

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS, PROF. DORA AKUNYILI AT
THE LAUNCH OF THE GLOBAL DATABASE OF NIGERIANS IN
DIASPORA FEBRUARY 21, 2009.**

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Honourable Chairperson,
House of Representatives,
Committee on the Diaspora,**

**Honourable Members of the of
Representatives of the Federal
Republic of Nigeria,**

**Your Excellencies,
Heads of Nigerian Diplomatic
Missions in Europe,**

**Ambassador T. D. Hart,
Senior Special Assistant to the
President on Foreign Affairs,
Representing the Honourable
Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Ojo Maduekwe, CFR,**

**Dr. John George,
Chairman, Nigerians in Diaspora
Organisation, Europe Region,
(NIDO Europe),**

**Dr. Mark Abani,
Chairman, Central Association of
Of Nigerians in the United Kingdom
(CANUK),**

Fellow Nigerians,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me start by thanking the board of trustees of the Nigerians in
Diaspora Organization for inviting me to this occasion as a special guest.

The singular honour and significance of this invitation and event are not lost on me at a time when our country Nigeria is suffering from a negative perception crisis and badly in need of ambassadors inside and abroad to change this perception.

2. Nigerians in Diaspora all over the world be it in Europe, North America, Canada, Asia and other parts form a critical beltway in the realization of many of Nigeria's goals and aspirations. By the sheer amount of funds remitted to family, friends, and businesses running nearly to a billion dollars annually, they are an economic powerhouse. In addition, their skills and expertise in various fields and how in their own little way have helped retell Nigeria's story in a better light.

3. Thus, the launch of the Global Data Base of Nigerians in Diaspora is a significant event no doubt, providing a one-stop shop where information about the expertise that exist in the Nigeria Diaspora community can be obtained for use by the government, private sector and our development partners all over the world. The development of the software with the capability to hold millions of data is a milestone and the data it provides will undoubtedly be useful resource for various aspects of President Yar'adua's 7-Point agenda and the country's 2020 goals. The international community of investors will also derive vital information from this data base being launched today.

4. About two weeks ago in Abuja, I convened a People's Forum to flag off the National Re-branding project. Various stakeholders especially the Nigerian people and their leaders were present. At that forum, I outlined

the rationale behind the need to take another bold step at addressing the negative perception of Nigeria and indeed Nigerians in general. We have decided to start the re-branding campaign internally through interfacing with various stakeholders and getting their buy in and support. We all are agreed to a very large extent that the perception about Nigeria is very bad especially abroad.

5. Let me put on record that Nigeria is where and what it is today largely because of the sacrifices of its people and at different times its leaders. Yet, there are certain aspects of our present narrative as a nation that are regrettable, demeaning, destructive and unacceptable. Pervasive corruption remains the bane of our development and self pride as a people.

6. Corruption today has become Nigeria's greatest liability. Every average Nigerian carries an unseen, yet very present burden of being perceived as corrupt. Corruption in the past four decades was allowed to permeate the Nigerian body polity without let or hindrance. This hydra headed monster that confronts us today was fed for a long time by successive governments who paid lip service to fighting corruption leading to the failure to provide Nigerians with a decent livelihood.

7. Nigeria today is branded as a corrupt nation and its people as potentially corrupt globally. This pervasive image that we are an almost irredeemably corrupt people has inflicted collateral damage on the country and its citizens. Annually, Nigeria loses billions to financial crimes and other forms of corruption. The use of green passport is almost

a liability. The declaration that you are a Nigerian is met with rolling eye balls and sometimes opens hostility. Because of Nigeria's reputation as a corrupt nation, the Nigerian state has become a liability to itself and its citizens. This is anti-theatrical to what a true nation should be. A true nation must serve its citizens within and outside well.

