

THE PRESIDENT
AT NATIONAL HISPANIC FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS GALA
Renaissance Mayflower Hotel
Washington, D.C.
September 19, 2000

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PHOTOCOPY
WJC HANDWRITING

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The Hispanic Education Action Plan to ~~encourage~~ ^{help} Hispanic youth to stay in school and go to college, along with our scholarship initiatives ~~and other things~~, have contributed to the fact that the college-going rate among Hispanic young people is up over 50 percent in the last seven years. And -- listen to this -- a report which was issued last week said there has been a 500 percent increase in the number of Hispanic students taking advanced ~~placement~~ courses in high school to prepare for college.

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And to just sort of a little picture of how fast America has changed, you may see the advertisements today for ~~they're~~ on television now, for Denzel Washington's new movie about the integration of T.C. Williams High School over in Alexandria, Virginia, and its football team, which occurred ~~what~~ almost 30 years ago - not such a long time ago once you've reached my age, anyway. Now, a little over three decades later, that high school is in a school district which has students from over 180 different racial and ethnic groups, parents speaking over 100 different native languages. It's the most diverse school district in America.

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
IN ADDRESS TO JOINT ASSEMBLY
House of Representatives Chamber
National Assembly Building
Abuja, Nigeria
August 26, 2000

Thank you very much. Mr. President of the Senate, the Speaker, Mr. Deputy President and Deputy Speaker, members of the Assembly. It is a great honor for me to be here with members of my Cabinet and government, members of the United States Congress, mayors of some of our greatest cities, and my daughter. And we're glad to be here.

I must say, this is the first time I have been introduced as President in eight years, speaking to parliamentary bodies all over the world, where they played a song before I spoke. I liked it a lot. It got us all in a good frame of mind.

Twenty-two years ago, President Jimmy Carter became the first President ever to visit sub-Saharan Africa when he arrived in Nigeria, saying he had come from a great nation to visit a great nation. More than two years ago, I came to Africa for the longest visit ever by an American President, to build a new partnership with your continent. But sadly, in Nigeria, an illegitimate government was killing its people and squandering your resources. All most Americans knew about Nigeria then was a sign at their local airport warning them not to fly here.

A year later, Nigeria found a transitional leader who kept his promises. Then, Nigerians elected a President and a National Assembly and entrusted to them -- to you -- the hard work of rebuilding your nation and building your democracy.

Now, once again, Americans and people all around the world will know Nigeria for its music and art, for its Nobel Prize winners and its Super Falcons, for its commitment to peacekeeping and its leadership in Africa and around the world. In other words, once again, people will know Nigeria as a great nation.

You have begun to walk the long road to repair the wrongs and errors of the past, and to build bridges to a better future. The road is harder and the rewards are slower than all hoped it would be when you began. But what is most important is that today you are moving forward, not backward. And I am here because your fight -- your fight for democracy and human rights, for equity and economic growth, for peace and tolerance -- your fight is America's fight and the world's fight.

Indeed, the whole world has a big stake in your success -- and not simply because of your size or the wealth of your natural resources, or even your capacity to help lift this entire continent to peace and prosperity; but also because so many of the great human dramas of our time are being played out on the Nigerian stage.

For example, can a great country that is home to one in six Africans succeed in building a democracy amidst so much diversity and a past of so much trouble? Can a developing country, blessed with enormous human and natural resources, thrive in a global economy and lift all its people? Can a nation so blessed by the verve and vigor of countless traditions and many faiths be enriched by its diversity, not enfeebled by it? I believe the answer to all those questions can, and must, be, yes. ✓

There are still those around the world who see democracy as a luxury that people seek only when times are good. Nigerians have shown us that democracy is a necessity, especially when times are hard. The dictators of your past hoped the hard times would silence your voices, banish your leaders, destroy your spirit. But even in the darkest days, Nigeria's people knew they must stand up for freedom, the freedom their founders promised.

Achebe championed it, Sunny Ade sang for it. Journalists like Akinwumi Adesokan fought for it. Lawyers like Gani Fawehinmi testified for it. Political leaders like Yar'Adua died for it. And most important, the people of Nigeria voted for it.

Now, at last, you have your country back. Nigerians are electing their leaders, acting to cut corruption and investigate past abuses, shedding light on human rights violations, turning a fearless press into a free press. It is a brave beginning.

