

**ACCEPTANCE SPEECH OF HIS EXCELLENCY, PRESIDENT
OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, ON HIS ELECTION AS THE CHAIRMAN
OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE AFRICAN UNION- 6 JULY 2004**

1. Outgoing Chairperson of the African Union, President Joachim Chissano;
2. Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government here present;
3. United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan;
4. Honourable Ministers;
5. Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr. Alpha Oumar Konaré;
6. Executive Secretary of the UNECA, Dr. Y. K. Amoako;
7. Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives;
8. Invited Guests;
9. Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Let me first of all express, on behalf of the government and people of Nigeria and on my own behalf how highly honoured I am to be elected as the Chairperson of the Assembly at this point in time in the life of our organisation. I accept with humility and deep sense of responsibility and promise to discharge the functions of the office with diligence. May I also assure Member States of the Union that Nigeria will spare no effort to justify the confidence that you have both, individually and collectively, reposed in us. In this regard, we shall strive at all times to promote our unity and solidarity as well as the sustenance of our hard earned independence. Nigeria will also count on the valuable support of all of you in our collective effort to vigorously pursue cooperation and integration and to promote sustainable development of our continent.

Your Excellencies,

2. Allow me to extend my sincere appreciation to the outgoing Chairperson of the Assembly, His Excellency, Dr. Joachim Chissano for the able manner in which he piloted the affairs of our Union during the past one year. We also thank the people and government of Mozambique for their contributions and sacrifices towards the attainment of our collective objectives particularly during their tenure as Chairperson of our Union.

3. Permit me, to also pay tribute to the Chairperson of the Commission, Dr. Alpha Konaré, for his dynamic leadership and the able manner by which he has been conducting the affairs of the Commission. In this respect, I wish to mention that the elaboration of the Vision, Mission and the Strategic framework of Action Plan which we shall be deliberating upon during our meeting bears vivid testimony to Dr. Konaré's quality as a visionary leader: We also acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of the Commissioners and the entire staff of this respect. It is our fervent hope that the Chairperson of the Commission will continue to provide the fight leadership to steer the affairs of the Commission towards a speedy realisation of our common goals and objectives.

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. As Nigeria assumes the Chairmanship of the Union, we will work together with all Member States, the Commission as well as all stakeholders with renewed determination to accelerate the socio- economic development of Africa. In this regard, we shall immediately focus attention on certain crucial areas, which in our opinion, deserve priority consideration.

5. Whatever laudable programmes, projects and activities that our Union may need to embark upon, will depend on the human and material resources at our disposal for their effective and successful implementation. We therefore intend to work together with the Commission to accelerate the on-going restructuring exercise in the Commission to bring the process to a speedy conclusion in order to enhance its service delivery capacity. This will also be in line with the decision that we took last year in Maputo on the matter.

6. Secondly, permit me to recall, briefly, that the fundamental objective of the African Union is essentially to accelerate the implementation of the African Economic Community in order to achieve rapid socio-economic integration of our continent. In this context, I believe that the Vision, Mission and the Strategic Plan of Action as espoused by the Commission should indeed provide the right impetus to reenergize our collective drive towards the attainment of these goals.

7. Your Excellencies, it is an established fact that in order to achieve socio-economic integration, political stability, peace and security are necessary conditions that must be in place. It is against this background that we intend to confront headlong, the conflict situations in Africa with renewed vigour and determination. Once again, we shall be counting on the support of all the Member States of the Union especially members of the Peace and Security Council as well as our partners in our determination to end conflicts on our continent.

8. As the Chairman of NEPAD's Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee, I shall be rendering to the Assembly tomorrow the report of the activities that have been undertaken under the programme since our last session in Maputo. Suffice to add that we shall seize the opportunity of our tenure as Chairman of the Union to reach out to all our colleagues to ensure that they subscribe to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) for purposes of adherence to economic and political good governance.

9. Finally, Your Excellencies, Nigeria will work strenuously, during her tenure, to make sure that Africa remains firmly on the agenda of the Group of 8 industrialized nations, the European Union and that of other partners in the effort to accelerate the socio-economic development of the continent. In this respect, the understanding of Africa's external debt as jointly shared and enunciated by the experts from Africa and the European Union and endorsed by the Ministers under the framework of EU-Africa dialogue will be given special focus on the agenda of the African Union at the highest political level with a view to finding durable solutions to Africa's debt burden.

In the same vein, our agenda will include the need to bring to the fore Africa's belief in effective multilateralism as the best option to handle issues of peace and collective security arrangement as enshrined in the United Nations Charter. We shall therefore strive to redirect and focus on rule-based international order in order to address problems of conflicts, poverty, underdevelopment and the absence of human security.

In this regard we shall also strengthen Africa's relations with the other regions of the world by continuously reaching out to our friends and allies in other fora such as TICAD, China! African Forum, the Arab League to mention but a few.

May I also state that an important aspect of our priority programme will be the need to ensure that Africa maintain collective position and speak with only one voice on major issues in the international arena as was the case at the last WTO forum in Cancun.

Your Excellencies,

10. These are just a few of the issues that we intend to pursue during the next one year. In these endeavours, we shall be counting on the goodwill as well as the support of all Member States. I hereby appeal to all of us to be prepared to make our modest contributions that may be required for the attainment of our collective objectives. In the next one-year, we shall make use of consultation that important tool by which Member States could be made to claim ownership of all our actions and activities on their behalf.

I thank you all.