

NIGERIA-JAPAN BILATERAL RELATIONS

*At Dinner Hosted by Junichiro Koizumi, Honourable Prime Minister Of Japan
Tokyo, Japan, 21 May, 2001*

Let me express my sincere appreciation to you, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, and to the good people of Japan, for the very warm and wonderful reception given to us since our arrival in this beautiful country. The reception is indeed a marvelous display of the hospitality for which the Japanese are famous.

As I was telling you earlier, Honourable Prime Minister, this is my third visit to Japan since our election nearly two years ago. My main purpose for the first visit as President-elect was to express appreciation on behalf of all Nigerians for the very important role and support that the Government and people of Japan gave Nigeria, in the dark days preceding the transition to democracy. Mr Prime Minister, let me, once more on behalf of all Nigerians, thank the Government and people of Japan for being our allies in difficult times.

Honourable Prime Minister, I want to express the hope that this visit, coming barely four months after the visit by your predecessor to our country, will help to further broaden our bilateral understanding which has a long history.

I personally thank you for your confirmed invitations which made me to be one of the first leaders from other lands to visit Japan during your premiership.

Like many countries in the region of Africa, Nigeria has been trading partners with Japan even while we were being ruled by colonial Europe. And today, in post-independent Africa, Japan is a major trading partner, offering alternatives to aspects of colonial thinking and habits.

Relations between Nigeria and Japan have covered political, economic and socio-cultural spheres and have been sustained over the years by the mutuality of interests and the friendship of our peoples. The relations have been characterised by frankness and trust between the leaders of our two countries, and owe a great deal to the desire of our two countries to forge ahead in addressing important issues that would make the world a better and more secure place to live. We in Nigeria cherish our ties with your country and would continue to do our best to consolidate these ties as well as the furtherance of relations in other spheres.

Apart from being a world economic and technological power, your country has also distinguished herself as a leading voice in the struggle to foster the principles of democracy, good governance and respect for the human rights of peoples throughout the world. It was no coincidence that Japan was among the first countries that I chose to visit after my election which successfully concluded our electoral aspect of transition to democracy.

I had also visited Japan in my capacity as Chairman of the G-77 to address the G-8 Summit. On this third visit, I am hoping to build on the earlier initiatives and discussions and attain new heights in both government-to-government and people-to-people relations between Japan and Nigeria.

Mr Prime Minister, I am happy to report to you that our Administration will in a few days time be marking the second anniversary of democracy in a process that has so far remained focused and given new hope to our people. Our democratic institutions are operating effectively within the confines of the system of checks and balances enshrined in our constitution. We have put in place appropriate legal framework for the protection of foreign investments and repatriation of profits. We are fully resolved, Mr Prime Minister, to make all necessary sacrifices in order to ensure that our current democratic dispensation takes root and becomes the entrenched political heritage of our children and their children.

Mr Prime Minister, we are aware that our commitment to improving the socio-economic fortunes of our country coincides with the expectations of the international community. For Nigeria, this means the expectation to emerge as a stable polity that respects the human rights of its people while pursuing sensitive and effective economic policies that would benefit her citizens, and play a significant role in African regional affairs. Nigeria is said to embody the hopes and aspirations of Africa. We will do all that is within our power to meet the expectations of Nigerians as well as our African brothers and sisters.

By now it is a truism that the virtues of good and democratic governance add up to little if the people cannot reap democracy dividends in their personal lives, namely, reduction in poverty level, together with the basic requirements of life such as food security, potable water, housing, healthcare, education, employment and energy. Thus, we welcome all available support for the strengthening of our fledgling democratic dispensation.

Mr Prime Minister, we note with appreciation that Japan has since resumed its development assistance to Nigeria in such vital areas as water supply, healthcare delivery, education and rural electrification. We are indeed pleased and grateful for the fact that this visit will result in further commitment of the Government of Japan.

