



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

Friday, 9 June, 2017

1. The House met at 10.08 a.m. Mr Speaker read the Prayers.
2. **Votes and Proceedings**
Mr Speaker announced that he had examined and approved the *Second Votes and Proceedings* of Thursday, 8 June, 2017.

The Votes and Proceedings was adopted by unanimous consent.

3. **Announcement**
Moment of Solemnity:
Mr Speaker invited the House to observe a minute silence in honour of all Members that passed away.

The House observed a minute silence in honour of the departed Members.

4. **Address by the Honourable Speaker:**
Mr Speaker read the following address to mark the second year anniversary:

Protocols:

Permit me to welcome all of us to this very important event marking the 2nd year anniversary of the 8th House of Representatives. It is indeed a rare privilege to preside over this House on such a momentous occasion attended by many of our predecessors who made this institution what it is: a House of the Nigerian people.

2. *We have chosen to mark this day, not because we are in the mood for celebrations. No. We are marking this day even when the nation is struggling to exit from the excruciating economic recession and anguish being faced by our people.*

3. *Our intention therefore is to simply appraise ourselves, to find out at mid-term, how far we have kept faith with our constituents and Nigerians in the contract or social charter we entered into at the inception of the 8th House of Representatives via our LEGISLATIVE AGENDA. We wish to be availed an honest assessment of the achievements and failures we have recorded so far, as a deliberate effort that may lead to deepening our democracy and its tools with which to approach with the needed confidence, the next two years left of our mandate.*

4. *It is important to ask ourselves some hard questions. Have we always placed the interest of our Constituents and Nigerians first in all our endeavours? Have we always placed national interest above self, regional and other interests? Are we patriotic or partisan? Have we used our legislative authority to expose corruption, inefficiency and waste in government activities? Have we made laws for the peace, order, and good government of Nigeria? Have we shown fidelity to the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in Chapter two of the Constitution?*
5. *The answer to above posers is the criteria and yardstick to assess who we are. Are we leaders or mere politicians? The difference is that while politicians are just interested in the next election, leaders are cultural architects because they create the environment by which others can grow and flourish.*
6. *On my part, I will answer the above posers with qualifications. Yes, we have done reasonably well in most of the indices indicated. But there is a very large room to do even more. I answer these questions, fully conscious of the fact that self-appraisal is inherently problematic and is prone to bias. The appraisal of the general public and our peers will be more objective. Let me therefore save myself from the dishonour of marking our own script and submit to the judgment of those given the task of appraising our performance today.*
7. *However, I must hasten to add that for our appraisal not to miss the mark, it must take into account our promise to bring change to and render nugatory the old narratives about our Parliament. We must never discount the fact that it is not what you change from but what you change to that brings true transformation. Change is about what you embrace not what you abandon. Objective assessment is often difficult in an environment such as ours where we want those in government to live the way we want but we want to be free to live anyhow.*
8. *Hon colleagues and distinguished guests, before I hand over this issue to others, I would crave your indulgence to make few comments and observations on our scorecard. In terms of the core mandate of law-making, we have remained a bastion of legislative activism. Indeed members of the 8th House of Representatives are in keen competition with one another in fashioning out legislative solutions to myriad of problems facing the nation. That is why in all facets of law-making, we can comfortably and conveniently assert that we have broken all records.*
9. *Statistics bear this out. The total number of Bills introduced so far are 1064 out of which Executive Bills are 50, Senate Bills transmitted to the House — 21 and Private Members Bills — 993. A total of 126 Bills have been passed by the House and the others are at various stages in the legislative mill. 27 Bills have received Presidential assent and a lot more are in the pipeline. Each of the achievements highlighted above is unsurpassed by any previous Assembly. The sheer volume of these Bills attests to the vibrancy of the House in its attempt to legislate on key areas of our national life at a very trying time in our history.*
10. *Public Petitions received in the last two years are over 500 in number and the Committee on Public Petitions conducts Public Hearings on these petitions almost every week to ensure citizen access to the legislature.*
11. *Whereas it is immediately difficult to measure the impact of these Bills, a thorough examination of them shows the interest of the House in getting the economy out of the current recession that has affected both large and small businesses as well as families across Nigeria.*
12. *On issue of Budget, we kept our promise to Nigerians at the beginning of the legislative session to ensure transparent deliberation and passage of the 2017 Appropriations Bill which will be signed into law early next week. We have also carried out significant Budget Reforms. For the first time in the history of Nigeria, a Public Hearing was conducted in the National Assembly to get the input of Nigerians in the budgetary process. Further reforms introduced include the details of the Appropriation Act being available to all members before passage in plenary; the requirement that*

members of each Committee should sign the Report of their Committees before being sent to the Committee on Appropriations. All these novel measures are unprecedented in the history of our Parliament. These proactive measures ensured that the House's debate and consideration of the 2017 budget proposal presented by the President was evidence based and geared towards galvanizing the economy for greater growth.

13. In addition to these, the House has considered and passed several Bills designed to stimulate economic growth and promote competition. These include: The Bill for an Act establishing Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, etc. This legislation has the potential to engender innovation and efficient allocation of resources, eliminate barriers to entry and restrictive trade practices in our market. It will have a hugely positive impact on the quality of goods and services and their prices in the interest of the Nigerian consumer. Several Bills and Resolutions aimed at improving ease of doing business in Nigeria have been passed and more are in the works.
14. Realising that underemployment is as grave a problem as unemployment, we in the House have introduced a Bill on new minimum wage Bill to promote the welfare and well-being of Nigerian Workers especially in light of changing economic realities. For us it is unacceptable that the average Nigerian worker is shut out from the promise of democracy, which is: "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". Our democracy must be made to work for all Nigerians including our workers who must have the tools with which to pursue happiness while in active service or in retirement.
15. One other challenge that the country has had to grapple with is corruption. Our legislative response has been by way of legislation and Resolutions. Many Bills in this respect have been passed, and many are still in the mill. Some motions have led to the series of investigative Hearings that are ongoing. Besides we have injected oversight emphasis in that direction.
16. This 8th House of Representatives introduced Sectoral Debates. The idea is to get Ministers to share their vision and how they intend to achieve them so that Parliament can hold them accountable to goals they themselves have set. The first phase of the debate on diversification of the Nigerian economy has been concluded. The other phases are scheduled in the next Session.
17. I must mention this to our collective credit, that the cohesion in the House is one of the major achievements of the 8th House. Without this, all else would have fallen apart as valuable hours of legislative business would have been dissipated on the management of internal squabbles. This we achieved by always placing patriotism above partisanship which is key to the unrelenting exemplary maturity that is seen on the floor, week in week out. It was Albert Einstein who said, "life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving". Dear colleagues patriotism is and will always be what keeps us moving and balanced. Permit me to commend and deeply appreciate you all as we look forward to even greater cohesion in the years ahead.
18. This self-appraisal cannot be complete without mentioning areas for further improvement. The timely submission of Reports by various Committees require improvement in the next legislative Session. To this end, we would ensure that timelines for legislative measures referred to Committees are strictly enforced. We need to also ensure that Ad-Hoc Committees do not constitute themselves into permanent or Standing Committees.
19. Furthermore, we need to do a better job of coordinating the activities of various Committees to ensure synergy and avoid overlapping of activities and functions.
20. On this note, it is my singular pleasure to once again welcome us all to this Special Session, and to specially thank my Honourable colleagues for your support, solidarity, patience, understanding, comradeship, hard work and harmony exhibited in the last two years in spite of many daunting challenges. Having said this, it is now time for me, to surrender the floor to our eminent assessors for their appraisal.
21. Thank you all, God bless you and bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Mr Speaker called on invited Guests to give their appraisal remarks of the House in the last two years in the following order:

