

Symposium on “Nigeria at Fifty: Ready to Engage the World” Commemorating Nigeria’s Fiftieth Independence Anniversary, held on 1st October 2010, Warsaw, Poland.

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Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

May I at the outset, express my gratitude to H.E. Ambassador Asalina Mamuno, Ambassador of Nigeria to Poland and the Czech Republic, for organizing this symposium on the topic “Nigeria at fifty – Ready to engage the world”. I feel highly privileged to be offered the honour as keynote speaker at this important Symposium and for the opportunity of sharing with you my thoughts on the topic “Nigeria at Fifty Ready to engage the world”.

Introduction: As Nigeria marks fifty years of independence, this is an occasion for sober reflection on the country’s successes, failures, strengths, weaknesses and prospects for continued engagement with the world and its contribution to global problems. I believe that Nigeria has made remarkable achievements in the past fifty years and it is ready to position itself as a geopolitical actor representing a developing region by taking a central stage in the evolving world order.

Most important, Nigeria must establish a strategic framework not only to engage the world; but also to address a number of domestic challenges, including the internal weaknesses of the national state; rampant corruption; political instability, national unity, human security – that is, safety of life, property and environment; administrative services, education, healthcare, housing, transportation, infrastructure, energy, income generation, and rule of law. Equally important, all organs of state should function smoothly. When all these are functioning in tandem, then Nigeria can look outward. In other words, it is critically important that Nigeria starts by putting its house in order. I say this because Nigeria is a rich country and has the resources to build a powerful State that is able to tackle its domestic and international interests.

It is critically important that we take stock of where we are today as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingua and multi-religious country. Since independence fifty years ago, the nature of Nigeria’s engagement with the world has always been changing, reflecting its domestic realities, the changing situation on the African scene, engagement with the United Nations, in particular, participation in peace operations, its changing economic fortune, and the perception of its leaders and the nature of political governance at home.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to focus on four specific areas:

First, the establishment of “Engagement”: Taking a close peep at the establishment of engagement, it is pertinent to ask what definition Nigeria gave “Engagement” at the time of independence? In other words, what were the

foreign Policy Projections Nigeria had at the time of its independence? At independence, the global environment was dominated by the cold war; African states were expected to toe the policy lines of their colonial masters and Africa was divided along lines of their colonial heritage; and emerging African states were mostly struggling for independence or struggling to consolidate their very tenuous independence.

When Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's first Prime Minister made his maiden address before the United Nations General Assembly on 7 October 1960, he articulated Nigeria's foreign policy based on non-alignment. In his statement, he said "We are willing to learn before we rush into the field of international politics, but we are totally unwilling to be diverted from the ideals which we think to be true. That is the reason we in Nigeria will not be found to align ourselves as a matter of routine, with any particular bloc. Indeed, I hate the very ideas of blocs existing at all in the United Nations."

Ever since, Nigeria has strived to maintain a policy of neutrality while in practical terms it leaned toward the West while professing a policy of non-alignment. British influence was strong on the first government of Sir Tafawa Balewa and throughout the civil war of 1967 to 1970. Nigeria managed to maintain friendly relations with its neighbours. With Apartheid at its highest in South Africa and Southern Africa effectively occupied, Nigeria made Africa the centre of its foreign policy and was a founding member of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), later African Union (AU). Nigeria was at the forefront in the total liberation of Africa and played a leading role in the OAU Anti-Apartheid Committee. It also expressed its commitment to the United Nations and the Commonwealth which it joined at independence.

In essence, wanting to make a success out of its independence as the most populous country in Africa and the country that has the largest population of Blacks in the world, Nigeria strived: not to be involved in the Cold War rivalry; to maintain a friendly attitude towards neighbours; and to be committed to the United Nations and the Commonwealth. These were the thinking that guided "Engagement" at the time of Independence

Secondly, Changes in the Pattern of Engagement. The first change in Nigeria's Engagement with the world came with the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963. From this point on, Nigeria took its first step in ensuring that its engagement with the world begins with its engagement with the African continent by adopting a very dynamic and radical policy in an "Afrocentric" policy framework. With the establishment of the African continental organization, the avenue for the country to express its engagement increased beyond the UN, the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Nigeria's contribution to the liberation struggle in Southern Africa, which was to increase in later years, started at this period when it supported the liberation movements in Africa. This support endured under both civilian and military regimes. There has been no other issue that has succeeded in uniting Nigerians, more than the total liberation of Africa.