But you know better than I how much more must be done. Every nation that has struggled to build democracy has found that success depends on leaders who believe government exists to serve people, not the other way around. President Obasanjo is such a leader. And the struggle to build democracy depends also on you, on legislators who will be both a check on and a balance to executive authority ~~and be a source~~ -- You know, if I said that to my Congress, they would still be clapping and standing. ✓

And this is important, too -- ~~let me finish~~. In the constitutional system, the Legislature provides a check and balance to the Executive, but it must also be a source of creative, responsible leadership, for in the end, work must be done and progress must be made. ✓

Democracy depends upon a political culture that welcomes spirited debate without letting politics become a blood sport. It depends on strong institutions, an independent judiciary, a military under firm civilian control. It requires the contributions of women and men alike. I must say I am very glad to see a number of women in this audience today, and also I am glad that Nigerian women have their own Vital Voices program -- a program that my wife has worked very hard for, both in Africa and all around the world.

Of course, in the end, successful political change must begin to improve people's daily lives. That is the democracy dividend Nigerians have waited for.

But no one should expect that all the damage done over a generation can be undone in a year. Real change demands perseverance and patience. It demands openness to honorable compromise and cooperation. It demands support on a constant basis from the people of Nigeria and from your friends abroad. That does not mean being patient with corruption or injustice, but to give up hope because change comes slowly would only be to hand a victory to those who do not want to change at all.

Remember something we Americans have learned in over 224 years of experience with democracy: ~~It~~ it is always and everywhere a work in progress. It took my own country almost 90 years and a bitter civil war to set every American free. It took another 100 years to give every American the basic rights our Constitution promised them from the beginning. ✓

Since the time of our revolution, our best minds have debated how to balance the responsibilities of our national and state government; what the proper balance is between the President and the Congress; what is the roll of the courts in our national life. And since the very beginning, we have worked hard with varying degrees of success and occasional, regrettable, sometimes painful failures, to weave the diverse threads of our nation into a coherent, unified tapestry.

Today, America has people from over 200 racial, ethnic and religious groups. We have school districts in America where, in one school district, the parents of the children speak over 100 different languages. It is an interesting challenge. But it is one that I am convinced is a great opportunity, just as your diversity -- your religious diversity and your ethnic diversity -- is a great opportunity. In a global society, growing ever more intertwined -- a great opportunity if we can find unity in our common humanity; if we can learn not only to tolerate our differences, but actually to celebrate our differences; if we can believe that how we worship, how we

speak, who our parents were, where they came from are terribly important, but on this Earth, the most important thing is our common humanity, then there can be no stopping us.

Now, no society has every fully solved this problem. As you struggle with it you think of the Middle East, Northern Ireland, the Balkans, the ongoing tragedy of Kashmir. And you realize it is a formidable challenge. You also know, of course, that democracy does not answer such questions. It simply gives all free people the chance to find the answers that work for them.

I know that decades of mis-rule and deprivation have made your religious and ethnic divisions deeper. Nobody can wave a hand and make the problems go away. But that is no reason to let the idea of one united Nigeria slip away. After all, after all this time, if we started trying to redraw the map of Africa, we would simply be piling new grievances on old. Even if we could separate all the people of Africa by ethnicity and faith, would we really rid this continent of strife? Think of all the things that would be broken up and all the mountains of progress that have been built up that would be taken down if that were the case.

Where there is too much deprivation and too little tolerance, differences among people will always seem greater, and will always be like open sores waiting to be turned into arrows of hatred by those who will be advantaged by doing so. But I think it is worth noting for the entire world that against the background of vast cultural differences, a history of repression and ethnic strife, the hopeful fact here today is that Nigeria's 250 different ethnic groups have stayed together in one nation. You have struggled for democracy together. You have forged national institutions together. All your greatest achievements have come when you have worked together.

It is not for me to tell you how to resolve all the issues that I follow more closely than you might imagine I do. You're a free people, an independent people, and you must resolve them. All I can tell you is what I have seen and experienced these last years as President in the United States and in working with other good people with similar aspirations on every continent of the globe. We have to find honorable ways to reconcile our differences on common ground.