- (i) Prof. Joash Amupitan — General Appraisal of the Legislative Agenda of the 8th House of Representatives

THE APPRAISAL OF THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA OF THE 8TH HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF NIGERIA

1. INTRODUCTION

Let me start by congratulating the 8th House of Representatives for this big leap — the occasion of the second year anniversary. When the Legislative Agenda was introduced in June 2015, a lot of people felt it was just a mere political propaganda by the new leadership of the House of Representatives. However, it was not in doubt at the inception that the Agenda was to guide the 8th House of Representatives throughout its four years tenure. The leadership meant business and today we are gathered to review the two years of the Legislative Agenda and indeed to celebrate the National Assembly.

Legislative agenda is one of the important concepts in modern democratic system. The nature, scope and effectiveness depends on the form of government whether a Presidential system or Parliamentary system; the Party system- whether one party or multi party and whether the party is a strong party (disciplined) or a weak (undisciplined) and the nature of parliament whether unicameral or bicameral. In a Parliamentary system, the responsibility for the legislative agenda is controlled by the executive while in a Presidential system, it is controlled by the Parliament.

Today is historic because it is an opportunity to appraise the work of the House of Representatives in the last two years. In doing this, the House will be commended in areas they have achieved the given target and also areas that are outstanding will be brought ought. Sometime, as a Nation, we achieve so much but we close our eyes to the achievements and focus on what has not achieved and that is one of the major reasons for underdevelopment. If we do not blow our trumpets where we have made significant mark, no one will blow it for us and the World will assume we have failed. The Western press is only interested in negative reports coming from Africa and especially Nigeria. That is why our indigenous broadcast stations such as NT A, AIT, Channels, Silver birds, etc should be commended although they can do more. Just like the proverbial lizard in "Things Fall Apart" that jumped from the high Iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did.

2. MEANING OF A LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The term Legislative Agenda is hardly defined by authors and even in Parliamentary Procedures. In fact, it may be more expedient to consider "Legislative" and "Agenda" separately to have an understanding of what the two concepts are all about. An agenda is defined! as "a list, plan, outline, or the like, of things to be done, matters to be acted or voted upon". This definition for our purpose cannot be improved upon. On the other hand Legislative is "having the function of making laws" or "of or relating to the enactment of laws". It is obvious from above that a Legislative Agenda is a plan or list or an outline or something to be done or matters to be voted or acted upon by a person or body having the functions of making laws. Therefore a Legislative Agenda is one that relates to the legislative plan of parliament over a given period.

In the same vein, the Dictionary of Parliamentary Procedure' defines a legislative agenda as the "The Government's legislative plans for the session, usually set out in the Throne Speech. The Government is free to modify its legislative plans without notice during the course of the session". From this definition, a legislative agenda is the government legislative plan, usually for a particular period, set out in the throne or inaugural speech and

subject to modification as may be necessary. Therefore, it is not immutable. In this context, the Legislative Agenda of the 8th House of Representatives is that Legislative Plan that was adopted by this Honourable House in June 2015 to guide the House throughout its four years duration.

3. **BASIS FOR A LEGISLATIVE AGENDA**

The power to legislate in Nigeria is by virtue of section 4 of the Constitution of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) vested in the National Assembly. It was for this reason that section 4 (1) of the Constitution provides:

The legislative powers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be vested in a National Assembly for the Federation, which shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives.

In addition, it shall be the responsibility of the National Assembly to make laws for the whole of Nigeria. Accordingly, section 4 (2) of the Constitution provides:

The National Assembly shall have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Federation or any part thereof with respect to any matter included in the Exclusive Legislative List set out in Part I of the Second Schedule to this Constitution.

The House of Representatives therefore derives its powers to make law for Nigeria in section 4 of the Constitution. However, it shared this power alongside with the Senate. The House of Representatives is in line with section 49 of the Constitution consist of 360 Members representing constituencies of nearly equal population as far as possible. It states —

Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the House of Representatives shall consist of three hundred and sixty members representing constituencies of nearly equal population as far as possible, provided that no constituency shall fall within more than one State.

The 360 members represent the people of Nigeria. That is why they are regarded as the Representatives of the people. The Legislative Agenda of the 8th House of Representatives therefore represents the Agenda of the People of Federal Republic of Nigeria. That is how important it is and ought not to be taken with levity.

Remarkable, section 4 comes under Part II of the Constitution which is titled “The Power of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”. Under this part, we have the three organs of Government stated therein. The Executive Power of the Federation is stated in section 5 while the Judicial Powers is stated in section 6. It is seen that the initiation of Governance is the Legislature, followed by the Executive who implements the laws and the Judiciary who interprets the laws. No wonder, it used to be said that the Parliament is so powerful that it can turn a man to a woman and vice versa. The Constitution is therefore the basis of the 8th House of Representatives making this Legislative Agenda and it is therefore within its competence to so do.

The House of Representatives is not only empowered to make laws but can also exercise the powers which it does possess for the purpose of assisting in carrying out a policy which may affect matters which are directly within its legislative competence. This point was brought out clearly by the Supreme Court in the case of **ATTORNEY GENERAL, ONDO STATE V. ATTORNEY GENERAL FEDERATION** where Ogwuegbu, JSC (as he then was) held:

“I have held in this judgment that the National Assembly can exercise the powers which it does possess for the purpose of assisting in carrying out a policy which may

affect matters which are directly within its legislative competence. It can also exercise powers, which it does possess for assisting in carrying out a policy, which may affect matters not directly within its legislative powers. See Osborne v. The Commonwealth (1911) 12 CLR 321 and Radio Corporation Pty Ltd v. The Commonwealth (1938) 59 CLR 170”.

“... where an enactment is in relation to a matter within the enumerated classes of subjects expressly assigned to Parliament (in this case by section 15 (5) and item 60 (a) on the exclusive legislative list of the constitution), the National Assembly may by that enactment provide for matters which, although within the legislative, or even executive, competence of the states, are necessarily incidental or ancillary to effective legislation by the National Assembly in relation to that enumerated matter. See Attorney-General for Ontario v. Attorney-General for the Dominion (1896) AC 348 at 359 and 360. The ICPC Acts is an enactment for the peace, order and good government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Any legislation on corruption and abuse of power must be of concern to every Nigerian notwithstanding that its operation will affect property and civil rights for citizens in a State. Such an enactment like all enactment of the National Assembly will be of paramount force”.

Uwais JSC also held in the same case that:

“Item 67 under the exclusive legislative list read together with the provisions of section 4, subsection (2) provide that the National Assembly is empowered to make law for the peace, order and good government of the federation and any part thereof. It follows, therefore, that the National Assembly has the power to legislate against corruption and abuse of office even as it applies to persons not in authority under public or government office. For the aim of making law is to achieve the common good. The power of the National Assembly is not therefore residual under the constitution but might be concurrent with the powers of State House of Assembly and local government council, depending on the interpretation given to the word “State” in section 15 subsection (5) of the constitution”.

From above therefore the Legislative Agenda of the 8th House of Representatives is the Agenda of the People of Nigeria.

IMPORTANCE OF THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The importance of the Agenda is that it can be said to be the Vision for the Nigeria. Even where a vision emanates from a President, it may not be effective and accepted until it is accepted by parliament. The vision of a Nation can be contained in the legislative agenda. As stated by A.P.J. Abdul Kalam former President of India”:

When I took over as president, I studied the Constitution, and the more I studied it, the more I realised that it does not prevent the president of India from giving the nation a vision. So when I went and presented this vision in Parliament and in legislative assemblies; everyone welcomed it, irrespective of party affiliations.

4. THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA OF THE 8TH HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The 8th House of Representatives put together a legislative agenda for its life span (2015-2019). The legislative agenda has fifteen main parts apart from the background which contains the Introduction and the Principles of the Legislative Agenda.

The underlying principles behind the legislative agenda are as follows:

- i. Build a House of Representatives with integrity and capacity to effectively and efficiently deliver on its constitutional and legislative mandate.*

- ii. *Operate a House of Representatives that responds to citizens' demands for greater transparency and accountability in the way the legislative activities of government are conducted.*
- iii. *Develop and implement an effective communication system for the House of Representatives in both its internal and external communications.*
- iv. *Establish an e-parliament that emphasizes use of ICT and digitization in legislative activities.*
- v. *Identify priority legislation for the country and ensure passage within a defined time frame.*
- vi. *Introduce necessary legislative interventions to promote equality and inclusiveness, and entrench the rights of Women, Youths and vulnerable groups in the society.*
- vii. *Establish necessary legislative interventions that respond to national economic challenges, address poverty and rebuild infrastructure.*
- viii. *Respond to Nigeria's demand for Constitutional and Electoral reform including the passage of already agreed alterations to the Constitution and the Electoral Act.*
- ix. *Promote regular and collaborative engagement with all arms of government especially the Executive in order to enhance effective legislation for Nigerians.*
- x. *Give priority to legislative relationship and collaboration with constituents, civic groups, professional bodies, international development partners and various stakeholders.*

The fifteen areas covered by the Legislative agenda are as follows:

1. Legislative Needs Assessment

The Legislative has at its starting point a need assessment which aims at auditing and documenting the resources (equipment, manpower and existing processes) needed by the National Assembly to run its legislative activities and to provide information to the public on the statutory responsibilities, finances, expenditure and activities. More importantly, it should ascertain the cost of running the legislative process in Nigeria in comparison with what obtains in other jurisdictions. The Needs Assessment shall be carried out by an independent Committee comprising — Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), independent groups, and professional bodies with the support of its international development partners.

The Needs assessment will clearly bring out what it will cost to air, live, its public hearings, to communicate all its proceedings and activities to its different constituencies and the general public, to conduct proper oversight on the Executive, to maintain Constituency Relations, to maintain and equip the offices of Members both in their Constituencies and at Abuja, to maintain the four Agencies of the National Assembly such as National Institute for Legislative Studies, National Assembly Service Commission, the National Assembly Bureaucracy and Public Complaints Commission, to pay the Legislative Aides of members, to engage other technocrats and Consultants, to transport members from one point to the other for official activities, locally and internationally, to continue to build the capacity of members, locally and internationally, to service the Standing Committees, Special Committees and Ad-Hoc Committees of the National Assembly.

2. Internal Operations/Processes

The 8th House of Representatives will work to improve its internal operations and processes with the aim of enhancing legislative business. In this respect, there are five focal areas — strengthening the House Committee system, vigorous Oversight and Investigative hearings, review of the Standing Orders of the House, robust Code of Conduct for Members and tracking delegated legislations.

Strengthening the House Committee system: This Agenda seeks to —

- a. make the House Committees to be efficient, effective and result oriented.*
- b. make the House Committees the engine rooms of legislative business and activity.*
- c. Make the appointment of the leadership and memberships of the Committees reflect the experiences and capacity of members in different fields.*
- d. Fund the House Committees properly.*
- e. Ensure that the House Committees conduct their assignments within the time frame as time limits for delivery of Reports referred to Committees shall be strictly enforced.*
- f. Implement the use of templates, manuals, and standardised formats for Committee activities in the area of Reporting, Oversight activities, Minutes of meetings, Public Hearings and Quarterly/Annual Reports.*
- g. Ensure that House leadership conducts regular meetings with Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of all Special, Standing or Ad-Hoc Committees to set Legislative Targets, Review performance in the attainment of Targets and ensure that the priority legislative activities of the Committees are consistent with the Legislative Agenda of the House.*
- h. Ensure regular training and retraining of staff and increased capacity building of Members of the House to enhance their skills and ability to better carry out their responsibilities. Yearly Retreats and Seminars for Honourable Members would also be encouraged. To this end, the House shall support and strengthen the National Institute for Legislative Studies (NILS), to continue to fulfill its role as the capacity building Agency of the National Assembly.*
- i. Ensure proper relationship and communication between Committee Staff and Members to enhance efficiency.*

Vigorous Oversight and Investigative hearings: *The House considers that the oversight of executive programmes and activities as very critical to effective performance of the Executive and good governance in Nigeria. It will therefore:*

- a. Continue, in line with its mandate in Sections 88 and 89 of the Constitution to expose corruption, inefficiency and waste in the conduct of government business, conduct vigorous oversight of the executive branch to promote accountability and reduces incompetence, misuse of government funds and abuse of power.*

- b. *Strengthen its processes, Rules and internal structures to support its Oversight and Investigating Hearing activities and ensure full access to all government financial information.*
- c. *Institute an appropriate system to involve CSOs, citizen monitoring groups, and the Media in Oversight and monitoring and evaluation of projects.*
- d. *Utilize the necessary provisions of the Legislative Houses (Powers and Privileges) Act to ensure proper and effective oversight.*
- e. *Curb abuses associated with the exercise of this oversight functions by members.*
- f. *Develop mechanisms to sanction those who do not cooperate with its oversight or investigative activities or who refuse to implement legislative wishes or Resolutions.*
- g. *Develop necessary legislative tools and mechanism to coordinate the oversight and the investigating functions of the Committees to ensure that the problem of overlap of jurisdiction among its Committee and even Senate Committee is resolved. Specifically, the House in consultation with the Senate will implement joint oversight and investigative hearings where necessary, institute regular consultation mechanism and information sharing between Committees of the House and between House and Senate counterparts and generally streamline activities of Committees to avoid duplication and conflict.*

Review of the Standing Orders of the House: *The 8th House of Representatives aims at a further review of the Standing Orders of the House in order to achieve better efficiency in Lawmaking, Representation and Oversight activities.*

