SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF SENATOR (DR) DAVID A.B MARK, GCON, AT THE RESUMPTION OF SENATE PLENARY ON TUESDAY, 29 APRIL, 2014

Protocol:

My Distinguished Colleagues and Bosses, Senators of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

I welcome you all back from your working short Easter break, and I am glad to see everyone hale and hearty.

For all Nigerians, this year's Easter was foreshadowed by sorrow, gloom and anxiety. A few days before Good Friday, there was a bomb blast at the Nyanya Motor Park in our Nation's capital at rush hour. The blast left in its wake, death, injury and massive destruction of properties. The anarchists followed up the bombing in Abuja with other acts of infamy in the North East, the most reprehensible being the abduction of secondary school girls in Chibok, Borno State.

Our thoughts and prayers go to all those affected by these needless acts of savagery. Our thoughts and prayers also go to their families. We stand united in grief with the families of these hapless schoolgirls in their hour of pain, agony and anxiety. We call on their kidnappers to immediately release them unconditionally.

There is no doubt that our nation is at war. The enemy has clearly and unequivocally served the nation notice of its vile intentions. Therefore, a clear and unambigious decisive military response from the Government, beyond the imposition of a state of emergency, is urgently required in this circumstance. This is an option we must consider now.

It is obvious that we are dealing with insurgents and well-funded nihilists who are determined to trample upon the secularity of the Nigerian state and destroy the country. A modern, vibrant, progressive, multi-ethic, multi-religious Nigeria is an anathema to them. Because they are fired by zealotry and extremism, they are not likely to be swayed by overtures of any kind. We must henceforth shift from fighting terrorism to fighting insurgency.

Our emphasis must therefore be on winning the hearts and minds of the communities in the immediate theatres of conflict. The full might and strength of our security services must be deployed to confront this scourge and we expect our security services to rapidly reorient their assets and capabilities as to overcome their difficult challenge. And this must be done within the shortest possible time frame with minimal casualties. Let me emphasis that for them to achieve this safety they require the full co-operation of all and sundry.

The Government must do all it can to immediately identify the sponsors and the source of funds to the terrorists and the insurgents. In this connection, nobody who is implicated, no matter how highly placed should be treated as a sacred cow.

On our part as Federal Legislators, we will continue to co-operate and work with all arms of Government and the people to bring this unwarranted assault on our peace and unity to a swift end. We will activate and deploy every possible constitutional legislative instrument in aid of the war against terror. Every concerted effort must be made to bring the reign of terror to a decisive end.

The breadth and scope of this assault on the Nigerian state makes for sombre reading: places of worship have been violated; pupils have been brutally murdered en masse in their dormitories; school girls have been brutalised and kidnapped from their schools; police stations and army barracks have been attacked, sacked and incinerated; lives and properties have been destroyed and whole communities uprooted and made refugees in their own country.

The tragedy is that at a time of grave national emergency like this when every Nigerian should stand in unity and openly rebuke evil, some of our countrymen and women, unfortunately only see this as an opportunity for partisan politics. Appallingly, rather than condemn in the strongest possible terms they have resorted to destructive partisan diatribes that can only demoralise our troops and nation and encourage the insurgents. When a nation is faced with clear and present danger, what is required is a bipartisan approach and a show of support for the government and the security services.

In other democracies where terrorism has been confronted with substantial success, bipartisan support for government's counter insurgency policy and war efforts have proved vital to lasting success. We must recognise these attacks as egregious assault on the Nigerian way of life, and a signal threat on her corporate existence. We must not quibble, nor speak along party lines. We must speak out as Nigerians, and collectively we must flash a powerful signal against terror. Our instinctive patriotism should be on display and we must rally bipartisan support for government to confront terror. That was what the Americans and the British did in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 7/7 London Bombings.

It is dispiriting that at the peak of the bombings, abductions and senseless killings by insurgents, rather than stand together as Nigerians, some people are speaking along party lines, scheming and viewing anarchy from the prisms of partisanship. This is commendable and totally unacceptable. We shall not sell the truth to serve the hour.

And the truth is that Boko Haram has declared war, not just on the present government, but on any government founded on the principles of democracy, secularity and tolerance!

I do not by any means seek to discourage debate, nor do I abhor constructive criticisms. But the print and electronic media are daily

inundated with criticisms so destructive that at times one is left to wonder whether the insurgents are now the heroes while those fighting them are villains. The times do not warrant this kind of devious and divisive politicking. The impression must not be given that anybody who gives his life fighting insurgency has died in vain.

The time has come for us to stand shoulder to shoulder as we confront this evil. As Nigerians, we must all unite across party lines with the sole aim of fighting and defeating our common enemy. If the enemy of unity, peace and progress prevails, there will be no political parties, except the party of hate, intolerance, of anarchy and of backwardness and bigotry and this must not stand. That is not a prospect that I, or any other Nigerian, would wish our dear country.

I therefore call on every Nigerian to be patriotic, patient, prayerful and hopeful. There is no way a strange and anarchic ideology not supported by any of the faiths tow which we subscribe, will overcome the civilised and collective resolve of Nigerians.

In spite of all these, let me re-emphasise my stand that we should not foreclose the avenue for dialogue as a means of finding a lasting solution to the current acts of terrorism and insurgency.

Distinguished colleagues, I welcome you back to this chamber and urge you to brace yourselves for the tasks ahead.

(Signed)
Senator (Dr) David A.B. Mark, GCON, FNIM
PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE