



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

JOINT SESSION

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

Tuesday, 2 December, 2008

1. The National Assembly met at 12.15p.m. The Chairman of the National Assembly in the Chair.
2. **Opening Prayers:**
Senator Kanti Bello and Hon. Emeka Ihedioha said Muslim and Christian Prayers respectively.
3. **Chairman's Opening Remarks:**
The Chairman, Distinguished Senator David Mark, President of the Senate, welcomed the President as follows:

Protocol:

1. *It is with great esteem and honour, that I on behalf of the Distinguished Senators and Honourable Members of the House of Representatives, warmly welcome His Excellency, Mr. President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and his entourage, to this Joint Session of the National Assembly.*

Mr. President's mission to this hallowed Chamber today is in fulfilment of a foremost Constitutional imperative - the presentation of the 2009 National Budget estimates to Nigerians through their Representatives in a Joint Session of the National Assembly.

Your Excellency, we appreciate therefore that though you are only a Guest, and a most distinguished and illustrious Guest, the day and the centre- stage, belong solely to you. But I trust that Mr. President will nevertheless permit me, to make a few remarks.

2. *First, Your Excellency, the ritual which you are about to perform this morning would have profound social, economic and political implications for our national economy, and the consequent attainment of the goals set out so vividly in the Seven-Point Agenda of your Administration. Fiscal and monetary policy, properly articulated, regulates the roadmap of the national economy, and steers the ship of State towards the shores of economic redemption, political stability and national prosperity.*

It is our collective, unanimous and sincere wish, desire and hope that this Budget will adequately address the current global economic crisis, stimulate economic growth, spur development in every facet of our national life, and enhance the living conditions of our fellow citizens and adequately and realistically address those fundamental issues that had hitherto retarded our national development.

3. *Secondly, Your Excellency, the National Assembly will be alert to its constitutional responsibilities, and we will therefore continue to take our oversight functions very seriously in accordance with Section 88 of the 1999 Constitution to ensure accountability, probity and transparency in public expenditure. We will work assiduously to eliminate the misuse or misappropriation of public funds and ensure strict adherence to timely implementation of the Budget.*

4. *Finally, I assure Your Excellency that the need to ensure the efficient use of public funds for the promotion of the welfare of the Nigerian people will be the cardinal principle in the consideration and speedy passage of the 2009 Budget.*

May I now invite the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, GCFR, to present the 2009 Budget estimates.

Mr President, Sir.

SENATOR DAVIDA. B. MARK, GCON,
President of the Senate

4. 2009 Budget Presentation by Mr President, Commander-in-Chief, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'Adua:

Mr President addresses the Members as follows:

PROTOCOLS

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to present the 2009 Budget to the National Assembly today, as we move to reposition our economy to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that we are faced with at home and internationally.

The changing international oil market poses grave concerns for our fiscal outlook. The international financial crisis has led to slowing growth across the world's economies, resulting in a lower demand for commodities, especially oil. While speculative investment activities had helped to buoy oil prices in recent months, the reality of the global recession is beginning to be hilly appreciated across the globe, and more poignantly in Nigeria by its adverse impact on the international price of oil.

The recent volatility of the oil price is apparent in the unprecedented decline of prices from record highs of about US\$147/barrel in July this year to current prices of below US\$50/barrel, and there is no guarantee that prices will not further decline despite OPEC's recent mitigating efforts. We therefore must adopt a prudent outlook that does not invest misplaced confidence in the expectation of unrealistically high prices.

Notwithstanding the global downturn, Nigeria's economic growth remains on track, buoyed by the strong performance of the non-oil sector. Growth in the non-oil sector, particularly in agriculture, remains robust, at an estimated g%. However, the oil sector's GDP contracted in 2008 by about 2.5% due to reduced production levels precipitated by the ongoing situation in the Niger Delta. Overall, real GDP growth for 2009 is estimated to be about 7.5% which compares favourably with the 6.6% recorded so far in 2008.

