

**WELCOME BACK SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE
SENATE OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA, HIS
EXCELLENCY (DR.) ABUBAKAR BUKOLA SARAKI, CON, TO
SENATORS OF THE 8TH SENATE ON TUESDAY, ON JULY 3,
2018**

PROTOCOL

1. Distinguished colleagues, I welcome you all back to the Senate Chambers after the short recess. I trust that the break has afforded each and every one of us the opportunity to cast our minds back over the last three years, to take stock and assess our performance thus far, and to better plot the way forward as we embark on the last lap of the 8th Senate.
2. As you all know, this Senate clocked its third anniversary while we were on break; and, given the sombre mood of the nation, there was no great celebration. Nonetheless, we had occasion to get an overview of the considerable achievements of this Senate since its inauguration on June 9, 2015. Indeed, we have come a long way, and have set a new bar in the legislative history of this country. We have passed 213 Bills in the period under review and cleared 138 Petitions – surpassing in three years the records of the entire four-year terms of every previous Senate. This is no mean feat. As we hit the home run, therefore, it is important we do not pack-pedal or slow down; we must intensify efforts towards doing all that we are sworn to do for the electorate that voted for us as their representatives.
3. Distinguished colleagues, you will agree with me when I say that the 8th Senate's achievements would not have been possible without the support of Nigerians. They gave us the mandate and they trusted us to deliver; the people's confidence in us has been a boon to all our endeavors in this hallowed chamber, and has put a spring in our steps with regard to all legislative activities.
4. With the backing of the people, we have been able to introduce landmark legislations that have helped boost our recovering economy. These include: the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA), which is the most significant business reform Bill in Nigeria in nearly three decades. As a result of the signing into law of the Secured Transactions in Movable Assets Act and the Credit Bureau Reporting Act, for instance, Nigeria was upgraded on the World Bank's annual Ease of Doing Business ranking. This has been a very welcome development for our

economy and for restoring investor confidence in our business terrain. Other landmark economic Bills include: the Warehouse Receipts Bill, the Nigerian Railways Authority Bill, and the National Transportation Commission Bill.

5. We have given tremendous support to the fight against corruption with the passage of Bills such as: the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Bill, the Witness Protection Bill, the Whistleblower Protection Bill and the Federal Audit Service Commission Bill. You will recall that it was the quick intervention of the 8th National Assembly – through the passage of the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit Bill (NFIU) - that saved Nigeria from being expelled from the global community of the Egmont Group.

6. It was in the life of this Senate that we finally ‘split the atom’ of the once intractable Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), after almost two decades in the legislative wilderness. We split the Bill into four manageable parts; and, not only have we passed the first of those, the Petroleum Industry Governance Bill (PIGB), we have started work on the remaining three – the Administrative, Fiscal and Host Communities components of the Bill and have already taken them up to Public Hearing stage. The clock is ticking and we must ensure that we conclude work on the remaining PIB Bills as soon as possible. Nigerians deserve no less.

7. Our many interventions over the last three years, have shown that we are a Senate that is responsive to the needs of the people. This is observable in the constitutional amendment Bills that we have passed. Notable among these is the #NotTooYoungToRun Bill, which received Presidential assent on May 31, 2018, to wild jubilation around the country, due to the momentous generational shift it is expected to trigger in national leadership, in paving the way for the greater participation of youths in governance. A youth-oriented focus has similarly informed our engagement with relevant organizations on youth development and empowerment, in order to create jobs that will usefully occupy our teeming youths. We should be rightly proud of the milestones we have reached in this regard, because as we all know, youth inclusiveness is key to sustainable democratic governance.

8. As a people-oriented Senate, we have made major interventions on the drug abuse epidemic afflicting our communities, especially the youth demographic. In so doing, we have helped spark a national debate about drug abuse that is now the subject of major media attention. Additionally, we have drafted two Bills to tackle the problem, namely the Drug Control Bill and the Mental Health Bill. It is now incumbent on us to introduce

these Bills and for the legislative process on the two to begin without delay, following their review by the relevant Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders.

9. Among our most transformative achievements, my distinguished colleagues, is the step we have taken to make healthcare a right of Nigerians, and to put it within the reach of our entire population of 180 million people. This we have done through the setting aside of 1% of the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) to establish the Basic Healthcare Fund in the just concluded 2018 Budget. This is grounded in our belief that all Nigerians, no matter their economic status, deserve access to qualitative and affordable healthcare, to make for a stronger Nigeria with healthy and vibrant citizens who will, in turn, drive the country's growth and development.

10. Distinguished colleagues, the foregoing represents something of a recap of the journey so far, and also, in a sense, maps out the challenges ahead of us, which we must face head on. We are resuming plenary today under a pall of national anxiety and apprehension over the state of insecurity in the country. We have been alarmed at so many senseless killings of Nigerians, with the high number of casualties in Plateau being among the most egregious of late. In the wake of the atrocity, I led a Senate delegation to pay a condolence visit to the Governor of Plateau State, and to commiserate with the people of the state. As always, our sympathies are with those who have lost loved ones in these acts of barbarity, and we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring peace and security in our country.

11. As you all know, we held a Security Summit some months back, specifically to address the rising insecurity and to work out strategies in collaboration with security agencies on safeguarding Nigerian lives. Furthermore, we set up the Ad-Hoc Committee on the Review of Security Infrastructure in Nigeria, chaired by Senate Leader Ahmed Lawan; and we must now take steps to consider the Report of that committee and take forward the recommendations therein as may be appropriate. Events have shown that we were right to take these steps in response to the security challenges facing the nation at this time.

12. Let me reassure Nigerians that we are as concerned as they are in the face of this challenge; and we continue to hold government accountable, in order to see to improvement in this area. In addition to the Security Summit earlier mentioned, we held briefings with Security Chiefs in a bid to better understand the problems; and have urged them to table their

requests for more funds, so that the legislature can work on that aspect as well, to better equip the security forces to protect lives and property. Through our oversight functions, we can ensure the proper utilization of such funds and see to it that we have full accountability in the management of the current security crisis.

13. I must say, once again, that the responsibility for ensuring security rests with each and every one of us. Issues of criminality are involved in these heinous acts, and the vigilance of community leaders and the average citizen is crucial, to assist the security agencies do their job. For us as the Senate, it does seem that these issues are also an indication that it is time to revisit the issue of State Police; and to devise a framework for the mopping up of the 350 million pieces of light weapons estimated to be in circulation within our borders – an alarming ratio of three weapons to one person.

14. Meanwhile, let me use this opportunity to call for calm on all sides. We have called many times for unity and tolerance, and we must remind ourselves of the imperative of peace at this difficult time in our nation. Moderation is needed in our speech and in our actions as responsible citizens, even in what may be deemed as provocative situations. We must therefore, all of us, be careful of speech that has the potential to heat up the polity and heighten tensions. We implore the media also to exercise great responsibility in their reporting; Fake News can lead to dire consequences that we can ill afford. Nigeria is the only country we have.

15. Distinguished colleagues, it is clear that internal tensions are also a reflection of the economic condition of the citizenry. We will therefore be calling on all stakeholders to put Economic Bills on the fast lane in order that we may conclude them, so that we can open the door to greater opportunities for our people. Growth and development can only serve to deepen our democracy. To this end, I call on Committees that have not reported on their various mandates to quickly do so, so that we can conclude work on outstanding Bills intended to create economic prosperity for Nigerians.

16. Happily, the 2018 Budget has been signed by the President. We call on the Executive to expedite the release of funds for Budget implementation, so that our people can begin to see the positive impact in their lives without delay. The work is not done. We as the Senate must continue to exercise our oversight functions to ensure successful implementation and value for money. Naturally, we continue to work towards reforming the budgetary process. Clearly, it is necessary for the

Executive and the Legislature to work towards a more robust engagement on the need for a better budget environment and process, going forward.

17. In closing, my distinguished colleagues let us maintain the standard that we have set for this historic 8th Senate. The remaining work on the Constitutional Review process, pending concurrence issues and – unconcluded Bills especially the three PIB components outstanding as well as the earmarked economic Bills – all these demand our urgent attention.

18. As we inch closer to the 2019 electioneering period, I urge us not to lose focus. The divided attention of the legislature is not in the interest of the country. We must not be distracted. It is incumbent on us, therefore, to not allow politicking get in the way of our first duty to the Nigerian people, as Senators of the Federal Republic.

19. On this note, I charge us all to fasten our seatbelts and power on with the work we have been tasked to do. Posterity is watching, and history will vindicate us if we do the job with diligence and in truth.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE