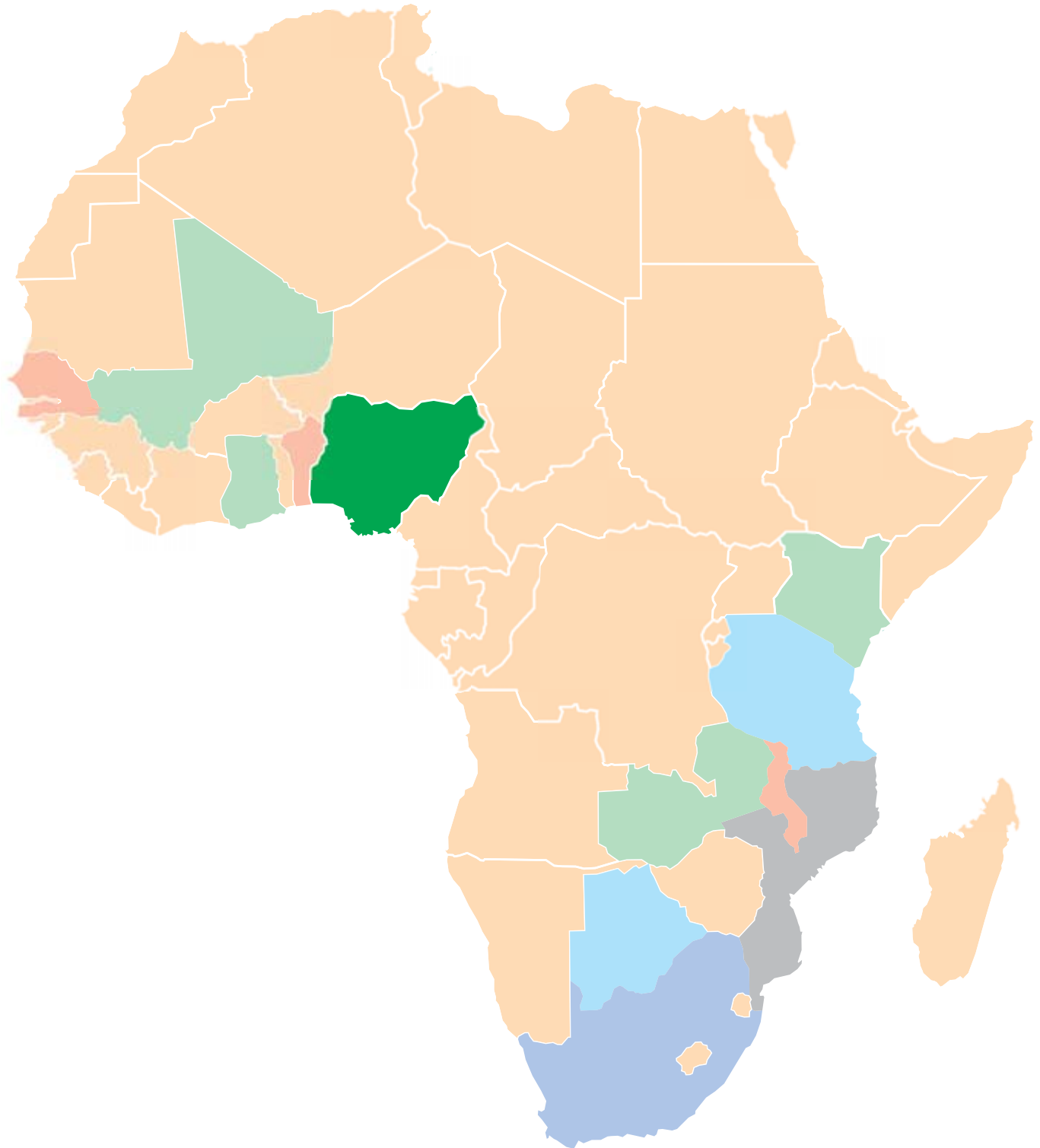


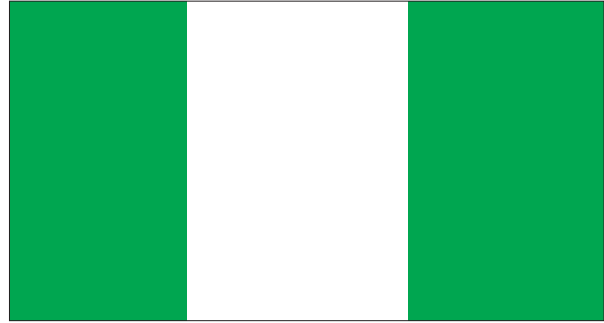
NIGERIA



NIGERIA



**Speech to the Nation,
Let Us Rebuild Nigeria Together,
 by His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo,
 President of the Federal Republic
 of Nigeria, to Mark the Forty-Fourth
 Anniversary of Nigeria's Independence
 1 October 2004
 Abuja**



It is with gratitude to God that I address you on the forty-fourth anniversary of our country's independence. I want to thank all Nigerians, including those in the diaspora, for their continuing belief in Nigeria, in our government, and in the boundless opportunities and possibilities that God has placed before us.

