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Transcript

Security And Sustainable Development In Northern Nigeria

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Aliyu M Wamakko

I feel honoured and delighted to address this forum on two of the most important issues of concern in my country and indeed in the part of Nigeria from which I come. As the Governor of one of the states North of Core-North, these issues on which I am about to speak are, without doubt, critical to our survival and advancement, first as an integral part of Nigeria and then, of course, as a geo-political Zone.

Long before the privilege came to speak on today's theme I had always pondered and come to a number of realizations on these two issues of discourse. First I have reached a conclusion that security and sustainable development are so closely related and inter-dependent, one cannot be attained without the other.

It is also obvious that the sustainable development of Northern Nigeria is in fact, a determinant to the overall development of Nigeria as a whole. Then of course, security in the North is invariably critical to security in the nation as a whole. Nigeria's socio-political experiences since our formation as a nation and recent events, particularly those concerning our current security challenges have moved these thoughts of mine from mere intellectual meditation to clear present realities.

It may not be exigent to rehash the dynamics and challenges of development in Northern Nigeria. Neither is it necessary to dwell on a description or analysis of the serious security trends in our part of the country. Obviously, it is with a full awareness of these and the sincere concern about their implications for our region and people that the topic for my talk is decided. Suffice it to say however, that it is with a view to drastically address the two issues that all efforts, across all segments of Northern society and indeed of the Nigerian nation as a whole, are converging.

The most immediate need, obviously, is to restore security on the land and the people's confidence in the capacity of government to guarantee the safety of lives and property. Of this, there tends to be two main aspects, the more significant one being to find a lasting solution to the current wave of callous attacks in the North. The other and longer term need is to sustain peace and order and forestall future threats.

The leadership in Northern Nigeria are not in the least unaware of the task before us of rising to the serious challenge and thus we are, as should be expected, at the frontline of the effort to combat this menace that threatens the corporate existence of our nation and the very survival of our region. At

individual and collective levels, leaders of various political, social, religious and governmental institutions in Northern Nigeria have stepped up efforts and strategies to contain the ugly trend.

Critical to success of these efforts however, is the need for all Nigerians, particularly those residing within the North to have the right impression on and attitude to the crisis. A strategy to ensure this is the activities of traditional and religious leaders and groups against the association of religious or ethnic motives to these nefarious acts. Joint declarations to that effect and social overtures between Christian and Muslim clerics and groups are sending the right message to adherents of both religions on understanding, trust and tolerance.

An integral part of this sensitization drive is the effort to raise the level of public concern and alertness about breaches of security. Government agencies, the media, traditional and religious institutions and civil society are actively engaged in the campaign to make neighbourhoods more alert and responsive to potential threats. In fact, the successes being realized in combating the current menace is largely ascribable to the cooperation of the public with security agencies.

Governments in Northern States are strengthening these measures through closer cooperation and greater support for security agencies. Interventions include the provision of logistics and facilities and financial contributions to security commands and units to enhance patrols and other operations. Security agencies are indeed playing a greater role in the planning by governments, as they are in fact part and parcel of the states.

Within their own jurisdictions, state governments like ours in Sokoto have introduced community-based security groups. The neighbourhood Initiative in Sokoto State which draws membership from youths from the local governments, who serve as neighbourhood alerts to complement the police. These vigilantes have helped to resolve minor local issues that had the potential to escalate to major security challenges.

An important measure towards addressing the root of the security challenge are the programs and policies by Northern state governments, aimed at reducing poverty among the populace, particularly the youth. In Sokoto State, such initiatives have been an integral part of our administration's development agenda since its inception. Already, our poverty alleviation programs have started yielding dividends, as thousands of artisans and small investors

benefit from government assistance, in the form of interest free loans and other facilities.

Our youth empowerment strategies have shown remarkable progress. This is the outcome of the various skill acquisition programs we have embarked upon *ab initio*, through which thousands of young people are trained in different vocations, ranging from soap-making, tyre-repair, welding and carpentry to computer management and several other programs.

