

**THE ONGOING EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE CURRENT SITUATIONS IN NIGERIA,
SIERRA LEON AND LIBERIA**

1. Let me start by thanking Mr. Hisashi Owada President JIIA for inviting me to this important symposium and giving me a chance to speak on matter of interest not only to me but to Africa and indeed the world.

2. Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Sierra Leone and Liberia belong to another sub-regional organization apart from ECOWAS called the Mano River Union and which includes the Republic of Guinea which has Conakry as its Headquarters.

3. Sierra Leone and Liberia are two countries in West Africa that are historically and culturally linked to each other. Both countries symbolize the freedom of the blackman as both were founded as settlements for freed slaves. Sierra Leone was the center of learning for the Anglophone West Africa, while Liberia was seen as a rock of stability.

4. As you are all aware the peace and tranquility of the region was broken in December 1989 as a result of the Liberian civil war which started with an armed incursion by National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) headed by Charles Taylor. The declared objective of ridding Liberia of the then President of the county, Samuel Doe led to the war that ravaged Liberia for (7) seven years. Despite the devastation and the human catastrophe the international community did nothing until the ECOWAS intervened with its ECOWAS Cease Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990. ECOMOG restored peace and election was held in 1997 which the present incumbent President Charles G. Taylor emerged as the winner.

5. The successful conduct of elections and the emergence of a democratically elected president do not seem to guarantee the sustenance of democratic culture in that country. There are several alleged reports of human rights violations as well as lack of tolerance of the opposition. The President is accused of dictatorship, consequently, the cohesion that will ensure the early removal of the scars of war, most especially through national reconciliation, has not been achieved. The result is that the dividends of democracy still

elude the people of Liberia. Continued insecurity has prevented foreign investments and other financial inflows from foreign governments, in terms of developmental assistance.

6. To complicate the situation, as a result of accusation against President Taylor of supporting the rebellion in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Conakry, fuelling unrest in the Mano Region, the international community with the United States and United Kingdom in the vanguard is seeking to impose sanctions on Liberia. There is an active debate aimed at imposing the ban on trade in diamonds and timber from Liberia, ban on flights as well on Liberian registered aircrafts and finally, international travel restrictions for Liberian government ministries and officials.

7 . To avert this and eruption of another war in Liberia, both the OAU and ECOWAS are working hand in hand to nurture the fragile peace. The UN is also not left out.

8. Despite President Taylor's denial of involvement of illegalities, he is being pressured to desist from activities that inflames unrest, insecurity and rebel activities in the ECOWAS Region. Since it is the ordinary citizens that suffer the consequences of sanctions, OAU is taking measures to see that it is not imposed right now. The ECOWAS is busy brokering peace using both the carrot and stick approach.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. The problem of Sierra-Leone is a spill-over of the one in Liberia. Just as the crisis in Liberia was "ending", violence erupted in Sierra Leone resulting in the overthrow of the democratically elected Government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah by a military junta in 1997.

10. This led to a brutal senseless civil war where the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel fighters, maimed citizens and destroyed anything on their path. There we also saw the introduction of women and child soldiers.

11. Once more the international community evacuated their citizens and

watched helplessly. The ECOWAS had to intervene. ECOMOG was deployed and was battling to restore and enforce peace in Sierra Leone for over two years before the UN offered some help with the deployment of its troops-United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).

12. With the setting up of UNAMSIL, the ECOMOG which was enforcing peace ceased to exist as its troops reverted to UNAMSIL whose mandate was only to observe peace and not to enforce it. The RUF took advantage and resumed their attacks with vigor, gained more territory and also captured UN troops with their equipment. It took a lot of negotiations before the UN troops were released.

13. The ECOWAS supported by the OAU and UN initiated a number of meetings to negotiate peace. A comprehensive Cease Fire Agreement was signed in Abuja Nigeria on November 10, 2000 between the Government and Sierra Leone and the new leadership of the RUF .

14. With this new agreement, it was hoped things might take a turn for better as the RUF has agreed that "UNAMSIL shall have full liberty to deploy its troops and other personnel throughout Sierra Leone including the diamond-producing areas". In addition and with a view to restoring the authority of the Government throughout the territory of the country, there will be free movement of persons and goods, unimpeded movement of humanitarian agencies and of refugees and displaced persons.

15. The issue of gross abuse of human rights as witnessed by the brutal killing and maiming of innocent civilians women and children by the rebels in Sierra Leone is an issue that has been taken up by the international community with the establishment of a UN Special Court for Sierra Leone. I fully agree that justice must be dispensed, but the Court should not adversely impact on the overall peace process.

