

Speaker
House of Representatives
Federal Republic of Nigeria

Keynote address by Rt. Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal CFR, Speaker, House of Representatives, National Assembly of Nigeria on the occasion of Omidyar Network African Democracy and Leadership Forum organized by the Stanford University Center for Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL) on 26th June 2014, Sheraton Hotel, Abuja.

Protocols:

It is truly an honour to deliver the keynote address participants in the Omidyar Network Democracy and Leadership Forum.

2. I want to commend Stanford University's Center for Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law for this initiative and for its consistent efforts at preparing young minds from the continent to appreciate the dynamics of democracy.

3. I am told that participants are drawn from across Africa in fields as diverse as the media, civil society, business and academia. These emerging leaders have the opportunity to further learn about the fundamental principles of developing a Democratic culture.

4. Since the aim of the forum is to engender good governance by encouraging groups to use strategic thinking, research and positive action to influence policy, this conference is practically a course in political science. It will no doubt help in the effort to develop a Democratic tradition in a continent that has seen how dictatorships and the attendant impunity have truncated development.

5. However, although Africa seems to be experiencing a revival of democracy in most parts of the continent, decades of living under dictatorial regimes have taken their toll. So it is not surprising for instance that after fourteen years of uninterrupted democracy in Nigeria we still suffer acute poverty of democratic culture and practices.

6. This is the challenge for anyone deeply concerned in the democratic process and operation. We must learn to build institutions rather than personalities, to place national interest above selfish interest, and to let objective principles take precedence over sentiments and whims.

7. To begin with, we must deliberately promote a viable and transparent electoral process. Also, the right to opinion and dissent must be given space to blossom. The need

for internal party democracy cannot therefore be overemphasized especially as we approach the pivotal 2015 elections.

8. We ought to ensure that all votes count whether in intra party democratic processes or at the level of inter party contests. True democracy does not happen by accident and it is the duty of leaders like those gathered here today to be in the vanguard of the efforts at deepening democracy.

9. We believe that the only antidote against the encroachment of dictatorship is good governance. The vicious troika of unemployment, poverty and insecurity constitute a grave social malady in our body politic. Sadly the debilitating insecurity situation has forced us to declare a war on consequences rather than causes.

10. It is important to realize that we must commence the war against unemployment and poverty as a sure way of consolidating our democracy.

11. Our national statistics reveal that 70% of our population is engaged in agriculture, 20% in services and the remaining 10% in industry. It means the agriculture sector alone accounts for over 70 million Nigerians of working age, some 65 million of which would be in subsistence agriculture where they are grossly underappreciated.

12. Similarly, a great deal of underemployment and mal-employment exists in similar proportion in the services industry and other sectors. For a continent whose population is mostly made up of young people, the challenge is not merely to create jobs but to recreate jobs by upgrading all those existing jobs that are indeed pretentious employments offering no living wage. We certainly possess the capacity to attain this in record time if we put our minds to it.

13. At the commencement of its journey, the 7th House of Representatives fashioned for itself a Legislative Agenda to guide its processes, programmes and operations. This agenda is consistent with the constitutional mandate of the legislature to wit: Legislation, Representation and Oversight. The legislative function of making laws for the peace, order and good governance of Nigeria appears reasonably well appreciated now by the general public. However on issues such as the oversight over the implementation of these laws, and the Representative function, there are still serious problems.

14. People forget the imperative of Representative democracy, and the need for the legislature to act as a check on the excesses of public servants and political leaders. The regular Public Hearings by the National Assembly is therefore meant to expose some of these excesses, which have derailed the effort to bring the dividends of democracy closer to the people.

15. As the representatives of the people, it is incumbent on the legislature to take the gauntlet on their behalf and defend the interests of the masses against the demons of nepotism, poverty, illiteracy, violence and disease. We must constantly ensure that the needs of the people come first and that all forms of political chicanery are jettisoned.

16. In this wise, it is high time we began to appreciate the role of the social media highlighting some of these injustices and keeping the people abreast of the issues so that they can make cogent contributions to the growth of our democracy.

17. One area in which the House of Representatives has been able to make good progress is in Consultative Representation. As part of our agenda to remain true and faithful representatives, we have elected to consult the people on all critical issues. Pursuant to this, the Peoples' Public Sessions were held in the 360 constituencies nationwide to avail the people the opportunity to participate in the making of their Constitution. This initiative was well received by the people, participation was massive and contributions robust and far reaching.

18. We have since discovered from that the citizens are zealous and passionate in participating in the running of their government and constitute a rich bank from which invaluable ideas can be tapped in pursuit of good governance. In the years ahead, we intend to further advance the cause of citizens participation through this consultative approach.

19. Democracy can only grow in proportion to the active participation of the people in deciding the manner they wished to be governed. The more interest there is from a larger section of the populace, the greater the chances that their needs will get priority attention.

20. Once more I wish to commend the organisers of this forum for propagating the ideals of democracy and I wish the participants a fruitful session.

Thank you.