

Democratic Transition and Challenges of Good Governance and Human Security in Nigeria

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Protocols

1. It is a great honour and huge pleasure for me to be here with you today to deliver the 2022 Convocation Lecture of this university. I have several reasons to feel highly elated as I stand before you. First, as you can well imagine, the Founder of this University, Alhaji Abdul Raheem Oladimeji, is an old friend for whom I have immense admiration. As an entrepreneur, he has recorded giant strides in his chosen line of business over the years. In securing to establish the Al-Hikimah University, he also has the kind of foresight and audacity which nations all over the world require for their transformation and advancement. You will surely have heard this said to you many times dear Founder, but allow me on this special occasion to state that by the private investment you made to provide a public good for the people of Nigeria in general and Kwara State in

particular, you have earned your place in the hall of champions of our national development.

2. My joy in being with you today is further reinforced by the fact that the occasion of the Convocation Lecture offers me an opportunity to take a short break from my duties at the service of H.E. Muhammadu Buhari, my boss and the President, Commander-In Chief of the Armed Forces in order to be back home to Ilorin and Kwara State. Such rare opportunities, when they present themselves, also enable me, amidst the call of duty, to reconnect with the extended family, the community of friends, and the many colleagues who keep the State going. Allow me, therefore, to pay tribute to His Excellency the Governor and the members of his team and His Royal Highness, Mai Martaba, the Emir and their officials for their unflinching duty of care in keeping our beloved Kwara State peaceful, safe, and serene.
3. I cannot complete my explanation about the feeling of satisfaction that has welled up in me as I prepared for this Lecture without underscoring that as an academic at heart, engagements with the members of our scholarly communities at home and abroad are always special occasions for me. After all, it was as a student of International Relations that I built the foundations of my career,

and the academy remains for me the place of sober reflection and critical analysis as we strive to tackle the big and small challenges of our times. I would like, therefore, by my presence here today to demonstrate my solidarity with the Vice Chancellor of the University, the members of Governing Council and Senate, the Academic Staff, and the students, doing so in the conviction that what you do is part of the vital building block on the basis of which our continued progress as a nation - and as humanity - can be assured.

4. Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, when in the course of the 1950s, the late British Prime Minister and Statesmen, Harold Macmillan, in a radical departure from the stance that had been taken by one of his best known predecessors, Winston Churchill, stated before his compatriots that a wind of change was already blowing across Africa which the United Kingdom and the rest of world would do well to notice and accommodate, he could not possibly have imagined the momentous changes which his words presaged. The Macmillan wind of change ushered Africa into independent nationhood and set in motion the train of processes and events which, over the years, saw the emergence into sovereign statehood of 54 countries on the African continent. Each of these countries have, in their

different ways, attempted to translate their independence into a power dynamic for the advancement of the welfare of their citizens. Our country Nigeria has not been an exception in this regard.

5. The journey of national rebirth and forward progress which we have travelled since 1960 has been characterised by various stages. The first stage which roughly overlapped with the First Republic was primarily devoted to the attempt at nation and state-building within the overarching framework of a system of a vibrant multiparty politics that was animated by an admixture of visionary, charismatic, and colourful political figures. It is a tribute to the efforts of these pioneering leaders that our country very quickly took its destiny fully into its hands and transited to become a Republic in 1963 with one of its own, the incomparable Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe or Zik of Africa as he was known - as President. Among his contemporaries were: The Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa with Chief Obafemi Awolowo as Leader of official opposition in Federal Parliament, and Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the Northern Nigeria. We will be forgiven to feel nostalgic when we look back at that era in our national history and recall the moments of immense inspiration which our founding leaders

represented for us, one and all.

