

Nigeria's 50 years of Independence

President Goodluck Jonathan Address to the nation.

1st October, 2010 marks the 50th Anniversary of our independence from Britain. It is with a deep sense of humility and gratitude to the Almighty that I address you this morning. On this day in 1960, the heroes of the nationalist struggles and all Nigerians were full of hopes and dreams. The citizens of the new country danced in colourful celebration of the newfound freedom. Nigerians were filled with expectations as the Union Jack was lowered and the green-white-green flag was raised in its place. A new country was born. A new journey had started on a road never taken before. The future was pregnant with promise. With patriotism and pragmatism, our founding fathers charted a course for the greatness of this country. While there were differences and disagreements, they did not waver in their desire to build a country that future generations would be proud of. They made compromises and sacrifices. They toiled night and day to build a viable country where progress and peace would reign supreme.

Our independence was gained by men and women who envisioned a land of freedom and one of opportunity. Our founding fathers sought a government of character, that seeks justice to her citizens as our national anthem so eloquently describes: One Nation Bound in Freedom, Peace and Unity. However, today, the opinion of many Nigerians is that these dreams and expectations have not been fulfilled. Not only have people despaired about the slow pace of progress, some have in fact given up on the country. Some believe that if the colonial masters had stayed longer, Nigeria may have been the better for it.

All these postulations, we must admit, are borne out of a somewhat justifiable sense of frustration. Our troubles and failures are well catalogued. For a country that was, in terms of development, on a similar, if not better level with many countries at independence, it is discomfoting that we are lagging behind as the economic indicators among nations now show.

In the midst of these challenges, it is easy to forget our unusual circumstances. We have actually been moving from one political instability to the other such that we have barely been able to plan long-term and implement policies on a fairly consistent basis. This instability has also impacted negatively on institutional development, which is necessary for advancement. The structures of governance had barely been developed when we ran into a series of political obstacles shortly after Independence.

While we were at it, the military took over power and this fuelled a different kind of political instability which ultimately led to the unfortunate 30-month Civil War. This was certainly not the dream of our founding fathers who sacrificed so much to give us Nigeria. They did not dream of a country where brothers would be killing brothers and sisters killing sisters. They did not dream of a country where neighbours and friends would exchange bullets in place of handshakes. Military rule and the Civil War were major setbacks for our nationhood. They produced a polluted national landscape.

This did not offer the best atmosphere for national development. It impacted negatively on Nigeria socially, politically and economically, a situation which further undermined our aspiration as a stable nation. Without political stability,

it has been very difficult to plan and build our institutions like other countries that were our peers.

Dear compatriots, despite the serious challenges that we have been living with; we cannot ignore the fact that we have cause to celebrate our nationhood and even a greater cause to look forward to a brighter future. This is a historic occasion when we need to pause and appreciate who we are, what we have, and to reflect on the encouraging possibilities ahead. There is certainly much to celebrate: our freedom, our strength, our unity and our resilience.

This is also a time for stock-taking, to consider our past so that it will inform our future. This is a time to look forward to the great opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for Nigeria. In fifty years, we have in several respects, attained heights that we should be very proud of as a nation.

In the fields of science and technology, education, the arts, entertainment, scholarship, and diplomacy, Nigerians have distinguished themselves in spite of the enormous hurdles they encounter everyday. If we could achieve so much under tough conditions, we are capable of achieving even much more in our journey to the Promised Land.

Our strides in medical science are hardly celebrated. Recently a team of Nigerian scientists led by Dauda Oladepo of the International Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD) discovered CD4 Lymphocyte baseline for testing people living with HIV/AIDS. The effort is all the more remarkable because it was funded by the Federal Ministry of Health and its findings are particularly useful to the Nigerian environment. The discovery is very vital to monitoring and managing the disease progression in infected people.

Also, a Nigerian scientist, Dr. Louis Nelson, has made significant progress in his research to find a permanent cure for diabetes, which afflicts over 123 million sufferers worldwide. The vaccine that has made Yellow Fever disease manageable was developed in our shores! While we may not have landed a spaceship on the moon or developed nuclear technology, our inventors and innovators have made globally acknowledged contributions. Clearly, these are indications that within us are potentials that can be harnessed for greatness.