Robust Code of Conduct for Members: *The House shall —*

- a. *Put in place a robust Code of Conduct for members and ensure zero-tolerance for corruption or misuse and abuse of legislative powers.*
- b. *Ensure that the leadership and membership of the Ethics and Privileges Committee are people with the highest ethical standards.*
- c. *Maintain the highest ethical standards in the discharge of its constitutional responsibilities.*
- d. *Review comprehensively the Legislative Houses (Powers and Privileges) Act to bring it into conformity with the 1999 Constitution as amended and meet other challenges arising from performance of Legislative duties by Members of the House.*

Tracking delegated legislations: *Given that there is currently no properly defined mechanism and process of Rulemaking, Regulations and general subsidiary legislation by Executive Departments of government, the 8th House of Representatives shall develop an appropriate legislative mechanism to track delegated or subsidiary legislations in Nigeria.*

3. ***E-Parliament: E-Voting, Digitization and Archiving***

The 8th House of Representatives commits to the use of ICT in the daily conduct of legislative activities of the House. Accordingly —

- a. *E-parliament and e-voting platforms will be made a regular feature of the House.*
- b. *E-voting will be used regularly during voting to properly reflect voting records of Members and parliamentary accountability.*
- c. *The House shall collaborate with relevant stakeholders to achieve the goal of an e-parliament.*
- d. *The e-parliament initiative will operate on the platform of modern, up to date digital technology. Internet and intranet access supported by computerized legislative information management system will be put in place.*
- e. *The House is to establish and equip a Parliamentary Information Centre where information and documents of the National Assembly will be made available. This will further increase citizens' access to the legislature and solve the problem of public access to authentic documents of parliament.*

4. National Assembly Communication

The House of Representatives commits to improving its internal and external communications. Improved communication will change the negative perception of the House by the public a lot of which arises from a poor understanding of the workings of the National Assembly. The House shall ensure:

- a. **Internal House Communication:** *House to improve communication among members and between Committees to ensure that information is well shared and that actions are coordinated.*
- b. **Communication with the Senate:** *The House to liaise with the Senate to create a special mechanism for sharing information and ensuring speedy passage and concurrence of Bills. Improved Communication would lead to carrying out joint legislative activities such as oversight, public hearings and where necessary, investigative hearings. It will also promote coordinated action and synergy.*
- c. **Communication with the Executive:** *An effective system of communication to be put in place to ensure regular communication with the Executive so as to reduce friction and ensure effective legislative service delivery.*
- d. **Communication with the Public:** *House communication with the public will aim to address lingering perception challenges and open up processes and information to public scrutiny. Questions related to House expenses and emoluments of members of the National Assembly will be addressed and information put out in the public domain. The Hansard is to be regularly produced so that members and the public would be better exposed to the work of the legislature.*
- e. **Establishment of Radio and Television Stations:** *The House will facilitate the establishment of a dedicated radio and television station and other electronic and Media platforms to cover the activities of the National Assembly.*

5. ***Review of the National Budgetary Process***

The Budgetary process has remained one of the major challenges of Nigeria's democracy since 1999. The 8th House of Representatives is to introduce Legislative measures to support and implement a proper budgetary process to bring about economic development. The review of the budgetary process will emphasize the following:

- *Promotion of an inclusive budgetary process that seeks the cooperation of the Executive in institutionalising pre-budget interface and consultations.*
- *Adoption of an effective Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF).*
- *Strict compliance with the provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA), 2007.*
- *Insistence on prioritisation of budget expenditure that reflects approved budget lines*
- *Zero tolerance for non implementation of capital projects as approved in annual Budgets.*
- *Effective monitoring and evaluation of expenditure and of outcomes achieved - value for money.*

To further strengthen the process, the House will —

- a. *Revisit the Constitution Amendment passed by the 7th House mandating the President to submit his Budget proposals at least 3 months before the end of a fiscal year, instead of "at any time" before the end of a fiscal year currently in the Constitution. This is critical in passing annual appropriation bill on time.*
- b. *Examine the efficacy of conducting public hearings on the Budget before legislative approval as this exposes the National Budget to increased citizen and stake holder participation.*
- c. *Ensure proper functioning and operation of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, including a possible review of the Act, to streamline budgetary processes and achieve strict adherence to timelines for budget presentation and passage. The Finance (Control and Management) Act would be further examined to expunge all provisions that are inconsistency with the Constitution and Presidential system of government.*
- d. *Limit the time a programme would run except it is re-approved by the National Assembly. This will enable the MDAs to be careful and accountable, as they may have to come before the National Assembly periodically for renewal of implementation mandate.*
- e. *Amend section 82 of the Constitution to reduce the period of 6 months that the President is allowed to spend without appropriation as this provision severely distorts the Appropriation process.*
- f. *Ensure that the Reports of Committees oversight are sine qua non for the passage of budgets of MDAs as Committees are significant focal points of legislative oversight and must assert the "Power of the Purse".*

- g. *Take legislative measures to ensure that the Executive does not choose which aspects of the Appropriation Act it implements.*
- h. *Seek the cooperation of the Executive to develop and enforce a Needs Based Budgeting System rather than an 'envelop' Based Budgeting System.*
- i. *Ensure the coming into being of an independent effective, non partisan Budget Office (NABRO) by law to aid in economic and budgetary information and planning.*
- j. *Enforce strict compliance with the Reporting requirements by various officials and MDAs contained in the annual Appropriation Acts which are currently observed more in breach by the Executive without consequences.*
- k. *Ensure that the release of appropriated funds and general implementation of the Budget shall henceforth define the relationship between the Executive and the Legislature in the 8th Assembly as the Nigerian people are entitled to feel the impact of governance through the appropriation mechanism and process.*
- l. *Consider the integrity of the project selection process in the Annual Budget estimates submitted to the National Assembly by the President. A mechanism that makes the process of Project selection more transparent, equitable, professional, accountable and needs based shall be put in place with the cooperation of the Executive. The budget process should include basis and justification for project selection.*

6. National Economy and Development

The 8th House of Representatives will put in place legislative measures to promote rapid economic growth and development. The 11 focal areas of this agenda are as follows:

- a. **Non-Remittance of Internally Generated Revenue and Leakages:** *Several Departments and Agencies of Government generating revenues from their activities and functions fail to remit these to the Federation Account and often spend without appropriation. The House shall take legislative measures to enforce the Constitutional provision on revenue generation and remittance by carrying out a holistic review of enabling laws of various revenue generating MDAs and come up with relevant amendments that plugs loopholes that lead to revenue leakages. To this end, funds generated by departments and agencies shall be remitted to the Federation Account or the appropriate constitutionally mandated Public Funds of the Federation and the expenditure out of these Funds shall follow due appropriation process.*
- b. **Management of External Reserves:** *The House shall take legislative measures to better oversight the management of Nigeria's external reserves to achieve better accountability and transparency and full capture of all resources. In this connection, the House shall conduct a review of the CBN Act, the Sovereign Wealth Fund Act and all other Acts pertaining to the management of the nation's external reserves.*
- c. **Donor Funding:** *The House shall track the use of donor funds, grants and loans for development projects. The current practice of duplication of funding from government and donor sources implementing the same projects creates room for malfeasance and abuse. The House will strengthen the established mechanism to track the application of funds and moneys given by donors to MDAs to ensure accountability and transparent use of resources.*

The House shall further develop a mechanism to include these funds in the Appropriation process.

