

Mission Statement:

“To mobilize the people of Ondo State to harness all our God-given resources, create and use wealth for the ends of individual happiness, collective fulfillment and peaceful cohabitation in an environment of transparent and honest leadership”.

The Vision:

“To make Ondo State the best-administered State in Nigeria and the cynosure of all eyes, of which all its citizens shall be proud; where equity, justice, and fairness shall be the driving forces of governmental action”.

I. Preamble:

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen of the Press, I welcome you all to this Press Conference and thank you for being here. I welcome our Party leaders and the very good people of Ondo State so well represented here today. I pray that the mercies of God shall continue to be on you all, on our State and Nigeria in general.

II. Our aspiration in historical context:

You will recall, members of the Press, that I once invited you to a similar forum to inform you of our aspiration, under the auspices of the Alliance for Democracy (AD), to lead the good people of Ondo State in year 2002 preparatory to the 2003 election. It has been four years since we had that interaction. I am sure that you are aware that quite a lot has happened in our body politic in general and in Ondo State in particular in those intervening years. At a point in the year 2003, it became obvious that the basis for democratic engagement no longer existed on the platform on which our State stood then.

The internal democratic mechanism for change within the Party was abused and sabotaged. We reckoned then that there was no way new ideas for development would have flourished in such a restricted political space. We therefore decided, after the requisite consultations, that it was time to join hands with others to reposition our dear Ondo State if we as leaders must not continue to be limited in our vision and Ondo State hesitant in harnessing the developmental opportunities that beckoned at that historical juncture. That was the context in which we decided to lend our support to the incumbent Governor who was then the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Though the initial signal of primordial preferences were worrisome, we still thought that the Governor would manage to put Ondo State on a path of sustainable development, especially with the length of time spent on planning. By early 2005, however, it had actually become obvious that the State Government was on the way to making a colossal shipwreck of the vision that produced the electoral victory of April 2003. Unfortunately, the discreet but concerted efforts of men and women of goodwill to salvage what remained of the contract with the good people of Ondo State had not come to fruition before July 2005 when I had to leave office as the SSG following my appointment by President Obasanjo as the Federal Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

Those very stimulating months during which I served as Minister, July 2005 to December 8, 2006, were for me a period of continued learning in effective governance. My experience enriched my vision, deepened my commitment to our country and imbued me, more than ever before, with great hope that the future of our country, and indeed of our State is bright.

III. Ondo State, May 2003 - 2007: An Inexcusable Failure

We have used the last few weeks following our formal declaration to run for the office of Governor of our dear State to move across the State with a view to bringing our message of hope to our people. I thank you all for the passion with which you have been spreading this message. I now consider it apposite to begin to share with you our outlay of programmes by which, working together, we shall be turning around the fortunes of our State, of our children and generations yet unborn, for the better.

What we offer our people in Ondo State is - A CARING HEART! – our 12-point agenda for positive change. But before I proceed on an elucidation of this programme of governmental action, permit me, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, to undertake an assessment of the prevailing national politico-economic situation as it relates to Ondo State.

Let me restate my earlier assertion that the Federal Government in the last eight years has made gigantic strides in creating a strong environment for States and Local Governments to achieve grassroots development. The prevailing macroeconomic environment, including the quantum leap in the funds available to each State since May 1999, are reasonably supportive of visionary efforts at the lower levels of government directed at transforming the quality of life of the people for the better.

As I showed on December 14, 2006, when I formally announced my intention to run for the office of Governor; just before the advent of democracy in 1999, Ondo State's total budget was N3.719 billion. For 2006, it was N43.5 billion, a growth of 1,170% over the 1999 figure. Our State has had more revenues at its disposal than at any other time in its history. In fact, in relative terms, the resources available to the current administration are perhaps more than all the revenues the State had from 1976 when it was created, to 2003, when the incumbent Governor assumed office. Sadly, the State has little or nothing to show for it.