This outturn lays the foundation for sustainable double-digit growth over the medium-term horizon, as we increase investments in critical infrastructure, implement sectoral reforms, maintain macroeconomic stability and ensure lasting peace, security and development, not only in the Niger Delta, but across the country, as a whole.

Year-on-year headline inflation has exceeded our single-digit projections and remains high at 14.7% in October 2008. This outcome is symptomatic of the rising global costs of food and fuel which affect all economies world-wide. By October, food inflation had increased to 19.2%. However, core inflation for all items other than farm produce and energy commodities, remained in a single-digit at 7.9%. Our efforts to manage inflation will continue to build on the increasing coordination between monetary and fiscal policy, and our emphasis on fiscal discipline and prudence in macroeconomic management.

Our economy, as with open economies across the world, is not immune to the challenges in the global financial markets arising from the acute contraction of credit and liquidity in the international financial markets. However, we have moved to protect the integrity of our nation's financial markets and system by introducing several measures to strengthen our financial sector and restore investor confidence.

Overall, our economic fundamentals are strong, buttressed by the growth of the non-oil sector in the face of these challenges. This confidence has been duly reflected in our Local Currency Issuer Default Ratings (IDRs) which were upgraded by international rating agencies from BB- to BB in May 2008. Our long-term foreign and local currency IDRs remain stable, endorsing our macroeconomic stability and strong external reserves position. Indeed, in November, an international investment bank, Merrill Lynch, rated Nigeria as the least vulnerable economy in the world based on a variety of economic indicators. Our ranking, ahead of all other leading developed and emerging economies across the globe, is indicative of the stability and safety that our ongoing economic reforms have guaranteed.

It is against this cautiously optimistic economic backdrop that the 2009 Budget Proposal, which I here by present, was prepared.

THE 2009-2011 MEDIUM-TERM SECTOR STRATEGIES AND THE 2009 BUDGET

The 2009 Budget preparation has been based on the outcomes of the 2009-2011 Medium-Term Sector Strategies which held in July 2008, with the active involvement of the Organised Private Sector and Civil Society, and in consultation with the relevant Committees of the National Assembly. This consultation with the National Assembly was continued in a series of interactive meetings between the Presidential Committee on the Budget and many of the Committees of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, such as the Legislative Joint Committees on Works. The commitment and input of the Distinguished and Honourable Members of the National Assembly in this work is deeply appreciated and underscores the spirit of cooperation and consultation with which the Budget has been prepared.

The 2009 Budget preparation also drew upon the Medium-Term Fiscal Framework which was conveyed to the National Assembly in October. However, this framework has since been reviewed in light of recent economic developments. We have sought to be more efficient in the use of public resources by eliminating or rationalising areas of waste and focusing on the critical sectors that would propel the growth of our economy and help us realise the objectives of the Seven-Point Agenda. We are moving from a system where we spread our limited resources thinly across many projects that take several years to complete, to one where we concentrate on fewer, highly prioritised projects, which we can bring to quick completion.

REVIEW OF THE 2008 BUDGET

The 2008 Budget was based on projected oil production of 2.45 million barrels per day, a benchmark oil price of US\$9.00/barrel and an exchange rate of NGN 150/US\$. Based on these assumptions, I signed into law last April an Appropriation Bill of N2.748 trillion, representing a 32% increase in federal spending over the 2007 fiscal year.

This, however, was based on a prior understanding with the National Assembly that the level and composition of projected expenditure under the 2008 Budget would be subsequently reviewed. Consequently, I submitted a proposal for a Budget Amendment to the National Assembly in July, which, I am pleased to say, has now been passed by the National Assembly. I congratulate the Leadership, and the Distinguished and Honourable Members for this gesture, which exemplifies the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect between both arms of government in the service of our people. Some of the efficiency savings from this reduced appropriation are being applied to finance the 2008 Supplementary Budget, which is designed to provide for certain items such as critical expenditure in the power sector.

