



**THE NORTH:**  
Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow

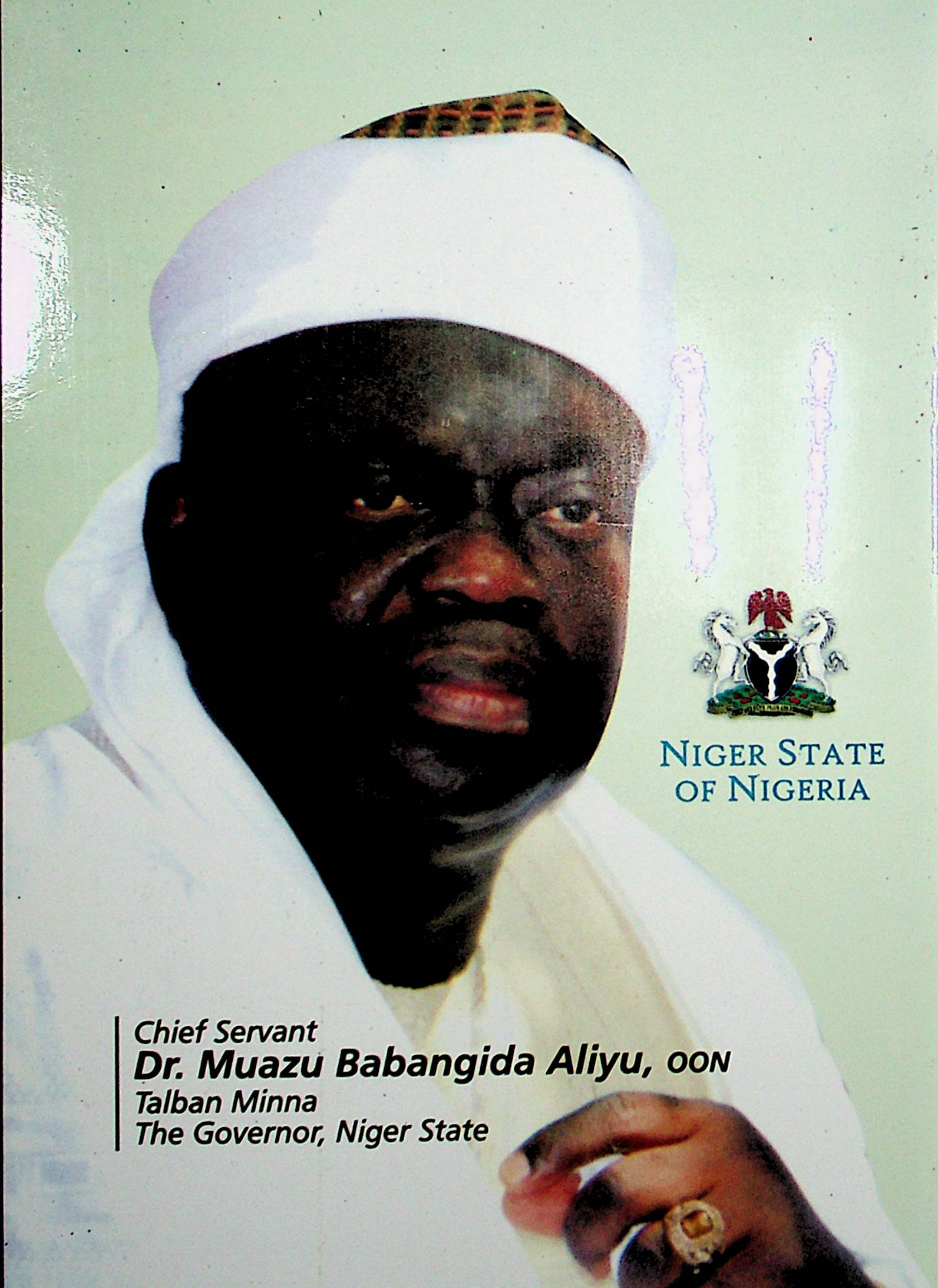
**A PRESENTATION**

By The Chief Servant  
**DR. MU'AZU BABANGIDA ALIYU OON,**  
(TALBAN MINNA)  
The Governor of Niger State/