Specifically, I wish to express appreciation for Japanese contribution to the Roll Back Malaria programme from last year's summit on malaria in Abuja, and the more recent commitment of **three** million US dollars to the cause of fighting the scourge of HIV/AIDS in Africa. But, as I told President Bush in America when he contributed 200 million US dollars, the programmes are still in initial stages and the demand for funds is open-ended.

Mr Prime Minister, as you may be aware the notorious **African condition**, is characterised by poverty, insecurity, conflicts and war. For us Africans, this condition is indeed a matter of life and death, and it is of everyday experience and everyday concern. Much of the cause of these conditions may be ascribed to bad governance in general of the past. But is also true that the root causes of the **African condition** are to be found in the impact of global economic disequilibrium, manifested in globalisation, the external debt burden, lack of access to capital and declining overseas development assistance. All these factors militate against the economic growth of African nation states, as well as make it impossible for African governments to provide basic social services and amenities to their people. Consequently, we have the situation where Africa alone accounts for *34 out of 49* - of the least developed countries in the world.

Mr Prime Minister, it is no longer a secret that external debt has emerged as the greatest obstacle to progress for us in Africa. Nigeria has continued to press this point, and some results have been achieved bilaterally and for the region of Africa. But much more has to be done. In fact, we believe that ultimately the surest remedy to unshackle the economies of African countries is through remission of debts, with determined and realistic developmental programmes. There are many ways this can be achieved. And we are going to remain engaged in seeking mutually acceptable solutions.

Mr Prime Minister, Japan and Nigeria need to strengthen the scope and content of their economic relations. The areas of interest to Nigeria are vast. It is my belief that my visit will provide the opportunity for us to deliberate and agree on other areas of cooperation between our two countries. It is my hope that our officials will work on the finer details of outstanding bilateral agreements in order to speed up conclusion and implementation.

Since its inception, our Administration has taken various measures to create an enabling environment for local and foreign investment to thrive. We have also put in place appropriate legal framework for the protection of foreign investment and the repatriation of legitimate profit. We are determined to change from the way and manner business was done in Nigeria in the recent past in order to institute a new regime of accountability and transparency in conformity with internationally accepted codes of business ethics. All these are aimed at enhancing the accessibility of Nigeria to foreign investment capital to facilitate an accelerated rate of economic development.

Our programme of privatisation to substantially disengage government from direct involvement in business has gone nearly half way. The major areas identified for privatisation include: telecommunications, power generation and distribution, petroleum, gas, fertiliser production, machine tool fabrication, steel and aluminum, mining and solid mineral extraction, sugar, and cement production, finance and banking, hotels, tourism.

I would therefore like to invite Japanese investor community to avail themselves of the immense and ample opportunities available for profitable investment in Nigeria under the present democratic dispensation. I am optimistic that the next market, and the market of the millennium, is in the making in Nigeria and covering the West African region.

I am happy that we have been able to deliberate on these and other matters of interest to our two countries. Your visit would also enable us to harmonise our two countries' position on a number of issues affecting Africa as well as other issues of international concern, especially on international peace, conflict management and security.

Honourable Prime Minister, Japan and Nigeria have a lot in common. Apart from our deep attachment to our rich cultural heritage, our countries share similar views on major international issues, such as the peaceful resolution of conflicts and respect for the rule of law. I am also aware that, just like Japan, and in line with the principles of democratisation sweeping across the globe, we have called for the reforms of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, to make it more representative. And we believe that Japan by all objective

criteria deserves a permanent place in the enlarged Security Council.

As a result of our shared experiences, we are willing and ready to learn from our collective experiences. Indeed, it is this characteristic that compels us to look towards Japan with a view to building functional and collaborative cooperation in areas of mutual advantage to our people. We believe such enterprise will help us achieve meaningful cooperation for sustainable economic growth.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I invite you all to rise and toast to the continuous good health of the Prime Minister, Honourable Junichiro Koizumi and to Nigeria-Japan relationship.

I thank you all.