- d. **Infrastructure Development:** *The House will legislate to support rapid infrastructure development in the country. Legislative action will be taken to support infrastructure development and rebuilding in Nigeria covering areas such as public transportation, electricity, fast rail system, federal highways, modern airports, housing and general infrastructure.*
- e. **Legislative Initiative on New Cities and Regional Hubs of Development:** *The House shall through legislative action and working in concert with the Executive institute a process of establishing regional hubs of development in each of the six geopolitical zones of the country. Under this concept, legislative action and support will be given to identify and create at least one large and expansive area provided with 21st century infrastructure that creates a modern city equipped with basic infrastructure, fast rail, mono-rail, communications, ICT, etc. In this direction, a legal framework that actively involves private sector participation will be put in place and necessary amendments to relevant existing laws introduced.*
- f. **Legislative Initiative on North-East and Niger-Delta:** *In the case of the North East Zone of Nigeria, the House will take legislative action that supports the delivery of special economic development measures that address the root causes of problems specific to the North East geo-political zone of the country. Specifically, the challenges of insecurity and terrorism in the North-East leading to massive displacement of Nigerians with the resultant huge Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) situation must be specially addressed. Furthermore, the physical and infrastructural devastation of states of the North East is a national security emergency that should be confronted. In the case of the Niger Delta, various initiatives such as Derivation Funds in the Revenue Allocation Formula, Ecological Funds, Amnesty Programme, creation of NDDC, creation of Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs have not solved the problem of environmental pollution, poverty, and infrastructural decay of the Niger-Delta. Further legislative measures including vigorous oversight would be adopted to address this lingering challenge.*
- g. **Legislative Initiative on Employment and Job Creation:** *The House will seek to tackle current high unemployment rate in the country by legislative action and through appropriate budgetary interventions that seeks to create employment. In addition, the House will hold regular dialogue sessions with critical stakeholders to articulate appropriate legislative intervention that will address this problem.*
- h. **Legislative Initiative on Housing, Urban Development, Mortgages:** *The House will seek to tackle housing challenges in the country by legislative action and through appropriate budgetary interventions that seeks to create mass housing and provide access to mortgage finance. In addition, the House will hold regular dialogue sessions with critical stakeholders to articulate appropriate legislative intervention that will address this problem.*
- i. **Legislative Initiative on Power:** *The House shall take legislative action to tackle Nigeria's energy crisis that has led to a general collapse of industries and businesses and inflicted hardship on citizens. Legislative measures to support improved generation and distribution of electricity to homes and businesses will be encouraged.*

- j. **Legislative Initiative on Security:** The House will provide legislative backing to measures aimed at addressing National Security challenges including terrorism and insurgency in the North-East of the country, kidnaping, and crime generally. The legal framework to support the security services in tackling crime, terrorism and other National Security concerns would be given full support.
- k. **Legislative Initiative on Economic Diversification:** The House will take legislative initiatives that support diversification of Nigeria's economy to foster its development from a mono-product economy to a multi-product economy. Obstacles to businesses in identified sectors of the economy will be removed. Special legislative measures to promote private sector involvement and collaboration with government on projects and policies would be encouraged.

7. **Priority Legislation**

The agenda on legislative Priorities centres on two main heads —

- (i) **Legislative Priorities of the House:** The 8th House of Representatives aims at giving legislative priority to promote better living conditions for citizens. Legislation focused on reducing poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education and strengthening regulatory agencies in charge of education standards, promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and Youths and access to good health care services will be promoted.

Legislative measures will also be taken to tackle the issues of endemic unemployment; insecurity of lives and property; poverty alleviation; health and education; water access; Agriculture, Culture and Tourism; protection of intellectual property; endemic corruption; electricity and energy crises; and general infrastructure decay.

There are many critical Bills that the 7th House could not conclude or were not assented to, some of which include: the Petroleum Industry Bill, which was passed by the House but not by the Senate; the Electoral Act (Amendment) Bill; the Disability Bill, NABRO Bill, Transport Bills, Bills to domesticate treaties, protocols and international conventions ratified by Nigeria. These Bills will be given priority in the 8th House of Representatives.

- (ii) **Sectoral Debates:** The 8th House is to introduce sectoral debates on various aspects of Nigerian economy as part of its legislative initiative to address national problems. These sectoral debates will lead to the crafting of new laws or amendment to existing ones or generate recommendations on how to address the specific problem in question.

The House will designate specific legislative sitting days or weeks in its calendar specifically for discussion on various problems facing the nation. Such identified themes, sectors, areas or problems include employment and job creation, Health, Education and Social Services; Women, Youths and Children concerns; Power/Energy Sector, Oil and Gas, Science and Technology; Commerce and Industry; Transportation; Telecommunications; Agriculture; Mining; Manufacturing; Diversification of the Economy, Finance, Corruption, Security Matters, Infrastructure and other initiatives of urgent national importance.

8. **Review of the Laws of the Federation**

The Laws of the Federation were published into volumes in 2004 but there has been no effort to update the laws and bring them into conformity with current day realities. The House will pursue efforts to bring Nigeria's laws into contemporary times, repealing obnoxious and out dated portions of it and reenacting contemporary laws for the country which will be published and made accessible to the Nigerian public.

9. **Anti-Corruption**

The nation's anti-corruption laws will be reviewed by the 8th House of Representatives and harmonized to achieve greater effectiveness in tackling corruption.

The merger of existing anti-corruption bodies will be encouraged towards consolidation into a single and effective agency equipped and empowered to deliver on its mandate.

10. **Constitution Reform Process**

The laudable efforts of the 7th National Assembly that led to far reaching alterations to the 1999 Constitution was not assented to by the former President, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR. The House of Representatives will revisit the Constitution Reform achievements of the 7th Assembly with a view to achieving its passage. Since Constitution Alteration is a continuous process, any further proposals to amend the Constitution would receive support of the House. On the whole, the Constitution amendment process will be expedited and concluded within a given and early time frame.

11. **Harmonisation of National Identity Data Management System**

The House of Representatives is concerned that there are multiple identity management bodies and systems in the country, which includes the National Population Commission (NPC), the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), FRSC's Driving License and Data base, INEC's National Voters Card, NCCs communication and telephone data bases, Nigerian Police Force data base, and others. The House will review legislation creating these multiple bodies and systems with a view to consolidating and harmonizing them to achieve a single National Data Management System. The House's intervention will save costs and revenue for the country and create a much more effective and efficient National Identity Management System for Nigeria.

12. **Reduction of Cost of Governance**

There is national concern about cost of governance in Nigeria. Recurrent expenditure in the National Budget is about 75% while Capital Expenditure is less than 25%. This is clearly unacceptable. Committees set up by the Executive have recommended merging and consolidation of government Ministries, Departments and Agencies to significantly reduce the cost of governance. The House of Representatives will take legislative measures to carry out prudent reduction of the cost of governance in various areas of our national life.