The administration in Sokoto State has periodically provided the impetus to bolster the business climate in the state through among, other strategies, the provision of loans to the business community, complete renovation of the Sokoto Central Market and construction of a new modern meet and fish market in the state capital.

Agriculture remains the main source of our people's wealth and major resource base. The sector is indeed the most feasible potential for the creation of employment opportunities for our people and vehicle for our economic advancement. In order to fully harness this endowment, our administration has accorded agriculture the priority it deserves. The provision of farming inputs and implements is top on our agenda, while we vigorously pursue the policy of building the capacity of farmers through the provision of loans to farmers' groups.

These efforts are in addition to our outreach strategies of partnership with advanced investors in agriculture outside the country, through which our farming communities will learn modern and improved techniques and remedies. The projected outcome of these initiatives is the development of agro-allied industries in our state, which would invariably boost our economy and provide jobs for our people, especially the youth.

Our administration is however aware of the pivotal role of qualitative education in the achievement of these goals. Incidentally, education is receiving the priority attention it deserves in Sokoto State, as indicated by the numerous interventions we have made since we secured our people's mandate.

The first action we took was the abolition of school fees from primary up to university levels. In the same vein, we have improved feeding quality in all our boarding schools to retain enrolment. Our government also takes the responsibility for settling the registration fees of all indigenes at all levels leading up to the university. These incentives are complemented by a drastic

improvement of the learning environment through massive renovation and reconstruction of school infrastructure at all levels and procurement of modern teaching and learning aids.

The government has in addition, endeavoured to provide sponsorship to indigenes, who wish to pursue higher studies in institutions within Nigeria and abroad especially in the sciences. Related to this effort, are our comprehensive teacher training programs, aimed at improving the quality of instruction, particularly at the basic level.

A major concern of our administration is in the area of girl-child education. This is indeed, top on the agenda of our government, as we have instituted various incentives to encourage the enrolment and retention of girls into school, in concert with partner agencies like UNICEF, UNDP, ETF, UNPF and Northern Education Project.

An added initiative in this regard, which has yielded remarkable results, is the school for continuing education in Sokoto, that offers a second chance to ladies, who for societal reasons like marriage have dropped out of formal school. A similarly noble strategy is the on-going integration of traditional Qur'anic education with western education, across the state.

A major boost to the program is the commissioning of the Almajiri integrated school in Sokoto by the President early this year.

The projected outcome of all this is to take children off the streets, particularly the army of child-beggars that roam the urban neighbourhoods, thus giving them a fair chance in life and distancing them from the reach of unscrupulous elements, who might wish to enlist them for mischief.

Various and accelerated as these and numerous other efforts are, their full benefits can only be realized with time, perhaps beyond the life-span of our leadership. What we are doing is merely providing the impetus and catalyst for what we believe will be a sustained process through the years to come.

Indeed, the final solutions to the problems of our country may not materialize as quickly as we wish them to. But it is the firm belief of all rational and right-thinking citizens of Nigeria that hope is not and cannot indeed, be lost on the future of our nation. For, as it has always been with our country, voices of reason and minds with noble thoughts are emerging and converging from all parts of Nigeria to give our dear nation the reason and strength to overcome our current challenges.

Certainly, too, with the understanding and support of our friends in the international community, Nigeria has nothing else to do but rise to be the great nation it has aspired and deserves to be.

Finally, for those of us who lived to witness the thirty months old bloody civil war in Nigeria, the menace of OPC in South West Nigeria, the unjust violence in the Niger Delta, the kidnapping mania in the south East and the Tiv uprising in the former Benue/plateau state; we have every reason to believe that the Nigerian nation will soon come out victorious of the current security challenges. All that is therefore required is for us to have joint and responsive governance from among the states and federal government as well as the society at large. Thank you.