

REMARKS BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, REP. FEMI GBAJABIAMILA AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE 2023 APPROPRIATION BILL TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA, HIS EXCELLENCY MUHAMMADU BUHARI, GCFR. FRIDAY, 6TH OCTOBER 2022, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY COMPLEX, ABUJA.

PROTOCOLS

1. On behalf of the National Assembly, I thank the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, for coming today to present the 2023 Appropriation Bill for parliamentary consideration and approval.
2. Today's presentation is historic because it is the last such presentation by President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR. It is also the last time the 9th Assembly will convene to receive the President for this purpose. We are once more reminded of the finite nature of public service and the obligation to make the most of our time to deliver on our promises to the Nigerian people. It is often said that it is not well you start but how strong you finish. We, intend here in the 9th assembly, to finish strong.
3. I assure you the National Assembly will prioritise this bill and ensure it is passed before the end of the year, as is the practice in the 9th Assembly. However, we will not, in the quest for timely passage, fail to do the due diligence expected of us by the Nigerian people. The reforms to the budget process initiated in the 9th Assembly have helped streamline the appropriations process and the oversight system. We have set a standard for others to match or answer for. This is to the credit of all those who worked to achieve these outcomes, particularly the senators and honourable members.
4. I have often said that a budget reflects priorities. National security, healthcare, education, public infrastructure and human capital development are the priorities we have pursued in the 9th Assembly. Every Appropriation Act we have considered and passed has reflected these priorities to different degrees. The 2023 Appropriation Act will be a budget of consolidation; our last, best opportunity to ensure that ongoing projects across the country are completed before the end of the administration.
5. Of course, government is a continuum, and it will fall to our successors in office to continue the development initiatives of this administration and see them to completion. However, though governance continues despite government changes, priorities may not remain the same. As such, we must endeavour to see to it that the policies and projects we have prioritised are adequately funded and fully implemented as we continue to do the work we have been elected to do until the last moment of our tenure.
6. Mr President, permit me to convey the disquiet in the House of Representatives arising from the reports of a massive decline in the volume of crude oil exports due primarily to theft and diversion by criminal elements. It is the sense of the House of Representatives that those engaged in these activities are agents of economic sabotage determined to bring our country to its knees. Therefore, our position is that their actions constitute treason against our country, for which they and their enablers must be held accountable to the fullest extent permitted by law. Nigerians no longer want to hear about crude oil theft. The question has now become what are we doing about it.

7. Therefore we are urging a swift and systemic overhaul of the systems in place to protect the country's oil and gas resources. Evidently, the arrangements in place are no longer adequate. As such, there is an obvious need for improvements to stop the loss of income occasioned by this ongoing sabotage. This is especially so at this time when the conditions and circumstances of our national finances require significant borrowing to finance government operations, sustain investments in infrastructure and national security and improve the living conditions of the Nigerian people. It is noteworthy that Mr President, the President of the Senate and my good self, without comparing notes dwelt extensively on this subject. This underscores its importance and the imperative to act and act quickly.

8. As we consider this 2023 Appropriation Bill, I wish to remind the heads of ministries, departments and executive agencies that the National Assembly expects thorough accounting for previous appropriations, disbursements and expenditures. Where such accounts are not forthcoming, we will demand them. And we will exercise the full authority of parliament to hold to account those who fail to provide the records we need to make informed decisions on the Appropriation Bill.

9. This is a priority for us as we wind down and begin compiling our service records for history and as a guide to those who will continue from where we stop. Just as the 9th Assembly has reformed the appropriations process to ensure timely budget passage, we also intend to leave a legacy of transparency and accountability as a standard for the future.

10. I thank His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR; the Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo; the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Mr Boss Mustapha; the Budget Office; Honourable Ministers and all those who contributed to drafting this Appropriation Bill. The National Assembly will build on your efforts to deliver an Appropriation Act that provides real solutions to national problems, unlocks economic potential, secures our country and brings a future we can all look forward to and be proud of.

11. Finally, let me appreciate the Clerk to the National Assembly, Arc. Olatunde Ojo and the entire management and staff whose efforts have made this joint session a resounding success. May God keep and guide us all. And God bless our Federal Republic of Nigeria.