8. This is perhaps why for Nigeria; the fierce urgency of now, like King Martin Luther king said is to prosecute a zero tolerance war against corruption and related societal ills. Happily, not all Nigerians are corrupt, which is why I am displeased by the recent quoted remarks of some of our political leaders who made public statements in the media about the fact that almost all Nigerians are corrupt and that no Nigerian or government can fight corruption. Such sweeping statements, made in the moment of political expediency, ridicules Nigeria. I wish to differ very strongly. There are many average and well to do Nigerians who are not corrupt and who make decent earnings. Do we as a people give up the fight against corruption and other ills in our society simply because we fear that we cannot win? No.

9. The high corruption perception index of Nigeria is responsible for its poor image at home and abroad. This is why we must all start to give serious thought and support to the twin initiative of fighting corruption in all forms and re-branding Nigeria's image. The re-branding I talk about is one that starts from within. There is a need for Nigeria to soul search and take corrective steps that will bring about a change in attitudes, instil a new leadership orientation and clear the path for the emergence of a new Nigerian brand.

Right now, the perception of what we have as a brand is a corruption brand, a near collapse state brand, a dysfunctional people brand and a brand that is hard to sell.

10. We must start to make serious attempts at re-branding through concrete efforts. The starting point is that there must be self belief in Nigeria for re-branding to work. We must start to believe in ourselves. By obeying the laws of our country, being honest in our business dealings, abstaining from taking or giving bribes, stopping the rigging of elections, staying clear of credit card scams and advance fee fraud (419) and holding public office holders accountable. Nigeria can serve notice that it is serious about correcting the negative perception that prevails.

11. We must each ask ourselves what we can do to project the Nigeria image. How we obey the traffic laws, how we stay in line for our turn, how we conduct ourselves in public places, how we behave at foreign embassies, the ethics of our business dealings and financial transactions and in fact the whole gamut of our relationships must project a positive Nigeria

12. Since I flagged off the re-branding project, the media have published several reactions including opinions, reports and interviews. There have been arguments about the terms branding and re-branding. Debate on whether Nigeria needs to re-brand its image or not. Concerns about the possibility that this recent attempt, will fail and worry about the huge sums that will be expended to execute this project. As constructive and informative as some of them were, a sizeable number bothered on

sheer punditry and questionable logic. While the ongoing debate is healthy, we must not stop there.

Very sadly, wild and bogus budget figures have been thrown around even when no figure has been mentioned anywhere. To this group of critics, it never mattered that I was upfront about the fact that this will not be another money making jamboree.

Let me declare here once again that there will be very prudent use of funds for the re-branding project. In fact, I am committed to ensuring that details of the money spent at every stage will be recorded and published in the newspapers at least twice. On my watch, we will publish what we pay or spend under the re-branding project for all Nigerians to see.

13. For those who argue that we don't need re-branding because of the present challenges, I wonder if they prefer that we have no brand at all or keep our current objective brand. Though there is much to be unhappy about, there is no justifiable reason to prefer that Nigeria stays the way it is rather than being part of the modest attempt to change its poor image. I hereby passionately appeal to all our brothers and sisters that have dissenting views to please give this project a chance.

14. I am mindful of the need for the leadership to lead by example. I understand and appreciate that Nigerians have a right to expect deliverables and a quality life. I am certain that we cannot explain away our past failures in the face of glaring evidence, but we can move on to

make necessary adjustments as citizens, and acknowledge the efforts being made by the government to address critical issues. Seeing the cup as half empty rather than half full creates a defeatist attitude that sees nothing good in government or what it does. Just as I call on the people to make sacrifices, I equally demand of the leadership at all levels to govern responsibly.

15. Like I have said earlier, though government is initiating this project, I trust that the people will take it over and fly with it.

Conclusion:

16. The data base launched here today is a significant event. I salute all the brains behind it. I equally salute the love you all have for this country. This data will be used by government and I look forward to a partnership between my ministry and your group.

17. Thank you for listening. God bless you. And God bless Nigeria.

PROF. DORA AKUNYILI
Hon. Minister
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