

**TRANSPARENCY AS A MAJOR  
FACTOR IN DEMOCRATIC SUSTENANCE**

**Statement by  
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On behalf of H. E. President Olusegun Obasanjo,  
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Let me on behalf of the People and government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria convey the sincere apologies of H. E. President Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for his inability to be personally present here today. His Excellency had looked forward to this occasion with great interest and concern. In the last 11 years, he has been actively involved in the important task of promoting transparency and accountability as principal signposts for good governance. He has asked me to thank you for inviting the Federal Government to this occasion and to express our government's commitment. Of the many international organisations, His Excellency has had the opportunity to associate with, Transparency International occupies a special place in his heart.

Africa, within the last decade or thereabouts, has experienced all kinds of calamities and crises, in form of wars, inter-ethnic conflicts, poverty, economic crisis, the spread of disease as well as problems of security and stability. These crises have a common root: bad governance, failure of policies, dictatorship and pandemic corruption at the highest levels of government.

Many have advocated liberal democracy as the standard solution. They say, let Africa seek the kingdom of democracy first and other things shall automatically follow. Democracy in effect, has become a magic wand, the ticket of admittance to the future we seek. The recent wave of democratisation in Africa today persuades one to conclude that this is indeed true. But democracy alone, as a principle is not enough. Democracy is a process. It is a beginning. Its spirit must be actualised, democracy must bring happiness to the people and create meaning in society as a real and felt process of development. The case of our country, Nigeria, is instructive. Only a few months back, our country was groaning under one of the worst possible kinds of dictatorship. The world wrote us off as another country that was irrevocably bound to self-destruct. However, Nigeria has been able to rescue itself from that imminent prospect. Today, we are a democratic nation. And one of the challenges we are having to face is how to cleanse the nation, enforce a moral re-birth and turn the country in a positive direction. It is an interesting challenge. Dictatorship and its concomitant problems are endemic diseases that take time to expunge from a national polity. And this is why many states suffer tragic relapse even while they are still celebrating their deliverance from tyranny.

A dictatorial government is propelled by the whims and caprices of an individual, and the henchmen in the corridors of power, a tiny minority who insist that they are above the people, the law and civilised norms. Democracy is not the dictatorship of a minority, it is about people, their survival, happiness and place in the scheme of things. Whoever is in power, is beholden to the people. He must meet their expectations, employ available resources to cater for public interests, and must be seen to be doing so.

This is what makes democracy an investment of trust and confidence. The people expect dividends. As a starting point, the values of the state and the society must be redefined, a new national ethics needs to be invented, and the people must become more enlightened about their

history and other possibilities for taking society to a higher level of achievement. Morality cannot be divorced from the business of democratic governance. In the final analysis, it is only the people that can defend democracy. No coup can succeed if the people do not support it. And no dictator can last a single day longer in power, if the people decide it must go. And this is why, even the most brutal coup maker, and must first find a means of justifying his enterprise to the people.

The most common accusation is that of corruption and mismanagement of the people's resources by the government that has been displaced. Coup plotters have long discovered this strategy of collective blackmail. They know that like a red rag to a raging bull, accusing a toppled government of stealing public money will promptly attract public sympathy.

The instruction from this is very clear. A democratic government must be above board. It must not only be above board, it must be seen to be clearly so. Transparency, therefore, is a cardinal bulwark for democratic sustenance. It is an inseparable complement, particularly for a society emerging from a dark season of dictatorship, where the people need to be assured that the times have truly changed and taken into confidence in the management of collectively owned resources.

If we must sustain democracy, the business of governance must be done in the open. At this point, let me bring in the issue of national security. Most abuses of government under military rule are carried out under the cover of national security. Human rights are traduced, public monies are stolen, and other atrocities are committed. While a military government can get away with this, at least for a while, a democratic government cannot afford it even for a day. The reason for this is that under a dictatorship, the security of the state becomes synonymous with the security of the individual in government, power is personalised. In a democracy, national security is the security of the people and the state; the people cannot be made to suffer for the protection of their own interests.

To sustain democracy, we have to keep itching fingers and greedy eyes off the public till. Those in power must be accountable to the people. The level of poverty in our country today, like in most parts of Africa is alarming. People can barely afford to eat well because they are so poor. Therefore, it will amount to criminal insensitivity for any government official to live in opulence and luxury in the midst of so much poverty and suffering, more so when the resources for such wasteful indulgence are stolen from people.

One of the cardinal targets of our government's policy for economic recovery is to stimulate investment in Nigeria. Towards this end, we continue to invite foreign investors to avail themselves of the manifold opportunities available in our country. It is clear to us that the investors can only feel safe to do so, if we are able to guarantee an enabling environment for such enterprise. This means that we must guarantee that investors will not be swindled or duped and that basic facilities such as transportation, water, electricity, and telecommunications are available and affordable. Above all, the security of life and property is important. All these, needless to say, depend on good governance, which in turn is a function of the quality of transparency and accountability in government transactions. If the resources meant for the development and maintenance of these infrastructures are not diverted, then efficiency can be assured. If the people are satisfied with the running of the state and do not feel disgruntled that they suffer while the people in government live a life of ostentation and conspicuous consumption, then there will be little room for public disturbances and outcry.

Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen, let me reiterate, here, the commitment of the Federal

Government of Nigeria to ethical re-engineering by pursuing a vigorous policy of probity and accountability in governance. The Anti-Corruption Bill initiated by the government was conceived to provide an effective legal framework against corruption and misappropriation of public resources. As a complementary step, and drawing on the extensive network of the Transparency International and other agencies, the government has commenced a range of training of senior public officials accountability, probity, openness and transparency in such areas as government procurement. In addition, we have also revised and disseminated financial procedure, civil service procedure and related document to put at the disposal of public officials knowledge essential in the institutionalisation of transparency as a fundamental canon of the administration.

Clearly, this government intends to leave a legacy of transparency. To this government, there is no going back or compromising the high standards we have set for ourselves, which we believe will percolate to all levels of government and the society.

Once again, accept the sincere apologies of His Excellency, President Olusegun Obasanjo for his inability to be present here. He asked me to tell you that he eagerly awaits the conclusions and recommendations of this meeting.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a most successful deliberation.