We surely have cause to be thankful to God. We have been through rough and tough times. As we try to retrace our steps and reposition our political economy for progress in an increasingly complex and competitive world, we must in all humility realise the blessings that we have enjoyed over the years. In spite of some tribulations here and there, we have been spared some of the horrendous experiences and attendant agonies that have plagued some nations. We are steadily recovering from our past errors and transgressions as we experience a renewed status in the international community, unprecedented growth in industry and agriculture, and successes in telecommunications, power and energy, industry, commerce, and health.

I particularly want to place on record my gratitude to the numerous youth groups, women's associations, professional bodies, religious and traditional institutions, leaders of thought, politicians, students, and workers who have stood by us, showed sympathy and understanding for the challenges we face, identified with the reform agenda, provided us with suggestions and ideas on how to move our nation forward, and made far-reaching individual and collective sacrifices in our longer-term interests. Let me assure you that on the part of government, we are determined to ensure that your understanding, support, and sacrifices shall never be in vain.

The fundamental focus of this administration has been on the consolidation of our democratic enterprise. We were fully conscious of the distortions and dislocations in our socioeconomic and political realities that [interfered with] the full functioning of democracy.

We thus committed ourselves to strengthening political institutions, fighting corruption, building new leadership, sanitising the nature of political competition, and refocusing our political perspective towards peace, tolerance, inclusion, harmony, and collective dedication to the common good. Of course, this has not been easy, but we are getting there. The fundamental aspect of our democratic consolidation project involved the package of reform that we have put together.

Nowhere in the world has democracy thrived without a firm, strong, integrated, productive, and sustainable economic base. I do not need to remind any of you about the state [of] decay and deterioration [that existed when we] came into office in 1999. Even our harshest critics agree that we are making admirable progress and [that] the economy at the centre is being steadily and visibly moved away from profligacy, fiscal indiscipline, mismanagement, corruption, waste, misplaced priorities, and insensitivity to the plight of the common person.

Let me urge you all to be patient with our reform agenda. You must believe that government has your best interests at heart, but we must realise that the past situations we inherited will take time to turn around for good. More important, the wrongs of the past cannot be allowed to continue no matter how convenient or seemingly comfortable they might appear. The past must teach us lessons for the present and the future, otherwise history will not forgive us for failing to do the right thing when we had the opportunity.

We must learn to save for the rainy day. Let us develop a new attitude towards government and governance. Our government is not intent on making life difficult for Nigerians. Our commitment is to steadily wipe the pain from the faces of all Nigerians. We can do this only by working together, thinking together, planning

together, bearing pain together, [and] sharing ideas and hopes, as well as praying for God's guidance together.

We have very carefully articulated a reform agenda designed to make life better for all Nigerians. The ongoing reform agenda that has been packaged as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is our grand strategy to reposition Nigeria for stability, growth, development, and prosperity for all. Through carefully designed programmes on privatisation and commercialisation, public and civil service reforms, institutional and governance reform, monetisation, and reforms of the administration of justice, government is irrevocably committed to altering the foundations of our socioeconomic interactions and building a basis for a sound, viable, and prosperous future.

Once the reform agenda at the federal level is effectively complemented by initiatives at the state and local levels—in the State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and the Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS)—we can begin to see unbounded and unprecedented development in all sectors and improvement in our lives.

NEEDS came out of widespread consultations with stakeholders across the nation and is aligned [with] both the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These AU [African Union] and UN [United Nations] initiatives give added legitimacy to our reform agenda, as they are dedicated to the same goals: poverty eradication, wealth and job creation, infrastructural development, expansion of the private sector, empowerment of women, and development of sectors that build capacity, productivity, and sustainable growth and development. My fellow Nigerians, however we look at it, the truth is that our reform agenda is working.

We have stabilised the polity. Most of the opposition movements that were active in 1999 have adopted democratic options in articulating and pressing their demands. We are talking to

those I described as “rascally elements” from the Niger Delta in the effort to open lines of dialogue and peace, as they feel aggrieved by their state authorities. I can assure you all that a rapprochement is taking place and that peace, stability, and harmony will return to the Niger Delta.