**GUEST SPEAKER AT THE**

**Arewa Media Forum's Commemoration  
of 50TH ANNIVERSARY of  
Self-Government in Northern Nigeria**

At Arewa House, Kaduna  
On March 15, 2009

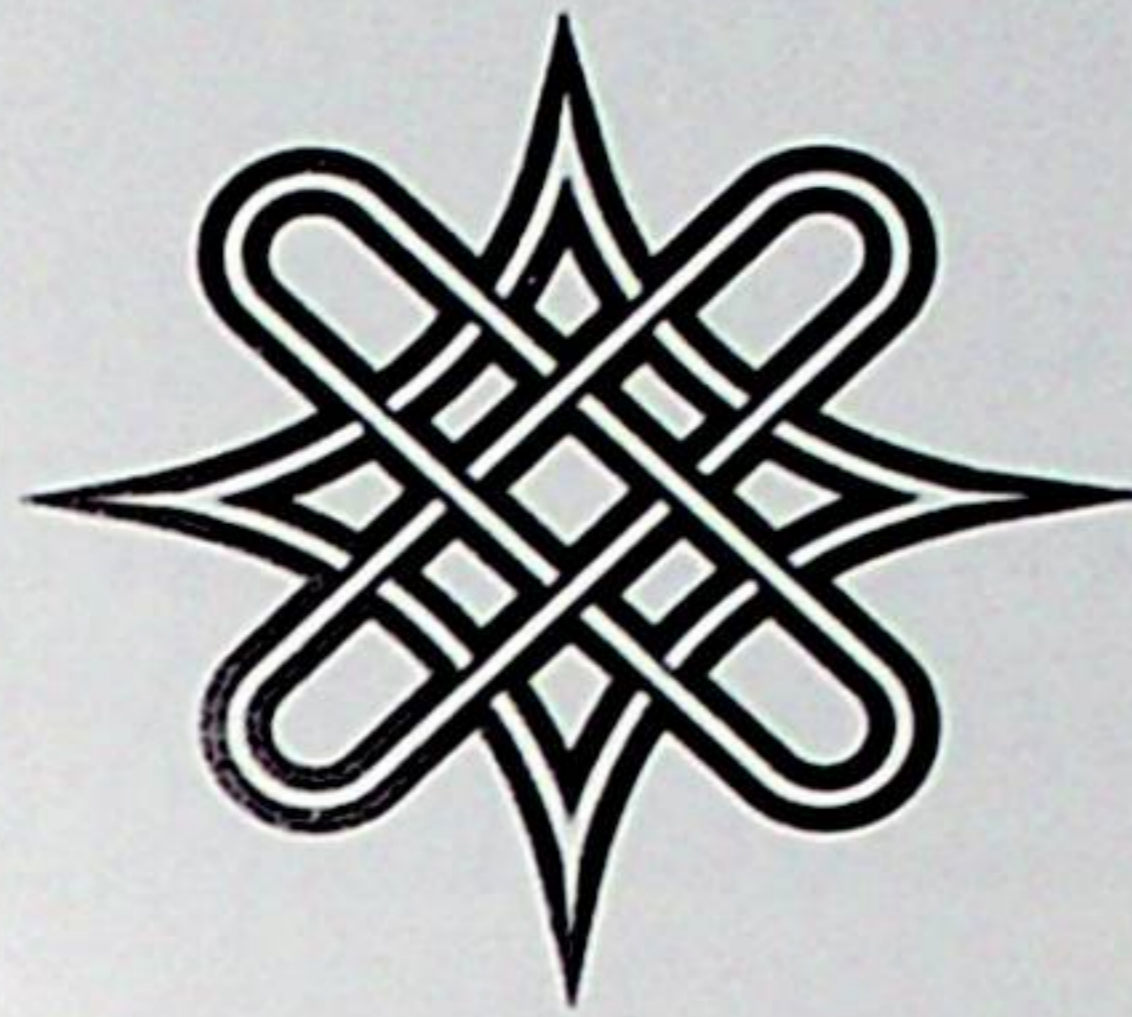


**NIGER STATE  
OF NIGERIA**

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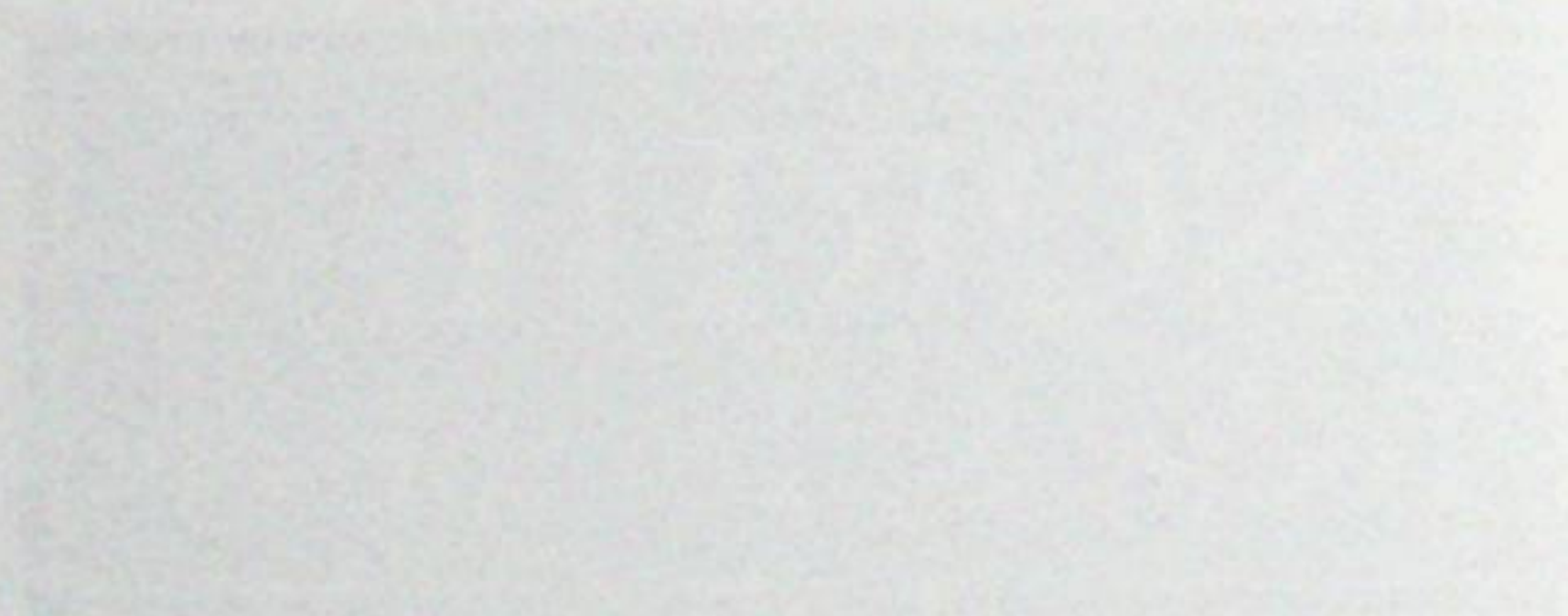
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## T H E M E

# THE NORTH: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

### PROTOCOL:

2. I will like to start by expressing profound gratitude to the Arewa Media Forum for the foresight in calling this most relevant interactive session and for giving me the privilege to be the maiden speaker at an event of this historical significance. I understand the idea of this discussion had been mooted way back in 2002 but you decided that it should coincide with the 50th anniversary of self-government in Northern Nigeria. It is indeed the most appropriate thing to do, considering that 50 years is a sufficient period to take stock, to assess and to see whether or not the collective aspirations of the people of a region which was once the most influential political bloc in Nigeria are being met. This event can therefore not be more appropriate than now given the unprecedented events and numerous challenges we are facing today as 'The North' as

well as considering the 'seriousness of the issues at stake'.

