

ADDRESS BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, RT. HON FEMI GBAJABIAMILA AT THE RESUMPTION OF PLENARY BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON THE 17TH OF SEPTEMBER 2019.

PROTOCOLS

It is my pleasure to welcome you all back to the chamber after the annual recess. I thank God that through all our travels within and outside the country, we have made it back without suffering any mishap. I hope that the time away has been a time of consultation and preparation, and also of rest and renewal because there is a lot of work to do.

Before we adjourned the House on 25th July 2019, a significant amount of work had already started. We had begun legislative action through the consideration of 13 number of bills including Electric Power Sector Reform Act (Amendment) Bill 2019, Physically Challenged (Empowerment) Bill 2019 and Student Loan (Access to Higher Education) Bill 2019. We had also in that time received and debated 57 number of motions on a range of issues including the non Remittance of Contribution into the NSIFT by the Federal, States, Local Government and Some Public and Private Organisations

Work on those Bills and those motions will continue, even as we continue to receive, debate and act on other new legislation. All ADHOC Committees to wind up and handover to standing committees by September 30th. I fully expect that in this session, the House of Representatives will consider important legislation such as the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB). I believe that we in this 9th Assembly are ideally suited to surmount the obstacles that have mitigated against passage of this essential reform legislation which is important if we are to properly address the structural, operational and policy challenges and inefficiencies in the Nigerian petroleum industry, and position the industry to best serve the interests of all the Nigerian people.

In addition to the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), we will see the reintroduction of the Bill prohibiting Estimated Billing in the power industry, intended to put a permanent end to the wastefulness and unfairness created by an unreliable and arbitrary system that imposes unforeseen costs on individuals and businesses alike, the Education Bank Bill, designed to ensure that no child in this 21st century is unable to get a quality tertiary education in Nigeria due to a lack of means and the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Bill which will serve to broaden the Local Content Act and ensure

the original intent of the Act is made real in the lives of our people.

We had also before the recess, taken action to prevent the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) from embarking on a strike action. that would have had an extremely deleterious effect on the delivery of healthcare services across the country. I am pleased to note that the agreement we reached with the doctors is still holding, whilst we work with them and the executive to fashion a permanent solution to the problems that so often lead to such labour unrest and the threat or implementation of strike action. On this I particularly thank chairman health, Hon Sununu on the initiatives taken. I

As part of efforts by the House of representatives to gain firsthand knowledge of what is happening in those parts of our country where banditry, insurgency and communal clashes have laid waste to towns and villages, displacing thousands of our fellow citizens, I recently led delegations of the House to Borno, Zamfara and Katsina states. On these occasions, we met with community leaders and government officials, we visited the internally displaced persons, and we heard their stories and considered their perspectives. The stories we heard were as much about faith in the promise of tomorrow

and hope that with a little help, these people who have lost so much can rebuild their world again. It falls to us to make sure that the stories of these our fellow citizens are not forgotten, and that the hopes expressed in those stories guide the actions we choose to take and policies we choose to pursue, as we act to achieve the restoration of lasting peace and sustainable development in those communities and across the nation.

I am also pleased to note that the standing and ad - hoc committees of the House of Representatives constituted before the recess have hit the ground running. The ad - hoc committee set up to investigate the underutilization of the Eastern ports has held several events, including a well-attended public hearing. We will shortly receive and consider the committee's report on the floor of the House, and take whatever action is required to ensure that these vital national assets are put to more effective use. The Ad - Hoc Committee on the Legislative Agenda for the 9th House of Representatives have completed their assignment and submitted their report. That too will be tabled before the House for debate, amendment and adoption. It is this Agenda that will serve as our touchstone in this 9th assembly and I look forward to a passionate and well-thought-out debate when the House meets to consider the draft Agenda.

Over the course of the recess, we convened two National Roundtable Discussions on reform of the budget process and on recovered assets. These roundtable sessions were intended to take a critical look at issues relating to the development, enactment, funding, implementation and evaluation of the national budget. The sessions provided an opportunity for institutional stakeholders from the executive and legislature to engage one another honestly on the problems of the appropriations process and the options for addressing those problems. It also allowed us to begin to prepare the ground for the 2020 Appropriations Bill which we expect will shortly be presented to the National Assembly by His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR. We look forward to receiving the Executive's proposals and making sure they align with our national development objectives as well as the expectations and best interests of the Nigerian people.

Through the National Roundtable discussion on Recovered Assets, we are working with the relevant executive agencies to develop a framework to more effectively account for the cash and non-cash assets recovered as part of the government's fight against corruption in public office. Government over the last five years has been quite successful in recovering so many of these resources, and these funds have in recent time contributed significantly to funding for

our national budget. We have a responsibility to ensure that the assets thus far recovered are diligently accounted for and properly deployed to meet our national development challenges. As a consequence of the government's aggressive pursuit of these assets, individuals and organisations who have partaken in the conversion of these resources have evolved newer strategies of concealment. A joint effort between the executive and legislature on statutory reform, capacity building and appropriations is necessary to achieve future success in recovering these resources and sustaining the fight against corruption.

The leadership of the House had cause to convene to address the most unfortunate events of xenophobic attacks against Nigerian citizens in the Republic of South Africa. The scale of these attacks, the cost in lives and property, and the appearance of involvement by state actors in the worst of the attacks were some of the issues we deliberated on, after which the entire leadership of the House, in an unusual occurrence, released a joint statement articulating in clear terms the feelings of the Nigerian people on the unfortunate events and demanding action from the South African government. We stand by the commitments we made in our public declaration and we will continue to work to ensure that those who have been hurt by these attacks are properly

compensated for their loss. The House commends the efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria in addressing the issues that gave rise to these unsavoury events, as well as holding the government of South Africa accountable through the available diplomatic channels. We will continue to support these efforts by whatever means is required of us. We will also seek to take whatever active measures we can to help the returnees resettle in Nigeria and to resume productive lives here at home.

I invite the House to at this time join me in commending the actions Julius Malema, leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and a respected voice in the politics of that nation who openly and without equivocation, condemned the attacks and directed his organisation to provide aid and protection to our citizens facing harm. He has since then, never relented in calling out the failures of the government that allowed the attacks to occur and to continue. In a similar fashion, Sir Allen Ifechukwu Onyema, Chairman of Air Peace Airlines provided his organisation's services without charge, to repatriate those Nigerians who were willing to return home to escape the carnage that had been visited upon them. He acted without consideration of cost, of tribe or personal interest. He acted in the best traditions of patriotism and love of country. Our country owes these men a debt of gratitude.

In my inaugural address to the house, I said that on our shoulders lie the responsibility of working together as a House to safeguard the future of our great country. That is as true today as it was then, and I ask you all to remember this as we proceed to do the work for which we have been elected. Today we recited the National pledge, now part of our recitals at the beginning of every sitting. This will help inculcate the spirit of nation building even in our subconscious.

Our success depends on us collaborating with one another honestly and with unity of purpose.

We must stay on the message of nation building and Let our disagreements over politics and policy never be allowed to get in the way of our joint task.

I welcome you all once more to the House of Representatives.

Thank you and my God bless you.