

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, DISTINGUISHED SENATOR AHMAD IBRAHIM LAWAN, CON, PhD, AT THE RESUMPTION OF THE SENATE PLENARY, ON TUESDAY 28 JANUARY, 2020, AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY COMPLEX, THREE-ARMS ZONE ABUJA.

PROTOCOL

My distinguished colleagues, let me welcome all of us back from our deserving Christmas and New Year recess, when the business of the Senate was put on hold. The Recess no doubt was an opportunity for us to celebrate the festivities with our families. Especially, getting the opportunity to be with our children who were on holidays themselves, having missed each other for sometimes. But it was also an opportunity to interact with our constituents; think and work on bills and motions that will engender better life for our citizens and ensure order and good governance in our country. Surely, the recess was an opportunity to take some well deserved rests. This is necessary in order for us to renew our energy, refresh our minds and recalibrate our focus for the work ahead. The celebration of Christmas and New Year were the anticlimax of events in the annual vacation.

My distinguished colleagues, we all worked very hard from June 2019, when we were inaugurated, to December, 2019, when we closed to go on the Annual Recess. The Senate has demonstrated the willingness and capacity to actualize its Legislative Agenda of working for Nigerians, when it passed crucial amendment bill on the Deep Offshore and Inland Basin, Production Sharing Contract Act, 1993; the 2020-2022 Medium Term Expenditure Framework and Fiscal Strategy Paper (MTEF/FSP); the Finance Bill, which comprised of seven very strategic veritable bills that will give effects to better and more effective and efficient revenue generation and collections for government; the passage of the 2020

Appropriation Bill within two months, in December, 2019, thereby, effectively returning the Federal Government Annual Budget cycle to January to December; the passage of the Public Procurement Act 2007, amendment bill, to address the challenges of avoidable delays and unnecessary cumbersome procurement processes and procedures and the passage of the 2020 Appropriation of the Federal Capital Territory, also being the first to be passed before the end of the year in a very long time.

The Senate also, achieved the feat of timely confirmations of the Ministerial nominees, Chief Justice of Nigeria, the Niger Delta Development Commission Governing Board, amongst others. I congratulate the Senate, indeed the National Assembly for this feat.

While the above are cheerful events, the death of Senator Benjamin Uwajumogu was a great loss to this Senate. Senator Benjamin Uwajumogu was a consummate and accomplished legislator, who lived and died working for his constituents. This Senate and indeed the National Assembly will surely miss him. May his soul rest in perfect peace. Amen.

My distinguished colleagues, as we resume today, we should remember that though we did well previously, there is still so much work to be done. The National Assembly needs to follow through the implementation of the 2020 Budget for the 12 calendar months that the Budget will be implemented by the Executive arm of government. The oversight by the National Assembly is as important and critical as passing the Budget itself. The committees of the Senate will need to carry out vigorous oversight on those Ministries, Departments and Agencies under their jurisdiction. In furtherance of this commitment, the Senate will receive and debate the reports of such oversight activities in plenary.

This is with a view to ensuring that the Budget is implemented fully, ensuring efficiency, economy and value for money. We expect the MDAs to be cooperative and forthcoming with necessary information whenever such are requested.

My distinguished colleagues, revenue generation, collection and remittance are important, indeed critical determinant and success factors in the implementation of the Budget. The Senate will engage with relevant revenue generating agencies on a quarterly basis with a view to supporting them to achieve optimum performance in discharging their mandates.

I am confident that the amendments effected on the Deep Offshore and Inland Basin, Production Sharing Contract Act and the Finance Bill will bring additional revenues for the government. It is quite obvious that revenue generation is a major challenge to our country today.

Therefore, all hands must be on deck to ensure that accruals to government are received and remitted.

The amendment to the Public Procurement Act 2007 is to ensure timely, effective and efficient execution of government projects. It is important therefore, that we monitor closely, the procurement processes of the various MDAs to ensure compliance with the new law.

My distinguished colleagues, we passed very important and critical legislations in our first six months. We should sustain both the tempo and focus, in order to achieve the same success or even do better. We have critical issues that require quick legislative interventions. The oil and gas sector, our main source of foreign

exchange earnings, needs our immediate attention. Similarly, our electoral processes and procedures need special attention in order to address the challenges we had observed in the 2019 general elections and the various re-run and bye-elections. It is a fact that free, fair and credible elections work as tonic to democracy, as voters will continue to have faith and trust in the efficacy of their votes.