3. The theme of this discussion: "The North: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" is therefore most apt, as it affords us the opportunity to peep into history, even if in cursory fashion, to see what used to make The North influential, to the admiration and envy of its friends and foes alike, to see whether after 50 years the dreams of the founding fathers of the North are realized or shattered, to examine ourselves to see whether we have been able to keep or improve on the enduring legacies of late Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto/former Premier, Northern Nigeria - unarguably the North's most illustrious and respected political leader - 43 years after he passed on. Whoever is interested in future must of necessity understand the past so that he can appreciate the forces of today which shall invariably shape the future.

4. This event also affords us the opportunity to do a reality-check of our present socio-political predicaments in the Nigerian federation and to seek answers to some pertinent questions. Are we doing enough as Northern stakeholders to



bequeath to the younger generations those lofty ideals, values and virtues which we inherited from our past Northern leaders? Are we demonstrating sufficient zeal for selfless service, sacrifice and commitment to the improvement of the quality of lives of *yan arewa*? Are we promoting the unity and cohesion of the North in the overall national interest? Do we still command the respect and wield enormous influence in shaping the political destiny of this country, considering our comparative advantages from time immemorial? Importantly, this event will put each one of us on the spot to think and act in the appropriate direction to change the situation of the North for the better. I believe we can do it and indeed we must do it.

5. I am delighted that this event is being spearheaded by a conscientious team of agenda setters; opinion moulders and change agents, members of the fourth estate of the realm. We are not oblivious of the powerful influence of the media in setting agenda for positive change, even as a weapon of propaganda to achieve desired objectives. We recall that some sections of this country are good at the use of the media to draw attention to themselves and their regions in order

to get more concessions. It is thus heartwarming that the Arewa Media Forum - a group of serious-minded media practitioners have taken up the gauntlet to kick-start a discussion, without sentiments or apologies aimed, I believe, at stimulating ideas on how we can take the North to higher levels - economically and socio-politically for the well-being and prosperity of all Nigerians, especially those residing in this part of the country.

6. If we want to follow the traditional ways of looking at this, we may segment the period as 1959 - 1966 (self-Government) and 1966 - 1999 (military adventurism in governance). The bullets that cut down Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of Northern Nigeria alongside the revered and remarkable gentleman, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa - the great orator, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola and six high flying military officers in their prime did more than take a few lives. That event and the inevitable repercussions that followed it, such as the obnoxious decree No. 7 of 1967, the internecine conflicts leading to the Nigeria Civil War, coups and counter coups and the total restructuring of the society were epoch making in nature as they shattered a once

systematic and tranquil process of change based on the rule of law and the consent of the governed and ushered in the rule of force where might was right and in consequence completely altered society, debasing its moral values and changing the focus towards greed and selfishness.

7. Let us take a cursory look at what the North looked like, especially during the reigns of its founding fathers. The history of the North is inexplicably the history of the contributions of some patriotic, dedicated, incorruptible and visionary political actors, led by the highly detribalized and amiable late Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto who, as Premier of Northern Region, exercised purposeful leadership over a geo-political entity that was more than the size of the other two regions put together (Western and Eastern regions), with 174 out of the 320 seats in the Federal parliament. Undoubtedly, the North was the most influential political bloc in Africa at independence in 1960, with a population of 35 million people, was the most populous of Britain's African territories. Ironically, going by our 2006 census figure of 140million what we appear to have been doing well as a nation over the years is reproduction, with dwindling quality of lives of

the population when we consider the negative human and economic development indices of our nation. The most remarkable feature of the North at that time was the relative stability and feeling of belonging by all the people of the region, with the concept of 'the North' reflecting 'a trans-ethnic community' and "Northerner" 'transcending tribal, religious and class affiliations'.

8. I believe we might recall that prior to the coming of the colonialists; there were interactions between communities, city states and kingdoms that made up the present northern states. Northern Nigeria, a multi-religious and multi ethnic region with a larger land mass than the other regions of Nigeria was more monolithic than Southern Nigeria when we had two protectorates and was more united when we had western, eastern and northern regions as administrative units in Nigeria. At that time, in the North, the Kanuri for instance regarded the Nupe as a brother, the Birom related with the Hausa as friend and brother, the Idoma saw the Tiv as a partner in progress. Everyone, regardless of family, ethnic or religious background was encouraged by our founding fathers to develop to

their full potentials. Discrimination of any kind was alien. Camaraderie was always on the air. Our reputation as potential powerful region was never in contention in spite of our late contact with the Europeans and formal Western education. However, as years and administrations went by, inconsistencies set in and our once viable systems started giving way. Degeneration was ushered in leading to the collapse of institutions that bound us together thereby weakening the strength we derived from being big and many. Groups began to retire to their primitive gatherings and what we have now is a divisive block, struggling to redefine itself.

