

ADDRESS TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BY THE SPEAKER REP. FEMI GBAJABIAMILA ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE 9TH HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. THURSDAY, 11TH JUNE 2020.

PROTOCOLS

Good morning honourable colleagues and thank you all for your presence here this morning.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this special day in the House of Representatives. I congratulate all of you on the first anniversary of our term in office, and I thank you most graciously for your services to our nation during the past year.

It is in keeping with the character of this 9th assembly that on the occasion of our first anniversary, we are gathered here in one accord to carry on the work to which we have dedicated ourselves. We have assembled to recommit ourselves to the goal of realising through legislative action, a peaceful country of prosperous citizens, living their best lives and achieving their highest aspirations. Honourable colleagues, you have in the last year, been dignified and forthright in your conduct. You have carried yourselves in the manner befitting of those whose voice carries within it the dreams of a nation. Because of your good service, it will not be said of us, that we failed to answer the call of service, or that having answered the call, we fell short of the responsibility to which we were called. I thank you all most graciously.

It is our fate to have assumed office at a time of global upheaval, with relentless change, both intended and unintended, cascading all around us to remake our world. We have been handed an opportunity to rebuild our country, to finally put Nigeria in a position to achieve the greatness long foretold yet too long unattained. We govern at a time of national consensus in favour of radical change. It is now, therefore, our responsibility to harness this consensus and to fashion therefrom, a future that is fairer than everything that came before and abundantly more prosperous than it ever has been.

We had begun on this path last year when within three months of our inauguration we adopted a Legislative Agenda that was bold in its commitment to reform, specific in its objectives and clear on the methods to achieve those purposes. We committed to delivering a fixed budget cycle, and by December of 2019, we had done exactly that. We committed to ensuring that Nigerians, wherever they may live, at home and abroad, are always assured of the support and protection of the people's House. Time and time again, we lived up that commitment in South Africa, in China and everywhere and every time the interests of our people were endangered.

This 9th House of Representatives has consistently extended a hand of cooperation to organised labour. It has become a virtual certainty that it is to the House that the representatives of labour will first turn to seek resolution of crises that affect the welfare of their members and threaten to disrupt our economy and essential services including education and healthcare. Like us, organised labour in this country represent ordinary men and women who are doing their best to provide for their families and be satisfied in the accomplishment of earning a good living by the efforts of their own hands. When

parliament joins in common cause with labour, we reaffirm a historical partnership that accounts for much of the social progress in the world over the last century.

Our interventions on these and other matter of national importance did not interfere with or decrease the pace of our legislative output. We have in our first year, passed thirty-seven (37) long-awaited and much-anticipated legislation including reforms of the Federal Government's public procurement system, the Company and Allied Matters Act and the Deep Offshore and Inland Basin Production Sharing Contracts Act. We have proposed and passed legislation to achieve electric power sector reform, establish a process of presidential transition that ensures continuity in government and limits the possibility of political or constitutional crisis arising from anticipated or sudden shifts of presidential power.

We heard the cries of those of our brothers and sister who being less able-bodied than others, have found their opportunities for advancement in education and professional prospects, curtailed and constrained. We passed on their behalf, the Physically Challenged (Empowerment) Bill, 2019 to promote accessibility and ensure that the barriers that stand in the way of people achieving their dreams no longer exist. We have delivered the Nigeria Industrial Revolution Plan Bill, and the Raw Materials Research and Development Council (Repeal and Re-Enactment) Bill, both of which will place our country on the path to industrial self-sufficiency and economic growth that lifts people out of poverty, creates jobs that pay a living wage and ensures that more of our people can contribute to the continued development of communities across the nation.

When the deadly Coronavirus arrived on our shores, it exposed the structural weaknesses of our system. We did not foresee, nor where we prepared for the global devastation of the Covid-19 disease. We were not ready to fight an enemy of this nature, and our lack of preparation has caused a great deal of loss and despair across our nation. We are still at risk of more severe damage to our economy and our national security. All of this is in addition to the existing threat of disease and loss of lives at a scale we will not long forget. I pray for the ill and the recovering, and I commit the dearly departed to a peaceful afterlife and ask for God's grace on those they have left behind.