Nigerian writers have won numerous awards on the global stage. Professor Wole Soyinka gave Africa its first Nobel Prize in Literature. Professor Chinua Achebe pioneered the most successful African novel in history. Ben Okri won the Booker prize. Helon Habila, Sefi Attah and Chimamanda Adichie, among several others, are internationally renowned.

In the movie industry, Nollywood is rated second biggest in the world. Nigerians have by themselves defied all that is negative around them to build a billion dollar film industry from the scratch. This is a major landmark worth celebrating. Today our actors and artistes are household names in Africa and parts of the world. The future can only be brighter as competition in this sector breeds improved quality and better creativity. Our leading professionals - lawyers, scientists, economists, doctors, diplomats and academics are celebrated all over the world. They occupy prestigious positions in the leading institutions across the developed world. Most of them were born and bred in Nigeria. Most of them schooled here before they travelled abroad. This should tell us something: that daunting as our circumstances have been, we are still full of ability and capability. We are blessed with talented and patriotic Nigerians at home and in the Diaspora, many of whom are willing and ready to return home to be part of the drive to turn Nigeria

around for good, so that the country can take its pride of place in the comity of nations.

My brothers and sisters, as we begin the journey to another fifty years of nationhood, we have two choices to make. We can choose to focus on the imperfections and problems that easily beset us as a nation or we choose to focus on the unlimited possibilities that we have. I urge us all to choose the latter. I prefer to see the silver lining in the dark cloud rather than the dark cloud in the silver lining.

Today, we need to celebrate the remarkable resilience of the Nigerian spirit. We need to appreciate, that even though the road has been bumpy; we have trudged on, in hope. We may not have overcome our challenges, but neither have our challenges overcome us. Whenever we are completely written off, we always bounce back from the edge to renew our national bond for the benefit of our progress. That is the Nigerian spirit. This is what has kept us together as a country even when other countries with far less challenges have fallen apart.

Our recovery from the scars of the Western Region Crisis, the Civil War, and the June 12, 1993 election annulment has convinced me more than anything else that Nigeria is destined for greatness. It has proved that in our differences, tough circumstances and diversity, what binds us together is far stronger more than what divides us. We have a glorious future awaiting us. I am convinced that North or South, East or West, Muslim, Christian or other faiths, majority or minority, we are all bound by our common humanity and mutual aspirations.

We are not sworn enemies. We are not irreconcilable foes. We are neighbours who sometimes offend each other but can always sit down to talk over our differences. We are one people and one family. There are clear examples across the country where, in one family, you have people of different faiths and convictions living peacefully under the same roof.

The father could be a Muslim, the mother a Christian and the children professing different faiths. Yet, they do not draw the sword against one another in the name of religion. Fellow compatriots, one of the greatest achievements of our union this past fifty years is our togetherness. The late Sardauna of Sokoto, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello once said: "Let us understand our differences." I identify fully with these words of wisdom. Our faith may be different. We may not speak the same language. We may not eat the same kind of food. But we are in a plural society where we have continued to accommodate one another and integrate without reservations. This we must build on! This we must strengthen! We have the opportunity of imitating our forefathers by envisioning a new society where our children and children's children will live in peace and harmony and enjoy good quality of life comparable to the best the world can offer.

Today marks the dawn of a new era. It is in our hands to decide what we want to make of it. We must reawaken in ourselves the hunger and aspirations of our founding fathers for a strong, united and prosperous nation that shall be the pride of future generations. To do this, we must change the old ways of doing things. The core values of patriotism, hardwork, integrity and commitment to good governance must henceforth take precedence.

It seems to me that the consensus of most Nigerians is that the time has come for us to break from the past and progress into a better future. We should not allow Nigeria to be pulled back again by those who believe it is either they have their way or the country should fall to pieces. The new Nigeria ahead of us, the new

Nigeria we have to build together, is a society where everybody must feel at home. It must be a place we can all be happy, comfortable and confident to call Ourcountry. It is not just enough for us to talk about how Nigeria can be great; it is our duty to make Nigeria great. We can change Nigeria from our communities, cubicles and desks. The task to make Nigeria great is a task for everyone.

My fellow citizens, we stand at a cross road. Our forefathers did not achieve our freedom by doing what was easy or convenient. We have not sustained our independence and built our democracy by wishful thinking. We must not allow our future to pass us by. We must grasp it and shape it, drawing on the same spirit and vision that inspired our founding fathers fifty years ago.

On my part, I promise visionary and committed leadership. I promise to give my all, my best, to our great country. I am committed to ensuring public safety and security. Government is fully aware of the ugly security situation in Abia State. We are determined to confront it with even greater vigour. For our present and our future, I am committed to improving the quality of education and to give Nigeria the edge in human capital development. We will rebuild our economy by continuing the implementation of the reforms in the banking and other sectors to ensure economic progress.

I will fight corruption and demand transparency so that we can all take pride in our government. Through various policies, we shall continue to seek ways to grow the economy further, give our citizens greater opportunity so that we can compete better in the global market place.

I am committed to the implementation of a national fiscal policy that will encourage growth and development. We will give priority to wealth creation and employment generation. I am focused on addressing our infrastructure needs, especially power, as this is the biggest obstacle to our economic development and wealth creation.

I am determined to implement to the letter the recently launched power sector roadmap, and I am confident that we will soon be able to provide the power that we need today as well as the resources to meet the needs of tomorrow. All the issues bordering on peace, justice and stability in the Niger Delta are being addressed and will continue to receive attention as we consolidate on the Amnesty Programme.

When God gives you an opportunity, you must use it to His glory and to the glory of His creations. I promise to use the opportunity given to me by God and the Nigerian people to move Nigeria forward. We must therefore pay special attention to the advancement of our democracy through credible elections. I have said this and I will say it again, with all the conviction in me: Our votes must count! One man, One Vote! One woman, one vote! One youth, one vote!

The future of Nigeria and generations yet unborn is at stake. We must start the journey to the next fifty years with credible elections, with a clean break from the past. We must show the whole world that we can do things the right and the equitable way. This is my pledge and I will never deviate from it.

The Nigeria of the next fifty years must be a land of delight. The signs are not difficult to see. We have a hardworking population, a growing sense of Nigerianness and a new generation of leaders with new ideas. We must have a new sense of purpose and a determination to make things work. WE MUST COLLECTIVELY TRANSFORM NIGERIA.

The ultimate result of all these, Fellow Citizens, is that a new Nigeria is in the making. The worst is over. Our latest democratic dispensation has defied all the odds. Since Independence, we have never had 11 years of unbroken civilian rule as we have today. This is a new experience for us. With this comes stability. With this comes the building of strong institutions. With this comes the ability to plan and pursue our plans.

The great people of Nigeria, I implore all to join in the renewed efforts to remake Nigeria. It is a task for make our country great; see and tap into opportunities for greatness that are everywhere around you and take pride in Nigeria. These are the ideals that I embrace. These are the issues that I am committed to.

In conclusion, I will like to speak to Nigeria's greatest resource: our young men and women. I say you have the greatest stake in transforming our nation. It is time for this generation of Nigerians to answer the call and contribute to Nigeria's foundation of freedom. That is how this generation will make its mark. That is how we will make the most of these opportunities. That is how we will ensure that five decades from now, as our children and grand children celebrate our nation's independence centenary, we will be remembered as having contributed to the great history of Nigeria.

On my part I commit myself to doing my very best and to call on your intellect, wisdom and commitment to bring this dream to fruition.

May God Almighty bless you all! May God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria!
Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR, President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF UNITY AND PROGRESS: BEIGN AN ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT GOODLUCK JONATHAN ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATION'S 50TH INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS TODAY 1ST OF OCTOBER 2010.