9. The situation was exacerbated by the creation of States, which although might not have reversed the philosophy of ONE NORTH, ONE PEOPLE, ONE DESTINY, but certainly made it difficult to practicalise. The division from one to six and ultimately to 19 States not only made the Centre (federal) strong thereby reducing regional influences but also made physical manifestation of oneness in any ideologically meaningful way awkwardly if not impossible. This has created a skewed federalism and federation, where the federating units have become beggars.

10. Hitherto, the leadership was truly selfless and focused on transforming the region economically and politically, hence there were limited agitations and restiveness from any ethno-cultural groups; the Tiv riots may come to mind here. There was a level-playing field for all, hence there was satisfaction by all concerned, because the child of the poor attended the same schools as those of the rich, and a qualified Christian, for instance could be appointed to the highest office as would his Muslim counterpart. This principle of equity and fairness saw the emergence, for instance of Christians like late Chief Sunday Awoniyi (Principal Private Secretary to the late Premier), late Ambassador Jolly Tanko Yusuf and Joseph Chindo working closely with the Sardauna of Sokoto.

11. Indeed, the modernizing aristocracy of Sir Ahmadu Bello used the traditional institutions to guide as well as to stabilize the apparatus of government and to give it coherence and efficiency. It provided the source of normative values in the moral and ethical underpinnings for all actions - private and public. This effective leadership approach, which even the colonial masters applied successfully, made the entire

region training and propping ground for people of character and integrity to be exposed, prepared and groomed for leadership positions. Moreover, these institutions so summarily dismissed by decree No.7 of 1967 were so intimately associated with the entire gamut of existence in relation to culture, history, tradition, religion as well as individual and community identity. We might recall that these were a class of people who commanded enormous respect and moral authority over their subjects and were the only truly effective channel of large scale mobilization of opinion and people, and most reliable avenue of conflict resolution; the emirs and chiefs played significant roles in the administration.

12. Perhaps, taking advantage of the stability created by the traditional institutions, Sir Ahmadu Bello who operated with meager resources, his last budget being forty-four million (44m) pounds for instance, yet the North recorded monumental landmarks including the Arewa Textile Mills which he constructed in 1957 at the cost of about One Million, Two Hundred and Twenty-five Thousand (1,250,000) pounds, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the Parliament building, the Ahmadu Bello Stadium, the State

House -all in Kaduna, among others. Indeed, the North was not created to be poor in any respect, for we are endowed with vast human and natural resources, with one of the world's finest climates and mineral deposits, resourceful land for agricultural production, very rich forests, lakes and rivers, which were being maximally exploited for the economic and political development of the region and Nigeria before the advent of oil. But alas, what kind of North do we have today?

13. Today, we have become probably a laughing stock, a people despised and dismissed as parasites on account of untapped economic potentials. We are being ridiculed even by people who have benefited from the proceeds of groundnut, cotton, hides and skin as well as other products that were previously the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. The gulf between the wealthy who live in affluence and the poor who live in the forest of deprivation and hopelessness is wider in the North than in other regions of Nigeria. The *almajiri* syndrome has become an embarrassing feature and indeed a sad commentary on the Northern Muslim community. Perhaps we have the highest concentration of beggars and destitute than anywhere else in West Africa. You may be



aware that only Nigeria and Niger Republic still practice the rote learning method of Quranic education - the *allo* system.

