The crisis in the Oil Producing Areas
- (ii) Food Supply, Food Security and Agriculture
- (iii) Law and order with particular reference to Armed Robbery, and

to Cultism in our educational institutions

(iv) Exploration and Production of Petroleum

(v) Education

(vi) Macro-economic policies - particularly, Exchange rate management etc.

(vii) Supply and Distribution of Petroleum Products

(viii) The Debt Issue

(ix) Corruption, Drugs, organised fraud called 419 activities, and crimes leading to loss of lives, properties and investment.

(x) Infrastructure - Water Supply, Energy, Telecommunication, Ports, Airways, National Shipping, Nigerian Railways, etc.

(xi) Resuscitation of the Manufacturing Industries

(xii) Job creation, and creation of conducive environment for investment

(xiii) Poverty alleviation÷

(xiv) Housing - both

* Civilian Housing Programmes; and

* Barrack Refurbishment and New Construction for the Armed Forces and the Police

(xv) ECOMOG

(xvi) Health Services

(xvii) Political and Constitutional Dialogue

(xviii) Women and Youth Development

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In pursuit of these priorities, I have worked out, measures which must be implemented within the first six months. Details of the focus and measures of this administration on these and other matters, will be announced from time to time. I shall quickly ascertain the true state of our finances and the economy and shall let the nation know. In the light of resources available, I shall concentrate on those issues that can bring urgent beneficial relief to our people.

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Cabinet

I will need good men and women of proven integrity and record of good performance to help me in my cabinet. I appreciate that the quality and calibre of the members of my cabinet and top appointments will send a positive or negative signal to Nigerians and the international community as to the seriousness of the administration to make salutary changes. In our difficult and abnormal situation, great care and circumspection are called for in appointments to the cabinet and high public positions. To be appointed a minister or to any other public office is not a licence to loot public funds. It is a call to national service. It is one of the best ways of rendering dedicated service to humanity. In this administration, being a minister or holding any other public office will not deprive you of what you have before you come into office but you will not be allowed to have conflict of interest, abuse of office or illicit acquisition. Service to the satisfying must entail sacrifice.

Regular weekly meetings of Cabinet will be reinforced to enrich the quality of decisions of government through open discussions of memoranda in Council. Before any issues are introduced to the cabinet, the time-tested procedure of inter-ministerial consultations would have been made. The conclusions of Council, circulated to all ministers and permanent secretaries will, as used to be the practice in the past, be the authority for executive action and for incurring expenditure of public funds. This will help the cohesion of the government, ensure discipline, and hinder corrupt intentions, since all major contracts must go to Council for open consideration. A code of conduct for ministers and other public offices will be introduced. Other measures for individual and collective self-control and self-discipline of ministers and other public officers will be introduced.

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Public Reconciliation

I am determined to stretch my hand of fellowship to all Nigerians regardless of their political affiliations. I intend to reconcile all those who feel alienated by past political events and I will endeavour to heal divisions, and to restore the harmony we used to know in this country.

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Crisis in the Niger Delta

A bill will be forwarded within weeks of the inception of the administration to the National Assembly, for a law providing for 13% derivation in Revenue Allocation to be used for ecological, rehabilitation, infrastructural and other developments.

A competent group will be set up immediately to prepare a comprehensive Development Plan for the Niger-Delta Area. Dialogue will be held at all levels with the great representatives of all sections of the oil producing communities to improve communication and better mutual understanding. The responsibility and initiative for resolving the crisis rests with the Government.

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ECOMOG

Nigeria has over the years played a very active role in ECOMOG for the restoration of peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Our national interest requires the establishment and maintenance of peace and stability in the West African sub-region. Specifically in the case of Sierra-Leone, we shall endeavour to ensure a quick resolution of the crisis by dialogue and diplomatic means by increasing activity on the second track of peace and reconciliation. This will enable us reduce

our commitments in both theatres but particularly in Sierra-Leone.

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External Relations

Nigeria, once a well-respected country and a key role player in international bodies, became a pariah nation. We shall pursue a dynamic foreign policy to promote friendly relations with all nations and will continue to play a constructive role in the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity, and other international bodies. We shall continue to honour existing agreements between Nigeria and other countries.

It is our firm resolve to restore Nigeria fully to her previous prestigious position in the comity of nations.

Let me, once again, thank our international friends who fought for democracy alongside with us. Today, we are taking a decisive step on the path of democracy. We will leave no stone unturned to ensure sustenance of democracy because it is good for us. It is good for Africa, and it is good for the world. We call on the world, particularly the Western World to help us sustain democracy by sharing with us the burden or debt which may be crushing and destructive to democracy in our land.

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The Nigeria Armed Forces

The incursion of the military into government has been a disaster for our country and for the military over the last thirty years. The esprit-de-corps amongst military personnel has been destroyed; professionalism has been lost. Youths go into the military not to pursue a noble career but with the sole intention of taking part in coups and to be appointed as military administrators of states and chairmen of task forces.

As a retired officer, my heart bleeds to see the degradation in the proficiency of the military. A great deal of reorientation has to be under taken and a re-definition of roles, re-training and re-education will have to be done o ensure that the military submits to civil authority and regains its pride, professionalism and traditions. We shall restore military cooperation and exchanges with our traditional friends. And we will help the military to help itself.

Harmony with the three arms of Government

It is my resolve to work harmoniously with the legislature and the judiciary to ensure that Nigerians enjoy good and civilised governance. I am also determined to build a broad consensus amongst all parties to enhance national harmony and stability and thus ensure success in the long struggle ahead.

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Politicians have a duty, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, whether as legislators or ministers, to be committed, and be seen to be committed to the public good. Politicians must carefully examine the budget to ensure that public funds are judiciously spent. They must avoid damage to their own credibility and not vote for themselves special privileges. They must join in the campaign against corruption and help re-establish integrity in the conduct of public affairs. I assure you all that it is the policy of this government to ensure fair remuneration in service and in retirement to public servants, which includes legislators, civil servants, the police and members of the armed forces, parastatals and public-owned educational institutions.

I call on all Nigerians but particularly on our religious leaders to pray for moral and spiritual revival and regeneration in our nation.

Conclusion

I shall end this address by stressing again that we must change our ways of governance and of doing business on this eve of the coming millennium. This we must do to ensure progress, justice, harmony and unity and above all, to rekindle confidence amongst our people. Confidence that their conditions will rapidly improve and that Nigeria will be great and will become a major world player in the near future.

May the Almighty help us.