Again, I am happy to observe the speedy approval of the 2008 Supplementary Budget by the National Assembly.

The performance of the 2008 Budget has been mixed. While releases of budgetary allocations to the MDAs have been on course, with 100% of the capital vote having been released by the middle of November, actual utilisation has not kept pace with the releases due to a number of factors which we are closely looking into. On the revenue side, although international oil prices reached record High levels in the first half of 2008, overall revenue performance has been below expectation, due to domestic oil production disruptions and declining international energy prices, as the global economy responds to the transnational financial crisis.

The aggregate projection for Federation Account receipts in 2008 was N4.529 trillion. Oil-related revenue was expected to amount to N3.606 trillion or 80% of this sum while non-oil sources of revenue were to account for the balance of N923 billion or 20%. In addition to volatility in international oil prices, actual crude oil production has been lower than projected, averaging just over 2 million barrels/day, due to the situation in the Niger Delta. As a result, overall revenue receipts have been well below expectation.

On a positive note, non-oil revenues have performed better than anticipated, due largely to increased efficiency of collection of the various taxes. Indeed, the current oil price situation underscores the overdependence of the Federal Budget on oil related receipts. Consequently, this Administration will continue to lay emphasis on diversifying our sources of revenue from oil to non-oil sources. In the 2009 fiscal year, increased emphasis will be placed on increasing remittances from public corporations, parastatals and agencies. In this regard, we anticipate greater Independent Revenue of about N306 billion from various sources. The Federal Inland Revenue and Nigerian Customs Services will be further empowered to meet their mandates and shall be expected to increase their efficiency in collection.

Trade related revenues will increase, as the 48-hour cargo clearance reforms transform the efficiency of our ports.

While the tariff bands under the new 2008-2012 Nigeria Customs and Tariff Book are lower than what previously obtained, the fifth band of 35% continues to afford modest protection for some of our key local industries. The new tariffs are also consistent with our commitment to expanding trade across the ECOWAS region and creating new export opportunities for our domestic industries. As compliance improves and the incidence of smuggling reduces, we expect that non-oil, trade-related revenue will increase. Finally, as we increase spending on our transportation and power infrastructure, we will ensure a better investment environment for our industries, entrepreneurs and investors through substantial reduction in the cost of doing business.

PHILOSOPHY AND THRUST OF THE 2009 BUDGET

The 2009 Federal Budget is focused on delivering on the promises of this Administration's Seven-Point Agenda by enhancing investment in critical, physical infrastructure and human capital development, implementing socio-economic reforms and consolidating democracy.

Many of the 2009 Budget interventions adopt a multi-dimensional approach in addressing key challenges to our development as a nation. As our Public-Private Partnership policy is fully implemented, private initiatives are expected to complement the Government's interventions in key areas of our economy with the overarching objective of making a positive, tangible and enduring difference to the life of the ordinary Nigerian.

The philosophy underlying the 2009 Budget is to give priority to the completion of ongoing projects, which will quickly deliver tangible results in service delivery. Accordingly, rather than indiscriminately embarking on new projects, this Administration has opted to devote more resources to completing existing projects and discharging outstanding obligations from the 2007 and 2008 fiscal years. We will continue to ensure that all new projects are well articulated, properly costed, and sensibly prioritised, taking into account available resources and the implementation capacity of the MDAs.

The thrust of the 2009 Federal Budget is to deliver on our promises to reduce poverty and attain our Millennium Development Goals. Our guiding vision is as encapsulated in the Seven-Point Agenda. By enhancing physical infrastructure through improving the power and road transportation sectors, we can improve the capacity of our non-oil sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, to contribute to more sustainable and enduring economic growth and development. By investing in human capital development through education and healthcare, we can create a better future for the next generation.

We must continue to improve national security and enhance the ability of the law-enforcement agencies to discharge their functions. As a responsible and people-centred Government, we must continue to abide by the rule of law, promote transparency and accountability in governance, and relentlessly pursue our efforts to combat corruption. By remaining true to our vision, we will create a more prosperous and secure future for all the citizens of our nation.

