

REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, PROF. YEMI OSINBAJO, SAN, GCON, VICE PRESIDENT, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA, AT THE 10th EDITION OF THE ANNUAL COLLOQUIUM FOR FORMER LAGOS STATE GOVERNOR AND APC LEADER, ASIWAJU BOLA AHMED TINUBU, HELD AT EKO HOTELS AND SUITES, VICTORIA ISLAND, LAGOS, ON THURSDAY, MARCH 29, 2018.

PROTOCOLS

Let me first say that we started this colloquium now about 10 years ago, and I'm sure that most of us have heard the story. Many of those who started the idea of the colloquium probably are here with us today. Most of us had worked with the then Governor of Lagos State, Governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu, for several years, some for four years, some for eight years. And we decided that every year, on the occasion of his birthday, we would take time to discuss matters of national importance. Part of the reason why we did so was because Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu was an unusual governor in Lagos State.

Let me say why it was unusual. The reason why it was unusual was because it was a government where there was a great deal of argument and he, as the leader of that government, allowed so much argument and so many different shades of ideas.

I recall a particular occasion, when we started talking about the land use charge. I know that there are issues around the land use charge today. But when the old concept developed around the land use charge, there were so many arguments. One group felt that we shouldn't even introduce the charge, another group felt that we should do so. I remember that in Ikeja, where this argument was taking place, we were in a small room; Lai Mohammed was there, Wale Edun, Yemi Cardoso, I think Dele Alake, and a few others. We were all there arguing on both sides. At some point, when Asiwaju was losing the argument, he said, "Ah, were you the people who were voted for?" Then he stormed out of the room and left. Then, we all waited. Nobody left. He came back a few minutes later and said, "ah, are you people still here? Then he continued the argument. Now he came back with more facts and figures. So we suspected that when he stormed out of the room, he actually went to bring some more facts.

In the end, we instituted the charge and so many other different ways by which the foundation for what we see in Lagos State today were developed. And I want to just commend Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu again, for ensuring that, not only did he develop a whole generation of persons who have become, in various respects leaders, but also that he allowed that group of people to develop ideas to contradict him many times, to controvert his own ideas many times, and many times, he gave in to those ideas, and we've seen the results of it.

My role here is to tie the knots and link the philosophy to governance and commitment of our social investment programme.

I want to thank His Excellency, The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari, for giving me the opportunity to coordinate this programme and also for giving me a free hand to run the programme. The way the programme was structured is that in order to ensure transparency, we left all of the issues around procurement and financing to the Ministry of Budget and National Planning. We have a steering committee of ministers, an inter-ministerial group, about six or seven ministers I think, who decide what to do and what the direction would be. I chair that group of ministers, that inter-ministerial team.

I must again say I pay my deep respect to the man in whose honour we are gathered here today and for whom we gather every year to explore and advance ideas that we hope would shape our nation for the better. And I must say that the Bola Tinubu Colloquium still draws its thematic priority from the main focus of Bola Tinubu's life- the people. Not only is Asiwaju Bola Tinubu a man of the people, his life's story in both private and public spheres, tells of a fighter and champion of people-oriented causes. Let me say that when we began this journey in 2014, and when I say 'this journey' I refer to our government, our party, the APC, was determined to change the dominant narrative about our country. We were determined to ensure that the notion of a country rich in all natural resources, but even richer in human capital, but being destroyed daily by grand corruption, and the impunity in the looting of public resources; we had to change that narrative.

We saw a nation where a few in office had so privatized the commonwealth that while oil prices were at their highest and we were getting growth figures as high as 7%, the majority of people remained extremely poor. On one of our campaign trips in Zamfara State, Mr. President said, "Look at the eyes of this people," and of course, we saw the poverty and desperation in their eyes. Then he said, "They expect us to fix this problem of their poverty as soon as we get into office."

So the President on the campaign trail emphasized three things; security, the economy; and by the economy here, in particular the welfare of the people and Corruption.

To address the question of the welfare of the people, we realized that if we waited for the economy to pick up and then provide jobs for the people, especially young people, many would have given up hope, and many would have ended up in all manner of illegal activities.

So we decided on two things; one to invest heavily in Agriculture; to create jobs in the hinterlands, provide enough food locally and for all of the urban areas. In our agriculture programme, I'm sure that many would already agree that this has been a tremendous success. Several millions of Nigerians have been employed in agriculture. Some who have abandoned their farms, in fact, Mr. President tells the story of his own village where people used to let out farms; they used to lease out their farms to farmers from Kano. But now, nobody is leasing out their farms anymore. Everybody is on his own farm. The more interesting part of that story is that not only are more people now going to Hajj, they are also taking more wives.

Secondly we also decided to put in place an audacious Social Investment Programme to the tune of N500 billion, the largest pro-poor programme in our nation's history, and the largest social safety net, at least in Sub-Saharan Africa. This was despite the fact that by 2015, oil prices fell by over 50% and our production also fell from over 2 million barrels a day to less than 700,000 barrels a day, sometimes even 500,000 barrels in 2016.