14. I believe the gloomy picture of Northern Nigeria today is all over the place for everyone to see - dilapidated infrastructures, proliferation of non-functional schools, a comatose agricultural sector, dead industries, ravaging poverty and general backwardness of the people, and the degeneration of our value systems and rich cultural heritage. Greed and avarice have replaced hardwork and personal integrity, corruption and indiscipline have become the order of the day, while arrogance and ostentation by the political class have replaced humility and selfless service. Today, we have the electorates being very distrustful of their elected representatives and political leaders, largely because the political leaders are seen to be self-centred, myopic and insensitive to their yearnings and aspirations. They see leaders as looters and opportunists, many of who come to office with almost 'nothing' but afterwards leave richer than the offices or institutions they led, when it is on record that our past northern leaders served the nation meritoriously yet they had no

property anywhere in the world nor left fat bank accounts for their children.

15. To my mind, we have found ourselves in this regrettable situation because we have lost focus and our sense of values; because we have become greedy and corrupt in all our ways and because we have become insensitive to the plight of our brothers and sisters. Bad politics, violent politics, chaotic management of public life, disorder and the collapse of public morality evident in the most terrible stories of gigantic theft of awesome amounts of cash by public officers, which today characterize our national landscape, are unfortunately a common phenomenon even in the North. We must accept the fact that today the political class and the elites - and I am referring by this to all of us in this hall and outside - have failed the present generation of the North. Each one of us is either busy protecting his own selfish interest, that of his family, his relatives, his friends and associates or is exploiting the advantage of being in government or being close to the corridors of power, or even his network of connections within the bureaucracy to perpetuate his hegemony and control of resources, power and authority to the detriment

of the majority who wallow in abject poverty and deprivation.

16. We attend private hospitals because the public hospitals have been left to decay; our children go to private schools, some abroad, and sad enough even teachers in our public schools send their children to private schools because our educational system has been left to rot; we develop the economy of other people and other nations because of our insatiable appetite for imported goods and products, including food items and textile materials that we have the capacity to produce, while our local industries are allowed to die. What of the large army of unemployed or underemployed youths roaming our streets, who are easily recruited for political thuggery and violence? What of the large number of school age children who are out of school for one reason or the other? What of our unfortunate cultural practices that encourage indolence and parasitic tendencies - the *ranka yadade* or *maula* syndrome? Why are we having an upsurge of political violence today in communities that hitherto regarded everyone as *yan uwa, yan arewa*?

17. Some of us old enough or who have delved into the history of the North and its people know that these tendencies are inconsistent with the philosophy of Sardaunan Sokoto and antithetical with the moral values and spirit of *yan arewa*; and that is why we feel quite sad that things have been allowed to go haywire in our generation. Believe me, we cannot have a better chance than the opportunity created by the organizers of this event to tell ourselves the home truth, to remind ourselves about our collective failures and to redeem our individual and collective images by doing something tangible, positive and relevant to reverse these ugly trends that have today become the Northern phenomenon. The time to make a difference is indeed NOW, for in the final analysis, the measure of a successful life is neither by the wealth we have, nor our level of affluence and ostentation but by our reputation, our integrity and most importantly how far we are able to make the world a better place than we met it. Indeed, as we are always reminded that we shall be called upon to account for our actions and inactions, as well as for the opportunities we all have as leaders and followers alike, by the grace of Almighty Allah (SWT).

18. Another disturbing trend is our criminal neglect of farming and the agricultural sector generally; a sector which accounts for the livelihood of about 82% of the population in a region with 731,340 sq. km. land area (about 76.8% of Nigeria's total land coverage), 50% of which is arable for agricultural production? What of our untapped irrigation potentials, with the Niger basin - one of the four surface area basins in the country - accounting for a land area of 584,193 sq. km (about 63% of Nigeria's total land area)? What about our untapped livestock, fisheries and agro-forestry potentials? What of the alarming threat of desertification which has displaced tens of thousands of farmers and families, with statistics showing that each year Nigeria loses 350,000 hectares of arable land to desertification while in 10 Northern States, the desert is reported to be advancing at an average of 10KM per annum? And what of the harmful effects of deforestation which has become a common feature in most parts of the North today, where trees are felled as a source of fuel for majority of poor families with attendant consequences on the environment and the ecosystem?

