



OUR DIASPORA; OUR DEVELOPMENT

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY H.E. OJO MADUEKWE, CFR, HONOURABLE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AT THE UK-NIGERIA DIASPORA EVENT, LONDON, 20TH JANUARY, 2010

It is a great pleasure to be part of this historic gathering, to celebrate the achievements and contributions of the Nigerian Diaspora to development at home and the strength of Nigeria's bilateral relationship with the United Kingdom.

2. This year marks the golden jubilee of Nigeria's independence. Ordinarily, fifty years may be a long period. But in the life of a nation however, it is a relatively short period to pronounce a final verdict. Nigeria, like most of emerging nations, has faced several challenges in the past fifty years. Some of these have severely tested the very foundations of our statehood. But these have also been milestones on the resilience of our great country. The world has hailed our ability to bounce back from the abyss. Pessimism about Nigeria is not justified by our history; nor is our geography a disadvantage. While this should not encourage complacency and recklessness, Nigeria as a work-in progress represents infinite possibilities of talent, creativity, enterprise and renewal. Writing off Nigeria may

be the morbid obsession of routine doomsayers and armchair analysts, but it is not the stuff of real politics as daunting as the challenges obviously are. What those of us who can make a difference are doing and who really cannot make a difference if they chose, is to invest our hopes and energies in lighting the candle rather than causing the darkness.

3. Every time the nation was faced with difficulties the Diaspora, especially the Diaspora in the United Kingdom helped us to overcome. Celebrating the Nigeria Diaspora in this country fifty years after Nigeria's independence could, therefore not have come at a better time in the history of our country and our relations with the United Kingdom.

4. Let me first express my deep appreciation to my host and colleague, the Foreign Secretary, the Rt. Hon. David Miliband, MP, for making this gathering possible. This forum is the very first of its kind in the history of UK-Nigeria relations, especially, one that focuses on Nigerian Diaspora. I will like to state, for the records, that the credit for holding this forum must go to the Rt. Hon. Miliband who suggested the idea to me when we met in his office for bilateral talks and consultation on Wednesday, 7th October 2009. I thank him for this great idea and for joining me in recognizing and celebrating today Nigerians in the Diaspora.

5. The event is also taking place against the background of the unfortunate international climate in which Nigeria has been listed by the United States as a "country of interest" in the war on terror, with all the implications this portends for our people, especially members of the Diaspora community, the vast majority of whom are law-abiding. This, you will recall, arose from the singular action

of one of our own nationals in the United States last Christmas. Although the idea of this forum clearly predates this ugly incident, I will be less than frank if I fail to admit that the unfortunate development has beclouded the primary objectives and context of the forum. Even as we are concerned about the war against terror we should not lose sight of the strategic importance of the ties that bind and the need to deploy them smartly to confront this millennial assault on our common humanity known as global terror.

6. I will therefore like to seize this opportunity to declare Nigeria's total abhorrence and condemnation of the action of this single individual. For the avoidance of doubt, Nigeria is not a state-sponsor of terrorism, and cannot, and will never be; neither is our country a training ground for terrorists. We are currently a signatory to all major international and regional treaties and conventions against terrorism. The National Assembly is about to pass a bill on terrorism which will complement existing measures that we have taken. In addition, our international airports are certified by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for standard security and operational procedures.

7. In the case of the attempted bombing of a Detroit bound airplane by a Nigerian, Umar Faruk Abdulmutallab, we have demonstrated that all airport security-screening procedures were duly followed and nothing untoward was found from the Nigeria end. I can add that Nigeria is cooperating fully in the on-going investigations in this matter, including close collaboration and information exchange between our relevant authorities and their UK counterparts.

8. It is against this backdrop that we have strongly protested the unearned classification of our country as a country of terrorism and terrorist interest to the United States. It is essential that Nigeria is not so unfairly branded on the account of this single incident, so that its consequences will not put a strain on the historic excellent relations we have with the United States. We have communicated to Washington in a measured manner and in the positive language you expect among friends that we should be delisted from country of interest in the war against terror. Having made our point, we think we should now move on to issues that have distinguished our history of cooperation.