The inability and/or refusal of the incumbent State Government to take advantage of this largely favourable macro-economic template has created a fundamental disconnect between the government and our people. It is in this overall context of palpable and pervasive failure of governance in the face of so much promise that we refer, for want of a better phrase, to Ondo State under the current dispensation, as an inexcusable failure. We consider it our responsibility, in the circumstances, to take the relationship between the government and the governed to a new level. For us, mutual trust between the government and the governed is a fundamental condition for good governance.

IV. Programme of Action

What the Labour Party is offering in Ondo State is a distinctive governance system predicated on using existing communal structures as the building blocks of governmental action. It offers a government that is selfless, transparent, forthright and committed to the generation of wealth for the good of all. It is a government in which every citizen is taken as a critical stakeholder in the true meaning of the concept, a government that is a catalyst of development and is committed to the deployment of the resources of Ondo State for the development of Ondo State citizens, an all-inclusive platform for individual well-being, corporate harmony and progressive politics.

For the avoidance of doubt, we wish to emphasize that while we believe in a liberalized, private-sector driven economy, we shall not shy away from the obligation of government, especially in an underdeveloped economy to intervene responsibly as a social obligation in direct employment, free/subsidized social services like health and education, social housing, soft credit and other poverty-reduction mechanism that will ensure that the weakest in society is given the opportunity to develop and actualize their potentials. It is in the context of this broad Labour tenor that we present our 12-point agenda.

The 12-point developmental agenda is encapsulated in the acronym, A CARING HEART.

A – Agriculture and Food Security

C – Community-driven city and coastal region renewal and general development initiatives

A – Aggressive capitalization of our land resource

R – Roads and Infrastructure

I - Industrialization

N – No-to-poverty programme

G – Gender equality and women empowerment

H – Health Care and Housing

E – Education and Capacity Building

A – Artisan development and empowerment programme

R – Rural Development

T – Tourism, Sports and Youth Development

1. A: Agriculture and Food Security:

The overall philosophy of our agricultural development programme is the robust deployment of robust support programmes to expand the productive capacity of our farmers and farm lands. This is not only in line with the trend even in the most advanced industrial economies of Europe and America, but also because for us, an overwhelming majority of our population is engaged in one form or the other of agricultural production.

The sector shall be driven by three broad goals – attainment of household food security with food being adequate and affordable; production of raw materials for industry and generation of employment. The strategy shall include the encouragement of small scale farmers through input-support programmes and marketing strategies, the encouragement of existing farmers and the creation of a new generation of large-scale farmers through a robust government investment and support initiative.

We shall undertake a total review and overhauling of the Youth-in-Agriculture (YIAP) programme which has thus far been marginal in its impact either in terms of increased food production, creation of a new generation of farmers, employment generation or poverty alleviation.

Without prejudice to our other commitments in the agricultural sector, our government shall reposition Ondo State as a tree crop planting State with emphasis on cashew in the northern part, cocoa and kola in the centre and palm trees and rubber in the south.

Cocoa production:

The first goal of our cocoa intervention programme is improved marketing strategy to ensure better and fairly stable prices. Action in this regard shall be at both the local and international levels. Our efforts at the international level shall revolve around regional cooperation in the context of the ECOWAS sub-region which accounts for over 70% of global production; and the delivery of cocoa in higher quality. We shall also review existing grading fees with a view to making them competitive. This will discourage the smuggling of our cocoa produce to neighbouring States for grading with the attendant loss of the revenue ordinarily accruable to the government when cocoa is graded within the State.

At the local level, we shall institute a price-support programme for farmers to ensure timely procurement of quality input as part of the overall farmers empowerment programme. Efforts shall also be geared towards increasing local consumption of cocoa products in line with extant Federal initiative.

Our second goal is focused on increased production. We seek to target existing farmers whom we shall encourage and support to embrace a systematic farm compartmentalization and rejuvenation programme. A government-supported programme for the creation of new plantations for individual large scale farmers, cooperatives and communities shall also be put in place.

