

13 February

2019 National Peace Accord Signing on the Prevention of Violence and acceptance of Election Results by Presidential Candidates and the Chairpersons of Political Parties Contesting the 2019 General Elections

Your Excellency Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria;

Your Excellency Abdusalam A. Abubakar, former Head of State and Chairman of the National Peace Committee;

All former Heads of State here present;

Your Excellency, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of Liberia and leaders of the ECOWAS election observer mission;

Your Excellency Mr. Yakubu Gowon, former President of Nigeria;

Your Excellency Mr Festus Mogae, former President of Botswana, and leader the NDI/IRI observer mission;

Your Excellency Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, and leader of the Commonwealth Observer Group;

His Excellency Atiku Abubakar, former Vice-President of Nigeria and other honourable candidates to the presidential election of 16 February 2019;

Eminent Traditional and Religious Leaders;

Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Members of the National Peace Committee;

Distinguished Invited Guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Let me begin by stating what an honour it is to be with you today, as the Secretary-General, representing the 2.4 billion citizens of the Commonwealth, following in the footsteps of Kofi Annan, a great and true son of the continent and the Commonwealth who deeply loved Nigeria and strongly supported this noble, home-grown initiative that is a critical element of Nigeria's continuing journey towards peaceful, democratic governance.

I warmly congratulate the Chair of the National Peace Committee, H.E. General Abubakar, the Committee, and the various stakeholders for their steadfast commitment to the promotion of peace

and hard work to ensure the success of today's Peace Accord.

I know that millions are praying for Nigeria and its people, hoping that the courage, integrity and love which has made Nigeria such a jewel of Africa will not fail.

Saturday's elections will be Nigeria's sixth since the transition from military to civilian democratic rule in 1999.

It marks a significant opportunity to not only consolidate the democratic gains of the recent past but to entrench and build upon them. A

significant opportunity to continue building a political culture that has at its core principles of freedom and respect for human rights, particularly, particularly when we disagree.

For some voters, especially those born after 1999, it will be the first time that they will have the opportunity to exercise their right to vote and determine who leads Nigeria.

It is these young people who we must not only encourage to dream of a greater and better Nigeria but also empower to embody the ideals of inclusivity and peaceful participation in democratic processes, particularly through

credible, transparent and inclusive elections to shape the society in which they live. These are Commonwealth values, enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, a copy of which I now hold.

The Charter further emphasises that governments, political parties and civil society are all responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard.

The signing today of the National Peace Accord is fully in-line with those Commonwealth values.

The country, region, continent and wider world are holding their breath. Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa, with the largest population. She plays a crucial political and economic role in Africa and our Commonwealth. What happens in Nigeria, matters to all.

I am greatly heartened, hopeful and expectant that the National Peace Accord signed today by Nigeria's political leaders will be lived up to in the coming days and beyond.

It is a heavy burden that Nigeria's political leaders gathered here today carry. Let us applaud and support their commitment to democracy and

constitutionalism and commend them for their courage and fortitude in committing themselves without reservation to adhearing these noble, ambitious goals.

Not only do we look to the leaders gathered here today to live up to the lofty aspirations set out in the Accord, we call upon their parties, supporters and the wider electorate to follow their lead and support them in the fulfilment of the promises made today to the people of Nigeria.

The promotion of peace is the shared responsibility of all stakeholders in Nigeria's democracy. We are all expected to play our

respective roles and we must pursue this common interest with sincerity and goodwill, with a view to strengthening Nigeria's democratic credentials, not only in the forthcoming election, but for the benefit of coming generations.

Nigeria has always played a key role in the Commonwealth and is a truly treasured and valued member of our family.

The very first Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference ever held outside London took place in Lagos in January 1966. One of my illustrious predecessors, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, is a son of

this soil. Nigeria hosted the 2003 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Nigeria truly is, and can be an even bigger beacon of transformative excellence; not only worthy of our respect but also our admiration.

By signing this National Peace Accord, Nigeria's political leaders are committing themselves to writing a new chapter in the country's future growth and prosperity - a chapter which we can all be proud of.

This Peace Accord which the leaders are about to commit themselves to will be put to the test ahead

of the elections, on Election Day and the days that follow, in particular after the results are announced.

This is when the Leadership in promoting peace will be more crucial than ever before.

All Nigeria is watching. Your supporters are watching your actions and listening to the statements you make. I therefore urge all of you to live up to the letter and spirit of this National Peace Accord. Elections will come and will go, but Nigeria, this great Nigeria, will remain. Treat her tenderly, she deserves your love and devotion.

We will not shy away from an appreciation of Nigeria's difficulties and challenges. However, it is exactly because of this that we have to continue on the path of democracy - because despite its difficulties, it offers us the best platform for managing our plural societies and delivering on the benefits of good governance. We know it is hard but the whole Commonwealth family walks with you.

Allow me to borrow the concluding words of your National Anthem, as I myself conclude:

“O God of creation,
direct our noble cause

Guide our leaders right

Help our youth the truth to know

In love and honesty to grow

And living just and true

Great lofty heights attain

To build a nation where peace

And justice shall reign".

May God bless Nigeria and keep her safe in the

palm of his hand.

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