9. In the meantime, we have also taken additional measures to enhance security at our airports to make sure there is no security breach in any of our airports. I assure Nigerian in Diaspora and friends of Nigeria that Nigeria will continue to closely collaborate with the international community, including our strategic partners, the US and the UK in the global campaign against terror.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. Let me make some points about the character and feature of the Nigerian Diaspora in this country. The United Kingdom is home to 2-3 million Nigerians. That is the figure of an average state in the federation of Nigeria. Some of these Nigerians trace their ancestry back to three generations long before Nigeria became independent. In the pre-independence period, many studied in the UK and returned home to lead the struggle for liberation and provide the nucleus of the bureaucracy of immediate post independence period. Majority followed these footsteps in the first two decades of independence, to study and acquire

new skills and much needed expertise. Some were forced into exile by the unfortunate civil war of the mid-1960s. The vast majority of Nigerians in these categories returned to the country in the 1970's, to help build a modern post-independent state and a strong economy.

11. By mid 1980's however, the adoption of the structural adjustment programme (SAP), the economic depression it engendered and the advent of military dictatorship in the early 1990's caused massive brain-drain. Adverse economic and social condition enhanced the push-and-pull factors and forced many skilled Nigerians into exile. Today, a large percentage of the Diaspora is made up of the children of these 'economic exiles' who fled the agonies of Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 80s. Some in this category are children of the burgeoning middle class parents in Nigeria who at the wake of the collapse of public education in Nigeria, arising partly from the disastrous consequences of neoliberal economic reforms and partly from the failure of leadership, which the Nigerian celebrated writer, Chinua Achebe, aptly captured in his classic essay "The Trouble With Nigeria", decided to send their children abroad for schooling. All these factors have combined to swell the ranks of Nigerian Diaspora, not just in the UK but all over the world. The large Diaspora creates fresh opportunities and challenges for home and host countries. With appropriate strategies, the Brain Drain can become Brain Gain.

12. The Diaspora could become the brain-power for the rapid economic and social transformation that will make the 21st century a Nigerian century. Since the restoration of democracy in Nigeria in May 1999, the challenge before successive governments in this matter has been how to effectively leverage the skills, expertise and huge potentials

or the Nigerian Diaspora, for the development of the country.

13. In doing this, we must not seek to diminish their continued contributions to the growth and development of their host countries. Amongst Nigerian Diaspora are highly qualified doctors, engineers, solicitors and advocates and sundry professionals. They are making tremendous contributions to the economic and social development of the United Kingdom. Statistics do tell the story. In 2000, about 50% of Nigerians living abroad were university graduates. As Lord Rooker, the UK Immigration Minister in 2001 observed, the UK highly skilled Program was designed to “maximize the benefit to the UK of highly skilled workers who have the qualifications and skills required by UK businesses to compete in the global marketplace”. Oftentimes, host countries have unfairly treated the Diaspora in spite of its tremendous boost to economic and social development in those countries.

14. In as much as the Diaspora makes a great contribution to host countries they can make even greater contribution to their home country. Already, the contribution of the Nigeria Diaspora to the investment funds through strategic remittance is well acknowledged by the government and the World Bank. Globally, in 2007, the Diaspora contributed about \$251 billion to developing economies worldwide. The Managing Director of the World Bank, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, herself of the Diaspora, has estimated that the Nigerian Diaspora can add about N40 billion to the Nigerian economy through remittance. However as hugely important to economic development remittances from Diaspora have been, they do not compensate for the consequences of well educated and skilled Diaspora to the economic and social development in home countries. As

Dave Kapur and John McHale argue the more dire consequence of brain drain is what they call 'the absence effect', that is, how migration of educated citizens undermine a country's capacity to build enduring institutions that promote economic development. Those who are migrating to foreign countries are those who have the incentives and ability to challenge the institutional deterioration in their countries.