Oil Palm:

Oil palm and its allied businesses are a big global business with annual turnover of about US\$30bn. Malaysia and Indonesia, currently the two largest producers, produce more than 15 million tones annually compared to Nigeria's paltry 800,000 tonnes. In Ondo State, we shall

encourage a massive oil palm cultivation project with the overall objective of increased production and better processing of palm-kernel oil into final products. Existing plantations owned by government shall be rejuvenated, better administered and controlled for greater yield.

Food Production:

We intend to support and strengthen existing structures on ground for food production. Tractors, cutlasses, seedlings and fertilizers shall therefore be made available to the farmers as at when due. The same shall be done in relation to poultry and arable farming. We shall complement this with encouragement of massive private sector investment in food, poultry and fish farming.

We shall encourage appropriate crop-targeting. The Cassava Initiative shall also be reviewed and overhauled for greater effectiveness.

A Household Protein Initiative shall be launched to encourage increased production of protein for household consumption and improved income. The target is fish, poultry, snail and rabbit farming.

Storage and Processing:

Existing structures for storage of all farm products shall be rejuvenated while new ones, including appropriate technology, shall be explored for maximum usage.

The processing of all farm products shall also be given special priority. We shall seek to add value to all our agricultural products, via processing. Our target is to ensure that no agricultural raw material is taken out of Ondo State in completely unprocessed form, after the first two years of our tenure. This would serve to empower our farmers and create useful and sustainable jobs for our youths.

Conservation and re-forestation:

Ondo State is endowed with different trees of economic value which are however being rapidly depleted. The prevailing concessioning strategy does not emphasize value addition beyond saw milling. We will review the concessioning strategy for forest resources with emphasis on post-sawmill processing capacity, e.g. furniture, joinery, etc. Our strategy will be to attract the interest of world class furniture industries to locate in Ondo State. Based on the above, we shall create a system that allocates concessions to firms and consortia with export standard, wood-based processed products - furniture, joinery, etc

An aggressive programme of re-forestation shall also be put in place with a view to expanding the frontiers of our wood and forest resources and economy.

Extension services:

A key feature of our agricultural development agenda is effective supervision and deployment of extension services. The crop of extension personnel in the system shall be re-trained, strengthened and deployed appropriately with well-established key performance indicators.

Earth dams:

Government shall build earth dams – at the rate of five per Local Government, translating to 90 of such facilities across the State in four years. This will support dry season farming, aquaculture and enhance rainfall.

2. C: Community-driven city and coastal region renewal and general development initiatives:

Government shall make deliberate efforts to organize communities for the purpose of development. Any community that is in a position to provide counterpart contribution either in cash, material or sweat for identified projects shall be supported by government to ensure the mainstreaming of communal involvement in development. The Local Governments (LGs) shall be made very active in this regard.

Urban renewal:

A 10-year programme of urban renewal for our cities, starting with Akure, shall be put in place. We shall put more vigour into the UN Millennium City Project as it affects the State capital. We shall control erosion, clean and green our cities, set up recreational parks and make life healthier and generally more interesting for our people. This programme is also designed to serve as a veritable source of employment for our young school leavers.

Neighbourhood markets:

There shall be developed for all our major cities and towns, mini-markets that would be neatly built and laid out outside the major streets in each city to facilitate easy access for our market women and their clientele. This will also ensure that our streets are clean and inviting at all times.

Coastal Region:

The development of Ondo State's coastal region is the challenge of our time. The goose that lays the golden egg deserves a better deal than it is getting in the context of Ondo State. We envisage a new, more robust future for our people in this zone through a massive programme of environmental restoration and infrastructural expansion.

The ongoing Adebayo Adefarati-initiated Igbokoda-Aiyetoro road which has been extensively advertised by the present administration and which seems to be going on forever, will be speedily completed and new ones initiated.

