

**WELCOME BACK SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE,
HIS EXCELLENCY, SENATOR (DR) ABUBAKAR BUKOLA SARA
(CON) ON THE 8TH SENATE'S RESUMPTION OF PLENARY FROM
THE 2017 ANNUAL RECESS ON TUESDAY, 26 SEPTEMBER, 2017.**

PROTOCOL

1. Distinguished colleagues, it a great pleasure to see you all back from our annual recess. In truth, it has always been a special privilege to welcome you my colleagues into this chamber, and today is no exception. I believe the recess afforded us, opportunity to take stock on the journey so far, consult widely with our constituents and be re-energized for the tasks ahead.
2. Let me also use this opportunity to, on behalf of the entire Senate commiserate with our colleague Senator Gilbert Nnaji Enugu East who recently lost his amiable wife Lady Ann Nnaji after a brief illness, we pray that the good lord will grant her eternal rest and you our dear Senator gilbert, the fortitude to bear this irreparable loss.
3. Distinguished colleagues, we have in the last two sessions of our term devoted enormous time, working hard on critical legislation, some with historical essence and others with relatively high-level implications for enhancing the welfare of our people and putting food on their tables. I am happy to tell you that some of these bills which has since become law have already started yielding

expected gains. This is especially so with the Secure Transactions in Movable Assets Act, with increased lending to private sector. We expect more to come. Our ultimate aim will be, inclusive growth, full employment for our people and frameworks that enable our young people to run viable startups.

4. Distinguished colleagues, as a firm believer that economic security is first and most important security we can offer our people, it is the apparent inadequacy of this security that is at the heart of the general disaffection of our people towards government. We have done this with the believe that with less hunger on the street; with more of our people gainfully engaged; insecurity will be significantly reduced and our economy revamped. In this period, I expect us to conclude work on the National transport commission bill, and the National Road Funds Bill, the Petroleum Industry Fiscal and Host Community Bill which are pending. It is my hope that we shall conclude work quickly on the Bank lending rate reduction initiative and the National Payment Systems Bill.

5. As we continue to take action to strengthen our economy, let me use this opportunity to congratulate all Nigerians for working together to get us out of recession. While we congratulate ourselves for exiting the recession, it is important that we don't rest on our oars as this is not an end in itself. There is a lot of work ahead. Our aim is to see our economy create millions of new jobs and see growth rates of 7% or more. This is why the implementation of the 2017 budget is crucial.

6. By the first week of October, we expect to begin the review of the implementation of the 2017 budget. To set the stage for this, we expect to invite the Ministers of Finance and Budget Planning to come and brief the Senate on implementation so far. Nigerians want to see a more significant improvement in the level of implementation of the budget this financial year. Let me therefore use this opportunity to call on all our standing committees to begin the process of putting together their oversight plan for a close and proper review of the performance of the 2017. In the same token, we must remind ourselves of the initiative we started and for which we have significant stride- that is, the Made in Nigeria initiative. Distinguished colleagues, it is time to enter the next stage of this initiative; the oversight of implementation to ensure that the policy yields expected gains.

7. I will like therefore to see the committee demonstrate proactivity and readiness to engage government to ensure that at least a significant portion of our annual budget is fully dedicated to local procurement. All committees of the Senate must be involved in this and find better channels to engage our people and enable feedbacks. However, for these efforts to be successful requires we maintain the peace and political stability. Hence the need for all of us to fight to keep Nigeria united and prosperous.

8. Distinguished colleagues, a house divided against itself will not stand. More than ever before, we need to stand for the unity and

indivisibility of our country. We must condemn in the strongest possible terms all forms of violence as a form of engagement. The constitution and laws has laid down tools and procedures for us to push through our interest as all democratic nations do. Our nation is blessed with exceptionally talented and beautiful people, we are collectively strong and indomitable and it is time for all of us to stand up for our nation. Our dream of a virile nation must keep us motivated and this dream is already at the horizon.

9. Distinguished colleagues, as leaders, closest to our people, we must rededicate ourselves to the values we have institutionalized in this chamber. In this chamber, we are first and foremost, Nigerians. Yes, we are Igbos, Yorubas, Hausas, Fulanis. Yes, we are Muslims, Christians and traditional worshipers. But we must in all our conversations and decisions continue to be first and foremost Nigerians and as Nigerian citizens be our brothers' keepers. Too many of our youths, too many of our families from the south to the North need a lifting. Our job is to help government give them a hand and ones again make them feel great again being Nigerians. This is our mission.

10. As we work to even make our constitution better, it must be remembered that constitution review is a continuous process which must undertake with the vision of the future in our minds. The process we have already will continue in earnest with the meeting of the speakers of the various states of Assembly and the National Assembly with a view to moving forward with the process. As promised, we will revisit and consider areas of the

constitution we believe will further strengthen our federation and enable our collective dream for a more prosperous Nigeria.

11. In the fight against corruption, aside the bills we have passed, it is important that we also sharpen up our oversight tools to ensure that government remains accountable always. However, I urge us all to more than ever, operate above board ourselves. In the last two years, we have successfully exposed numerous cases of corruption in our agencies and officers of government and as a result saved government enormous amount of public resources. This is what Nigerian people expect of us and we must continue to deliver on this. We must not make the mistake of resting on our oars. I say this to encourage you to keep up with the good works of exposing corruption as you have been doing so far irrespective. Yes, like senator Isah Hamma Misau who had the courage to expose deep rooted institutional corruption, you will be attacked, blackmailed and insulted but, unlike any former Senate before this, we will not bow or be intimidated.

12. Distinguished colleagues, our focus on interventions critical to our national development will continue in the session. We will be interacting with stakeholders with the aim of repositioning our education sector and the health sector especially with the health insurance subsector as key primers of the economy. The major direction will be to expand access to basic education and health, incentivize investment in these critical sectors and find lasting solutions to issues of strikes and interruption in these sectors.

13. Dear colleagues, we are all witness to the revolutionary growth of innovative works and remarkable fits Nigerians both in the entertainment industry and software development are making across the globe. However, their ability to fully harness and reap the fruits of their effort continues to be hampered by our intellectual property regime which is yet to be reformed to meet with today's digital realities and opportunities. We are determined to contribute our quota to make their lives easier and better by initiating and paying close attention to our intellectual property (IP) rights frameworks.

14. Distinguished colleagues, a lot has happened in our nation within the last few weeks especially with the floods. Let me take a moment to commiserate with all Nigerians who may have been affected by the recent floods. Our hearts and prayers are with you at this period.

15. On a salutary note, I am happy to report to you distinguished colleagues that while we were away, we also took note of some of the strides Nigerians have been making. We congratulate our women on the wining of the African Basket Ball Championship. We also congratulate our Super Eagles on their journey so far for the world cup qualifiers and we will continue support and encourage them.

16. Before, I conclude this speech, let me on another winning note and on your behalf welcome Mr. President who has acknowledge his return to office through an executive communication earlier within the period of our vacation back to the saddle. We pray that the almighty Allah will continue to grant him full restoration.

17. Let me wish us all a very successful session. Thank you all and God bless Nigeria.