

TRIUMPH OF AFRICAN UNITY

At the National Seminar on African Union

Abuja, 15 May, 2001

It gives me great pleasure to be here today with you at this important National Seminar on **African Union**, whose birth later this month marks the fulfillment of Africans' desire to have a continent united for the progress and development of all peoples on our blessed continent. Due to earlier engagement I missed the opening ceremony yesterday. Nevertheless, I attach such importance to this Seminar that I had to make time to deliver the keynote address today.

As you are all aware, on the 26th of April, Nigeria ratified and deposited the ratification of the Constitutive Act establishing the African Union. In so doing, this Act has now been ratified by two-third of the member States of the Organisation of African Unity. Thus the African Union comes into being on the 26th of May. There will now be a transition period of one year when the OAU will transform into the African Union.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the provisions of the African Union is essentially the same as that of the African Economic Community anticipated in the Abuja Treaty signed here in Abuja in 1991. In other words, the African Union is the final goal of African Unity that African leaders have been pursuing for more than 40 years.

The Federal Government salutes the birth of African Union and urges all Nigerians to join in making this African dream a reality. It is important that Nigerians are fully aware of the consequences of this new frontier in African unity by which the management of their political, social, and economic affairs will be integrated into those of the African continent. The message from this Seminar should be that the African Union is entirely in the interest of the people, and that they stand to gain infinitely from this new continental entity. At the same time, Nigerians will be called upon to make their contributions such as payment for Pan-African Parliamentarians, selected on equality of states and payment on the basis of economic strength of member States.

For the past five decades, generations of African Leaders and other committed Pan-Africanists have dreamt, planned and even taken up arms to fight for the day when our beloved - but colonially divided - continent would be free and united. Millions of Africans have paid the supreme sacrifice for the realisation of this noble continental objective. Millions more are still making enormous sacrifices, displaced in refugee camps as a result of destructive wars and conflicts, or bugged down at home in a seemingly endless circle of poverty and disease.

The road to freedom and unity has been long and tortuous, but the dream has been kept alive like a flickering candlelight in a dark night of hopelessness. It is a great testimony to the resilience and perseverance of the peoples of this great continent, that neither wars, nor conflicts and diseases, nor excruciating poverty can discourage us from pursuing the great endeavour for the unity of our continent.

Nigeria has always shared this Pan-African vision. Nigeria has always worked for its achievement. Nigeria has always been prepared to commit men and resources for the realisation of this great objective. And Nigeria remains committed to the pursuit of this noble goal of African freedom and unity.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in May, 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was a historic turning point. Indeed, it marked the **end of the beginning** in the search for an institutional framework for the struggle for freedom and unity.

The signing of the **Constitutive Act of the African Union** in Lome in July, 2000 marked the beginning of the end. It has taken us nearly 40 years to move from the **Charter of the OAU**, to the **Abuja Treaty** establishing the **African Economic Community** and, to the **Constitutive Act of the African Union**.

In all these years, regional economic cooperation and integration has remained a central pillar of Africa's development strategy. It has rightly been considered as a necessity rather than a choice. It has been seen as an essential instrument for faster collective growth and prosperity for the countries and peoples of this continent. It is our hope, and indeed our shared aspiration, to create a larger economic entity and market place that would facilitate viable production capacities in industry and agriculture, through a collective exploitation of our enormous human and natural resources.

More importantly, regional economic cooperation and integration can also make it possible for us to collectively build integrative infrastructures in transport, communications and energy which would otherwise be too costly for individual, small and fragmented African countries to undertake. Above all, in the ruthlessly competitive world of globalisation and liberalisation, cooperation and integration offers us the only chance to be relevant and to speak with one voice in international negotiations.

You are all aware that the developed countries of Europe, North America, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific regions are moving steadily towards political and economic integration. The European Union is expanding and the North-American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) has, at a recent summit in Canada, decided to establish a **Free Trade Area of the Americas**. The **Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)** and the **Asia-Pacific Economic Forum**, are all examples of the growing global trend towards economic regionalism. Africa cannot afford to be left behind.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, in order to ensure the successful implementation of the integration process through the establishment of the proposed **African Union**, we must examine in a dispassionate manner, the successes and failures of the past 40 years. The emerging **African Union** must be built on a solid foundation.

It is pertinent to recall here that the first generation of Africa's integration arrangements focused primarily on trade promotion through trade liberalisation schemes based on the creation of Free Trade Areas. The strategy was to overcome three fundamental development constraints characteristic of African economies, namely:

- ▶ *the relative small-sized economies of many African nation-states, thirty of which have populations of less than 10 million;*

- ▶ *the lack of structural complementarities* as manifested in the narrow set of similar, low-value added primary agricultural and mineral export commodities; ***and***
- ▶ *the dependence on import of intermediate and capital goods.*

Regional integration was viewed as offering opportunities leading to market expansion, economies of scale and diversification of Africa's economic base. Consequently, a plethora of regional integration institutions were established: the Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa (UDEAC, 1964) later to become the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC); the East African Community (EAC, 1967-1977) now the East African Cooperation; the West African Economic Community (CEAO, 1972); the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, 1975); the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA, 1994); the Preferential Trade Area (PTA, 1981) now the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA, 1995); the Southern African Development Co-ordinating Conference (SADCC, 1980) now the Southern African Development Community (SADC, 1992); the Union of Maghreb Arab States (UMA, 1988). In addition to these regional bodies, numerous sub-regional organisations have since been established.