In line with the above philosophy, the 2009 Budget provides 910/0 of the capital vote to five key priority sectors, namely:

- # *N361.2 billion for Critical Infrastructure, including capital allocations of N88.5 billion for Power, N15.4 billion for Aviation, N26.5 billion for Resources, N129.5 billion for Works, N35.2 billion for Transport and N48.7 billion (out of a capital vote of N64.45 billion) for critical infrastructure within the Federal Capital Territory;*
- # *N131.9 billion for Human Capital Development including N39.6 billion for Health, N33.6 billion for Education, N32.6 billion for MDGs Conditional Grants, N19.7 billion for MDGs Quick Wins Projects and N6.3 billion for MDGs Capacity Building;*
- # *N91.8 billion for Land Reform and Food Security focusing on Agriculture and Water Resources;*
- # *N67 billion for Security; and*
- # *N77.12 billion on the Niger Delta, comprising N27.12 billion for the NDDC and N50 billion on the newly created Ministry of the Niger Delta including provisions for enhancing critical infrastructure, environmental protection, youth development and grass-root empowerment.*

ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE 2009 BUDGET

The 2009 Budget is predicated on certain key assumptions that take a realistic fiscal outlook for 2009. These include:

Oil production of 2.292mbpd(200Sb:2.24Smbpd)

Benchmark oil price of US\$4S/barrel (200Sb: US\$S9)

Joint Venture cash calls of US\$S billion: (200Sb: US\$5 billion)

GDP growth rate of 8.9% (2008 b: 93%)

Inflation rate of 8.2%: (2008 b: 8.5%)

On the basis of these assumptions, taking into account the revenue formula, the total federally collected revenue is projected at N8.131 trillion, which includes oil revenues of N2.9405 trillion and non-oil revenues of N1.973 trillion (as well as other non-Federation Account items such as grants and special levies amounting to N217.5 billion). The total Revenue for the Federal Government Budget is forecast at N1.778 trillion including Independent Revenue of N306 billion.

2009 BUDGET EXPENDITURE

The aggregate expenditure for 2009 is N2.87 trillion, comprising N140.7 billion for Statutory Transfers, N283.6 billion for Debt Service, N1. 649 trillion for Recurrent (Non-Debt) Expenditure and N796.7 billion for Capital Expenditure.

This aggregate expenditure represents a 4.45% increase over the N2.748 trillion initially appropriated in 2008 and an 8.42% increase over the 2008 Amended Budget's level of expenditure of N2.647 trillion. More crucially, the capital vote of N796.7 billion is significantly higher than the actual capital expenditure of N491 billion in 2007.

KEY PROJECTS THAT WILL BE FUNDED BY THE 2009 BUDGET INCLUDE;

Power: N3.5 billion for the Mambilla Hydro-electric power generation project, N21.5 billion for other Generation projects (including N6.5 billion for the completion of the Niger Delta Power Holding Company's NIPP projects), N32 billion for Transmission projects, and N19.25 billion for Distribution projects;

PETROLEUM RESOURCES: N903.9 million for the Trans-Sahara Gas Pipeline, N6.7 billion for the Calabar- Umuahia-Ajaokuta Gas Pipeline, N10. 3 billion for the Ajaokuta-Abuja-Kano pipeline and till billion for the Gas Supply Pipeline to PHCN Delta IV;

WORKS: N10. 7 billion for Access Roads to 6 NNPC refmeries and ports, N56.86 billion for highways construction and rehabilitation, N4.3 billion for the construction of the 2nd Niger Bridge at Onitsha and N3.6 billion for the Guto/Bagana Bridge across the River Benue (both bridges are being constructed through PPP arrangements) and provisions for several other Presidential Initiative and Priority road projects;