19. What about the incessant tensions and violent clashes between farmers and pastoralists who are forced to move through cultivated lands in search of water, a situation accentuated by desertification and lack of properly delineated grazing reserves? What of the recurring violent political conflicts in the region with deeper roots in economic disenchantment rather than religious or ethnic bigotry, leaving thousands of mostly innocent people dead and property worth millions of Naira destroyed as a consequence? And indeed, what of the manipulations of some few people who have sworn to dictate the scheme of things in this country in a cult-like manner, who will continue to recycle themselves and find their ways into any administration that emerges even when they have no bright ideas or value addition to the system, people who showcase only past opportunities rather than achievements and tangible contributions towards improving our situation?

20. Distinguished guests, undoubtedly the picture I have painted here is that of a region so hugely blessed and endowed yet predominantly poor and undeveloped because we have failed to follow the footsteps of our heroes past who, to a

large extent, had laid solid foundations for the socio-economic and political development of the North, through selfless service to the people, transparency, accountability and due diligence in government and governance. Where then do we go from here?

21. **Given that we have common heritage and destiny, and indeed common denominators of socio-economic indices in all the Northern States - very high rates of illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, infant and maternal mortality, general backwardness and underdevelopment, what we need, in my view and in my capacity as the Chairman, Northern Governors' Forum is, to agree on concerted efforts to reposition the North to play its part towards the realisation of the nation's Vision 20:2020. How do we go about this? At the Forum, we have already declared Education, Health, Agriculture, Social Security and Infrastructural development as major emergencies requiring strategic intervention and huge investments by all the 19 Northern State Governments in synergy with the private sector and development partners and other non-governmental organizations. What we must do and sustain is to develop sector-specific**

roadmaps and action plans in order to deliver the North from its present predicaments.

22. For instance, we have organized and/or facilitated the Northern States Summits on Health, Education, Agriculture, Economic development and supported the Conference on the De-industrialization of the North, put together by the Leadership Newspapers group, all aimed at fashioning out a blueprint, with specific timetables and deliverables for the growth and development of the North. The development of independent power outfits is presently under consideration. This is because development and growth will be a mirage without constant and reliable power supply. Wind, solar, hydro and bio sources of energy should be put under serious consideration in terms of exploration and incorporation into our development strategies.

23. It is pertinent to recognize the initiatives and giant strides being made by the 19 Northern State Governments in tackling the development challenges facing our States at the moment. It is indeed gratifying to note that we have a crop of Governors who are committed and making remarkable impact in transforming the lives of



the people in a number of ways - education, agricultural production, effective healthcare delivery, independent power supply, security, urban renewal, graduate employment, poverty reduction and so forth. To all of us 'Development and Progress' are the watchwords.

24. As was once recommended here in Kaduna, we may still need to go back into the archives of the defunct Northern region, study the local government system superintended by the regional Ministry of Local Government, as I am aware some of my colleagues are doing, without necessarily undermining principles of democracy. We should attempt to integrate the traditional institutions as instruments of our management systems in appropriate ways; we should give them greater relevance at state and national levels to afford us the benefit of their stabilizing role and social guidance. Similarly, the National Advisory Council of Traditional Rulers recommended by the unpublished Constitution produced by the national Constitutional Conference should be positively examined.

25. It is gratifying to note that we are comparing notes and exchanging ideas on policies and best

practices in tackling the multi-faceted problems confronting our States and the North in general. This is with a view to setting minimum standards of performance in our efforts to serve the people who have given us their mandate. But as I believe, it is not efforts but results that matters in our present circumstances; therefore I must reiterate that we have a heavy task ahead of us. However, we cannot be seen to be succeeding unless we commit ourselves as Governors and leaders in our own rights to ensuring that the North is taken back to its past glory, that we have functional and well-equipped public schools with a highly motivated teaching staff, well-equipped and modern hospitals, abundant social amenities, a booming economy with functional agro-processing and manufacturing industries, a revitalized infrastructural system, increased agricultural production with the farmers richer and happier from guaranteed minimum selling prices, integrated farming technologies, access to agricultural credit financing, low tariffs and tax on agricultural implements and subsidies on agro products.