However, in spite of this proliferation of regional integration institutions all over the African continent, a dispassionate assessment of the impact of Africa's efforts at regional economic co-operation and integration between 1960 and 1990, suggests that the expected benefits have eluded the continent. Africa's participation in World Trade has remained at an insignificant **2 per cent**, while intra-African trade has hovered around **10 per cent**. Equally noteworthy is the absence of any significant change in the structure of African economies. Exports are still confined to basic minerals and primary agricultural products.

A critical review of the integration process in Africa will reveal more than ten reasons for our past failures. I shall limit myself to some of the most obvious reasons, such as:

- ▶ *the lack of political will* on the part of African governments who have been unwilling to subordinate domestic political and economic interests to supranational institutions with long-term regional goals;
- ▶ *the lack of good governance and rule of law*, coupled with endemic political instability, resulting in debilitating civil wars and armed conflicts;
- ▶ *the inadequate mechanisms for equitable sharing* of the costs and benefits of regional arrangements;
- ▶ *the pervasive weaknesses in regional integration structures*, as exemplified by the existence of weak industrial structures, and the absence of intra-industry linkages, poor or lack of transport and communication infrastructure, and the non-convertibility of currencies;
- ▶ *the lack of policy consistency and credibility* as well as antipathy to market-oriented economic reforms, resulting in vacillation and reversals in implementation of reforms, and the continued state domination of production through inefficient and heavily subsidised parastatals;
- ▶ *the overlapping memberships of several regional groupings*, with duplicative mandates and structures, thus leading to inadequate financing of the integration process and inefficient use of limited resources; ***and***
- ▶ *the lack of private sector and civil society involvement.*

It is gratifying to note that the African Union will not only be building on existing regional blocs, but also broadening the objectives of economic co-operation and regional integration to include:

- ▶ *the urgent restoration of peace and stability* (conflict resolution);
- ▶ *the protection of human rights* and establishment of societies based on democratic governance and the rule of law;
- ▶ *the co-ordination and harmonisation* of macro-economic policies;
- ▶ *the facilitation of the free movement* of persons, goods and services; ***and***, above all,
- ▶ *the full involvement* of the private sector and civil society.

In order, therefore, to learn the correct lessons from the failures of the past, the **African Union** will be built on **six** strong pillars:

- ▶ ***one***, an appropriate institutional framework with sufficient authority and capacity for implementing agreed decisions;
- ▶ ***two***, regional integration infrastructures in transport, communications and energy;
- ▶ ***three***, full private sector and civil society involvement in order to ensure the building of integrated production capacities in industries, agriculture, mining etc, to satisfy enlarged markets and global competitiveness;
- ▶ ***four***, sustainable development through the adoption of regional strategies and policies on poverty eradication, environment, health and water resources management, human resources development and on technical cooperation;
- ▶ ***five***, promotion of intra-regional trade at a level that matches the potential of the continent; ***and***
- ▶ ***six***, equitable burden-sharing in matters affecting the continent and the administration of the Union.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, in keeping with our long-established tradition of commitment and dedication to the course of African Unity, Nigeria must be prepared to devote her energy and to commit men and resources towards the establishment of the African Union. Because the Union is a fast-tracking of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, we must work assiduously with other African countries in order to ensure that its institutions such as the **Assembly of the Union**, the **Executive Council**, the **Pan-African Parliament**, the **Court of Justice**, the **Commission**, the **Permanent Representatives' Committee**, the **Specialised Technical Committees**, the **Economic, Social and Cultural Council** and its **Financial institutions** (the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund and the African Investment Bank), are designed and structured to achieve efficiency and success.

It is my firm belief and conviction that unless we build the African Union on shared values – values of peace and stability, of democracy and good governance, on the promotion and respect for the fundamental human rights of our peoples, we shall not succeed in our endeavours. Indeed, I am convinced that with a true dedication to the fundamental political and economic rights of our people and, with the full involvement of the private sector and the participation of all our peoples in the integration and development process, our efforts shall be crowned with success.

The African Union is an idea whose time has come. Let us follow in the footsteps of our Pan-Africanist predecessors in the pursuit of the African dream of freedom and unity, freedom from oppression, freedom from wars and conflicts, freedom from ignorance and disease. Let us rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of the African dream to live in peace, freedom and prosperity.

May God Almighty bless Africa!

I thank you.