

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OF
THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE (AANI), MAJ. GENERAL (RTD)
LAWRENCE A. ONOJA, CFR, PH.D, mni AT THE SPECIAL
MEET-THE-PRESS-DINNER ORGANISED BY AANI
MAY 27, 2013 AT ARMY HEADQUARTERS COMMAND
OFFICERS MESS, ASOKORO, ABUJA**

PROTOCOL

Fellow AANI National Executive Council Members
Distinguished Members of the National Institute
Ladies and gentlemen of the Press

INTRODUCTION

I warmly welcome all of you to this historic "Meet-the-Press-Dinner". This is the first of its kind being organised by our Association. Today's interactive session with the Press offers us a singular opportunity to intimate the media about the objectives of our Association, unfold the plan of the Executives to reposition the Alumni Association of National Institute (AANI) and much more importantly share our informed views on topical national issues for a better Nigeria.

AANI IN HISTORY

The Federal Government in 1979 established the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) to serve as a high level centre of reflection, research, and dialogue where academics of intellectual excellence, policy initiators and executors and other citizens of practical experience and wisdom drawn from different sectors of national life in Nigeria would meet to reflect and exchange ideas on the challenging issues of

society, particularly as they relate to Nigeria and Africa in the context of the dynamics of a constantly changing world.

The need for government and the Nigerian society to constantly tap from the rich mix of high-level human resources churned out by NIPSS informed the formation of AANI. Hence AANI was tasked with establishing the means of contributing objectively to national discourse on issues affecting the development of Nigeria and proffering appropriate solutions to government. Our Association is also expected to serve as a think-tank to the Federal and State Governments.

To date, about 1,560 Participants have graduated from NIPPS. The list includes serving and past top level executives from various walks of life including the presidency, state government houses, civil service, the Armed Forces, academia, labour, media houses and para-military institutions, among others. AANI has in its membership list three former heads of state, namely, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, late General Sani Abacha and General Abdulsalam Abubakar. AANI has produced scores of governors including my humble self and deputy governors. Comrade Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole is a serving governor who is also a Member of the National Institute. A number of Ministers, Inspectors General of Police, heads of military formations, permanent secretaries, heads of service, vice chancellors as well as officials of labour movements, are members of AANI.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of AANI include:

- To promote the noble ideals of the National Institute as embodied in its motto: "Towards a Better Society";
- To promote understanding, unity, brotherhood and cooperation among the members;
- To strengthen the relationship between the Association and the National Institute with a view to maintaining synergy;
- To interact with the Federal and States Governments of Nigeria, other organisations or associations, with similar objectives;
- To establish the means of contributing objectively to national discourse on any issue affecting the positive development of Nigeria and proffer to the government appropriate recommendations and implementation strategies;
- To serve as think-tank to the Federal and States Governments of Nigeria;
- To maintain the highest standards of conduct, etiquette and discipline among its members;
- To establish schemes for the promotion of the welfare, security and economic advancement of members;

- To create and maintain an endowment fund for the proper observance and discharge of any of the objectives of the Association.

Between the period when the Association was established till date, AANI has successfully organized 33 Annual General Meetings with successful election of members of the National Executive Council (NEC).

The 33rd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Association held at NIPSS Kuru, Jos on 2nd March, 2013 where I was democratically elected as the 10th President of AANI. Other duly elected members of the Association are Dr. Garba Usman Tetengi, Ph.D, SAN, mni, Vice President; Comrade Issa Aremu, Bsc, MA, mni, Secretary General; Hajiya Ramatu Usman, BB.Ed, mni, Assistant Secretary General; and Dr. Bello Rabi Alkali, PhD, mni Publicity Secretary. Others are Hon. Sola Ephraim-Oluwanuga, LLM, BL, MA, FCI Arb (UK), mni, Legal Adviser; Dr. Pat Emembolu Eze, MON, PhD, mni, Welfare/Social Secretary; Alhaji Abbas Bello, FCA, mni, Financial Secretary; and Mrs. Comfort Olu Eytayo, CFA, FCA, mni, Treasurer.

The transparency, acceptability and openness of the election demonstrated that AANI is promoting the culture of internal democracy and advancing the country's democratic process.

TRIBUTE

We respectfully pay tribute to the founding Fathers of the Alumni Association of the National Institute (AANI) and acknowledge the

remarkable selfless services they rendered for the growth and development of the Association. Indeed, our past leaders must be commended for keeping the spirit of AANI alive among its members. Remarkable achievements of the past leaders of AANI include;

- A modern AANI Secretariat in Abuja;
- Establishment of various committees;
- Establishment of AANI liaison office in NIPSS Kuru;
- Data bank of AANI members;
- Successful organization of AANI conferences/AGMs, among others.

