



CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE
T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: contact@chathamhouse.org.uk
F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 www.chathamhouse.org.uk
Charity Registration Number: 208223

Transcript

Democracy in Nigeria and the Rebirth of Opposition

Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu

National Leader, Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)

18 July 2011

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Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu:

Mr Chairman and Member of Parliament, Hon Chi Onwurah, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured to be here at the Chatham House to rub minds with you all about the state of democracy in my homeland, Nigeria, where drama and democracy sometimes seem interchangeable. This city and this nation, will always occupy a special place in my heart, each time I reflect on our protracted struggles to enthrone genuine democracy in our country. This city and this nation provided the Nigerian opposition leaders and activists' refuge when we were hounded out of our country by the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha. Some of the leaders of this country, especially of the Liberal Democrats and Labour, provided some impetus to our democratic struggle, by helping to step up the pressure on the military junta at home. We remain indebted to political leaders such as Eric Reginald Lubbock, better known as Lord Avebury and the former foreign secretary, the late Robin Cook. They played salutary roles in the Nigerian struggle. We are grateful.

Throughout its nine-decade history, the Chatham House has been a forum for discussion of the great issues of the day. It has been a receptive venue to raise and examine the ideas that shape the contours of history and make up the fabric of our political economy. It is thus my pleasure to be here to share my thoughts on Nigeria's political development by focusing on the status of Nigeria's democracy and the resurgence of a viable political opposition in the country. We cannot talk about the vitality of Nigerian democracy without talking about the vitality of the political opposition. For there is no democracy without diversity in substantive opinion and political affiliation.

To underscore this fundamental concept, our party spurned an offer by the ruling party to join a nebulous 'Unity Government'. Our ground of rejection was that our democracy would be better nourished and better served if we, as a minority party, remain outside the loop of power to nurture the culture of opposition. I must report that the ruling party appeared to have bought the idea when it excluded cabinet nominees of a string of small parties grovelling to be part of the government.

The past quarter century has seen the expansion of forms of democratic governance throughout the world, including Africa. Democracy is so well considered the most legitimate form of government that no one dare publicly speak ill of it. The lack of vocalization does not mean the lack of enmity. It would be premature and naïve to conclude that true democracy has emerged

triumphant. History is still being shaped and the verdict is yet to be rendered. We must not err into thinking democracy has been anchored in Nigeria or in other countries just because of the conduct of elections and the existence of certain institutions usually found in a democracy. We must be careful not to read too much into the increasing visibility of processes that appear democratic. If we lend too much credence to the outward appearance, we will fail to look critically at the inner workings of government and the substantive quality of its output. We dare not mistake the image of democracy with real democracy any more than we should mistake the image in a mirror with the real person. If so, we will be applauding a form of government that looks like democracy but does not act like it. We will be applauding as Nigeria's political economy becomes a corporatist entity in democrat's clothing.

It is of utmost importance when talking of Nigerian democracy, that we not only highlight the existence of certain institutions but weigh those institutions on two scales. First, do these organs procedurally function in a democratic manner? Second, do they produce outcomes that advance the public welfare in ways that further democratization? Based on this analytic construct, we should assess Nigeria's democracy. I say this, not due to anything learned from a book but due to my own humble experiences. I have fought, struggled and suffered to help promote democracy in Nigeria. This has been the main pursuit of my adult life and remains my guiding light. Thus, I know well the snakes that lurk in the garden.

There are many people who are all too willing to take advantage of the democratic process. They advocate democracy up to the point of gaining power and no further. Once in power, they eagerly whittle down the very democratic mechanisms that enabled their political ascent. Upon making it to the rooftop, they kick aside the ladder to prevent others from making a similar climb.

Nigerian democracy is not yet strong enough to have corralled these errant forces. Actors with democratic phenotypes but authoritarian genotypes abound in the current political landscape. I dare say Nigeria has more of this ilk than of genuine democrats. If not kept under watchful eye, these personalities will deface what already is a sparse edifice. We are positioned at the fulcrum where Nigeria is as likely to incline toward artificial democracy as it is toward the real specimen.