**26. We need to focus attention on tourism which has become an important foreign exchange**

earner for many African countries today. We are aware that virtually all the states of the north are blessed by nature with abundant tourism resources which we should package and market to the world. While we redirect our energies towards the development of this sector, we must set new standards that will surpass the existing ones in order to make our States the ultimate tourists' destination.

27. To regain our past influence in the political arena in this country, we need to do much more as political leaders of this generation. We need to demonstrate that we are servant-leaders, indeed that we are more concerned with the welfare and well-being of the people rather than with our own comfort; we must demonstrate clear vision and determination to solve the complex problems confronting our people, and we must prove that we remain incorruptible. Luckily, most of us, indeed all of us have learnt some lessons from the travails of many who were on the political scene between 1999 and 2007, a period which I consider as a learning period in our nascent democracy. We are also doubly lucky to be serving under the inspiring and purposeful leadership of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua, GCFR, and a man with

focus, determination and sincerity of purpose who is on course to transform Nigeria into one of the leading 20 world economies by the year 2020.

28. We may perhaps ask: does the task of salvaging the North rest squarely on the political leadership? I believe all stakeholders have various roles to play. Parents must send their children to school, especially the girl-child, so that the free education policies of some State Governments will not be a wasted investment; our children must be brought out for immunization and vaccination, so that we don't hold the rest of the country and the world back on polio eradication, and other preventable child-killer diseases; we must cultivate the habit of tree-planting and stop bush-burning and cutting down of trees; we must stop some of our traditional practices which we often mix with religion, like refusing our spouses to visit the hospital to access healthcare, sending our children to far away obscure locations to acquire Islamic education, mostly under *mallams* who do not have adequate means of catering for the multitude of pupils under their custody, thereby creating social problems for the society.

29. Please permit me, at this juncture to share with you in a nutshell some of our policy

initiatives in Niger State, which we have put in place to improve the quality of lives of all Nigerlites, by which we mean all Nigerians resident in Niger State. We have in place an integrated agriculture development programme aimed at accelerating agricultural production for our domestic consumption and export purposes; free education up to secondary school level for boys and girls, and up to the university for the girl-child; free healthcare services for children aged 0-5 years, and our senior citizens aged over 70 years; free examination fees for NECO, WAEC and NABTEB; graduate employment scheme for all graduates in Niger State; abolition of contract appointment for Nigerians on account of state indigeneship; prompt payment of pensions and gratuity to our retirees; increased salaries for teachers and healthcare for professionals, and indeed all civil servants; and massive support to all federal institutions in Niger State.

30. In conclusion, for the North to get back on track, we must pay serious, indeed serious attention to the following issues: we must go back to agriculture as the mainstay of our economic growth and development - embrace commercial farming, subsidize agriculture to keep our

farmers in business while they produce food for our domestic and export needs, provide farmers with access to flexible agriculture credit financing, modernize agricultural production through farm mechanization, embark on aggressive livestock breeding programmes; we must pay adequate attention to education, for if we get education right at all levels we would get everything right in the North because we would be able to produce professionals and experts to man critical areas of our developmental agenda; we need to develop our Hydro potentials as viable and more reliable alternatives to the Gas and other Independent Power Projects (IPP) which are vulnerable to vandalism in many areas, in other words, we need to concentrate on the development of small earth dams across our numerous rivers in the North for the power generation and irrigation farming, because some of these small dams can generate between three and five megawatts of electricity which is barely what many of our rural communities need.

31. Similarly, we must embark on massive afforestation and wage total war against deforestation for environmental protection and sustainability. Most importantly, we must pay

attention to the issue of leadership, which is not about hypocrisy and sycophancy. All of us need to be involved in dialogue, consultation and interaction for the improvement of society. We must be bold and sincere enough to criticize leaders when they are still in office so that they can make amends for the good and benefit of all of us. We would be helping our leaders by speaking out while they are still in power to ensure that they live up to their mandates for the well being of the citizenry. We must endeavour to make the North of the future better than the North of today because the North of yesterday was certainly excellent.

32. I thank you for this opportunity and for listening. May Allah continue to bless the North and Nigeria at large.

33. May Allah bless us all. Amen.

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