13. **Executive-Legislative Relationship**

The House, while protecting its independence and autonomy, will maintain a robust and cooperative relationship with the Executive. As a consequence, the House shall consider naming a Liaison Officer to the Executive Branch, to foster synergy and improve relations. The House shall also develop a system to coordinate Executive officials and other witnesses appearance before Committees of the House.

It shall also encourage more effective engagement with the Executive on policy formulation and Budget initiation in order to minimize friction and ensure better service delivery.

14. Implementation

The 8th House will establish modalities for the implementation of this Legislative Agenda. Partnership, collaboration and cooperation with CSOs, development partners and professional bodies to realize the effective implementation and monitoring of this Agenda will be adopted.

15. Conclusion

The House adopts this Legislative Agenda as a framework to guide the operations of the House from 2015 - 2019. The implementation of this Legislative Agenda will require the cooperation of the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Executive Arm of the Government of the Federation. A copy of the Agenda as adopted will be transmitted to both the Senate and the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for their information and necessary collaboration.

5. THE JOURNEY SO FAR

Critical Success Factors

In appraising the success or otherwise of the Legislative Agenda, it is paramount to bring out what I called the 'Critical Success Factors' of the Agenda. There are six main critical success factors —

1. *Collaboration and cooperation of the Senate of the National Assembly. As pointed out earlier, the responsibility of making laws for Nigeria is not just that of the House of Representatives but performed jointly with the Senate. Since the principal reform sought to be brought about by the House is majorly in the area of legislation, working with Senate is a sine qua non. This is apparent from section 4 (1), 47 and 58 (3) of the Constitution.*
2. *Collaboration and cooperation with the Executive. When laws are made, the Executive is to execute. One of the reasons behind the poor implementation of the Budgets and poor finances of the Judiciary or National Assembly is the fact that the Executive is in charge of disbursement of funds under the Constitution after appropriation at the National Assembly. The Executive might not implement or execute projects identified as National Assembly projects despite the fact that it has been provided for in the budget. Moreover, the President must assent to every Bill passed by the National Assembly before it can become law under section 58 (1) of the Constitution.*
3. *The States Houses of Assemblies also have their part to play when it comes to amending any of the provisions of the Constitution under section 9 (2) of the Constitution.*
4. *The cooperation of political parties especially the ruling Party who may wish to impose its party's policy on the House.*
5. *The general public must also be properly sensitized to key into this Legislative Agenda. In this wise, The CSO, professional bodies and Labour Unions have critical roles to play. The perception of the general public towards the National Assembly must be worked on. A lot of people are ignorant about the workings and constitutional responsibilities of the National Assembly coupled with the fact that the institution has failed Nigerians in the past. This has made the public to be gullible. The perception can be changed through pursuing the welfare of the populace and speak for the people.*

6. *The current economic meltdown may hinder the oversight initiatives of the Agenda and the public hearings expected apart from the debilitating effect of the recession on the welfare of Nigerians. This will also hinder availability of funds for infrastructure and business development.*

It is remarkable to note that in drawing the Legislative Agenda, some of the above critical success factors were taken into consideration while some were not. The internal and external communications mechanisms put in place has greatly assisted the House in maintaining a cordial relationship with the Senate, the Executive, the Party, the States as well as the general public. On this note, big congratulations to the House.

Revolutionary Steps

So far, the House has taken some revolutionary steps since the Legislative Agenda was made in 2015.

***The Budget Process:** First the budget process which became so controversial and chaotic last year. The Budget process and Procedure in Nigeria from God knows when has always been faulty and Nigerians are yearly foisted with a situation of failed Budget- dead on arrival. However, the pretence continued. The poor budgetary process in Nigeria is not only a threat to the Nation's democracy but has made economic development a mirage. The late presentation of the Budget by the President each year thereby extending the process beyond the "Financial Year" under section 318 of the Constitution, the inability to implement the Budget fully especially capital projects and controversies over preference of the Executive for some projects as well as whether the National Assembly can increase the budget estimates as presented by the President are some of the major issues in the budget planning and implementation in Nigeria. Section 318 of the Constitution states that "financial year" means any period of twelve months beginning on the first day of January in any year or such other date as the National Assembly may prescribe.*

The 8th House of Representatives in the last two years have taken some steps to curtail and "kill" the various budget malaise in Nigeria.

The House position is that an Appropriation Act should run for an uninterrupted period of 12 months from the date the budget is signed by the President so as to save the Nation from the high rate of abandoned projects and distortions in the economic planning and that this does not require the amendment of section 318 of the Constitution to achieve this objective. The average implementation rate of the Nigerian Budget is put at between 30-50% every year. In the language of Speaker Yakubu Dogara.

As I counseled last year, an Appropriation Act must be allowed to run for an uninterrupted period of twelve months for the Executive to have enough time to execute it. This means that both the President and the National Assembly must find a way to continue the execution of the 2016 Budget especially the capital component till May 6, 2017 which is twelve months from the date President signed the 2016 Appropriation Act. This is also the clear intendment of the definition of a Financial Year in section 318 of the Constitution. The problem is that most often, the recurrent component of the Budget is implemented to an appreciable level, but the capital component execution is very low. It is crystal clear that the capital component of the 2016 Budget cannot realistically be implemented for only six months period, considering the time required for procurement processes and the raising of the revenue including loans by government. Except something is done, this will result in yet another failed Budget. A vicious circle repeated every year.

Consequent upon this and working with the Executive, the House extended the 2016 budget implementation period to May 2017 in order to give more time for the capital component of the budget to be implemented appreciably. This perhaps is one of the major accomplishments recorded in the implementation of the Legislative Agenda of the 8th House.

Moreover, the House has identified sections 81, 82 and 318 of the Constitution as requiring urgent legislative actions. Section 81 empowers the President to prepare and lay before the National Assembly "at any time" in each financial year estimates of the revenues and expenditure of the Federation for the next following financial year. The House has rightly identified this provision as one of the main problems of the budgeting process in Nigeria and has proposed an amendment of the section so that the Budget is laid at least "three months" before the end of the current financial Year before the National Assembly to be able to conclude the process before the end of the Financial Year. Further a budget time frame is also proposed to be included in the Constitutional amendment that will be binding on both the Executive and the Legislature.

In addition, the House has proposed an amendment of section 82 to reduce from 6 to 3 months the time in which the previous year's budget may continue to run in event that the Appropriation Act is not passed at the beginning of a financial year. The section empowers the President to authorize the withdrawal of moneys in the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Federation for the purpose of meeting expenditure necessary to carry on the services of the Government of the Federation for a period not exceeding months or until the coming into operation of the Appropriate Act, whichever is the earlier. It is the view of the House and in accordance with its Legislative Agenda that it seeks to reduce the period to 3 months to prevent laxity and abuse.

Section 318 is also to be amended to clearly define the financial year through which the Budget must run to ensure that its full twelve months course is completed. All this will require the concurrence of Senate, the Houses of Assemblies of States and the assent of the President.