TRANSPORT: N12.4 billion for the completion of the Ajaokuta- Warri line to the Delta Steel Jetty; N8.3 billion for the modernisation of locomotives, coaches and wagons, rehabilitation works and procurement of railway equipment, and N8.4 billion for the dredging of the Lower River Niger;

HEALTH: Healthcare projects including N6.5 billion on the sector's response to HIV I AIDS, N3 billion on Midwifery Services Scheme, N7.7 billion on maternal and children's health, and N6 billion on polio eradication;

AGRICULTURE AND WATER RESOURCES: N4.6 billion on the development of livestock production infrastructure, N15 billion on the supply of fertiliser, N6.5 billion on tractor service PPP schemes, N9.2 billion on the construction and rehabilitation of dams, and N1 1.6 billion on water supply and sanitation; and

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGER DELTA: the new Ministry will invest N28.4 billion on the East-West Road to improve accessibility to the region, N92.8 million on projects to improve and restore the environment and N18.6 billion on other projects, such as the establishment of two sophisticated skills acquisition centres to help the youths from the region acquire practical skills relevant to the energy and petrochemicals industry.

BUDGET/IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF/DELIVERABLES

In line with this Administration's emphasis on ensuring service delivery and insisting on the rule of law, transparency and accountability, the MDAs will be expected to implement their projects and programmes with the deepest sense of responsibility and with emphasis on due process in the implementation of this Budget. Emphasis would be on increasing value for money, setting the highest standards of accountability and probity in the discharge of public service, and expecting these standards to be respected by all.

As we move towards a more dynamic, results-oriented and performance-based budgeting process, the MDAs will be held to their commitments to delivering measurable targets and outputs. Specific areas of note include:

- # **SECURITY:** *the Police are investing N5.738 billion in a new initiative in enhancing security and community policing in 7 cities across the Nation, namely Abuja, Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, Maiduguri and Onitsha. The Nigerian Police Force is committed to reducing crime by 40% in these 7 cities over the next year. The Interior Ministry is investing Ni.8billion in prison infrastructure rehabilitation to improve the security of the prisons and provide better facilities for reorienting convicted felons for rehabilitation into society.*
- # **WORKS & HOUSING;** *the Ministry proposes in 2009 to complete the construction and rehabilitation of 3,293km length of roads. Under the FERM A programme, 10,676km of federal roads will be kept in motorable condition under the Retainership Programme, and 20,000km of roads will undergo emergency repair work. The Zonal Intervention Roads project will cover a total of almost 2,400kms of roads. This Administration is also committed to accelerating the enhancement of road works by maintaining 10,000km of roads every year for the next three years.*
- # **POWER GENERATION;** *the Government is increasing investment in power generation by enhancing NNPC's ability to provide 1.2 billion SCF of gas to the domestic market, so as to ensure that this Administration can deliver 6000 MW of power by the end of 2009.*
- # **FOOD SECURITY;** *in 2009, the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources will increase land under cultivation by 5%, by optimising 220, 000 hectares of irrigated land and irrigating 12, 000 hectares of arable land. This will result in an increased yield of between 50-250% depending on the type of crop. The Ministry also intends to increase fish production from 650, 000 metric tonnes to 1.5 million metric tonnes. The Ministry is targeting an overall increase of 8% in agriculture's contribution to GDP.*
- # **HEALTH;** *The Ministry of Health is completing the modernisation of the Teaching Hospitals in Calabar, Awka and Ife, completing the modernisation of 7 specialist hospitals in Kaduna, Lagos, Kano, Calabar, Enugu, Maiduguri and Abeokuta, and scaling up investment in its polio eradication programme.*
- # **FCT;** *the Government is investing over N11.3 billion to accelerate the completion and furnishing of the Foreign Affairs Headquarters to enable the Ministry relocate to its new premises by 2009, freeing up their existing accommodation for use by other MDAs in need of office accommodation. This is in addition to the Shehu Shagari Complex and the Federal Ministry Building Phase II (Bullet House) which will all be completed and furnished in the 2009 financial year, ready for occupation by the MDAs. The FCT will also invest N5.1 billion in the construction of water treatment plants, N10.8billion on completing various road projects, N3.5billion for Abuja Technology Village, and N11 billion for the Abuja Metro rail project.*

