

ADDRESS BY DR. OBA OTUDEKO, OFR AS CHAIRMAN ON THE OCCASION OF THE FINANCIAL STANDARD'S GOVERNOR OF THE YEAR (2009) AWARD

Protocols...

Globally, perhaps it is fair to say that participation in electoral politics has never been for the faint-hearted. However, despite its many shortcomings, politics remains "the art of the possible", and an effective instrument for advancing social and economic progress. By *general* consensus, very few contemporary Nigerian leaders in public office today embody the spirit of selflessness, resilience and humanitarianism as skilfully and colourfully as His Excellency, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko, the Executive Governor of Ondo (the Sunshine State), whose achievements we are here to celebrate this evening.

Before I proceed, I wish to convey my sincere gratitude to the Board and Management of Financial Standard newspaper for inviting me to chair this gathering of eminent and highly-distinguished Nigerians, from both the private and public sectors. I must also commend Financial Standard newspaper for remaining focused to its vision of making the paper an authoritative source of value-added economic and financial information, not only in Nigeria but in Africa of large.

As a private sector player in the last half a century, I fully appreciate that it is only dogged, resolute and determined minds that can remain focused to the purposes for which they founded their businesses in our highly unpredictable environment. For over a decade now, the founders of Financial Standard have held on to their vision in spite of the challenges facing businesses in Nigeria. It is for this reason that I salute their determination once again, while praying that the good Lord will continue to endow and empower them to forge this noble vision ahead.

Back to tonight, we are all gathered here to *celebrate* a consummate democrat, a grassroot politician, an enabler, a disciplined tactician, an inspirational and charismatic *leader*, an achiever, a dependable ally and a gentleman - *indeed*, our man of the moment, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko, the Executive Governor of Ondo State, who, through his exceptional leadership qualities, has within a short time broken the myth and inertia of failed leadership and has positively impacted and progressively empowered the good people of Ondo State with the highly desired dividends of democracy.

Our own late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo once described democracy thus:

"In its long and tedious progression since the beginning of recorded history, mankind has tried various forms of government [and] from all available historical evidence, however, and having regard to the composition of the state, it is clear that the best of them all is democracy."

But while we would want to agree with our revered founding father that democracy is the most effective system of governance, it is even more important for us to appreciate that *"democracy is not just a consummatory value but an instrumentalist one"*, according to late Professor Claude Ake.

Government is the defining feature of politically-organised societies. It is even more so in a democratic setting, wherein the majority of the people decide to entrust their present and their future to a few individuals with the hope that this privileged few will, through their leadership, foster and improve the common good of all.

Sadly, democracy loses its essence if it fails to engender economic growth, development, improvement and social welfare of the citizenry. This explains the agony many of our citizens feel across the country; that despite a decade of democratic rule, we continue to wallow in denials, poverty and hopelessness. We have not begun to see improvement in the lives of our people as anticipated. What we observe is more of politicking than constructive governance. This is an unfortunate trend that must be reversed if our dear country must join the league of developed societies. Indeed, if we must chart a new course.

I want to believe that it is the manifestation of this new direction in Ondo State under the dynamic leadership of Governor Olusegun Mimiko that the organisers of this award ceremony have observed and for which they have decided to honour this progressive change agent. Reports from Ondo indicate that democracy is performing its instrumentalist function of fostering improvement in the living conditions of the people. We hear of infrastructure! development, especially in the area of roads and basic services; we hear of programmes initiated to empower the citizenry; and we also hear of improvement in the areas of education, health, agriculture and social welfare.

If you will accommodate my capitalist orientation, I am particularly impressed by Governor Mimiko's visionary and equally revolutionary efforts (in partnership with the private sector) which have begun to re-model Ondo State from the stereotypical, civil service-primed milieu into a hub of sustainable and hustling economic activities. In fact, I was excited when the Governor, in a recent interview, said that his plan is to replicate the Malaysian transformation model in Ondo State. This is by no means an easy task. It might even be a tall order. But with dedication and devotion of all stakeholders towards this intended repositioning of Ondo State, this vision can come to fruition for the benefit of the good people of Ondo State.

I have always been convinced that good governance, as the bedrock of development, is not exclusive to the BRIC countries. The development of any society is essentially a product of its sacrifice - of its determination to embrace the right values; of its willingness to improve its own conditions and of its resolution to work relentlessly until its aspirations materialise. I therefore urge all the good people of Ondo State to support the visionary leadership of Governor Mimiko to transform the state to a haven of abundance and a prosperous society for the good of all.

In ending this address, please permit me to congratulate Your Excellency on this well-deserved honour while urging you not to relent in your valiant efforts. Of course, the task you have chosen for yourself is onerous and it will require the full exertion of your physical, mental and spiritual capacities. But the good Lord is your strength. It is therefore my sincere prayer that the Almighty God will continue to replenish, nourish, protect and preserve you even as you commit and devote yourself to the emancipation and development of your people. Congratulations once again, Your Excellency.

Thank you, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, for listening and may God bless our dear country Nigeria.



Oba Otudeko, OFR 23rd July, 2010