2003 and 2007 Elections: Less Than Meets the Eye

A discussion of the state of Nigeria's democracy must look at the recent elections. Before we do that, a brief historical sketch is in order.

Nigeria has gone through four or five major governmental changes. The first was the movement from colony to independent state in 1960. The second was the military coup of January 1966 and the counter coup of July 1966. Both events were bloody and marked our nation's transition from civilian rule to military rule. The two events inexorably led to Nigeria's first civil war, which ended in 1970. In 1979, after several aborted attempts at democratization, the military finally handed over power to elected civilians. Four years after, in the dying hours of 1983, the soldiers seized power again. A renewed attempt at democratization began in 1992 with elections into the national and state assemblies and the governorship posts.

The crowning poll was the presidential election on 12 June 1993, won freely and fairly by the Nigerian businessman, Moshood Abiola. This election, adjudged the best in our nation's history, was inscrutably annulled by the military tyrants. A democratic transition that was in full gear was abruptly terminated. Hell was let loose. Protests were crushed by military tanks. Hundreds of protesters died. Freedom of expression and political rights taken for granted in this land of Magna Carta and the Human Rights Act, were rudely curtailed in my country. Some media houses were shut down, titles proscribed, journalists detained without charge or spurious charge. The winner of the election was imprisoned for four years for demanding the actualization of his mandate. And he died under incarceration. Politicians, especially those affiliated to the National Democratic Coalition, NADECO, had charges of treason dangling on their heads. Scores of politically endangered Nigerians scurried into exile. I was among this group, spending about five years marooned outside my country of birth. In June 1998, the military dictator had a sudden death, with the successor, paving way for another attempt at democratization. The military-civilian transition was consummated on May 29, 1999 with elected officials taking charge of governance.

The superficiality of the transition, its many contradictions sooner began to manifest. The newly minted political system was found to possess many attributes of the parent. Our country's democracy was a parody of true democracies: ours mimicked some essential aspects of military and authoritarian rule.

President Obasanjo had the chance to become the father of democratic Nigeria by using his tenure to accelerate the drive to federal democracy by establishing a fair and tolerant political culture. Instead of raising a unifying banner and standing as a father to the nation, he became a hector that fought all and sundry. In the end, his great failing was his attempt to superimpose a barracks mentality on a fledgling democracy. Thus, he entertained themes such as a one party state. He and his close acolytes resonated with undemocratic anthems such as the PDP ruling for sixty years or a millennium as if this were the blossoming of a Nigerian Reich. He even attempted to rewrite the constitution to rule for a third term!

When the 2003 elections came, Obasanjo and the PDP pilfered more elections than they properly won, using brute force and brazen fraud. In the western part of Nigeria, where my former party, the Alliance for Democracy had won five states in 1999, our control was sharply reduced to just one state, Lagos State, then under my watch. In all, the PDP emerged from the 2003 polls as a party with a super-majority in all things except performance. Opposition parties had been ruthlessly emasculated. The PDP would henceforth rule without any viable opposition.

Come 2007, the PDP raised its electoral rascality a notch higher. First, President Obasanjo declared the election as a 'Do or Die' affair. PDP stalwarts openly commandeered election materials everywhere it could. Phantom results were announced for phantom polls. Candidates were illegally excluded from the ballot paper. Opposition candidates, who went to bed cocksure they had won in their constituencies, woke up the next day to learn that the result had been altered to favour the PDP rivals. That election was a monumental embarrassment and a mortal threat to the pursuit of democracy. Things at that juncture seemed very bleak for the opposition.

In retrospect, by this gross overreach, the PDP had become its own most potent adversary, triggering both international and national backlash. After eight years of shoddy arbitrary governance, it belied logic that the PDP in 2007 would capture 80 percent of the gubernatorial seats, literally enjoy a clean sweep in most State Assemblies and maintain supermajorities in both chambers of the National Assembly. It appeared that Nigeria orbited in a strange universe where the poorer the ruling party performed, the greater was its electoral reward.

However, the wholesale confiscation would come unglued. It was too blatant for even a relatively quiet public to stomach. The electoral robbery actually

energized some of us in the opposition and spurred moves for the building of a coalition of political forces.

