

AN ADDRESS BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THE RT. HON. TAJUDEEN ABBAS, PHD, ON THE RESUMPTION OF THE 10th HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON TUESDAY, 4th JULY, 2023

Honourable Members of the House of Representatives and fellow citizens, I welcome you back to the People's House for the People's mandate.

2. I believe that the recess afforded us an opportunity to rest and refresh our minds and bodies for making laws for the good of our citizens and nation. The short recess, culminating in the Eid celebration, allowed our Muslim brothers to reflect and rejuvenate spiritually. I am delighted to see all of us back, looking refreshed and in high spirits for the task at hand. We thank God for His mercies, kindness, and protection and for bringing us all back safely. We pray for God's continued grace.

3. Honourable Colleagues, let me report that the six committees set up before our recess continued working and have made tremendous progress. This is particularly so with the Committees on Welfare and Legislative Agenda. The Committee has concluded office, parking lots and seats allocations in the chamber for Members to settle down quickly while other issues related to the work environment are being sorted out. The leadership of the House will take quick steps to address the welfare needs of members. I must appreciate members of the Committees, especially those in charge of the office allocation, who sacrificed their recess to ensure the offices, parking lots and seat allocations, were ready before our resumption. I also thank the Committee on Legislative Agenda, who sat throughout the holidays. We will continue working together to ensure a very conducive environment for our legislative duties.

4. May I also report that the constitution of Committees is ongoing. The process is designed to meet the interest of every member irrespective of party and political affiliations. However, we will be guided by the legislative interests, experiences, capacity and background of every member. The same principle should be adopted in filling up the remaining principal positions of the House.

5. Colleagues, we cannot gloss over the capacity challenges this 10th House will have to grapple with as we settle down to work. This of course, is owing to the high turnover rate of the legislature. It is perhaps, the highest in our democratic journey since 1999. It is in this regard that I implore you to consider competence, capacity and experience in choosing your Aides. There is an array of experienced hands within and outside the National Assembly you can rely on. Your success as a legislator is largely dependent on the quality of your legislative Aides as well as the legislative bureaucrats. In view of the high legislative turnover which has become part of our democratic culture, the House, going forward will consider professionalising the legislative Aides services to ensure that new members have a smoother transition into the Assembly.

6. Dear Colleagues, I want to believe that during our recess, we had the opportunity to interact with our constituents, to hear their concerns, and to witness first-hand the challenges they face in their daily lives. This connection, and bond between representatives and the people we serve, lies at the core of our democratic principles. So, as we gather here today, we must recognize the immense responsibility placed upon our shoulders. We have been entrusted with enacting legislation that will address our people's general well-being and shape our nation's future. The issues before us are complex, and the expectations of our citizens are high. We must rise above personal and partisan interests and work together for our collective success.

7. Dear Colleagues, we have been called to serve at one of the most challenging times for our constituents and nation. The present administration, which we are part of, is challenged by many economic issues, which include a huge debt profile, a volatile international oil market, rising unemployment, hyperinflation, a high poverty rate, infrastructure deficit, de-industrialization, and many more. This calls for our immediate attention and action. I need not remind us that our constituents are going through so many difficulties following the stoppage of government subsidies on petroleum products. Though taken in the nation's best interest, this singular action has occasioned increased commodity prices, transportation, and operational costs for businesses and the general cost of living. As the Executive comes with

policies and programs to alleviate the impact of the subsidy removal, we must be ready to respond with the necessary legislative actions in this regard.

8. There is no gainsaying the fact that the House of Representatives and indeed, the National Assembly, plays a vital role in this country's economic trajectory. Consequently, we must proffer legislative reforms to unlock Nigeria's economic growth and development of our vast human and natural resources. To achieve this, we must focus on opening bottlenecks in critical sectors of the economy through appropriate legislations positioning for emerging industries that will attract foreign and domestic investors and, in turn, create sustainable economic development.