The overwhelming fact of modern life everywhere, believe it or not, is not the growth of the global economy, not the explosion of information technology and the Internet, but the growing interdependence these changes are bringing. Whether we

like it or not, more and more our fates are tied together -- within nations and beyond national borders, even beyond continental borders and across great oceans. Whether we like it or not, it is happening. You can think of big examples, like our economic interconnections. You can think of anecdotal examples, like the fact that we now have a phenomenon in the world known as "airport malaria," where people get malaria in airports in nations where there has never been an single case of malaria because they just pass other people who have it, from around the world, in the airport. ✓

Whether we like it or not, your destiny is tied to mine, and mine to yours, and the future will only make it more so. You can see it in all the positive things we can build together and in the common threats we face from enemies of a nation state, from the narco-traffickers, the gun runners, from the terrorists, from those who would develop weapons of mass destruction geared to the Electronic Age, very difficult to detect and easy to move.

Now, we have to decide what we're going to do with the fundamental fact of modern life -- our interdependence. Is it possible for the Muslims and the Christians here to recognize that and find common ground? Can we find peace in Jerusalem between the Muslims, the Christians and the Jews? Can we find peace in the Balkans between the Muslims, the Orthodox Christians and the Catholics? Will we ever bring an end to the conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants in Northern Ireland -- I mean, finally ever really have it over with completely? Can the Hindus and the Muslims learn to live together in Kashmir? ✓

Isn't it interesting, when I came here, in part, to help you move into the information revolution more quickly, to spread its benefits to more of your people, that all over the world in this most modern of ages, we are bedeviled by humanity's oldest problem: the fear of the other, people who are different from us.

I'm sure there was a time in the deep, distant mists of memory, when everyone had to be afraid of people who were not of their tribe; when food was scarce and there was no means of communication. But all of us still carry around with us the fear of people who are different from us. And it is such a short step from being afraid of someone to distrusting them, to disliking them, to hating them, to oppressing them, to using violence against them. It is a slippery, slippery slope.

So I say again, the biggest challenge for people in the United States, where people still, I'm ashamed to say, lose their lives because they are different -- not nearly as much as it used to be, it's a rare occurrence, but it still tears at our hearts,

because we know everyone counts, everyone deserves a chance at life, and we all do better when we help each other, and when we find a way for everyone to follow his or her own path through life, guided by their own lights and their own faith.

So I say to you, I come here with that in mind. The world needs Nigeria to succeed. Every great nation must become more than the sum of its parts. If we are torn by our differences, then we become less than the sum of our parts. Nigeria has within it the seeds of every great development going on in the world today, and it has a future worth fighting for. You are already a champion of peace, democracy and justice. Last month in Tokyo, your President reminded leaders of the Group of Eight very firmly that we are all tenants of the same global village.

He said, and I quote, "We must deal with the challenges for development not as separate entities, but in partnership, as members of the same global family, with shared interests and responsibilities." So today, I would like to talk just a few minutes about how our two nations, with our shared experience of diversity and our common faith in freedom, can work as partners to build a better future.

I believe we have two broad challenges. The first is to work together to help Nigeria prepare its economy for success in the 21st century, and then to make Nigeria the engine of economic growth and renewal across the continent. The second is to work together to help build the peace that Nigeria and all of Africa so desperately need.

To build stronger economies we must confront the diseases that are draining the life out of Africa's cities and villages, especially AIDS, but also TB and malaria. AIDS will reduce life expectancy in Africa by 20 years. It is destroying families and wiping out economic gains as fast as nations can make them. It is stealing the future of Africa. In the long run, the only way to wipe out these killer diseases is to provide effective, affordable treatments and vaccines. Just last week, I signed into law a new \$60-million investment in vaccine research and new support for AIDS treatment and prevention around the world, including Nigeria.

In the meantime, however, while we wait for the long run, we have to face reality. I salute President Obasanjo for his leadership in recognizing we can't beat AIDS by denying it, we can't beat AIDS by stigmatizing it. Right now, we can only beat AIDS by preventing it, by changing behavior and changing attitudes and breaking the silence about how the disease is transmitted and how it can be stopped. This is a matter of life or death.

There are nations in Africa -- two -- that have had a significant reduction in the AIDS rate because they have acted aggressively on the question of prevention. Tomorrow the President and I will meet with Nigerians on the front line of this fight and I will congratulate them.

Building a stronger economy also means helping all children learn. In the old economy, a country's economic prospects were limited by its place on the map and its natural resources. Location was everything. In the new economy, information, education, and motivation are everything.