The Resurgence of the Opposition

Both at the levels of fighting for electoral integrity and justice and that of ensuring true fiscal federalism, the opposition made the courts the first theatre of battle. In many cases, the response to the overbearing ways and outright constitutional violations of the Federal government fell upon the opposition states to initiate. The reason was that the majority of the states were controlled by the PDP- and most governors were for reasons of party unity, or simply timidity, unwilling to oppose the President and the Federal government, even when their best interest would be served by opposition. The exception was the so called 'resource control' cases, when oil producing states stood up against the Federal government.

The approach of the opposition in redressing many of these unacceptable policy positions, constitutional violations of the federal principles, and election rigging was quite varied. We believed then that in the absence of a significant voice in the parliament with coalitions of smaller opposition parties, the courts would be our only serious option for redress. Between 2001 and 2007, we mounted several legal challenges in the Supreme Court, the Lagos State usually being a plaintiff, where we asked the court to resolve a wide variety of issues.

Beginning in 2002 with the case of Attorney-General of the Federation v Attorney-General of Abia State and 36 Other States, Lagos State being the 24th defendant and counter claimant, the Supreme Court made a number of far-reaching pronouncements on fiscal federalism. It held inter alia that the

(I) funds in the federation account can only be distributed among the federal government, States and Local governments. The provision for 'special funds' was held inconsistent with the Constitution.

(II) External debt could not be serviced from the Federation Account; each government – federal, state, local government – could not charge its debt to the federal account. It was therefore unlawful for the federal to deduct its debts from the federal account.

(III) Funding of joint venture contracts and the Nigerian Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) could not be charged on the federation account, as NNPC could not qualify as either the federal government, a state or local government.

(IV) States were entitled on the basis of derivation to a share of revenue derived from capital gains tax, incomes or profit of persons other than companies and stamp duties.

(V) Natural gas is a natural resource- and any revenue accruing from it qualifies for the application of the principle of derivation in favour of any state from which it is derived.

In *Attorney-General of Lagos State v Attorney-General of the Federation* decided in 2003, the Supreme Court was called upon to nullify the provisions of Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Decree No 88 of 1992 which purportedly gave the Federal government the right to control urban and regional planning as well as physical development of land in Lagos state. The Supreme Court held by a split majority of 4-3 that:

'No argument can defeat or reduce from the general planning legislative power of the House of Assembly of a State which is a residual constitutional power. It gives the State the exclusive function for the planning, layout, and development of their respective areas...' (Uwaifo, JSC).

In 2004, in *Attorney-General of Lagos State v Attorney-General of the Federation* we were again before the Supreme Court, this time, to challenge the President's order withholding funds allocated to Lagos State, for the benefit of its Local governments and for the reason that we had created local governments illegally.

The Supreme Court held that the President had no power or warrant to withhold funds meant for a State from the federation account. Regarding the question of whether the 37 new local governments created by the State's House of Assembly were illegal as contended by the federal government, the Supreme Court held that although the process of the creation of the local governments had not been completed, as the National Assembly had not amended the schedule containing the list of local governments to include the 37, the local governments were nevertheless validly created by the House of Assembly.

Time and time again our recourse to the courts won us, more constitutional victories than the National Assembly's majority was able to secure for itself by legislation. By and large, the battle for a truly federal state has been fought not in the chambers of the National Assembly but in the hallowed halls of the Supreme Court. Nigeria's National Assembly looks like an undemocratic institution, serving undemocratic ends.

Winning Back the States

As mentioned earlier, the PDP fraudulently commandeered victories in the states and assembly elections. Rather than resort to the streets in protest and encourage anarchy, the opposition resorted to the courts because of its respect for the rule of law and began the battle to regain the stolen mandates. Thus, the battle to regain the state, of which we were brazenly robbed in 2007 elections – namely, Edo, Oyo, Ogun, Ekiti and Ondo were fought in the courts. For the first time in our country, we used technology and forensic analysis to prove electoral fraud in many states.

The method of rigging widely employed by the PDP in those states was multiple thumb printing of ballot papers, often with the connivance of the police. These thumb-printed papers were then stuffed into ballot boxes at different polling units. This method had succeeded largely in previous elections, with the perpetrators confidently believing that they would not be detected.

