

(iv) INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, CHIEF OLUSEGUN OBASANJO, GCFR, PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. ALHAJI ATIKU ABUBAKAR, GCFR VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

I have a message from the President, and he actually wanted to be here this morning to be with you, but unfortunately, the Excellencies, of duties which he has committed himself earlier would not allow him to be here. So he has asked me to stand in for him and to deliver as his address and this is the message.

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for the Federal Republic of Nigeria to have another opportunity of hosting for a second time, an annual session of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization (AALCO); - the first was in 1972. The Federal Government of Nigerian extends a very warm welcome to all delegations at this 41st session.

At this time of globalization more than ever before, there is a greater need for co-operation, politically and economically between the continents of Asia and Africa. The two continents need each other, now more than ever before.

I am happy to note that this Organization was established for the development of International Law, economic and social integration of its member states. AALCO should therefore be seen in the light of today's world as a conscious unifying force for African States and their Asian counterparts, for the re-integration and positioning of their common interests in the determination of the present World Order. I would like to see the member States of AALCO move further from their voting power position in the World Assemblies to Technological powers.

It is gladdening to note that the member states have been monitoring and sensitizing their interests on matters before the United Nations Organization. May I implore you to evolve some specific programme that will help to arouse the interest of individual member states in the world assemblies and in other assemblies where international matters come forth for discourse.

Member states should strive without necessarily contravening the international rules and order, to be tolerant of each other especially in matters of consular protocols and in the treatment of citizens of members on matters of repatriation and of convicted victims. I will like to advise that it is paramount and essential that all Member States should be carried along in all the discussions of the Session. To this end, there must be interpretations and translations in languages spoken by member states. I have been reliably informed that the official languages as at now are English and Arabic. I earnestly implore this Session to consider the inclusion of French language to enable other nations which do not speak either of the two languages to participate actively in the business of the Organization and so that other countries who are contemplating joining this organization will be better informed about the Organization.

I have seen the subject of the Law of the Sea in the Provisional Agenda, I believe that enormous resources of the Sea abound in the waters surrounding AALCO States, yet these resources which are described as heritage of mankind are left almost entirely to be exploited and captured by the developed nations. It is my kind advice that the African-Asian Countries should evolve a solution to their non-participation and involvement by removing all standing constraints to engage in the deep Sea exploitation activities. Also, the issue of environmental pollution and degradation should also be given useful attention while a special Session should be devoted to the issue of women trafficking and child labour with the realization that there would be no more market for them in the developed Countries. Globalization should be seen and taken as a tool for international development and co-operation. I am happy therefore that AALCO has taken steps on crucial issues of international law and trade matters as offends the world in the present era/age, especially the matter of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The overwhelming and overhauling influence of the developed nations on the developing states could

only be curtailed with the active participation of the developing countries in international commerce and technology. There is no doubt that WTO has become a bloated mechanism for the suffocation of development of trade, suffocation of manufacturing and a stifling influence on the agrarian industry in the developing countries of Asia and Africa. A mechanized agricultural practice is discouraged and made impossible in the third world but it is encouraged and practiced with perfection in the developed countries. I strongly enjoin this session therefore to focus attention to how best WTO could be utilized for the benefit of developing nations. The crippling effect of globalization arising principally from unfair competition triggered by the unwholesome problems of smuggling and dumping should also be tackled. I call upon AALCO to design specific strategies to strengthen cooperation among member states in multi-lateral relations, marketing, visas, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

On July 9th 2002, the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U) the 39-year- old parent body of African Nations transformed into the African Union (A.U.) the new ship with which the continent hopes to sail away from poverty, disease and other aches of development.

A.U. is the African Leaders response to the political and economic immobility of the continent in the last century and an acknowledgement that the global village could do with fewer barriers and frontiers.

Nigeria, realizing the need to create a much needed economic and political integration in Africa, has joined in championing the establishment of a scheme called NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development). The scheme is intended to rescue the continent from its economic travails and His Excellency, President Olusegun Obasanjo is the Chairman of the Implementation Committee.

NEPAD will, among others,

Seek better market access for African products.

Seek to increase private capital inflow into Africa, as an essential component of a sustainable long-term approach to filling the resource gap.

Strive for better health for the people

Bridge education gap, and

Promote agriculture.

Many critics of the programme have said it may not meet the yearning of Africa. But the President Obasanjo led Committee is forging ahead. Africa has made a clear statement – that it is ready to take its destiny into its hands. The same can definitely be said for the Asian continent too.

I therefore admonish this August gathering of African-Asian Delegates to proffer suggestions and ways of making this noble scheme work. What is most needed is commitment and support of the people and funds to execute the programme. The era of African-Asian countries waiting for loans and grants from Europe is gone. We must not go cap in hand to donor nations to beg for funds. We should go to them as partners to sell a project that has in stock several benefits to them.

Finally may I end by acknowledging the continuing efforts of AALCO in proffering an alternative remedy to litigation for dispute resolution in International Commerce within the regions of Asia and Africa by its establishment of Regional Centres for International Arbitration within member states.

Through this integrated dispute settlement scheme proffered by these Regional Centres established in Kuala-Lumpur, Cairo, Tehran and Lagos, Arbitration and other Alternative Dispute Settlement (ADR) methods, have gained grounds within these Regions as the preferred modes of settling International Commercial business disputes, and this no doubt will continue to encourage foreign investors to transact business and investments within the regions of Asia and Africa.

The Federal Government of Nigeria will continue to honour the terms of the Headquarters Agreement, executed between AALCO and Nigeria in relation to the Regional Centre for International Arbitration situated in Lagos.

Lastly, I should take the opportunity of this august occasion to inform you on the vast economic opportunities in Nigeria and member states who are desirous of opening economic co-operation with my country would be only too welcome. Nigeria is all of diverse and varied opportunities in commerce, manufacturing, technology, oil and gas and many countless others. Under our fledging democracy and liberal investment laws, the opportunities abound.

I wish you fruitful deliberation, and a happy and memorable stay in Nigeria.

Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, GCFR
President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.