The Civil War and the second change in the pattern of "Engagement". Six years after independence, civil war broke out in Nigeria. This bitter civil war resulted in a change in the nature of its engagement with the International Community. The fact that the immediate neighbours did not support the secession was a major factor in ensuring the quicker success of the Federal effort in the civil war. This showed the country the importance of good neighbours. The most immediate outcome of this was Nigeria's leading role in the establishment of ECOWAS. Thus, Nigeria's engagement has moved from Global to continental and finally to region between 1960 and the establishment of ECOWAS in 1973.

Post Civil War realities and the third change in the pattern of Engagement: At this stage, Nigeria had won its civil war in 1970, was exporting oil and developing its infrastructure. There was relative prosperity in the country. The alteration of emphasis from the Regional to the National. With the changes in Nigeria's economic fortune and the negative image the country was having, the nation decided to look more inward. While not completely withdrawing from the Global, the continental and the regional engagement, the country now began to also look more "national". The main objective of the policy during this phase was that the country's engagement with the international community would be more meaningful if it was rooted in a strong domestic setting.

The combat against international terrorism. The war against terrorism, including international terrorism, is likely to be a factor in Nigeria's future engagement policy with the world. With the Al Qaeda attack on Uganda during the recent world Cup, Nigeria ought to take seriously the possibility of a terrorist attack on Nigeria, especially as the country was one of the two African countries specifically mentioned by Osama Bin Ladin in one of his earliest releases as the country where Muslims should rise in revolt. Therefore, Nigeria should take more seriously its responsibility under UN Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) by ensuring that its intelligence and security agencies focus more aggressively on ensuring that no terrorist cells exist in Nigeria.

It is encouraging that Nigeria already actively supports international efforts to combat terrorism through its cooperation with the United Nations Security Council Counter Terrorism Committee in its task of global combat against

terrorist activities. Further, Nigeria participated in the negotiation of the OAU Convention Against Terrorism as well as the Algiers Plan of Action to which she is party. Nigeria has also signed the Protocol to the Convention.

Thirdly, Pattern and contents of Engagement: Nigeria provided enormous Political and financial support to the anti-apartheid liberation groups, such as the ANC, SWAPO, ZAPU and ZANU for their liberation activities in southern Africa. This was particularly prominent enough as to result in Nigeria being made an honorary member of the Front-Line States in terms of ideological affinity despite its geographical location. At the United Nations, Nigeria served for over two decades as the Chairman of the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid and used this position to draw the attention of the international community to the Apartheid system and mobilized effective support to end it.

Military Activities underlining International Engagement: Nigeria has also maintained an enviable record of participation in United Nations mandated peacekeeping operations since she became a member of the Organization. In total, Nigeria has participated in (28) twenty eight of such operations, spread across the globe. Nigeria has also played vital roles in undertaking regional and bilateral peacekeeping on the African continent. It has chaired the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations for several years. However, it is one thing to make these contributions, but what is most important is to have a national coherent policy for engagement in global peace operations.

Other financial support given to other countries especially in the West African sub-region, for example, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone demonstrates Nigeria's commitment to full democratic process and stability of the sub region. This financial support has cost Nigeria billions of USD.

The Technical Aid Corps Scheme. The Technical Aid Corps (TAC) scheme which was started over twenty years ago can be compared to the America Peace Corps. TAC which comprises volunteer engineers, nurses, doctors, teachers, lawyers etc have been deployed in such far away places as Namibia, Mozambique, The Gambia, Seychelles, and the Caribbean where they are making important contributions to the development of these countries.

Fourthly, the Future of Engagement: I would like to conclude by taking a look at the future of engagement. First of all, if Nigeria is able to put its house in order, it will be better placed to be able to continue engaging the world along the lines of balancing domestic concerns with global realities. Key among issues that will play a major role in Nigeria's future engagement with the world includes:

The desire to ensure positive global image. Nigeria has already embarked on “charm offensive”, best exemplified with the re-branding exercise going on in the country. The government now wants the world to engage her under a better framework rather than the negative stereotype that existed in the past. This has become all the more necessary after the Mutallab incidence of December 2009 in the United States. I will not elaborate as I am sure you are all know what happened.