*The House has set up a **Budget Reform Committee** to drive most of the reforms being proposed in accordance with the Legislative Agenda. The Committee is to "undertake a thorough and holistic review of all issues relating to the budget to ensue due process, more transparency, better accountability, openness and value for money. The Committee will comprise experts and professional organizations and will work in liaison with the Senate and the Executive Branch".*

The House has also, in line with the Legislative Agenda, proposed a robust pre-Budget interface between the Executive and the Legislature to reduce areas of friction during the Appropriation process and selection of projects to be included in the Budget to reflect the actual need and federal character. The stakeholders would also be part of the process through a robust public hearing.

The House has also passed the National Assembly Budget and Research and Research Office Bill (NABRO) in December 2016 to establish an independent Budget Office that will help the National Assembly to build capacity and provide the required information and statistics.

The House of Representative has introduced the Budget Process Bill, 2017 which seeks to address some of the problems associated with the budget problem in Nigeria especially the vicious circle of non-implementation of budgets in Nigeria and to incorporate some of above reforms contained in the Legislative Agenda. The Bill was

sponsored by Rt. Honourable Yakubu Dogara the Speaker himself. The Fiscal Responsibility Act (Amendment) Bill, 2015 has also been introduced in the House and the Committee report is being awaited.

Priority Legislations: Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the 8th House is in the area of priority legislation to promote better living conditions for citizens and address major sectors of the economy. Consistent with its core mandate of law making, there were 1055 Bills considered by the House between June 9, 2015 and 1st June, 2017; out of which 50 were Executive Bills, 18 were from Senate while 987 were private member Bills. Out of these figures, 351 Bills are awaiting second reading, 337 are referred to Committees, 30 are awaiting consideration while 122 have been passed by the House and transmitted to Senate for concurrence. In addition, 15 Bills were turned down while 18 Bills were withdrawn. In the first session of the 8th House, 685 Bills were considered while in the second session 370 Bills were considered. The House was much more vibrant in terms of law making in the first session than in the second year. This is perhaps traced to the activities of the Law Reform Committee set up by the Honourable Speaker to review the Laws of the Federation. The Committee submitted 176 Bills in the first Session to the House and 72 Bills in the second Session.

It is also remarkable that the President has assented to 22 House of Representatives Bills. In fact, of the 25 non-budget related Bills assented to by the President since the beginning of this administration, 22 emanated from the House of Representatives Committee on Review of the Laws of the Federation. In December 2015, the House passed a record of 130 Bills through the first reading. That was unprecedented and this feat earned the Speaker recognition from the Royal Commonwealth Society of Nigeria. Few months later another 100 Bills were introduced in one sitting. Major Bills considered by the House during this period are the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission Bill which is to protect consumers and ensure healthy competition in the economy; the Petroleum Industry Governance Bill, 2016, Petroleum Industry Bill, 2016, Petroleum Industry Fiscal Framework Bill, 2016, Bio-Fuel Energy Policy Bill, 2015, National Oil and Gas Museum and Research Centre (Establishment) Bill, 2016, Deep Offshore and Inland Basin Production Sharing Contracts Act (Amendment) Bill, 2016, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Statutory Appropriation Bill, 2016, Oil and Gas Free Zones Authority Statutory Appropriation Bill, 2016, Petroleum Host Community Development Bill, 2016, Palm Oil Development Bill, 2015, Commodity Exchange Bill, 2016, International Trade Commission Bill, 2015, Nigerian Railway Authority Bill, 2015, Internet Child Pornography Prevention Bill, 2015, National Biotechnology Development Agency (Establishment) Bill, 2015, Companies and Allied Matters Act (Amendment) Bill, 2015, Public Interest Disclosure Bill, 2015, Data Protection Bill, 2015, National Minimum Wage Act (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

Sectoral Debates: Another landmark achievement is the introduction of sectoral debates into the democratic processes. The House commenced the debates on economic diversification to address the problem caused by the fall in the price of crude oil. This featured Hon. Ministers appearing at the Plenary session of the House on the activities of their Ministries with respect to diversification. The Ministers of Information and Culture, Agriculture, Solid Minerals Development, Communications and Finance appeared and made presentations which were aired live on NTA, Radio Nigeria and Freedom Radio. This sectoral debate was regarded as the first of its kind in the legislative history of Nigeria.

The interaction was quite useful and afforded Hon. Members the opportunity to seek clarifications from Hon. Ministers. It has greatly improved Executive/Legislature Relationship. It has further restored hope to the Common man that the House is on top of the situation and alive to its responsibilities. The whole essence is to be able to craft new laws and strengthen the oversight functions of the House.

***Review of the Laws of the Federation:** This is item 8 of the Legislative Agenda of this current House. Keeping to faith with its determination to update the laws and bring them into conformity with current day realities, the Speaker inaugurated the Committee on the Review of the Laws of the Federation on 2nd July, 2015....*

6. **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Despite all odds, the 8th House of Representatives has within a period of two years achieved so much. The Legislative Agenda has been implemented so far through Bills, Resolutions and Public Hearings. As stated earlier, the Legislative Agenda represents the aspiration of the Nigerian People. Two years is gone. We will have to follow with kin interest the developments in the next two years to see whether the Agenda can take us to the Promised Land.

However, if the Legislative Agenda is to achieve its desired objectives, parliament has to be united. According to Edmund Burke:

Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed; but when you have chosen him, he is not a member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament.

Not must the parliament be united, the Executive, the Judiciary, CSOs, Labour union and the general public must work together.

On whether this Legislative Agenda will be sustained, time will tell. In the future, there may be the need to subject it to public hearing.

Let me end with the famous quote of William Hague that when you guarantee the freedom of speech for the citizen, you are rather guaranteeing the freedom of members of parliament to speak freely against any powerful monarch or despot. In his words:

The Bill of Rights was intended to secure freedom of speech — the freedom of speech of members of parliament to speak freely rather than be at threat of... the threat of an over powerful monarch at the time.

(ii) Olusegun Adeniyi — *Image Perception of the Legislature: Causes and Possible Solutions*

Image Perception of the Legislature: Causes and Possible Solutions

Last week, a Bill proposing a six-month imprisonment for persons who jump queues in public places scaled second reading in this August assembly. It was sponsored by my brother from Kwara State, Hon Abubakar Amuda-Kannike to whom I have a poser this morning: If someone who jumps queue needs to spend six months in jail, how many months should those who jump fence with their babariga and designer suits, in the full glare of television camera, spend behind bars?

Mr Speaker, Right Hon. Yakubu Dogara, the Chairman of this occasion, Honourable Members of this distinguished House, before Hon. Kannike begins to sing "Ajekun iya" for me, let me express my gratitude to the leadership of the House of Representatives for inviting me here today as you mark the second year anniversary and the mid-term of the 8th session of the National Assembly.

Based on an analysis of the number of executive and private member's Bills either awaiting second reading or referred to committees as well as those already passed, it is evident that the 8th House of Representatives has done a lot with regards to its lawmaking and oversight functions. That you have worked harmoniously with the executive is also a proof to the maturity of the leadership which is commendable.