In pursuant to our Legislative Agenda, the next six months, like the first six months will be a busy and engaging period for us to address the challenges facing the oil and gas sector as well as our elections. The National Assembly needs to start work on the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) immediately. The previous attempts in the sixth, seventh and eighth assembly sessions to pass the bills failed. This Senate should learn from the mistakes that mitigated against the successful passage of the bills. We need to break the jinx. We must avoid the pitfalls that worked against the passage of the previous bills.

The Petroleum Industry Bill when passed will encourage investments into the oil and gas sector. The International Oil Companies (IOCs) have deferred investments in the industry largely due to two decades of fiscal uncertainties occasioned by various failed attempts to deliver on the petroleum industry legislations that practically subsisted since 1967 and disputes associated with fiscal clarity of the 1993 Production Sharing Contracts.

It is therefore, imperative to speedily deliver on the reforms in the oil and gas sector to spur economic growth and prosperity for our people. It is my belief that when the Petroleum industry governance and fiscal laws are delivered, economic uncertainties will be eliminated and conducive environment for exploration and production of oil and gas will be emplaced.

Similarly, it is important that the National Assembly starts work to effect amendments in those areas of our electoral processes and procedures that posed some real challenges to free, fair and credible elections in our previous elections. For elections to express the will of the electorates, they must be free and fair. The Senate will consult widely with stakeholders to ensure that any legislative intervention reflects the necessary step to reforming the electoral environment.

My distinguished colleagues, before we went on the recess, the Senate held roundtable discussions on the power, agriculture and solid minerals sectors with the view to identifying the challenges militating against the optimum performance by those sectors. The reports of the discussions are ready and will be presented to the Senate by the appropriate committees. The reports will be debated in plenary and necessary resolutions will be taken. Ultimately, there will be shared responsibilities between the Legislature and the Executive on the way forward to address the various bottlenecks.

My distinguished colleagues, the security situation in our country requires serious attention and due consideration by the Senate and indeed the National Assembly. Recently, the security in the country had deteriorated and the attendant loss of lives is not acceptable. We need to secure the lives and property of our citizens, as enshrined in our constitution. We all are witnesses to how our economy is also affected by the inclement security situation. Therefore, we need to speedily seek for solutions to fix the security problem bedeviling our dear country.

There is urgent need for paradigm shift and reform of the architecture and structure of our security systems. Equally important is the citizen participation, and collaboration in providing security. In this regard, the Senate will engage the

Executive arm of government to discuss the implementation of the recently launched National Security Strategy (NSS) 2019.

For a long time, major stakeholders in the security of our nation and police authorities appear to achieve consensus on the necessity of introduction of Community Policing in the country.

The Senate is going to pursue the implementation of community policing vigorously. To this end, the police authorities will be invited to brief and update the Senate on the progress made so far.

My distinguished colleagues, it is an incontrovertible fact that, the power sector cannot function optimally and thrive under the current circumstances. The anticipated outcome of improvement in effectiveness and efficiency of the privatization process has not been achieved, and doesn't look feasible. Therefore, we have to take all necessary steps to salvage this indispensable sector. The ensuing debate on the report of the Roundtable Discussions will no doubt reveal the actions that the Federal Government will need to take.

My distinguished colleagues, the solid minerals sector was neglected after the discovery of oil. Though there have been attempts to revamp this sector, it is yet to make any meaningful contribution to our economy. Today, the solid minerals sector accounts for only about 0.3% of our Gross Domestic Product. It is obvious that we need to take a holistic look into the challenges in the sector. It has also been reported that, presently, about 80% of mining operators fall into the category of artisanal and small-scale miners. This deserves our attention, to ensure inclusion, effective and efficient operations by those involved.

My distinguished colleagues, let me remind us that agriculture played an important and leading role in our economy before the discovery of oil. Prior to the discovery of oil in Nigeria, agriculture was the mainstay of our economy. Agriculture was then the highest earner of foreign exchange for the country and Nigeria was also largely self-sufficient in food production.

However, with the discovery of oil, the lure of petro dollars turned the focus of the country from agriculture. Despite the present efforts of the Federal Government to enhance the performance of the agricultural sector, there is still much to be done to make the sector perform optimally. No doubt, the agricultural sector is critical for the diversification of the economy of Nigeria, as we can create jobs, create wealth, earn foreign exchange and ensure food security. We therefore, should ensure the restoration of the viability of this sector in order to utilize the abundant potentials and opportunities it offers.

My distinguished colleagues, the challenges and work before us are enormous and indeed urgent. But, we have demonstrated patriotism, commitment, capacity and willingness in our previous handling of similar challenges. We can therefore, equally tackle these issues with the same dispatch and commitment.

Finally, let me once again welcome us back from our recess. I wish us a very successful New Year, and a great decade, 2020.

SENATOR AHMAD IBRAHIM LAWAN, CON, PhD
PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE