

(i) WELCOME STATEMENT BY AMB. DR. WAFIK ZAHER KAMIL, SECRETARY-GENERAL, AALCO

Hon'ble Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria H. E. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, Hon'ble Ministers, Excellencies, distinguished delegates and observers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization and my own behalf, it is my pleasant duty to welcome you all at the AALCO's 41st Session in this beautiful city Abuja. Despite the tragic demise of Chief Bola Ige, the then Attorney General and Minister of Justice of Nigeria and the Vice-President of AALCO's 40th Session, I believe that the successful conduct of this session in Abuja would be a fitting tribute to the memory of that great son of Nigeria.

On behalf of AALCO, I would like to express our deep gratitude to the esteemed Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the kind invitation and the excellent arrangements that have been made for the success of AALCO's 41st Session.

At a personal level, I attach high sentimental value to this session held in Nigeria. Myself being an African, elected with the unanimous support of the African Member States, this is a special occasion as this is the first session held in the African region after my election as the Secretary-General.

Excellency, this is the second time AALCO has the honour to hold its annual session in Nigeria. The earlier occasion was when Nigeria, after joining AALCO in 1970 immediately hosted the AALCO's annual Session in 1972. That was a period when more and more African States realized political independence and joined the Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization. It would not be out of place for me to recall the role of an eminent jurist from Nigeria, Judge T. O. Elias in urging the Asian-African States to actively participate in the process of international law-making, more particularly the then ongoing negotiations relating to Convention on the Law of Treaties. The relationship between Nigeria and the AALCO was further strengthened by the decision of the Government of Nigeria to host the AALCO's Regional Centre for Arbitration and the signing of the Headquarters Agreement in 1999.

Your Excellency, the kind invitation extended by your esteemed Government to host the 41st Session and your august presence on this occasion testifies to the commitment of Nigeria in promoting a world order that is based on adherence to the rule of law in international relations and continued support to AALCO's activities and a keen interest in promoting the co-operation among Asian-African states in general and among African States in particular.

Nigeria is a great nation possessing abundant natural resources, and Excellency, under your able leadership, we are sure that it would emerge as a role model for other developing countries in the region. The process of globalization and rapid growth in technology have forced the international community to seek innovative solutions to newly emerging problems. This includes a wide range of issues like problems of governance; harmful side-effect of liberalization; corruption; debt-burden; combating menace of HIV/AIDS; terrorism; environmental pollution; trafficking in women and children; protecting refugees and human rights. Many of these issues have their own contextual settings in Asia and Africa. Therefore solutions have to be sought keeping in mind the regional specifications and our own potentials which have to burst in concrete action.

The importance of regional efforts to promote international law stands vindicated by the central role Your Excellency played in the transformation of the OAU to the African Union. Efforts at the international and regional levels should be organically linked so as to ensure a wholesome and harmonious development.

This is exactly where the role of AALCO would be potentially useful. Apart from traditional areas of international law the AALCO is the ideal forum for Member States to identify common problems; share regional and national experiences; and in a spirit of South-South co-operation work together to seek solutions to such problems. Such co-operation could focus on newly emerging issues of international

law:- cyber crimes; money laundering; protection of traditional knowledge; protection of migrant workers; genetically modified organisms; and other issues I have enumerated earlier.

Some of the related issues are already on the agenda of AALCO's work programme. More particularly, this annual session would witness deliberations relating to trafficking, refugees, International Criminal court, Migrant workers; Human Rights and Terrorism and WTO. I firmly believe that this session would be a memorable one both in terms of the excellent arrangements provided by Nigeria and also in terms of the substantive outcome of our fruitful deliberations.

Excellency, before I close, may I once again thank you and your Government for your kind invitation and the customary warm African hospitality that we have enjoyed since our arrival here.

Thank you.