

ADDRESS BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, REP. FEMI GBAJABIAMILA ON THE RESUMPTION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE 2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WEDNESDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY 2021.

Protocols:

1. Good morning honourable colleagues. I welcome you all to the House of Representatives, and I thank all of you for being here this morning to continue with the people's business.

2. We have reconvened this year in the shadow of a great loss, the untimely death of our colleague, Hon. Ossy Chinedu Prestige, who until his demise was the member representing Aba Federal Constituency. I pray that his soul finds eternal rest and that his family receives the comfort and grace of God through this trying time. As we mourn the passing of our dear colleague, let us pledge ourselves once more to continue in this 9th Assembly to serve the people of Nigeria to the glory of God and in memory of all our fallen brethren.

3. In a few months, we will mark the halfway point of our tenure in the 9th House of Representatives. We still have a lot of work to do. We have obligations to the people who elected us to serve them. And the fraught circumstances of the previous year will not suffice to spare us the harsh judgment of history if we fail to meet the commitments we have made to God and country.

4. The promises we have made and the fierce urgency of this moment compel us to do more, do better, and do so with haste that reflects our understanding of the challenges and promise of this moment in history and our determination to succeed against all odds. We are called to take legislative action to unleash the spirit of invention and our people's untiring industry. We have to do this for this generation to thrive here at home as they have done everywhere else in the world where they have access to the resources and infrastructure they need to succeed.

5. Honourable colleagues, we begin this new year with a renewed commitment to legislative action that drives the course of progress and brings us closer to achieving the highest aspirations we hold for our nation. We begin with renewed determination to achieve better oversight of government spending priorities through a collaborative effort with the executive arm of government and with civil society. And we remain dedicated to the lofty, yet clear

ambitions we articulated in our Legislative Agenda when we resumed in the 9th Assembly.

6. Despite the unfortunate and unforeseeable difficulties we faced last year, we managed to put points on the board. We passed meaningful and potentially transformative legislation including the Nigerian Police Act (Repeal and Re-enactment) Bill, the Electric Power Sector Reform Act (Amendment) Bill, Physically Challenged (Empowerment) Bill, Deep Offshore and Inland Basin Production Sharing Contracts Act (Amendment) Bill, and the Companies and Allied Matters Act, amongst many others.

7. We also considered and passed the National Health Insurance Scheme Act (Repeal and Enactment) Bill, National Transport Commission Bill, and the Public Procurement Act, No. 14 of 2007 (Amendment) Bill. Some of those bills have been passed in the Senate and signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR. We will work with the Senate to achieve expeditious concurrence and passage into law on other outstanding priority Bills.

8. In the 2021 legislative year, we will focus the attention of the House of Representatives on bills and motions that improve ease of doing business and unlock economic potential by stripping away restrictive regulation and ending predatory regulatory practices that deprive our young people the opportunity to conquer new frontiers. In this age of technology and innovation, of daring and enterprise, we cannot risk implementing policies that handicap our ability as a nation to participate in new markets and profit from emerging industries.

9. Honourable colleagues, the true test of government is in our ability to protect the most vulnerable amongst us. We cannot separate the goal of economic prosperity from the ambition to ensure that all our people live in a just society free from abuse of power and protected by a justice system built on fairness and the rule of law. Therefore, we will shortly begin considering Bills to amend the Administration of Criminal Justice Act. We will follow up with a long-overdue review of the Trafficking In Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement And Administration Act and other legislation that seek to deliver a justice system that works for all.

10. "The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government". With these words, the constitution obligates all of us who swear to serve in government to do everything to protect the lives and property of all citizens and promote their well-being above all else. This obligation is central

to the governing contract between the government and the citizenry. Every time a citizen going about their business is killed or kidnapped, loses their property or livelihood, we have failed in our obligation. From the abundance of these failures has emerged a culture of self-help in matters of internal security that portends grave danger for our nation's continued existence.

11. If ever there was a time for us to put aside all other considerations, especially the petty concerns of partisanship and politics, it is now. If ever there was a time to set aside our differences of tribe and religion to focus on a concerted effort to defeat the challenges of insurgency and banditry, communal violence, and the violent struggle over land, that time is now. The forces that threaten our lives and property, our sovereignty and nationhood, do not make any exceptions based on the God we pray to or the language of our native tongue. From every region and state, citizens of every tribe and religion have suffered and will continue to suffer the pain of death and the grief of loss until we put an end once and for all to the terrors of banditry, insurgency and malignant crime in all forms.

12. Here in the National Assembly, we do not command any armies or control the police. Command and control of our nation's security infrastructure is an exclusively executive responsibility. Yet it is to us that our constituents look to when the forces of darkness descend to disrupt their lives, often irreparably. We have to reconcile the obligations we owe to our people with the constitutional limitations under which we operate. But we will not shrink from our role as advocates for the forgotten voices, and we will continue to exercise the appropriation and oversight authority vested in us to hold to account those who bear direct responsibility for the protection of all our nation's people.

13. Last year we initiated legislative action in the House of Representatives, to build a more effective framework for policing accountability. That process is ongoing, with the Police Service Commission Reform Bill currently making the way through the legislative process. We will ensure that a Bill shortly emerges from the House of Representatives, without compromising any of the objectives that necessitated our intervention in the first instance.

14. At this time, I will crave the House's indulgence to raise a matter of urgent importance. It has become more difficult with each appropriation cycle for the government to meet its obligations. The exploding recurrent cost of governance demands that we be more circumspect in the priorities we pursue, particularly regarding Establishment Bills in the National Assembly. At a time of reduced revenue, with preexisting and worsening infrastructure deficits requiring significant investments, we cannot afford to keep establishing more institutions that impose a permanent liability on government income. I am not unmindful of the realities that often necessitate such legislation, yet we cannot

ignore the facts that lie before us. Let us work together to reform and strengthen the institutions already in existence, and remove those no longer fit for purpose. I believe most sincerely that this is the pathway to a legacy that we can all be proud of.

15. My honourable colleagues, I look forward to a successful year of measurable achievement in the joint task of nation-building. And I thank you all most sincerely for your presence here this morning.

Welcome back to the House of Representatives for a new legislative year. God bless you all, and God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.