However, we were determined not only to win back the states, through the judicial process but also to prove the extensive rigging perpetrated by the PDP. The ACN hired 52 British finger print experts led by late Bristol-based finger print expert, Adrian Forty. We also hired an additional 10 Israeli finger prints experts. In a massive finger prints identification operation spanning almost four months, over 1.5 million votes across the contested states were examined. In the end the experts identified incredible percentages of multiple thumb prints. In one locality – Ife, in Osun State – we detected over 80% of the ballots purportedly cast for PDP were thumb-printed by a few persons. In Osun state, the biometrics was confirmed by simple arithmetic and common sense. In one unit Oduduwa Hall of the Obafemi Awolowo University, a total of 2,300 votes were returned. Two thousand of the votes were purportedly returned for PDP. The voting period recorded for that unit was between 8 am and 3 p.m. This is 420 minutes. When you divide 420 minutes by 2,300, you get an average of eleven seconds! So we were able to prove that an average voter, who should have spent at least 5 minutes from accreditation to voting spent only 11 seconds! Only multiple thumb printing can explain that.

In the preparations for the 2011 elections, we knew what we were up against as the opposition: an electoral system designed for easy manipulation by the ruling party, electoral laws that were undemocratic and susceptible to abuse and manipulations by the ruling party, a hostile security environment, and a system in which so much state money had been pumped into the system to fight the opposition.

We were fully aware that unless we made electoral integrity a make-or-break issue, the 2007 travesty would only be a dress-rehearsal for even greater impunity. We therefore initiated the 'every vote must count campaign'. Several civil society and professional groups kicked off the campaign at a lecture given in my honour on my birthday- March 29, 2008. Thereafter we established in collaboration with several civil society groups "the Coalition of Democrats for Electoral Reforms (CODER), to ensure the integrity of elections. As part of our struggle for free and fair elections, we supported and joined the mobilization by CODER to ensure the integrity of elections. We used CODER to demand for electoral reforms, we rallied Nigerians, especially politicians with progressive orientation to our side. Under my direction, CODER led the struggle for electoral reforms. Local and international civil society organizations and foreign governments also engaged with the government to ensure transparency and accountability in the electoral process. From this stage, the 'one man, one vote' mantra resonated across Nigeria.

As a result of the vigorous agitation by the opposition for fundamental electoral changes, the government inaugurated the Electoral Reform Committee to bolster its image. Chaired by former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Muhammed Uwais, the committee did a good job and produced a comprehensive report detailing the faults in the electoral process and enumerating 83 procedural and substantive recommendations. Key recommendations dealt with ensuring the independence of the electoral commission and of creating an electoral process less vulnerable to manipulation. If implemented, the report would have constituted a radical transformation of the political landscape and place Nigeria on the right path to stable democracy.

As with most attempts to reform a stubborn and regressive system, our efforts succeeded in part and failed in part. Due to public agitation, the Electoral Commission Chairman who engineered the sordid 2007 election was replaced by a respected figure in whom civil society had confidence. We also were successful in calling for a new voter's register to replace the one the former Electoral Commission head had concocted.

These pressures opened the way for the change in the leadership of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which eventually was largely responsible for the relative transparency experienced during the last elections. It must be stressed, however, that the change in the leadership of INEC is insufficient for the total transformation of the electoral process in Nigeria.

First, the recalcitrant government failed to resolve the issue of the independence of the Electoral Commission. Second, government refused to alter the selection process giving a president unilateral power to appoint the Chairman and its commissioners. And third, government refused to provide the Electoral Commission an independent budget. This means the Commission remained susceptible to political influence because the National Assembly and President could control the Commission's purse strings for as long as they deemed appropriate.

The few and cosmetic reforms made by the National Assembly were also delayed because neither the assembly nor the presidency really wanted genuine reform aimed at improving the electoral process. Their eleventh hour antics were mere shifty manoeuvres to bolster their political positions for the approaching election. Instead of perfecting and insulating the electoral process and broader political environment from manipulation, they focused national discourse on trivial intra party matters.

The 2011 Elections

Against this backdrop, the 2011 elections must be weighed. The elections improved on the 2007 edition. The PDP still emerged the dominant party, with its majority in the National Assembly slightly reduced. Its losses were the opposition gains.

However, the 2011 elections were not of the high quality the government and many international observers proclaimed. In a way, international observers have done Nigeria a disservice that will become apparent in the future. The 2007 elections were the bitter dregs from a bad cup. Those who conducted it employed the full handbook of electoral malpractice. Coming into this year's polls, foreign observers and many domestic observers thought the worst. These observers were possessed of the preconceived notion that they would see open and coarse misconduct in broad daylight and at every polling station.

Thus, observers were pleasantly surprised when they travelled about Nigeria's urban centres only to find our citizens standing in orderly lines waiting to cast votes. Expecting the worst, they unduly applauded the modest improvement that took place. If this were all that constituted the electoral process, I would agree with the clean verdict pronounced by the observers. However, the observers did not see what took place before Election Day or what happened in rural Nigeria. More importantly, most observers ended their day as the sun set and the polling stations closed. They ended their watch

just as the agents of malpractice would begin their craft. Observers made a broad final conclusion based on a thin filament of information. They judged a complicated play solely by viewing one of its several acts.

Had they looked more thoroughly, they would have noticed that ACN supporters and candidates were intimidated and beaten in many places. In Benue and Kwara states, the gubernatorial elections were snatched from our party. In Taraba and Akwa Ibom we suffered electoral brigandage. But the medallion for gravest misconduct goes to the PDP governor of Akwa Ibom State. Seeing his re-election in danger, this man, armed with billions of petro Naira, stopped at nothing to thwart our candidate. He threatened, maimed and destroyed. Hundreds of our members were injured. Many were killed. The security forces did nothing to protect our members. Our candidate would not be deterred. The PDP then deployed the police powers to influence the election. Although we were the party being attacked, our candidate was arrested and whisked to Abuja to be charged with treason. In parts of Nigeria, deigning to contest against the PDP incumbent became a treasonable offense. This is not the mark of democracy. It bears the stamp of crude repression. It is reminiscent of the military state.

There was more in the PDP state of Akwa Ibom. The Governor was not satisfied with the abuse of the law.

When our candidate returned to Akwa Ibom, the governor steamrolled through a pliant State Assembly a measure granting him the unilateral power to detain an individual without judicial recourse. The law was to straitjacket our candidate. It was backdated and gazetted in a hurry and retroactively used against our candidate. Again, this was the fruit of an elected anti-democrat at work. The governor used the colour of the democratic legislative process to accomplish a result that would make even the most flint-hard autocrat blush in giddy embarrassment. Akwa Ibom was just the most blatant manifestation of a bushel of condemnable electoral practices during the 2011 elections. The frequency of these practices at the state and local levels were such that they cannot reasonably be discounted as exceptions. This misconduct was a common, decisive feature of the elections.

This is a truer picture of the quality of the 2011 elections than the tidy fable widely disseminated. I can understand how observers came to their conclusion given the constraints under which they operated. I can also understand that many friendly governments wanted to see the elections in Nigeria as successful. Given the world as it is, no one seeks another foreign policy challenge. Yet, the negative consequence of this inflated measure is

that the bar has been set too low for the conduct of subsequent elections. Those in power now believe they will not have to improve the process. This would be a gross miscalculation of the public mood. Should subsequent elections be of the same uneven quality, I fear a backlash that cannot simply be contained by resort to the judiciary for resolution.

The Presidential Election

This brings us to the presidential election. I believe Jonathan won the election but that the returns attributed to him in some parts of the country obviously appeared exaggerated. The inflated tally subtracted some plaudits from what would have been a well deserved victory. Thus, celebrating the election as free and fair might lead to INEC beating its chest and might short circuit the process of fundamental electoral reform. We must not relent in our struggle for fundamental reforms.

