

**VOTE OF THANKS BY THE RT. HON. ABBAS
TAJUDEEN, PHD, SPEAKER, HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES, AT THE PRESENTATION OF
THE 2024 APPROPRIATION BILL TO A JOINT
SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY HIS
EXCELLENCY BOLA AHMED TINUBU (GCFR),
PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE
ARMED FORCES, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA,
AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON WEDNESDAY,
29TH NOVEMBER, 2023**

Protocols:

On behalf of the National Assembly, I express our sincere gratitude to Mr. President for taking time out of the gruelling demands of his Office to undertake a time-honoured democratic tradition of presenting and laying the budget estimates for the year 2024. Your presence in this hallowed chamber is indeed historic not only because it represents your first address to the Joint Session of the National Assembly as the 16th President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, but also because it represents a homecoming for you. By undertaking this important constitutional responsibility, you have continued what you started at your inauguration on 29th May, 2023. All your

actions since then have been bold, decisive and purposeful. They indicate your resolve to make decisions that may be hard but necessary to remedy past errors and put Nigeria on the path of economic recovery, security and development. We commend you for your courageous and determined leadership.

2. Your Excellency, sir, your administration's "renewed hope agenda" is the philosophical foundation of the Legislative Agenda of the 10th House of Representatives. We have developed a detailed roadmap to ensure that the legislature supports, promotes, and oversees the strategic objectives of this government. A major thematic area of our Agenda is "economic growth and development". We recognise the role that parliament plays in shaping the economic trajectory and the role that we play in influencing the economic environment. Towards this end, the National Assembly will support the government's policies and programmes targeted at alleviating poverty, economic restructuring and diversification, as well as general social sector reform and development.

3. For the first time in our legislative history, the 10th House of Representatives created monitoring and evaluation committees to ensure effective implementation of the budget and Mr. President's 8 Point Agenda among others. I am happy to report to Mr. President that the Legislative Agenda was on 14th November, 2023 unveiled to the Nigerian public.

4. Mr. President, it is a well-known fact that millions of our constituents are living through incredibly difficult times. For this reason, they also look to the Tinubu-led government to provide quick and sustainable solutions. The antecedents of the President and your track record in governance inspire a lot of hope in Nigerians. Mr. President, it is for this reason that we cannot afford to fail Nigerians. If anyone can change the rot and chart a new course for Nigeria, **IT IS YOU!** I have no doubt whatsoever that we can measure up to the expectations of Nigerians through your visionary leadership and the commitment of the National Assembly.

5. Accordingly, the budget laid before us today should not be seen as a mere financial document but a reflection

of our collective resolve to address the most critical needs of our long-suffering citizens. In order to promote economic growth and development, the 2024 Budget should prioritise social welfare programmes to help reduce poverty and inequality. Equally important is job creation and youth empowerment in view of the large and ever-growing youth population. Failure to do this means failure to invest in our future. This Budget must also prioritise investment in education and healthcare, which is critical to human capital development and a more productive workforce. Infrastructure development is another critical area of importance, which is crucial for economic growth. The biggest challenge, however, is balancing these priorities within the constraints of available resources.

6. In view of this and the related challenge of a high level of public debt, the National Assembly will ensure that the 2024 budget includes concrete strategies for sustainable debt management, including measures to increase revenue and control expenditure. Specifically, the focus should be on raising more revenue through tax

reform, fiscal reform, subsidy reform, foreign exchange convergence, and centralised revenue collection. In our recent engagement with MDAs on the MTEF, we emphasised the need for revenue-generating agencies to double their targets to meet the N18trn revenue projected in the budget.

7. Mr. President, the effectiveness and legitimacy of fiscal policies depend to a very large extent on public support. As the **People's House** and in line with our Legislative Agenda, the House of Representatives will convene the first national **citizens' budget town hall** to harness public input and opinion. We are convinced that this will increase transparency and accountability, improve policymaking, and increase trust in government. Public participation in the budgetary process has been shown to improve resource allocation and service delivery as well as a more stable and robust economy. By seeking input from citizens, we aim to understand their local needs and preferences better and allocate resources more effectively.

8. Going forward, Mr. President, we will also work to institutionalise pre-budget engagement with the executive to further improve and hasten the budget process. The House has already commenced interface with MDAs through the Sectoral Debates to understand the challenges facing government agencies and identify areas for legislative intervention. All of these efforts are geared towards ensuring that we provide the necessary legislative support to your administration's renewed hope agenda.

9. I cannot conclude my remarks without highlighting some of the perennial problems that have hampered the budget process in Nigeria. These are well known to Mr. President, who is an experienced ex-legislator. Although the government budget is an important tool for economic management and promoting growth and development, it has generally not met the expectations of improved service delivery and development. This has largely been due to challenges relating to budget enactment, budget implementation and budget oversight. The well-known gaps in the various stages of the budget process

underscore the need for budget reforms, including altering relevant sections of the Constitution and existing laws to strengthen the budget process and transform our budget into an authentic tool for development. For this reason, I propose enacting a Budget Act to strengthen the budget process and promote development outcomes. This is a well-established practice in democracies across the world.

10. Mr. President, let me, on behalf of my colleagues in the National Assembly, assure you that we will give this bill the utmost priority it deserves. While we would give it accelerated consideration, we will diligently scrutinise it alongside Nigerians to ensure that when it is passed, it will be a budget that best addresses the most critical needs of our people.

11. Accordingly, we seek the cooperation of all heads of MDAs, especially during budget defense by Committees. We shall thoroughly examine various aspects of the budget proposals, including economic feasibility, allocation and utilisation of funds and sustainability of proposed fiscal policies. This is essential for maintaining

checks and balances and ensuring that government spending aligns with national priorities and is conducted transparently and efficiently. Therefore, I urge all stakeholders to approach the deliberations on this budget with a sense of purpose and commitment to national development.

12. Distinguished Senators and Honourable Members of the People's House, we must proceed with the huge task ahead. The next couple of weeks will be tough and demanding for us. But I do not doubt our capacity to effectively and speedily discharge our constitutional mandate. We must ensure that the budget when finally passed, meets the expectations of the people we represent. We must equally follow through the implementation process through our various oversight engagements.

13. Mr. President, let me conclude my short vote of thanks by once again thanking you for undertaking this important exercise of budget presentation to the National Assembly. I wish to categorically express the assurances

of the 10th Assembly to work with you to ensure that you succeed and that Nigeria succeeds.

14. Thank you, and may God continue to bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.