As part of our coastal region development agenda, the Ondo State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (OSOPADEC) shall be transformed into a virile, accountable and community-driven agency with a mandate to create a viable petro-based economy in the riverine area of the State. Our government shall bring funding for the Commission to 45% of the Derivation Fund. Its focus and mandate shall be reconfigured to enable it to accomplish the under-listed objectives:

1. initiate a unique joint-ownership programme of development between the Ondo State government, indigenes of the oil-bearing areas, the oil producing multinationals and international financial institutions;
2. undertake major transformational projects of value to all stakeholders, including the creation of a fully-integrated oil service town; and
3. ensure that its projects are sustainable and offer unique option of peaceful and strategic alliance between all stakeholders.

We shall increase the role of communities in priority setting, implementation, monitoring and impact assessment. We shall aggressively pursue capacity-building in

targeted areas to increase our local skill involvement in the nation's oil and gas sector to complement Federal Government's Local Content Initiative. Our New Town Development Initiative shall include land reclamation as a major infrastructural development objective, and an affordable housing programme anchored on the exploration of new and appropriate technology.

3. A: Aggressive capitalization of our land resource

Land is wealth. Unlike most other commodities, it does not depreciate. Its value generally appreciates with time. If well tapped and well managed, therefore, land may be as valuable as oil.

Land however is dead capital if it is not titled. Titling converts land to live and investible capital. As part of our general development, urban planning and citizenry empowerment programme, we shall institute an aggressive and appropriate computerized mapping, land registration and administration system that will serve as a veritable source of investible capital for our people and a model for other States of the country.

4. R: Roads and Infrastructure

Roads:

We shall put a new emphasis on the building and rehabilitation of roads across the State - both main and link roads. As a starting point, all existing surface-dressed roads are to be asphalt-overlaid.

We shall, in consultation with the Federal Government, put in place a master plan to link the major towns and commercial centres with dual carriage ways, with provision for bye-pass in the major cities.

We shall embark, in collaboration with the LGAs and communities, an extensive rural and inner-city roads rehabilitation programme. At the end of our four years, we shall have done no less than 1000kilometres of both rural and urban roads in all.

Waterways:

All relevant equipment for the clearing of water hyacinth and other water weeds from our waterways shall be procured and deployed under a public-private sector partnership arrangement that would also seek to create jobs and boost easy transportation in the riverine areas of the State. We shall continually explore the possibility of putting cleared weeds to industrial uses.

Water provision:

Our desire is to put an end to the perennial shortage of water in Akure and all our major towns and villages within the first two years of our administration. The focus is on making the existing water works in the State, both State and Federal Government-owned to function. New mini-water works shall also be built.

Two mini-water works shall be developed in each senatorial zone every year. That gives 24 for the entire State in four years. With appropriate reticulation, this would ensure that Ondo State people have access to water all year round. This will also enhance agriculture, especially dry season agricultural production.

We shall do a review of the existing solar-powered borehole initiative with a view to expanding it while focusing it more on the rural areas.

Electricity:

We shall tackle the problem of inadequate supply of electricity in the State in three related ways. First, an aggressive campaign for private sector investment in the building of power plants shall be undertaken to boost electricity supply to the State. Secondly, our government shall as a matter of urgency procure and deploy transformers and other distribution materials as appropriate to enhance functional electricity supply. Thirdly, a phased lighting-up of the rural areas shall be accomplished through an aggressive rural electrification programme.

The ultimate objective of our action in the area of electricity supply is to reduce the problem of power supply in the State to the barest minimum. We regard this as a sine qua non for rapid industrialization in the State. In all of these, the State will play a strong catalytic role, with the private sector taking the lead.

5. I: Industrialization

Appropriate investment climate:

The overall goal of our industrialization programme is employment generation and socio-economic development. Basic to this is the provision of a right investment climate for high-net-worth Ondo State indigenes and other genuine investors, including foreigners, to invest in this sector. Emphasis is on agro-based, small and medium scale, labour-intensive enterprises which would serve to provide gainful employment and generate more export income for our people. Government shall serve as a catalyst for the setting up of cottage and large scale industries in areas where the State has comparative advantage. It shall assist with feasibility and capacity-building initiatives and the deployment of credit as appropriate. We shall honour on-going commitments in this sector.

Olokola Deep Sea Port and Free Trade Zone:

The initiative of the three development partners on Olokola FTZ and the Deep Sea Port – the Federal, Ondo and Ogun State governments must be commended. The decision to cite the LNG project in Olokola is also commendable. We shall honour existing commitments in this regard. In addition, we shall ensure aggressive marketing to attract new investments in the FTZ. We also are committed to positioning Ondo State indigenes strategically through adequate information, communication and capacity-building, to be able to benefit maximally from these projects.

Leveraging on the Olokola project, we shall build up a town on the Ondo State side of the project, already positioned to become the major oil service hub for the country. What we seek to provide is a safe and friendly oil service town for the major oil service companies, devoid of hostilities between the communities and oil companies operating in the region.

Development of bitumen and granite industries:

We shall engage with the Federal Government in a most constructive manner on our bitumen development initiative. This is with a view to eliciting the type of response necessary for translating the project into reality. We shall also continue to seek private local and foreign capital and improved technology into the project. We are also resolutely committed to ensuring that full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) precedes actual exploitation of our bitumen resource. Government shall at all times be sensitive to the state of the environment and would not allow the well-known negative externalities by which crude oil extraction in Nigeria is defined to be replicated in Ondo State.

We shall encourage the exploitation and the processing of the abundant granite resources in Ondo State for the purpose of employment and wealth generation.

6. N: No-to-poverty programme

We shall foster a tripartite and sustainable alliance against poverty - between the State Government, the private sector, and individual communities. The purpose is to facilitate a prosperity-enhancement environment into which individuals and collectives in Ondo State can key. We shall encourage a well-defined Nigerian conceptualization and local indicators of poverty to enable us to verify what progress we make in our poverty-attack programme at intervals.

Cooperative system:

The cooperative system is to be overhauled to serve the purpose of our prosperity-enhancement programme. It shall be made a useful mechanism for the deployment of micro-credit, focused as it were on a demonstrable and sustainable improvement in the quality of life of the people.

Well-organized trade groups, farmers, transporters, market men and women, artisans, etc, shall also be used as viable vehicles of poverty eradication.

Employment generation:

We intend to create wealth as a basis for our people's collective happiness. We shall eradicate the emergent street culture in our cities into which our hordes of unemployed or underemployed youths are being acculturated. As soon as the government gets inaugurated, we shall direct the opening of a register of all unemployed youths and graduates in the State with a view to putting all of them to meaningful and sustainable work before the end of our tenure. Our unemployed youths shall be massively deployed in environmental renewal and mass literacy programmes, in minor contract execution, extension and monitoring activities, etc.

Employment into the Civil Service shall be made as appropriate, as we believe that a fresh crop of graduates needs to be brought in to bridge the yawning gap between the different cadres in the Service. We consider this as part of the social responsibility of government. We therefore shall not retrench workers from the State's Civil Service.

We intend to work with community development associations, co-operatives, trade unions, market women and trade associations for the floatation of micro-finance banks that will be responsible for empowerment and prosperity-enhancement.

We shall also create other mechanisms of micro-credit delivery. Over a four-year period, we hope to invest not less than N4 billion directly in micro-credit financing on our poverty-attack programme. In all respects, lending would be based on a structured and graduated subsidy regime with government absorbing some percentages of the interest on each facility.

Our overall objective is not to alleviate poverty, but to put Ondo State on an irreversible path of poverty eradication.

7. G: Gender equality and women empowerment

The African woman suffers from many disadvantages, and in the average African society, Ondo State inclusive, they bear the greatest brunt of poverty. The transformation of the state of our women from this fundamental position of disadvantage, without necessarily upturning the more valuable aspects of our culture, shall therefore be a primary concern of our government. It is also an established fact that women empowerment is one of the surest keys to rapid socio-economic development. We shall therefore embark on a sustainable women empowerment programme as a plank to the overall development of our society.

To demonstrate our commitment to womanhood, we shall ensure that a fairly large number of women is appointed into government positions. Our ultimate objective is the construction of enduring structures of women emancipation and the overall repositioning of the girl-child.

8. H: Health and Housing

Our goal is to ensure affordable and qualitative health care for all citizens of Ondo State. A programme of free health care for all pregnant women and children, 0-5 years of age, shall be put in place immediately we get to government. We shall enhance existing programmes of free and mass surgery (Festivals of Surgery), and ensure that adequate health personnel are employed and deployed to all our health facilities, both urban and rural. We shall especially create conducive working condition and environment to attract and retain specialists in the services of the State.

Community involvement in health care at the local level shall be employed. A simple but robust and effective Health Insurance Scheme shall be put in place within six months of the life of our administration. We shall also promote herbal drug production.

Accident and Emergency Centres:

The Accident and Emergency Centres initiative shall be enhanced such that effective treatment shall be administered in all life-threatening situations. An arrangement shall be put in place under which private diagnostic and blood transfusion centres would be established in all our major hospitals under the careful guidance of government.

Health Rangers Scheme:

The Health Rangers Scheme was a veritable platform for bringing health care services to the rural segment of the State. We shall revive and reposition this programme for greater coverage and effectiveness and as a complement to the domiciled health care structure that exists in all our rural communities.

Overall, we shall put in place a health care reform programme that will ensure equitable, qualitative and affordable health care in terms of infrastructure, personnel, drug procurement and distribution, diagnostics and blood transfusion, dental care services and an efficient rapid-response highway ambulance system. It shall be a model in health care reform.

Housing:

Our government shall partner with the private sector to develop housing estates in the cities and our Development Centres in the rural areas. Government shall provide basic infrastructures (site and services) in the new estates to be opened up, as well as in all the existing ones. This is to make the estates to be attractive to private individuals and corporate developers and also ensure affordability.

We shall ensure that workers in the formal sector, especially public servants, benefit from available mortgage finance opportunities. The moribund public-sector staff housing programme shall be revamped. Deliberate and well-packaged mortgage arrangements will also be emplaced for the informal sector (which must be about 70% of the working population) as a way of encouraging movement into the formal sector, a boost in our peoples' saving habit and increased sense of socio-economic well-being that home ownership engenders.

We also recognize that housing is a veritable employment-generation tool, a means of poverty alleviation and a fundamental need of man and an index of economic growth. A Ministry to take charge of housing will therefore be created.

9. E: Education and Capacity Building

Our agenda for the development of education in Ondo State seeks to enhance the quality of learning through massive investment in the restoration and expansion of structures. To this end, all dilapidated primary school buildings are to be rehabilitated and new ones are to be built. We shall massively expand the enrolment rate in the schools with the target being the enrolment of every child of school age into school before the end of our tenure. We shall evolve an organic and enduring linkage between education and the socio-economic development of Ondo State by overhauling the curriculum at all levels. Government shall provide resources to widen the scope of government financial assistance to students through enhanced bursaries and a reinvigorated scholarship programme that is strictly driven by merit.

We recognize the centrality of teachers to educational development. We shall therefore put in place a robust incentive package for teachers, including training, prompt payment of salaries and other emoluments, etc. Our target is the overall enhancement of the status and quality of teachers in our school system.

Specifically, government shall seek to put the following programmes in place for the purpose of overhauling the educational system.

(i) Running grant:

Payment of running grants to schools will continue. Tuition shall be free in all our primary and secondary schools. There shall therefore be no basis for the collection of frivolous levies from parents and students.

(ii) Inspectorate:

The inspectorate division of the Ministry of Education shall be strengthened for greater effectiveness.

(iii) Excellence in Mathematics and English Project:

We shall direct our efforts at achieving excellence in two subjects: Mathematics and English, in our primary and secondary schools. To this end, we shall organize training workshops to equip our teachers to use the most modern teaching methods and teaching aids with a view to improving the performance of our students in the two subjects. We shall complement the workforce with new contract employees to teach Mathematics and English so that each primary and secondary school student will receive a specified minimum number of hours of tuition in the two subjects under a maximum student:teacher ratio.

(iv) Science and computer laboratories.

We shall deepen the policy of equipping science and computer laboratories in our secondary schools.

(v) Teachers Training Programme:

A massive programme for training of teachers in modern teaching methods, including computer appreciation skills, shall be undertaken. To achieve excellence, the State will avail itself of services of methodologies adopted by private schools with excellent results. Where necessary, these will be complemented by foreign instructors.

(vi) Secondary School Performance Improvement Project:

In the secondary education system, a major milestone for progress is success at the Senior Secondary School (SSS) examinations with a minimum of five credits including in Mathematics and English. Our schools are returning woeful results. In addition to the training and motivation programme for teachers therefore, we shall create a performance-improvement project that will involve the government partnering with parents and the private sector to improve performance in the public schools.

(vii) Information and Communication Technology and Science Training:
Government shall establish a well-equipped Centre for Information and Communication Technology and Science Education. Our target is to have every child from the third year in primary school become ICT-compliant. We will also arrange for teachers to be able to undertake web-based teaching certification.

The Centre will serve as a training and research centre for students and teachers. It is envisaged that in the next few years, Ondo State will become a major software development centre of global reckoning. Our government shall partner with private sector operatives in the implementation of this scheme.

Tertiary Educational Institutions:

As at today, statistics show that the State University at Akungba-Akoko and the Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, are some of the least funded among their counterparts in the country. We shall move away from this unacceptable situation and fund our tertiary institutions massively. The development of the permanent site of Adekunle Ajasin University shall receive priority attention from our government. We shall also establish an additional higher institution to be located in the southern senatorial zone of the State. Exploratory work on this long overdue project shall commence within our first month in government.

As part of our employment-generation strategy, producing graduates who achieve gainful employment, either paid or personal, within 12 months of completing the National Youth Service Scheme will be made the yardstick for measuring our tertiary institutions in Ondo State. To this end, a major strategic and curriculum review shall be undertaken to transform Adekunle Ajasin University and Rufus Giwa Polytechnic to specialized centers of excellence for producing quality work force for the national economy and the Gulf of Guinea region.

The Public Service:

We appreciate the strategic importance of the bureaucracy as the engine room of development. Therefore our government shall ensure that an effective recruitment and well-articulated succession plan in the Civil Service is quickly put in place.

We seek the enhancement of the delivery capacity of our Public Servants. This shall be canalized through a series of well-directed and broad-based training programmes, adequate remuneration and recognition.

We shall depoliticize the Civil Service as a way of enhancing job security and efficiency.

We shall ensure that pensioners are no longer left defenseless in the face of the vagaries of Federal allocation of funds. An adequate funding mechanism, involving private financial institutions, shall be evolved to ensure prompt payment of the entitlements of pensioners.

We shall in this direction ensure the success of the contributory pension scheme. We shall also create a financial mechanism, with the Federal Government's consent, to ensure that the backlog of pension owed by the Federal Government in Ondo State is paid without delay.

Short term training and retraining of our unemployed youths shall also be undertaken for appropriate gainful employment.

10. A: Artisanship development and empowerment programme.

Artisans of all grades and categories form a major force in our society and economy. Their importance is therefore not just limited to their number, but is also in the critical role they play in our commerce. With improved electricity supply and the expansion of other infrastructural facilities, the overall environment in which this category of citizens work shall be greatly improved. But beyond that, we seek a mass mobilization of our artisans. We would encourage them to get better and fully registered. We shall provide them with access to capital and subsidized credit. We shall put in place structures to help them in accessing funds from agencies like the Bank of Industry (BOI) and from the CBN-directed reserves which commercial banks keep for the purpose of supporting small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs). This is with a view to creating a pool of funds from which artisans can obtain loan, with their workshop and/or landed properties serving as collateral. All of these are designed to provide a boost in the economy of the State, get more of our children to undertake apprenticeship and improve the quality of lives of families.