This House of Representatives responded to the emergence of the Coronavirus by passing in one session, the Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill as the first response by any arm of government to the economic issues that we foresaw would be the consequence of the arrival of this disease on our shores. The Federal Government of Nigeria has long since begun to adopt and implement provisions of that Bill by granting deferrals on loan payments owed to federal Government institutions and lifting tax restrictions on the importation of essential medical goods needed in the fight against Covid-19 in the country. I also set up a Covid-19 Response Strategy Team (CRST) in my office to support the development and implementation of legislative interventions in response to the weaknesses that have been revealed by our management of the pandemic and the economic and social challenges arising therefrom.

In addition, members of the House contributed two months of our salaries to the Fund to fight Covid-19 in the country and inspired others to do the same across the country in

whatever measure they could. We set up an AdHoc Committee to carry out robust and joined-up oversight of the Federal Government's response to Covid-19. We advocated for and achieved greater accountability and equity in the allocation and distribution of palliatives to those of our citizens most in need of assistance. We have initiated and are committed to a comprehensive overhaul of the statutory framework for managing Public Health emergencies in the country. Just this week, as part of the amendment of the 2020 Appropriation Act, we provided the sum of Four Billion Naira to provide for the welfare of doctors in Nigeria. This is of particular importance at this time when we are managing the public health crisis of Covid-19 in Nigeria.

Though much has been done, there is much yet left to do. Nobody in this room has ever witnessed a time such as this in all our lives. If any good will come from this crisis, it will be from the renewed recognition that we need quick and effective action in the immediate term, to unshackle our economy from the restrictions of law and regulation that have too long stood in the way of innovation and investment. We are all now affirmative believers in the need for a robust social welfare system, built on accurate data, including a comprehensive national identity database that includes registration of births and deaths across the country. The global upheaval, as a result of the killing of George Floyd and many others in the United States of America, is a stark warning to us that if we continue to ignore the failings of policing here at home, the moment of reckoning will not long be upon us. The alarming rate of assaults against women and children all over Nigeria calls for nothing short of a state of emergency to mobilise government resources towards ending once and for all the scourge of sexual and gender-based violence in Nigeria.

It was in recognition of these realities and more that we resolved to conduct a review of the Legislative Agenda of the House of Representatives as the first step towards designing a post-Covid plan to address the identified weakness of our nationhood. The AdHoc Committee that we appointed for that purpose have concluded their assignment, and will today present the updated Agenda to the House. The updated Agenda, once adopted by the House, ceases to be a statement of intent, it becomes a contract with the Nigerian people. This is a binding agreement between the House and the Nigerian people, which will be used to measure the impact of our public service and hold us accountable for the rest of our time in office. The updated Agenda includes clearly defined legislative interventions in the immediate, medium and long term. We will yearly return to that document to appraise our performance and conduct a candid assessment of our efforts.

After our deliberations today, printed copies of the updated Agenda will be provided to all the members and committees of the House. When we resume for the new session, legislative proposals brought for consideration by the House will receive priority in line with the objectives as set out in the Legislative Agenda. Please use the opportunity of this recess to present the Agenda to constituents and stakeholder groups in your communities. Engage with them, so they understand what we have undertaken to do, and the role they have to play in this joint task of nation-building. Let us also use the time to identify in the Agenda, those areas of policy where we each have particular interest and expertise so that we can begin now to develop legislative proposals that will be approved and slated for

consideration as soon as possible. We no longer have the luxury of time, and we must act with the urgency that this moment requires.

Honourable Colleagues, the day you elected me as your Speaker, was one of the highest honours of my life. I will never forget, and I will never relent from the commitment I made to you on that day to “use the legislative platform and the instrumentality of the law to make Nigeria a better and more perfect union”. I assure you that I will always strive to ensure the unity of this House, recognising the particular concerns of the different constituencies that make up our great and beloved nation. I assure all Nigerians of our ongoing commitment to our country whose call we have obeyed, whose cause we have sworn to defend until that day when peace and unity, justice and prosperity is the inheritance of all who fly our nation’s noble flag.

We will return from our recess, refreshed and renewed in our determination to deliver on the promises we made in the updated Legislative Agenda. Our mission is clear, and our path is defined. With God on our side, and with the support of our people, we will not fail.

With all my heart, I thank you all for being here this morning. God bless you, and God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.