To be honest, the opposition did not run a strong enough and sufficiently coordinated campaign with a unifying message. The opposition believed that public disenchantment with the ruling party, PDP was enough to get rid of them at the polls. In retrospect, we made an important strategic mistake that continued to play out and weaken us throughout the campaign. The major opposition parties began their serious work too late. We got distracted by the electoral reform gimmick employed by the PDP led National Assembly. Already faced with a short election season, we waited too long to make important decisions and to get our campaigns off the ground.

In the end, the opposition parties danced with each other but did not embrace. Our constant dancing however confused the public and partially doused some of the public's enthusiasm. It was a learning experience that will not be repeated in the next election.

A unified ticket would have made for a more competitive race and the final outcome would have been different. Due to the unique circumstances of his rise, much of the public saw Jonathan as a distinctive figure. They saw him as an outsider of the much detested PDP establishment. Because he faced a few powerful figures in the PDP primary, many people assumed he was the man of the future because he had squared off against men of the past. Thus we heard the popular refrain 'I voted for Jonathan not the PDP.'

Security and the Economy: The Pillars of our Future

The election has come and gone. President Jonathan is there now in his own right. The first challenge he faced was the post-electoral violence in parts of the north. The violence was caused by perceived inequities much deeper than what occurred during the election. The eruption was both about the quality of the election and the dwindling quality of life.

The electoral violence comes from the same wellspring that has produced the urgent security threat called Boko Haram, which has launched a violent campaign against government authority. Boko Haram signposts the deficiency of the ruling party in governing the country.

The nation's stability and the President's mettle are being tested. Should he stumble on this, unrest may follow in other areas. Different groups may race to mimic Boko Haram's apparent success in challenging government. This is a serious matter not to be under-estimated.

On this issue, the President has my full sympathy and support in finding ways to quickly resolve Boko Haram. He must succeed, for his failure will damage Nigeria. However, he must do much better at communicating with the public, to build widespread support for a durable resolution to this dilemma. Without enduring peace, government will not be able to achieve the transformational agenda already promised Nigerians.

While the opposition has a duty to lend support on existential issues of security, we likewise have a duty to draw a distinction between us and the PDP on key matters affecting the political economy.

This is the area where the opposition must make material improvement in talking to the public and in highlighting the vast difference between us and the ruling party. The average Nigerian sees little space separating the PDP's political and economic policies from ours. This means we have not been proficient in explaining who we are and what we stand for. We must alter the landscape of Nigerian politics. We have to remove the obstacles of region, ethnicity, religion and personality so that people can see the substantive issues more clearly. We must turn politics from the practice of 'who do you know' to a critical inquiry into 'what do you know and in what do you believe.' This is the opposition's next great agenda.

Should we do this, the public will begin to see the profound difference between the progressive Nigeria we want and the static Nigeria of the PDP. Should we do this well, the outcome of the next election will be vastly different

notwithstanding any attempts to colour the outcome in a hue different from that chosen by the people. At that point, we will be able to say that the scales of Nigeria's future have shifted in favour of democracy and away from the mere semblance of democracy.

In a nutshell, our objective will be to grow the economy for the benefit of the many and not the few. We shall do this by recalibrating the strategic balance between the real and financial sectors. We will put the financial sector in its rightful place as facilitator of investment to the real sector. Our emphasis will be on the agricultural, manufacturing and industrial sectors to expand Nigeria's wealth. No country of our size can be great without a robust manufacturing base.

Our elected officials shall be responsive to the people. That is why our party's governors issued a public statement, agreeing to pay the minimum wage, while others were dithering.

The Bad Management of the Economy

PDP management of the economy in the last 12 years has been ineffective and here I am being charitable in my use of adjectives. They claim real GDP growth at a robust pace of nearly seven per cent per annum. How can that be? Inflation runs at over 12 percent. Are they really claiming the economy is growing at nearly 20 percent in nominal terms?

High unemployment rates remain unchanged. Official statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics puts unemployment rate in Nigeria at 19.7 per cent, with about 10 million Nigerians unemployed as at March 2009. But we know the figures are much higher. The amount of people living below the poverty line has not decreased. The middle class – the backbone of any democracy – is an endangered species. Manufacturing and industrial firms are closing faster than others are opening. Electricity supply remains a serious challenge. In the last 10 years, over \$15 billion has been spent to improve power generation. Yet, it remains at an abysmal level of less than 4,000 megawatts per day. Cities such as London and New York enjoy four to five times more electricity than the entire Nigeria.