11. R: Rural Development

The ultimate aim of our rural development initiative is to create functional and very vibrant “Centres of Development” in our much-neglected rural areas. Massive expansion of infrastructural facilities, the absence of which has for so long promoted massive drift to the urban centres, shall be undertaken. Every one of our development projects everywhere, but especially in the rural areas, shall be underscored by a bottom-up approach to development. This is to ensure community ownership and project sustainability.

12. T: Tourism

Tourism is a potential money spinner that shall be exploited to the hilt by our government. Idanre high hills, Ebomi Lake, the sandy shores of Araromi in Ilaje Local Government Area, etc, shall be fully developed. The target is to make Ondo State a hub of tourism in Nigeria, with the attendant positive implications for our economy and the livelihood of the people.

Sports:

We seek the composite development of sports, not just as a tool of winning laurels, but as a platform for character and leadership development, especially in our schools. We shall through deliberate policy transform Ondo State to the foremost swimming State in Nigeria. We shall develop a befitting sports complex for the State and upgrade three regional ones.

Youth Development:

The youth remains the main focus of our development efforts and we shall emplace deliberate policies to ensure proper secular and moral education of our youths. We shall ensure gainful employment for all, provide the type of leadership and create the enabling environment that will engender proper values, including spirit of volunteerism and general social commitment.

VI. Conclusion

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it remains for me to touch on two related issues before we begin to bring this address to a close. The first relates to finance and the strategies for funding our programmes. On finance, you will agree with me that our plans require a capital expenditure outlay beyond the existent fiscal profile of the State. We are putting in place a three-pronged approach for fund mobilization. We shall overhaul the tax administration system with a view to boosting our Internally Generated Revenue (IGR). We shall as a matter of deliberate policy award contracts to deserving professionals and others within the State rather than outsiders who have no tax base in the State, thereby stemming the current tide of capital flight from the State.

Secondly, we shall create a Bureau of External Finance with the mandate of networking for funds in form of grants, aids and other local and international facilities for projects in the State. All loans shall be directly tied to specific projects under private sector leadership, and so will not involve putting the State under any yoke of debt. We shall also explore the use of Municipal Bonds in collaboration with our Local Governments to generate additional funds for investment purposes.

The third strategy involves an aggressive courting and mobilization of private sector investment under the close guidance of government with a view to ensuring that this is appropriately targeted. In this regard, we shall tap to the fullest the expertise, exposure and contacts of Ondo State citizens in the Diaspora for the purpose of the overall development of our State. They shall be encouraged to invest their own funds and persuade their foreign friends and partners to do the same. To this end, we shall ensure a constant flow of ideas and information between our government and the diasporic community. This is to enable the latter to make inputs into the processes of the administration of the State. The requisite infrastructure for mainstreaming this concept shall be in place through the registration of all Ondo State indigenes abroad, and the establishment of a contact office for investment mobilization in all the major countries.

Let me add, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, that ours is A Divine Agenda. In the true utilitarian tradition, we seek to bring happiness to the greatest number of citizens of Ondo State who crave the opportunity to raise their heads high again. What we seek to build is a fully re-positioned Ondo State where the gains that had been made over the years in human resources would be translated to an edge over the other States in the Federation in commercial and industrial developments; where no one goes to bed thinking about what to eat the next morning; where every child of school age will be in school; where every child, every adult and every senior citizen shall have a secured and guaranteed health care; an Ondo State whose government shall be forthright and shall hold the people in confidence as progress partners.

My goal is to provide enlightened, selfless and committed leadership for our people. We shall create a new confidence in government, create the type of environment that will ensure that every individual and every community sees themselves and act as a major stakeholder in the rapid socio-economic transformation of our State; an environment in which there is surely ROOM ENOUGH FOR ALL.

Thank you all for coming.

Dr. Olusegun Mimiko,
Ondo State LABOUR PARTY Gubernatorial Candidate,
February 19, 2007.