Combating culture of corruption in Nigeria. On the war against corruption, Nigeria participated actively in the successful negotiation in Vienna of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2002. Nigeria has subsequently signed and ratified the Convention. An anti-corruption bill is currently before the National Assembly and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is taking aggressive action to bring to justice the high and mighty that have devastated Nigeria’s treasury. I have no doubt that if the law enforcement agencies are given the tools and resources, that corruption in Nigeria will be brought under control.

The quest for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The quest to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council will be a culmination of Nigeria’s active engagement at the United Nations, in particular, in peace and security efforts which underscore its capacity and will to fulfil its role in an expanded UN Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security. Nigeria maintains the same position with other African countries that the Security Council needs to be expanded in both the permanent and non-permanent categories, in order to make the Council more representative and effective.

By virtue of its material and human resources, its demonstrated political will and diplomatic and military capacities in engaging in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement, vital to global peace and security, and development, Nigeria is eminently qualified for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Further, Nigeria’s resources and participation in peace operations are important, but these are not enough to gain a permanent seat. Nigeria has to work hard and go the extra mile, as it were, to bring this effort to fruition. I say this because Egypt and South Africa are making impressive progress on securing the two permanent seats that could be zoned to Africa. Nigeria’s efforts in this regard have not sufficiently resonated.

On the domestic front, the desire for economic development underlines the efforts to ensure that the international community appreciates the efforts Nigeria is making to ensure that peace comes to the Niger Delta following the recent

Amnesty Programme. It is significant that the government is ensuring that its activities in the Niger delta get publicity. No doubt, the government efforts in the Niger-Delta have helped to calm the situation, thus gaining international confidence. But more needs to be done to stabilize this area.

There is also the Gulf of Guinea which is likely to be of significant engagement strategy for Nigeria's maritime security network. The United States has indicated that by 2015, 20% of its oil supply will be coming from the Gulf of Guinea. It is expected that Nigeria will factor the Gulf of Guinea into its strategy calculations for the future in order to combat terrorism, piracy, drug trafficking and organized crime. Nigeria initiated and coordinated efforts of countries of the Gulf of Guinea to establish the Gulf of Guinea Commission as a framework of cooperation, including rational exploitation of the rich resources, especially hydrocarbon and fisheries in the region.

No doubt, this cooperation should reinforce the spirit of good neighborliness, remove potential sources of conflict as well as strengthen trust and confidence among member states of the Commission. This should also enhance peace, stability and security and advance the goals of the United Nations Charter.

It is expected that there will be a continued engagement with the key international organisations, especially ECOWAS, the AU, the Commonwealth and the United Nations. The desire to secure a permanent seat on UN Security Council is also likely to result in the country being more determined to reach out to the international community. In this regard, one of the priorities for the incoming president after the 2011 presidential election will be reversing of Nigeria's negative image and restoring its continental leadership to fill the leadership vacuum in Africa for which it has the potential. It is high time Nigeria reclaims its leadership role in Africa and global affairs. Moreover, this will go a long way towards achieving the quest for a permanent seat on the Security Council. Nigeria will need an invigorated Foreign Ministry with the support of the President and not a personalized foreign policy that sidetracks the Foreign Ministry as has been the case for some time.

The combat against drug trafficking and organized crime needs to be taken more seriously by increasing cooperation with other countries in West Africa where drug trafficking has become a threat to the security of the sub region. For example, Guinea-Bissau, which is the weakest link in West Africa, has become almost a narco state. Within Nigeria, the NDLEA continues to make impressive efforts to apprehend drug traffickers.

It is noteworthy that Nigeria has signed and ratified the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, as well as the Protocols to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in persons, especially Women and Children, and the Protocol Against Smuggling of Migrants. Nigeria has also joined efforts in the West African sub region to combat the phenomenon of women trafficking.

I hope that our deliberations at this symposium will evoke the right responses that will help to project positive image of Nigeria as it engages the changing international and economic order.

Thank you