We have seen today the empirical evidence of the successes of this programme, and all of that is evident for us to see and listen to several testimonies and stories. 200,000 jobs for undergraduates employed under the N-Power programme, 300,000 more waiting to be employed; they have been pre-selected; over 7 million children being fed daily in 22 States so far; beneficiaries of microcredit loans going to about 300,000; and almost 300,000 households benefiting from conditional cash transfers.

As for our fight against corruption, we realized, as Mr. President said, that if we don't kill corruption, corruption will kill us. Corruption is an existential problem for Nigeria. Let me pause here to reiterate that from all I have seen in government in the past three years, the corruption of the previous five years is what destroyed the Nigerian economy. Every time we talk about this, every time we talk about corruption, our opponents say, "Don't talk about it, just do your own, Don't talk about it." The Yorubas have an adage, they say, and I will translate that. It says "When the conversation comes to the matter of tales, the frog will say, let us skip that, don't talk about it." We will talk about it. And the reason why we will talk about it is, first, we must let our people know that we cannot afford to go this way again; never again should we allow a system where people take the resources of this country and skew the resources of this country, use the resources against the people of this country, and at the same time, they want to continue in ruler-ship. The second is that, we as a party and your government, must show the difference between us and the party and government that impoverished our nation. We must show that difference.

Let me give you an example. In 2014, when oil was at between 100 dollars and 114 dollars a barrel, the actual releases for capital for three ministries – Power, Works and Housing – then they were three separate ministries, was in total N99 billion; while Transportation got 14 billion, and Agriculture got 15 billion. I'm talking about actual releases, not budgeted, what they actually got. Let's compare that with capital releases to the same ministries in 2017, when oil price was between \$50 and \$60 a barrel, N415 Billion for Power, Works & Housing, N80 Billion for Transportation; N65 Billion for Agriculture; totalling N560 Billion, in a time when we were earning at least 50% less than we were earning in 2014.

What is the reason why this is possible? It is possible because if you do not steal the resources of the people, you can spend on the projects that concern the people; it is as simple as that. If you are not stealing the money, you will spend it on the right things, and this is what we have seen.

When the President insisted that the TSA must be done, we suddenly discovered that we actually could see for ourselves how much money was available in the system, and so much money was available. We doubled the money from everywhere, and we found out that this money was available.

And when we say that this same government that spent N139 Billion only on all of Agric, Power, Works and Housing, Transport, etc; spent between January 2015 and the elections, the sum of a N100 Billion in cash and 289 million dollars, altogether about a 100 Billion in cash, was released and spent, shared. This sum of money was in excess of the amount of money that was spent on Power, Works and Housing. And this is the point we are making, that there is no country in the world, and we must know this; there is no country in the world that would allow its resources to be plundered in the way our own resources were plundered and expect to be economically viable; it is not possible. Nigeria is unlike any other country because of the level of corruption that was perpetrated. We must stop that corruption and that is why we are so committed.

When you fight corruption the way we are fighting it, corruption is going to fight back. The system would fight back. You will find that the fight-back is taking place everywhere, it is taking place on social media, it is taking place everywhere. But we are determined. When you listen to the stories of these young people, when you listen to the stories of the vulnerable, the disabled, and all of these people, these are the people for whom we are responsible; these are the people who voted for us. We must ensure that we defend their rights, it is in the defence of the rights of these people that we will put everything out to make sure that those who have been taking the resources of this country are made to pay for it.

I will just give you one last example. Three billion US dollars was lost to something called the Strategic alliance contracts in NNPC, 3 Billion US Dollars, and never paid back. Now, the same 3 Billion dollars, the Minister of Finance sat with us at a meeting of the Economic Management Team, and we are proposing; in fact 3 billion dollars is about a trillion naira. We are now proposing foreign loans for the same 3 billion dollars: (to build the following roads): Abuja-Kaduna-Kano road, 2nd Niger Bridge, Enugu-Port Harcourt road, East-West road, Sagamu-Ore-Benin road, Kano-Maiduguri road, Abuja-Lafia-Akwanga-Keffi road, and Lagos-Abeokuta: the old road, all for the same 3 billion.

That is why the criminal looting of this country cannot be allowed to continue and those who did it must be held to account.

Today we earn almost 50% less than five years ago and we are investing several times more. In 2017 we spent 1:3 Trillion on capital, the largest in the history of this country, despite earning 50% less. The majority of our people depend on the integrity of those who govern them because they don't have the odds. They are far too poor, in many cases, far too vulnerable to be able to say anything for themselves. It is our historic duty as a party, as a government, to provide for all of them, to be a voice for them, to make the sacrifices that are necessary, even when the sacrifices are costly; we must make those sacrifices for them. That is why I am so pleased that the government of President Buhari has chosen the path of the people, to stand with the people. In this government, we have chosen to take the side, and we will remain taking the side of the people of this country.

Again, let me commend the man for whom we are gathered, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the man whom has been known time and time again for his battles for the people of this country, beginning here in Lagos State, all over the South West and for the entire nation.

I want to commend him for his resilience and for sticking to his principles as a fighter for the people of this country. On our part as a government, and for the rest of us, I believe that the best times for our country are yet to come. The future of our country is bright; day by day, step by step, we are going in the right direction. Our country is getting better and better every day.

Thank you very much and God bless you.

Released by:

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