We also salute the distinguished members of the Heritage Council headed by His Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Mohammed Sa'ad Abubakar III mni. Other notable members are HRM Igwe Nnaemeka Alfred Ugochukwu Achebe Obi of Onitsha; HRM Oba Rilwan Babatunde Aremu Akiolu Oba of Lagos;, HRH Alhaji Iliyasu Bashar Emir of Gwandu; and HRM Alhaji Sani Sami, Emir of Zuru. Others are HRH Alhaji Ahmed Hassan II Emir of Nasarawa and HRM Orhue Felix Mujakperuo Orodje of Okpe. We also salute the Board of Patrons led by General IBB. Other members include General Abdulsalam Abubakar, Vice Admiral Akhigbe, Maj. Gen. D. Jemibewon, Senator Olabiyi Durojaiye, Lt. Gen. J.T. Useni and Prince J. Adelusi-Adeluyi.

We owe them profound gratitude for their constructive advise and guidance over the years.

PROGRAMME OF ACTION

The new Executive Council has resolved to build on the legacy of the founding fathers of the Association through our programme of action. We are determined to take AANI to a higher level through many activities and initiatives that include;

- Seeking the continued support, guidance and blessings of the Heritage Council through His Eminence the Sultan of Sokoto and also through the Board of Patrons led by former President IBB, GCFR, mni.
- Resuscitation of AANI State Chapters and empowering of those already active.
- Introduction of a yearly AANI Reunion Day through a national retreat.
- Completion of the multiple purpose AANI centre in Abuja. Promotion of the visibility of AANI through regular constructive policy suggestions to all tiers of government towards a better society.

All these will be carried out within the framework of our Six Point Mission Statement of promoting transparency, accountability, welfare of members, revival of AANI to be proactive on key

national issues, completion of AANI Centre, Abuja and nurturing and sustaining of a cordial relationship between AANI and relevant public and private sector institutions.

TOWARDS A BETTER SOCIETY

The motto of NIPSS is "**Towards A Better Society.**" We make bold to say that no group in Nigeria is better strategically placed than members of AANI to help achieve the objectives of good governance and a better society. This is because all the pressing issues of development facing Nigeria have been well researched by the annual regular courses of NIPSS from national security, education, health, infrastructure, industrialization, roads, good governance, agriculture development, foreign policy and women and youth empowerment, among many others.

COMMENDATION

Let me seize this opportunity to commend the President of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan GCFR on his administration's Transformation Agenda. If properly implemented the Transformation Agenda will definitely make Nigeria one of the leading 20 industrialized economies of the world by 2020. The strength of the Transformation Agenda of President Goodluck Jonathan lies in it's total commitment to the diversification of the economy as well as promotion of the inclusive growth that will create jobs.

AANI is encouraged that in recent years there have been massive investments in agriculture, housing, construction, manufacturing, aviation, power, roads, rail, solid minerals and the information and communication technology (ICT) sectors by both

the government and the private sector. These sectors are gradually transforming the economy, and creating jobs in the process. It is also encouraging to see that the country's hitherto moribund railway is being revived. The lesson of the recent positive development is that governments at all level have critical roles to play in reviving the economy, through appropriate industrial policies, infrastructural development and financing of critical sectors like education, health and the railways.

ECONOMY

The key economic indicators are also positive. Inflation is single-digit at 9.0%. The exchange rate has been relatively stable, and fiscal deficit under 2% of GDP is commendable. Our national debt is at a sustainable level of about 19.4% of GDP. With GDP growth of 6.75% for 2013, Nigeria is a fast growing economy in Africa.

Indeed it is estimated that Nigeria's GDP of \$232 billion will surpass that of South Africa currently at \$368 billion. Infact Nigeria's GDP has already surpassed that of Egypt.

However, this commendable growth rate has not reduced poverty significantly. There is still massive youth unemployment. For example, the recent poverty statistics released by the National Bureau of Statistics show that about 60% of Nigerians are living below the poverty line.

AANI wishes to partner with the Federal and State governments to ensure that economic growth rate translates to development through reindustrialization and revival of labour intensive industries like textile, food and beverages, among others.