Fuel supply is also a major challenge. We have a government unable to provide millions of Nigerians with refined petroleum products. While in the past, oil majors were able to meet demand, the reverse is the case now.

Food prices are climbing so much so that hunger has entered households where it was once a stranger. After earning about 200 billion dollars from oil

revenue in 10 years, based on NNPC documents, Nigeria is still a pauper nation. The PDP big guns must be the only ones benefitting from this illusory economic growth.

This brings me to the issue of corruption which remains the bane of our development. Corruption continues unabated and examples abound. There are allegations bordering on the extortion of illicit payments from operators in the upstream and downstream sectors of the oil economy. The outright wastage of financial resources on illegal subsidies that never percolate to the people need to be boldly addressed by President Jonathan. Mis-management of scarce resources as exemplified in the delegation of the Petroleum Subsidy Funds (about \$8billion per year) to the Ministry of Petroleum instead of the Ministry of Finance leaves the door wide open for corruption.

Nigeria suffers one of the world's worst rates of income inequality. The economy is not an open one and we do not yet practice sufficient economic justice to change the skewed regime. The PDP strategy is a corporatist/financier model whereby it seeks to place a greater and greater concentration of economic wealth and power in the hands of a select few. The party exploits the levers of government to lay claim to vast tracts of economic power to the exclusion of everyone else. This is dangerous. This policy began with President Obasanjo, who tried to establish a new economic elite in his own image. He pushed the formation of the holding company called Transcorp. The plan was to use Transcorp to lay claim to an obscene amount of the nation's resources with the support of self-acclaimed technocrats in Obasanjo's cabinet. Transcorp was to resemble one of the vast royal corporations of two or three centuries past. This entity began purchasing everything it could grab, from national telephone company to the best hotel in Abuja. Had Obasanjo and his platoon of merry men succeeded with extending to a third presidential term, this vision for the domination of the Nigerian economy would have been realized.

One of the unspoken achievements of the late President Umaru Yar'Adua was that he dismantled this scam. Nigeria owes him a debt of gratitude for this single act of justice and common decency.

Unfortunately, many of those who plotted this course with Obasanjo are back and have angled close to President Jonathan. They want to finish what was interrupted, albeit in a more discreet, subtler manner. I sincerely doubt if President Jonathan is cognizant of this history or of the ulterior motives of these new found companions. He may think their advice will help move the economy toward broader prosperity and openness. The extent to which he

takes their advice is the measure in which he will travel in the opposite direction.

Despite the Supreme Court verdicts, the PDP government continues to practice a skewed form of fiscal federalism.

Under the excess crude account and now its progeny, the sovereign wealth fund, the federal government has improperly siphoned funds constitutionally meant for the states. This represents a massive slush fund that the federal government can use as it wishes with little public knowledge or oversight. At best, the monies will be used to fund rentier practices that enrich government cronies but pauperize the larger economy. At worst, the money will be squandered. I cannot speak for other states, but I wager that the people of the ACN states would rather see their states' proper share of these funds in the hands of their governors than in the custody of the unnamed bureaucrats servile to PDP chieftains.

The ACN will do better than the PDP in managing the economy by pursuing a true fiscal federalism.

Conclusion

The Nigeria that now exists is neither the Nigeria I have worked for all my life nor the one I would have loved to bequeath to my children. Thus, I shall keep working. Nigeria stands in the middle of the road between democracy and disillusionment, between a strong, progressive economy and a mean, feeble one. It is time that we pulled Nigeria to the right side of the road. The PDP is a corrosive organization beyond the hope of reform and redemption. It has long passed whatever utility it might have had. Although imperfect and in need of improvement in how we conduct ourselves, Nigeria's opposition parties are her best chance for a virile democracy. We can only do this, if we continue to demand for fundamental electoral and financial reforms. Thus we must strive until we place Nigeria on the road to her better destiny. This we can achieve in partnership with the civil society, the media and progressive elements, by forging a critical mass that is capable of enthroning change.

I thank you all for listening.