When I was coming down here today, Reverend Jackson said to me, remind everybody that America, to help Nigeria, involves more than the government; it's also Wall Street and Silicon Valley. That's what's growing our economy and it can help to grow yours.

One of the great minds of the Information Age is a Nigerian American named Philip Emeagwali. He had to leave school because his parents couldn't pay the fees. He lived in a refugee camp during your civil war. He won a scholarship to university and went on to invent a formula that lets computers make 3.1 billion calculations per second. Some people call him the Bill Gates of Africa.

But what I want to say to you is there is another Philip Emeagwali -- or hundreds of them -- or thousands of them -- growing up in Nigeria today. I thought about it when I was driving in from the airport and then driving around to my appointments, looking into the faces of children. You never know what potential is in their minds and in their hearts; what imagination they have; what they have already thought of and dreamed of that may be locked in because they don't have the means to take it out.

That's really what education is. It's our responsibility to make sure all your children have the chance to live their dreams so that you don't miss the benefit of their contributions and neither does the rest of the world. It's in our interest in America to reach out to the 98 percent of the human race that has never connected to the Internet, to the 269 of every 270 Nigerians who still lack a telephone.

I am glad to announce that the United States will work with Nigeria, NGOs and universities to set up community resource centers to provide Internet access, training and support to people in all regions of your country. I also discussed with the President earlier today a \$300-million initiative we have launched to provide a nutritious meal -- a free breakfast or a free lunch -- for children in school, enough to feed another 9 million kids in school that aren't in school today, including in Nigeria.

90
 We know that if we could offer -- and I'm going to the other developed countries asking them to contribute, and then we're going to nation by nation, working with governmental groups, working with farm groups -- we don't want to upset any local farm economies -- we understand their challenges here -- but we know if we could guarantee every child in every developing nation one nutritious meal a day, we could dramatically increase school enrollment -- among boys, and especially among girls. We don't have a child to waste. I hope we can do this in Nigeria, and I hope you will work with us to get the job done.

I have also asked the Peace Corps to reestablish its partnership with Nigeria as soon as possible to help with education, health and information technology.

Building a strong economy also means creating strong institutions, and above all, the rule of law. Your Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, has written that he imagines a day when Nigeria is "an unstoppable nation, one whose citizens anywhere in the world would be revered simply by the very possession of a Nigerian passport."

I don't need to tell you that the actions of a small group of Nigerians took away that possibility, took away the pride of carrying the passport, stealing the opportunity from every decent and honest citizen of this country. But we will bring the pride and prosperity back by cracking down together on crime, corruption, fraud, and drugs.

Our FBI is again working with Nigeria to fight international and financial crime. Our law enforcement agencies are working to say to narco-traffickers: there should be no safe havens in Nigeria. As we do these things, we will be able to say loud and clear to investors all over the world: Come to Nigeria. This is a place of untapped opportunity because it is a place of unlimited potential.

This year, I signed into law our Africa trade bill, and many of its champions are here with me from our Congress. It will help us to seize that opportunity, creating good jobs and wealth on both sides of the Atlantic. The challenge is to make sure any foreign involvement in your economy promotes equitable development, lifting people and communities that have given much for Nigeria's economic progress, but so far have gained too little from it.

Neither the people, nor the private sector want a future in which investors exist in fortified islands surrounded by seas of misery. Democracy gives us a chance to avoid that future. Of course, I'm thinking especially of the Niger Delta. I hope

government and business will forge a partnership with local people to bring real, lasting social progress, a clean environment and economic opportunity.

We face, of course, another obstacle to Nigeria's economic development, the burden of debt that past governments left on your shoulders. The United States has taken the lead in rescheduling Nigeria's debt within the Paris Club, and I believe we should do more. Nigeria shouldn't have to choose between paying interest on debt and meeting basic human needs, especially in education and health. We are prepared to support a substantial reduction of Nigeria's debts on a multilateral basis, as long as your economic and financial reforms continue to make progress, and you ensure that the benefits of debt reduction go to the people.

Now, let me say, as we do our part to support your economic growth and economic growth throughout Africa, we must also work together and build on African efforts to end the conflicts that are bleeding hope from too many places. If there's one thing I would want the American people to learn from ^{our} trip here, it is the true, extraordinary extent of Nigeria's leadership for peace in West Africa and around the world.