SECURITY

The most critical challenge today remains the issue of security. To this extent, we support the emergency measures taken by the President to address security challenges in some parts of the country namely Borno, Adawawa and Yobe. The primary responsibility of government as stated in the constitution hinges on security of lives and properties of citizens.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) through its Governor, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi has done well as whistle blower by advising the Federal government not to over spend on security to avoid inflation. Agreed, government must be cost conscious. However, I make bold to say that no amount of money spent to ensure security is too much. As a matter of fact, the cost of insecurity is even higher than the cost of maintaining security. The recent state of insecurity has led to massive loss of lives and properties which are estimated in multiple trillions of Naira. Indeed, no costs can be assigned to loss of lives that include youth corpsers, peasant farmers, ordinary workers and security agents.

All said, AANI believes that there cannot be sustainable security without addressing the root causes - unemployment, corruption and poverty. Part of the trillions of Naira being spent on security can be proactively better invested in development which will in turn minimize the state of insecurity in the country. To this extent, I salute some of the state governors that have taken up the challenge to address the unemployment crisis.

We also commend the Federal initiative through the SURE-P programme.

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY

This press conference is holding on the eve of democracy day. AANI salutes all Nigerians for keeping faith with democracy for more than a decade. With almost five transitions and five Federal and State elections as well as hundreds of local governments elections, indeed Nigeria has become a democracy destination. Everything seems contestable including informal political groups like the Nigeria Governors Forum. However the recent unfortunate outcome of NGF's election in which 36 governors could not count 36 votes is a set back for democratic process.

Indeed the incident that characterized the elections of Nigeria Governors Forum deeply saddened AANI. We strongly condemn the incident and wish to call on the governors to immediately put their house in order and refrain from any action that may threaten our collective security. The Nigeria media should continue to promote free choice of leadership through intensive advocacy.

We therefore advise our leaders at all levels that the contestations as good as they are, the ultimate remains public welfare and unity of Nigeria. So contestation must also go hand in hand with cooperation. NGF should emulate the internal democracy of AANI. With over 1500 members there was a free and fair election towards a better Nigeria. We also strongly recommend that governors have refresher leadership course in

NIPSS Kuru in Jos to enhance their capacity and broaden their patriotic national outlook.

It is against this background that I advise the governors to cooperate with the President and commander-in-Chief. Conversely, the President has the responsibility to have a bipartisan approach to governance. Informal gathering like the Nigerian Governors Forum is not a substitute to Constitutional National Economic Council. All the game plans for 2015 should give way to good governance in 2013. We need all hands to be on deck to address critical challenges facing the country today to be sure of a country in 2015.

All the above emphasize the need for good governance. Experience of Nigeria has shown that democracy has its own challenges. But the alternative which is military rule will be certainly worse.

We call on AANI members to collaborate with government at all levels irrespective of political affiliation to move the nation forward and ensure a better society. Political office holders are encouraged to make use of the enormous human resources and policy ideas of AANI members.

Our new AANI EXCO is poised toward helping especially the Federal Government to convert research findings in numerous spheres that abound in NIPSS. Many of the idling researches proffer useful suggestions towards the rapid advancement of Nigeria's sustainable economic development and growth.

Distinguished men, ladies and gentlemen, undoubtedly, peace is the most basic prerequisite and anchor base on which all else will emanate. Surely, without peace, there can be no development, which in turn, depends on investments particularly by the private sector.

However, for Nigeria to make better progress, AANI is totally dedicated to assisting the Federal government through the provision of relevant and realistic suggestions that would help in effectively tackling our country's myriad challenges like insecurity, fight against terrorism, indiscipline and corruption, youth unemployment, insufficient and inconsistent electricity supply, inadequate tapping of the agricultural sector, neglect of Nigeria's vast solid minerals, and politicization of regionalization of most national issues. AANI strongly believes that when these key challenges are properly and effectively tackled simultaneously, then the implementation of the Federal government's Transformation Agenda will impact more positively on the country's quest for accelerated economic and technological development.

NATIONAL UNITY

The national executive committee of AANI led by the retired Maj-Gen. Lawrence Onoja wishes to reechoe our unshakeable faith in a more united, peaceful and prosperous Nigeria, irrespective of religious, cultural, political, ethnic and other related affinities.

MORE FUNDING FOR NIPSS

The critical matter still retarding the National Institute remains funding. I want to appeal to the Federal Government, state

governments and organized private sector to come to the aid of the institution to enable it achieve its noble objectives which is Towards A Better Society.

Long Live The National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies!

Long Live The Alumni Association of The National Institute (AANI)!!

Long Live The Federal Republic of Nigeria!!!