FISCAL BALANCE

December 3, 2008 The fiscal balance is a deficit of N1.09 trillion or 3.95 %0 of GDP, based on our assumed benchmark oil price of US\$45/barrel and forecast production of 2.292mbpd. The deficit is to be financed by outstanding signature bonuses, proceeds of ongoing privatisation, the recall of US\$200million from the Nigerian Trust Fund of the African Development Bank, any unspent balances from the 2008 Budget, domestic borrowing and a Naira-denominated international bond issue of US\$500million. The latter bond issue is primarily for the development of a benchmark for the pricing of local and foreign currency denominated sovereign debt instruments.

The decline in international oil prices has compelled Government to make some exceptional adjustments in our spending plans and priorities. In this regard, this Administration is introducing certain policies to curb inefficient spending in MDAs. Given the need to address the infrastructure gap and make key investments in priority sectors, aggregate spending remains relatively large, compared to revenue. In this regard, the Government considers it expedient to seek the consent of the National Assembly to take the extraordinary step of exceeding, in the short term, the deficit target we set for ourselves under the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2007. However, we remain committed to reverting to a more conservative and sustainable fiscal deficit of 3%, or lower, in the minimum term, consistent with international best practice.

Monetary policy in the medium term will be focused on continuing efforts at managing inflation within a single-digit and keeping interest rates at appropriate levels using the present market-determined monetary management system. We are committed to maintaining an appropriate exchange rate and taking necessary steps to manage the volume of money supply through the Central Bank's open market operations.

NEW PUBLIC LENDING EFFICIENCY POLICY MEASURES

In view of the challenging international and local environment, our Administration has adopted certain policy measures to ensure that the 2009 Budget reflects these new realities. To maintain accelerated capital investment in key priority areas, and to strengthen and increase efficiency in public expenditure management, certain sacrifices have had to be made in the overall national interest. Accordingly, under the 2009 Budget Proposal, recurrent expenditure by way of overheads is being frozen, in the main, at the 2008 level or substantially cut, in a number of cases.

Investments in non-priority capital outlays such as the acquisition of new vehicles, and the construction and furnishing of new headquarters for MDAs, have been suspended. Excessive expenditure on international travels and training also has been curbed. Recurrent expenditure on personnel costs will be controlled with the full deployment of IT, by way of the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), to all MDAs. Payments for goods and services supplied will be discharged through the e-payment system to increase efficiency and reduce avenues for corruption.

These new policy measures apply across all MDAs, and will also be fully applicable to all parastatals and agencies that are not funded by the Treasury. While these policy measures will require significant adjustment across the public sector, they allow greater emphasis to be given to enhancing capital expenditure on ongoing projects, in key priority areas, despite the reduced resources available to the Government in the 2009 fiscal year.

CONCLUSION : DELIVERING DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE SEVEN -POINT AGENDA

Mr. Senate President, Mr. Speaker, Distinguished Senators, Honourable Members of the House of Representatives, our strong economic condition today has been won through our commitment to preserving macroeconomic stability and maintaining prudent public expenditure management. Although the challenges ahead of us as a Nation are formidable, our commitment to translating the gains of our macroeconomic reforms into tangible, positive and enduring change for all Nigerians, remains firm.

We remain steadfastly focused on our vision for Nigeria, as encapsulated in the Seven-Point Agenda and the Vision 20-2020 programme. By being faithful to our guiding principles of value for money, service delivery, accountability and the rule of law, we can face the challenges thrown up by the uncertainty and turbulence currently confronting the global economy with a well-founded confidence in the prudence of our policies and our unwavering resolve to see them through. We will actively engage with the Legislature with a view to ensuring that not only will the 2009 Budget be faithfully implemented but also that our success in this undertaking will lay a firm foundation for future budget cycles.