9. Colleagues, our economic challenges are aggravated by the parlous security situation in the country despite the very commendable efforts and tremendous sacrifices of our security personnel. The relationship between the economic crises and the precarious security situation leaves the country in a quagmire as both are fallouts from each other and reinforce themselves.

10. Notwithstanding the successes of our security forces in protecting lives and property, internal security remains precarious and challenging. In the course of our recess, the nation witnessed unprovoked attacks on innocent students of the Federal University, Gusau, the killing of farmers in Birnin Gwari, the attacks in the communities in Mangu Local Government of Plateau State, the reported killings in Anambra state and other such cases that are reported and often unreported. We shall take adequate and proactive legislative steps toward further strengthening our security forces to rid our nation of these criminals. I must acknowledge the swift action taken by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, in injecting fresh ideas into the security sector for the appointment of new security chiefs. We hope the new security chiefs will respond to the security situation with the urgency it requires. On our part, we will provide the required legislative support in the defence of our nation.

11. Honourable colleagues, while building on the legacies of previous sessions, we must now redefine the modus operandi of legislative business as we advance. We shall strengthen committees to conduct oversight of MDAs effectively. Henceforth, oversight duties, including investigative hearings, must be brought to their logical conclusions with reports and recommendations tabled before the entire House for necessary legislative actions. The leadership of the House shall monitor this process to ensure that members conduct themselves appropriately.

12. As we reconvene today, we must be guided by accountability, transparency, and good governance principles. We must hold ourselves and the executive branch accountable for their actions. The trust that the Nigerian people have placed on us demands nothing less. We must also ensure that our deliberations and decisions are transparent so that our citizens have faith in the integrity of our legislative processes.

13. This Assembly is a citizens' parliament. In that regard, the Committee on Legislative Agenda will engage all members through appropriate platforms to develop a citizen's legislative agenda. I, therefore, call on all members to actively participate in this process when called upon. Let me emphasize that in the Legislative Agenda, the House will pay priority attention to participatory budgeting process and delivery, law reform, electoral reform, women's participation and inclusion in governance, improved socio-economic conditions, entrepreneurship, employment, health and education, infrastructure, citizens-focused diplomacy, institutional capacity development and citizens engagement, constitutional amendment and restructuring, renewable energy among others.

14. As legislators, we know that the citizens' engagement is the fulcrum of any legislature. The 10th Assembly will adopt the 'OPEN NASS' Project. The 'Open NASS' project will not only affect the conduct of oversight and law-making but will equally cover issues around the funds of the National Assembly. If, as a legislature, we ask questions about how other arms of government utilize appropriated funds, we must equally be open to taking such questions from citizens. This equally requires having functional constituency offices and regular

interactions with our constituents. We will strive to return the legislature to those who own it through regular, meaningful, and productive engagement.

15. As noted in my acceptance speech, Colleagues, I remain grateful for the privilege of leading the 10th House as the Speaker. I assure you that I will not fail in discharging my duties alongside everyone. Let me reiterate that the House, under my leadership, will be fair to every member irrespective of our political leanings. Feel free to approach us anytime, as we carry this responsibility of service to the fatherland.

16. The fanfare and excitement of elections are over. It is now time for serious business of governance. May I remind us once again that we have been called to serve at one of the most difficult times when our nation and people face tough challenges with huge expectations, but for us to succeed in this task ahead and bridge the massive deficit in citizens' trust in government, we must set aside our differences and work together as patriots, committed to the ideals upon which our great nation was founded. Let us put the interests of Nigeria above all else and strive to create an inclusive society that upholds the rule of law, protects human rights, and promotes social and economic progress for all. Together, let us work tirelessly to address our nation's pressing issues.

17. May our collective efforts bring about positive change and transform Nigeria into a beacon of hope and opportunity. To achieve this, we must demonstrate a renewed hope, determination and an unwavering commitment to building a greater nation. As I welcome you back to the People's House, we must roll up our sleeves for the People's mandate!

Thank you. God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.