I hope our members of Congress who are here today will tell this to their colleagues back home. Over the past decade, with all of its problems, Nigeria has spent \$10 billion and sacrificed hundreds of its soldiers' lives for peace in West Africa. Nigeria was the first nation, with South Africa, to condemn the recent coup in Cote d'Ivoire. And Nigerian soldiers and diplomats, including General Abubakar, are trying to restart the peace process in Congo. In these ways, you are building the record of a moral superpower. ✓

That's a long way to come in just a couple of years, and I urge you to stay with it. But I know -- I know from the murmurs in this chamber and from the murmurs I heard in the congressional chamber when I said the United States must go to Bosnia, the United States must go to Kosovo, the United States must train an Africa Crisis Response Initiative, the United States must come here and help you train to deal with the challenges of Sierra Leone -- I know that many of you have often felt the burden of your peacekeeping was heavier than the benefit. I know you have felt that.

But there's no one else in West Africa with the size, the standing, the strength of military forces to do it. If you don't do it, who will do it? But you should not have to do it alone. That's what's been wrong with what's happened in the last several years. You have too heavy a burden. Because of your size,

everyone expects you to lead, and to do so with enormous sensitivity to the needs of others. But despite your size, you cannot lead alone, and you shouldn't have to pay the enormous price. I am determined, if you're willing to lead, to get you the international support you need and deserve to meet those responsibilities.

This week, the first of five Nigerian peacekeeping battalions began working with American military trainers and receiving American equipment. With battalions from Ghana and other African nations, they will receive almost \$60 million in support to be a commanding force for peace in Sierra Leone and an integral part of Nigeria's democratization. We think the first battalions will be ready to deploy with U.N. forces early next year. We expect them to make an enormous difference in replacing the reign of terror with the rule of law. As they do, all of West Africa will benefit from the promise of peace and stability, and the prospect of closer military and economic cooperation. And Nigeria will take another step toward building a 21st century army that is strong and strongly committed to democracy.

Let me say to the military leaders who are here with us today that the world honors your choice to take the army out of politics and make it a pillar of a democratic state.

Last year, President Obasanjo came to Washington and reminded us that peace is indivisible. I have worked to build a new relationship between America and Africa because our futures are indivisible. It matters to us whether you become an engine of growth and opportunity, or a place of unrelieved despair. It matters whether we push back the forces of crime, corruption, and disease together, or leave them to divide and conquer us. It matters whether we reach out with Africans to build peace, or leave millions of God's children to suffer alone.

Our common future depends on whether Africa's 739 million people gain the chance to live their dreams. And Nigeria is a pivot point on which all Africa's future turns.

Ten years ago, a young Nigerian named Ben Okri published a novel, "The Famished Road" that captured imaginations all over the world. He wrote of a spirit child who defies his elders and chooses to be born into the turmoil and struggle of human life. The time and place were modern Nigeria, but the questions the novel poses speak to all of us in a language that is as universal as the human spirit.

In a time of change and uncertainty, Okri asks us, "Who can dream a good road and then live to travel on it?" Nigerians, as much as any nation on Earth, have dreamed this road. ~~and~~ since

Anthony Enahoro stood up in a colonial Parliament and demanded your independence in 1953. Nigerians have dreamed this road in music and art and literature and political struggle, and in your contributions to prosperity and progress, among the immigrants to my country and so many others.

Now, at the dawn of a new century, the road is open at home to all citizens of Nigeria. You have the chance to build a new Nigeria. We have the chance to build a lasting network of ties between Africa and the United States. I know it will not be easy to walk the road. But you have already endured such stiff challenges. You have beaten such long odds to get this far. And after all, the road of freedom is the only road worth taking.

I hope that as President, I have helped a little bit to take us a few steps down that road together. I am certain that America will walk with you in the years to come. And I hope you will remember, if nothing else, what I said about our interdependence. Yes, you need us today because at this fleeting moment in history, we are the world's richest country. But over the long run of life and over the long run of a nation's life, and over the long run of civilization on this planet, the rich and the poor often change places. What endures is our common humanity.

If you can find it amidst all your differences, and we can find it amidst all ours, and then we can reach out across the ocean, across the cultures, across the different histories with a common future for all of our children, freedom's road will prevail.

Thank you, and God bless you.