16. The Lome Peace Agreement provided for establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which will represent an interim measure between addressing gross human rights violations and the presentation of violators when the Court starts operating.

17. The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program which is a prerequisite for holding of any form of democratic elections seems to be moving at a very slow pace. I am therefore of the view that the proponents of extending the term of office of President Tejan Kabbah until such a time that there is an atmosphere of peace and security are right.

18. The situation in both Liberia and Sierra Leone cannot be said to be ideal. Liberia has not fully recovered from the devastating consequences of the war. Post conflict building efforts have been extremely slow, however situations have come a long way. All hands are on deck to move the countries forward and this is a good sign that with the co-operation and support of everybody, including the international community, we may soon see the light at the end of a long tunnel of conflicts and civil crisis in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. One of the most significant outcomes of the involvement of ECOWAS in conflict resolution within its member States is the emergence of Nigeria as the undisputed power in the Sub-region. It deployed one of the largest number of troops to be contributed by any single country in the world, 15,000 soldiers, about 12,000 alone for Liberia. It applied about 3 to 4 billion United States dollars in these two operations. The outcome undoubtedly had put the country at the forefront of regional leadership. However, that is not to say that Nigeria did not have its own share of turmoil.

20. The country was plunged into civil war in 1966 after a military coup with a section of the country trying to secede to create a state of Biafra. The war lasted for over two years after which General Yakubu Gowon the then military Head of State initiated a program of 3Rs –(RRR) Reabsorption, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation and proposed to conduct election and handover to an elected government in 1976. However, when he reneged from his promise, he was toppled in a military coup that ushered in General Murtala Mohammed as the Head of State with General Olusegun Obasanjo as his Vice who later became the Head of State in 1976 when General Murtala Mohammed was assassinated in another coup attempt.

21. General Obasanjo conducted election in 1979 and handed over reins of government to Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari who emerged as the winner. In December 1983 during his first few months in his second term, President Shagari was toppled by the military and General Mohammadu Buhari who emerged as the Head of State was himself overthrown in 1985. General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) became military President and ruled for 8 years.

22. General IBB conducted election and installed the Local Government Council, State Governments, and National Assembly and ruled with them for 2 years. In 1993 he conducted Presidential election in which Chief (Alhaji) Moshood Abiola from the South Western part of the country seemed to be leading when the results were being announced. Along the way, the remaining results were withheld and the entire election was annulled.

23. The cancellation brought the country to the brink of another civil war as the south western part of the country felt they were being deprived of producing a President for the country.

24. To assuage them, President IBB set up an Interim National Government (ING) with Chief Earnest Shonekan from the south west as the Head. The ING which was a child of necessity was bedevilled with crisis right from its birth. It was challenged in court of law and was declared illegal and as such could not exert any authority, could not maintain law and order and anarchy was setting in.

25. To save the country from further chaos and disintegration, it was toppled by the military and General Sani Abacha became the Head of State.

26. To further compound issue Chief Moshood Abiola who was the presumed winner of the annulled 1993 Presidential elections declared himself the President of the country. Consequently he was arrested by the Abacha Regime and put into detention until his death on 8 July 98.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

27. You would recall that I was at the head of the administration, which

mid-wifed Nigeria's transition to democratic and constitutional rule on 29th May 1999. Having assumed the reins of leadership, following the passing away of General Sani Abacha on 8th June 1998, series of consultations were undertaken at various levels and among the different segments of the Nigerian populace to fashion out a sustainable and acceptable transition to democracy in the country. The philosophy of the military administration, whose leadership was bestowed upon me, was to uphold the tenets of democracy and good governance.

28. Since its inception, the President Olusegun Obasanjo administration has been grappling with many problems. The agitation by ethnic activist for control of local resources, the insistence by certain parts of the country for sovereign National Conference, the vandalism of public utilities by protesting youth, the religious and identity-driven revolts by communities that had lived together over the years began to rear their ugly heads.

29. The executive-Legislative dichotomy did not help matters. The Senate leadership has changed hand three times within 18 months. The States' administration has their share of turmoil. About four speakers of the state assemblies have been impeached while three to four state Governors have narrowly escaped impeachment.

30. Nevertheless, the Nigerian political landscape is greatly stabilizing due to the strategy adopted by the Federal Government by not suppressing any agitation and through deliberate fashioning of reconciliation process.

31. Measures are being put in place to combat corruption and its negation effect. Efforts are on to improve the economic being of the citizens. Avenues are being explored to provide employment. Once there set root, Nigeria is on the highway to greatness.

32. Thank you for listening.