Respected Members of the National Assembly, I once again wish to thank you for your patriotism, cooperative spirit, and steady support over the course of the annual budget cycle. I must place on record the consummate and thorough manner in which the National Assembly has engaged with the Executive in our budget preparation, monitoring and implementation work.

As I have before you the 2009 Budget Proposal of the Federal Government of Nigeria for your consideration, I look forward to an expeditious passage, and even greater collaborative efforts in our joint effort to move our great nation forward into a more promising future.

I thank you most sincerely for your attention.

May God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

5. Vote of Thanks:

Mr Speaker, on behalf of the National Assembly thanked the President thus:

Your Excellency, Mr President and Commander-in-Chief

Your Excellency, Mr Vice President,

President Your Excellency, Mr Deputy Speaker,

Distinguished Senators,

Honourable Members of the House of Representatives,

Honourable Ministers here present.

It is my privilege to deliver the Vote of Thanks on this occasion. Your Excellency's presentation of the 2009 budget to this Joint Session has re-enacted the symbols of our constitutional democracy. This being the second full budget by the President Musa Yar'Adua administration, it has expectedly re-affirmed the commitment to far-reaching and comprehensive reforms.

Mr President, we appreciate government's funding predicament in terms of the current instability in the global oil and finance markets. Even within the adverse circumstances, we note that this budget is appropriately targeted at improving the living standards of our people through the provision of critical infrastructure and other indices of development. The major focus on security, infrastructural provision and the Niger Delta has been matched with the comparative level of funding that would ensure that your administration's plans for these priority areas are fully realized.

We must all brace up to make the 2009 budget the best it can be. We will, therefore, work with the Executive arm to ensure that there is a significant enhancement in the performance of the 2009 budget, especially in the area of capital funding; which was arguably the bane of the 2008 budget. In strengthening our oversight functions, we will ensure that budget performance is geared towards meeting the specific objectives of your administration.

We have demonstrated our preparedness to support government through our application of the input-output-outcome, corporate governance, expenditure strategy. You may recall, Your Excellency, that our unwavering commitment to oversight activities led to the recovery of about N450 billion unspent funds from the 2007 budget. For the 2008 Appropriation Act, our investigations also reveal preliminary reports that N13.5 Billion (about N2 trillion) was spent on the Power sector without commensurate results. Significantly too, we discovered that in the last five years alone, over \$24 billion (about N3 trillion) revenue collected by Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) was not remitted to the Federation Account as constitutionally provided. Our investigative activities on the NNPC are still on-going, the objective of which is to formulate proper legislative framework for the 7point Agenda and not to persecute anybody.

In spite of internal and external distractions, we will continue to ask the right questions with a view to correcting mistakes of the past. This is perhaps the only way we can provide a synergy with other arms of government to translate your reforms to desired outcomes.

In the National Assembly, we will continue to provide the needed support towards the attainment of the MDGs. We believe that the objectives of the 7-Point Agenda are achievable. We are also of the conviction that the larger Vision 20:2020 is realizable.

Your Excellency, Mr. President, Sir, while we expedite action in approving the revenue needed to implement your administration's programmes, on behalf of all Distinguished Senators and Honourable Members of the National Assembly, I wish to appreciate most sincerely, Your Excellency's deep commitment to the goal of uplifting the living standards of our people and leading Nigeria to greater glory.

Thank you all, and may God continue to bless Nigeria.

*RT HON. DIMEJI S. BANKOLE,
CFR Speaker*

6. Closing Prayers:

Senator Benjamin N. Barigha-Amange and Hon. Aminu Tumbawal offered the Christian and Muslim closing prayers respectively.

7. Adjournment:

At 1.40 p.m. the Chairman adjourned the Joint Session of the National Assembly *Sine The*.

David Mark
Chairman