Agriculture recorded an unprecedented growth rate of 7 percent, and we plan to do better this year. Our strategic grains reserve reached 150,000 tons for the first time in our history, and the tonnage is rising. The World Food Programme is planning to establish its office in Nigeria as [a] demonstration of how well our agricultural policies are working. The aim is to be able to obtain food from Nigeria for other African countries in need of food. We have [instituted] far-reaching policies to revive and protect the textile industry, and the feedback has been very positive. Our ban on certain products has unleashed boundless productive energy in the areas of livestock production and agriculture.

Nigeria should be self-sufficient in [producing] poultry and poultry products by the end of this year, and Nigeria today has fruit juice factories with as many as five production lines. Our export drive policy is providing encouragement for local producers, opening up new foreign markets, and improving on foreign-exchange earnings.

We are recording successes in our enhanced service delivery, as the story of NAFDAC [National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control], NIPOST [Nigeria Postal Service], and Biometric Passport Issuance will testify. These islands of success in service delivery must be expanded through emulation. Our educational institutions are gradually returning to life as citadels of learning, crime is being steadily checked, and our investment in infrastructure is yielding results.

Private institutions are equally setting standards and helping to contribute to the Education for All initiative of government. Investors are coming into our country at a rate never experienced previously. In the areas of power generation, we have reached an unprecedented level of over 4,000 megawatts, with several plants and transmission lines completed. This is in addition

to encouraging independent power operators in a bid to ensure [a] steady power supply.

In science and technology, we have launched the Nigeria Sat-1, and plans are under way to launch our telecommunications satellite. This [is] in addition to work on a technology village, a Silicon Valley-type of project, and [a] heavy investment in computer literacy and software development.

In the area of communications, you are all direct beneficiaries of the improved teledensity profile of Nigeria, and we are continuing to encourage product development, quality control, better service delivery, and competition. Similar progress is being recorded in water supply, health, education, tourism, and other sectors.

Suffice it to say that in spite of what was on [the] ground in 1999, this country has made tremendous progress, and our development partners have fully and openly acknowledged this. Of course, we still have a long way to go, and that is why we must redouble our efforts and [our] commitments to the process of reform.

The achievements mentioned so far can be consolidated and built upon only when we all buy into the reform process at every level, including in the conduct of personal affairs. We must eschew violence, indiscipline, arrogance, intolerance, and a fixation on subverting due process and the rule of law.

I [submit] to all Nigerians that rascality and vandalism, which are rapidly becoming the hallmark of the Niger Delta, have implications for the production, distribution, and pricing of crude oil; for our global economic rating; for investor confidence in our economy; and for overall resources available to support growth and development. Let me assure those patriotic, peaceful, and law-abiding Nigerians that government will not tolerate any act that would compromise the interest of the majority. Accordingly, government is taking appropriate steps to stem the tide of undue militancy, and we are confident that reason and the law will prevail.

Sustainable development is possible in Nigeria if we all put our hearts and minds into doing things the right way at all times in the interest of

our people and country. The 13 percent special allocation to the Niger Delta on the basis of derivation, which now extends to the offshore, is meant to deal with the recognised and acknowledged situation of the Niger Delta.

The obvious assessment so far is that not much impact has been made on the lives and living standards of most ordinary people of the Niger Delta. In the interest of security and stability of the Niger Delta in particular and of Nigeria in general, I appeal to those elected officials of the region whose efforts have not measured up to expectations to endeavour to be more alive to their responsibilities and [to] the plight of the people they are elected to govern.

There has recently been some unease about the full deregulation of the downstream sector of the oil industry. Government is fully aware [of] and sensitive to these feelings of unease. We do understand your hopes, dreams, and needs. The decisions taken by government have been taken out of love and out of concern for our future, not out of insensitivity or sadism. Let me assure you that where it is avoidable, we are doing everything [possible] to cushion the impact of these policies so that Nigerians [do] not have to suffer.

In the specific area of deregulation of the downstream sector, the federal government has set up a committee chaired by the Honourable minister of finance to consider what cushioning measures can be taken to alleviate or moderate the pressures without compromising the goals of our reform. I hope that the committee will submit its report for inclusion in the 2005 budget that will be presented to the National Assembly in the first half of October 2004.

There is a time in the history of every nation for reflection, forgiveness, unity, and collective rededication to a positive future. We have been through a lot, but let us look inwards. Let us look at our history, our communities, our families, and ourselves. Let us seek answers to whether we are doing the right things before man and God individually and collectively, and let us work hard so that history and our creator will be kind to us.

As we celebrate this forty-fourth independence anniversary on a low key, let us pray for

our country, colleagues, friends, and families, and let us recommit ourselves to the collective efforts to build a strong, productive, corruption-free, God-fearing, and democratic Nigeria. I wish you all a happy independence anniversary, and may God continue to bless Nigeria.