6. Forging a nation out of land of the many diversities embedded in Nigeria at independence was never going to be an easy and straight forward task. One of the approaches which the pioneering generation tried out was the adoption of a federal arrangement for administering the country. It was an arrangement which came with many advantages which have been extensively and satisfactorily documented by many scholars to merit being retreated here. However, as noted by one of such scholars of Nigerian Political Science, there was also a certain inevitability of instability embedded into the tripodal model of governing the federal system. The embedded contradictions boiled following the 1964 election and eventually led to the collapse of the First Republic in 1996.
7. As Nigerians, we all know the different aspects of the crises that led up to and followed the fall of the First Republic, including the unfortunate Civil War that we fought. The next phase of our quest for a national rebirth, running from 1966 to 1999 was essentially dominated by a succession of military governments. Indeed, during those 33 years, the country was Government by military rulers for a full 28 years of that period. The Second Republic, when it was inaugurated in 1979 barely last four

years and three months. As for the Third Republic, the gradualist, engineered approach to unveiling it got stopped in its tracks with the annulment of the Presidential Elections of June 12 1993. The Interim Government to which the administration of Federal affairs was entrusted barely lasted three months before full blown military rule was re-imposed.

8. Nigerians have many competing interpretations of what to make of the period between 1966 and 1999, and that is to be expected - and even celebrated as a mark of one of our many strengths as a people who question, debate, and contest. Amidst the different interpretative arguments that have flourished about the period, there are certain core facts and messages that stand out about which most can agree. First, is the fact that the tragic civil war that pitched us against one another was our own war of unity that focused our minds in how to be build a better and greater union for ourselves whilst still respecting our many diversities. Secondly, on account of the renewed resolve to build a more virile country, the period witnessed some of the boldest re-engineering of our national political structure as evidenced, among others, by the creation of new states and local governments.

9. Accompanying the re-engineering of the national political structure was a massive investment in the national infrastructure which, looking back, must go down as one of the best moments of a bold surge forward in the developmental trajectory of the country. Undergirding the development process of the period was a strong commitment to national development planning. There was a strong sense of statehood that pervaded the air of the period and refracted itself into a new phase in the quest to forge a vibrant national identity. Various policy measures and institutional innovations were tried out. Some here may remember the Jaji Declaration of 1978 that outlined a clear vision for national advancement. As a people, we were not short of ambition, audacity and hope. We understood our manifest destiny as the leader of the African continent, not least because of our population and other natural endowments that provided indices of power that we could tap into.
10. Not surprisingly, internationally, the period from 1966 to 1999 also saw some of the boldest expressions of Nigerian presence and influence on the world stage. It was my singular honour as former Director-General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United

Nations, and Under Secretary-General of the United Nations, I have many stories to tell of the equally numerous moments of pride that we earned as a leading voice in African continental and global affairs. From our role in the making of the Economic Community of West African States, the effort for the liberation of rest of Africa from settler colonial rule and apartheid, the sacrifices made to end the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone through ECOMOG, the outreach to Global Africa, support to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), active involvement in the activities of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) - the list goes on.

11. Pointing out a few of those aspects of the governance experiences of the period from 1966 to 1999 that resonate with most Nigerians as representative of significant milestones in our journey of nationhood and statehood is not to suggest that there were no serious challenges. Of major worry to the generality of Nigerians were the authoritarianism impulses associated with prolonged military rule, including the prolonged suspension of constitutional order. Whatever may have been the positive attributes that could have been associated with the succession of military administrations that governed the country, Nigerian political and civil societies could never accept militarised governance as anything more

than a temporary aberration that would have to be rectified at the earliest opportunity. After the collapse of the Second Republic and with the Third Republic still born, the next opportunity for the task of rectification came in 1999 when the Fourth Republic was born.

12. Nigeria's return to elected civilian government in the framework of a competitive multiparty system cemented Africa's part in what Samuel Huntington described as the global third wave of democratisation. It marked a new start for Nigeria in the quest to institutionalise democratic governance as the political system of choice for managing national affairs. The ensuing transition process has already produced the longest continuous spell of elected government in all of Nigeria's post-independence history. As of this year 2022, elected civilian government and multiparty politics have run unbroken and uninterrupted for 23 years. In that period, we have witnessed the first civilian to civilian transfer of power, the alternation of power between a ruling party and an opposition party, the growth in confidence and authority of the Independent Electoral Commission of Nigeria, the assertion by the judicial and legislative arms of government of their autonomy, an efflorescence in civil society associational life and the Medusa terrain, etc.