15. Remittance alone cannot compensate for your absence from Nigeria. We need to engage your intelligence and political energy to build a better country. Given your sheer numbers, there is an obvious need to be engaged in the democratic process, including voting. Part of the objective of this forum should be developing frameworks and processes to enable Diaspora play more constructive role in politics and public leadership in Nigeria. The Federal Government has responded to this challenge by encouraging the establishment of the Nigerian in Diaspora Organization (NIDO). While this nascent organization now enjoys a global spread, I believe we can do a lot more to tap into the immense resources of the Nigerian Diaspora, especially our talented and skilled Diaspora in the United Kingdom.

16. For this to be effective however, we need to redesign and fine-tune the structure of this engagement back at home and determine how strategic partners and friends such as the UK can assist in making this possible.

The Rt. Hon. Foreign Secretary, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. I will like to see today's event as a good beginning of a process. UK-Nigeria relations and the place of Nigerians in

the country are too important for the growth and development of Nigeria not to be accorded top most priority. Some estimates put total remittances by Nigerians in the Diaspora at between US\$7 - US\$10 billion in 2008, a phenomenal increase over the US\$2.26 billion recorded in 2002. It is further estimated that 10% - 15% of total remittances from the UK flow to Nigeria alone, which represents the same percentage share of our country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Remittances, both formal and informal, are much larger than the volume of annual aid and foreign investments into the Nigerian economy. This is why it is essential that efforts be intensified to reduce transaction costs and make remittance cheaper and safer, for the benefit of the sending and receiving countries and communities.

18. We must also tap the awesome pool of expertise, skills and knowledge of best practices, to fast-track developments back at home. This is why the two countries must design an effective process of constructive engagement in all aspects of our bilateral relations, including Diaspora matters, democratic governance, immigration, climate change and other global issues of common interest to both countries.

19. In this regard, we must develop and maintain a mechanism for regular dialogue and consultation as strategic partners, in the interest of the two countries and their peoples. I believe the Nigerian Diaspora has a major role to play in this regard. Everyone here today, as a member of Nigerian Diaspora in the UK constitutes a strong and veritable linkage between Nigeria, the country of your birth and the UK, your adopted country.

20. The expectation of the Nigerian government is that today's event will usher in an era of dialogue, cooperation and collaboration that will lead to the creation of a UK-Nigeria consultation forum for the regular review, management and conduct of the strategic partnership between Nigeria and the UK, in which the Nigerian Diaspora communities would continue to play an active part.

21. Much of the work depends on Nigerians, Diaspora and governments. We are at a threshold of radical transitions that will guarantee our democracy and development. We have to transit from a low-income and dependent economy into a medium to high income, self-reliant economy in less than a decade. The tasks and challenges seem daunting. But with a vibrant and patriotic Diaspora we can achieve what India, Israel and China did. We expect Nigerian scientists and technologists in the UK to follow the examples of Nandan Nilekani to found Nigeria's version of Infosys and launch Nigeria on the map of ICT revolution. Our scholars, researchers and scientists in leading UK institutes can establish Nigerian Institutes of Technology and enhance the human capital for global competitiveness of their mother country.

22. Thank God we have entered the age of 'plug-and-play'. Distance is no longer a barrier and stiff immigration and consular bottlenecks may not stop a committed Diaspora from contributing to finding solutions to our many nagging problems at home, be it power supply or electoral reform. Free and fair elections which Nigerians and our foreign partners find credible will create the stable environment in which the genius of the Nigerian people will become manifest. We cannot afford to fail in 2011 elections, starting with the 2010 governorship election in Anambra State. The

stakes are too high for the Diaspora not to be fully engaged with the reform. We should all expect that government delivers on its promise of electoral reform. I have confidence that President Yar'Adua means to deliver on this promise.

23. You should continue to invest your creative ideas, energies and goodwill on your country, Nigeria. The President and government of Nigeria appreciate your contributions and even the sacrifice you have made to participate in this event. I also thank all those who have contributed in one way or the other to the success of today's gathering.

24. I thank you for your attention.