13. There is every reason to believe and affirm that Nigerians have come to see and accept democracy and democratic governance as the preferred method of national governance. However, there are equally strong concerns about the absolute necessity to invest in ensuring that democratic politics works for the people. Across the country, and at different levels of governance-national, state, and local - there is a string yearning that has endured to ensure that elected civilian government delivers the dividends of democracy. These dividends mostly comprise a basket of things that range from employment, poverty eradication, wealth creation, and social policy for citizen welfare to the efficient and abundant supply of quality services to the public, respect for the rights of the populace, the empowerment of women, the creation of opportunities for self-actualisation by the youth, etc.
14. These elements and symbols of the democratic dividend would easily be recognized by all the actors in political society and government as essential to the prospect for sustaining and consolidating democratic governance. That is why since the 1999 transition to elected government, successive administrations have committed themselves to delivering some aspects or the other of the democratic dividends that citizens expect.

However, it is also a fact that on account of a confluence of factors, the delivery of the dividends has also proved to be far more daunting than might have been expected or wished for. The inadequacy of public revenues to service the different competing needs that governments must serve has been compounded by such shocks as the wildly fluctuating prices of primary commodities, the contagion effects of global financial crises emanating by way of the sub-prime meltdown that hit the US before spreading to Europe and the rest of the world, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Great Recession it triggered, and, presently the adverse consequences of the war in Ukraine.

15. The point must also be made that the quest for the delivery of the dividends of democracy has been stymied by a number of domestic factors. Among these factors is the significantly weakened capacity of our public service institutions, the persistence of corruption in the public sector especially, and a sharp decline in ethical values in society. In the face of these challenges, generalised human security has proved quite elusive to win. As unemployment, poverty, and inequality have persisted, a fertile ground has fostered itself as to enable the emergence of an array of enemies of Nigerian democratisation.

These anti-democratic forces include the admixture of radical extremist groups, trans-frontier and home-grown criminal gangs, different groups of pirates, and bearers of violent ethno-regional irredentism, etc. Combatting these groups and countering their anti-secular, separatist and violent ideologies have been at the heart of the governance of national security.

16. Under President Muhammadu Buhari, significant strides have been made in the implementation of the Administration tripod Programmes on Security, Economy and Anti-Corruption. The score card is there for any objective analysis. In addition to massive infrastructural projects and his commitment to free and fair elections, at the end of his second and final tenure in office, in May 29th, 2022, the President would leave Nigeria a legacy of safer, more diversified and growing economy and more united country than he inherited in 2015.
17. Let the point be made at this stage that the challenges of human security afflicting democracies is a global phenomenon. Not surprisingly, the situation is exercising the minds of scholars, activists, and leaders around the world. The central question that is posed is how democracy can be renewed and reinvigorated to better serve the needs of citizens? It is here that I

feel the Nigerian scholarly community in general has its work cut out for, including you at Al- Hikmah. At a time of when students of democracy around the world are stepping up their work on how democratic governance could be recalibrated to meet the challenges of very rapidly changing times, our scholarly community must rise to the challenge of how, in our context, elected government can be ushered to a new phase that will enable leaders to answer the problems of the day.

18. The importance and urgency of ensuring that democratic governance works to advance human security cannot be overstated. First, we have a population that is still growing and which is overwhelmingly youthful. Secondly, in the face of real challenges, unhealthy ideologies and fears that are threatening to divide Nigerians, need to be countered with a new vision of faith in the benefits of our oneness and hope in our future. Indeed, we must not permit the enemies of the Nigerian State to triumph over the legitimate aspiration for a united, peaceful and prosperous nation. Thirdly, in the global effort to remake democratic governance, it cannot and must be that Nigeria and Africa should find themselves simply adopting the role of rule takers, as against claiming a seat at the table as rule makers as well.

19. Finally, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Excellencies, as we march towards the general elections of 2023, political society has an opportunity which it must seize at every moment of the campaign trail to remind Nigerians that despite the plethora of challenges facing the country and the toughness of the times, democratic governance still offer the best chance for the achievement of the goals of our national transformation, and unity provides the most solid platform for realising our national greatness.

20. Thank you for your kind attention. Long live Al-Hikmah University. Long live Ilorin Emirate. Long live Kwara State. And long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria. God bless you all.