However, this anniversary comes at a most auspicious time in the life of our nation when all sorts of characters without any mandate are seizing the landscape to threaten other Nigerians. While you remain our elected representatives, these unelected men-and they are all men, including those who, in their fifties and sixties, still categorise themselves as youth-are declaring sit-outs, sit-ins and giving quit notices in a bid to cause confusion in our country and create problems for all of us.

To the extent that the legislature is the most significant link between the government and the governed, and the one charged with articulating and addressing the grievances of the people, I believe it is in your enlightened interest to weigh in and let these impostors know that they are only speaking for themselves and that there are consequences for incitement and hate speech. In case it has not yet registered, these map-drawers are calling to question your legitimacy as the true representatives of Nigerians the fact that they are gaining some sort of credibility should worry you.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, while the existence of a legislative house, whatever name it is called, does not necessarily connote democracy, it is a given that there can be no democracy without such representation. So central is the legislature to modern government that from available statistics, 190 countries in the world today have some form of functioning parliament.

In the particular case of our country, you make all the difference because whenever civil rule was interrupted in the past by the military, the only arm of government that was usually dismantled was the parliament. That is no surprise because this is the only institution where representatives are elected to discuss the needs of citizens, forge national policies and resolve whatever conflicts arise within society through dialogue and compromise. But the pertinent question remains as to how faithful you are in discharging those responsibilities and I guess that is the essence of this session.

In the first ever Global Parliamentary Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) which focuses on the relationship between parliaments and citizens, the UNDP Administrator argues that the legitimacy and effectiveness of any legislature depends on public opinion and support. But the choice of topic for today's session and the context it was presented to me suggests that there is a major disconnect between the way the Nigerian public perceive you as lawmakers and the image you have of yourselves and this House. As far as the Honourable members seated here this morning are concerned, you are serving the people. But where majority of Nigerians are concerned, you are all here serving only your own interest.

Whether the populace is right or wrong is not the issue here. What is important is for the members to be aware that the people whose interest they claim to serve do not think highly of them. In fact, there was a recent joke on WhatsApp which went viral. In the course of the negotiations to free the last batch of the Chibok girls, somebody quipped about why the authorities would bother to do swap with Boko Haram men when they could easily have handed to the insurgents some of our National Assembly members in exchange for the girls.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, before I continue, let me add that there is hardly any country where the legislature is popular so the perception problem confronting the National Assembly is not unique to Nigeria. Around the world, the legislature is generally the least rated of all arms of government and national institutions. Survey figures compiled by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) which was subsequently reproduced in the IPU's publication on parliament and democracy in the 21st century revealed that, across the world, parliaments were less trusted than other institutions of government.

Interestingly, that has been the pattern from the past to the present. As of May 2017, according to Gallup polling, for instance, 74 percent of Americans disapprove of the job that their congress is doing and that has basically been the average disapproval rating over the years. The implication is that three quarters of Americans don't believe that their lawmakers are serving them. In fact, American Congress men are so unpopular that even President Donald Trump, with all the baggage he carries, is now making jokes at their expense. But let me share two jokes by popular American actor and television host, Jay Leno, to illustrate my point. The first one: "Police in Florida have arrested a man who said he finally achieved his goal of shoplifting in all 50 States. You know what you call someone who steals from all 50 States? A congressman" The second: "Congress' approval rating has dropped to 12 percent. The other 88 percent are withholding judgment until Congress actually does something."

What the first joke implies is that American lawmakers take what does not belong to them while the second suggests that they are not working for their pay. The same perception problem has dogged members of parliament in other countries, most especially in the United Kingdom where in 2009 a newspaper investigation exposed MPs across the House of Commons to be cheating on their expenses. So, effectively, we can see that you are in good company but that does not excuse some of the issues that rile many Nigerians about the National Assembly.

For 18 good years, the best kept secret in our country was how much each member of the National Assembly was taking home every month. That was a self-inflicted problem that impacted negatively on the image of this vital arm of government whose members are touted as receiving one of the highest remunerations in the world. Yet, there are more issues. From certificate and bribery scandals to allegations of budget padding and rowdy sessions that sometimes degenerate into fisticuff, every negative episode involving members only serves to erode the credibility of the legislature. And the situation is not helped by the manner in which issues that are clearly personal are given primacy in the National Assembly.

While committee investigations and hearings are normal parliamentary practices, turning such powers to instruments of oppression is unacceptable. Let me cite one quick example. In the course of THISDAY editorial meeting on Wednesday, our senior editors in Abuja had to leave for the Senate to respond to a summon by a committee investigating a story about whether or not the Senate Majority Leader was prevented from entering his town by some mob as reported by our newspaper. If the Senate Majority Leader, or any lawmaker for that matter, felt aggrieved by a publication, it is not for the whole Senate to set up a committee to be investigating such story and be summoning editors. That is a clear abuse of power and a demonstration of lack of seriousness.

Unfortunately, that has become a pattern and contributes to your negative perception. On matters of privileges that are personal, like in the instant case of the Senate Majority Leader, the National Assembly might wish to amend its rules in order to mitigate the prevailing public perception that the legislature is essentially a self-serving arm of government. An effective and efficient legislature is one that really looks out for the interest of the people and work towards ensuring that the executive delivers on its mandate. It is not about defending the deflated egos of some members.

Mr Speaker, Honourable members, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, while I am not here to deprecate you and the difficult job you are doing, I believe that the foregoing background is important so that as I conclude I can offer a few words on the possible solutions to the perception problems. Even when I have stated earlier that the challenge is global and not peculiar to our country, there are also problems that are uniquely Nigerian and should be highlighted.

There is a school of thought that the negative perception of our lawmakers derives from the hang-over of several decades of military rule during which the legislature was an anathema. It is a valid argument. The situation was not helped by the fact that the first political leadership that emerged under the current dispensation came from that military background.

There is another Nigerian challenge that we should not gloss over. While the Honourable Members of this House were elected to make laws for the good governance of the country and through that bring developments to the people, what most of your constituents demand are instant gratifications. They want money to pay the school fees of their children, establish businesses and sometimes even to marry more wives. If you are not able to deliver on these, no matter how many Bills you sponsor in the National Assembly or how efficient you are in your oversight functions, you are a failed lawmaker, in their estimation.

The crisis of expectation arising from that is a major problem you confront that is hardly ever discussed. Meanwhile, if we are to judge the National Assembly by Section 4 (2) under Part II of the Constitution which confers on the lawmakers "power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the federation" and your other principal functions which basically are representation and oversight, I believe this House has done well, all factors considered. Not only have you passed important legislations, at critical epochs in our nation, you have stood up to be counted on the side of common sense and national unity.

From the passage of the Niger Delta Development Act (NDDC) which led to the 13 percent derivation principle for oil producing states to the scuttling of the so-called Constitutional amendment that was to pave way for a controversial extension of tenure for the then incumbent president with all the implications for social order to the "Doctrine of Necessity" which defused a potentially dangerous political landmine in our country and several others, we owe a lot to this institution.

If the public therefore feels that you are not serving them well enough, it is because to whom much is given, much is expected. My admonition therefore will be that while it is important for the National Assembly to worry about its image, it's much more productive for individual members to carve a positive image for themselves by their stewardship. That is the way it is elsewhere.

In an article in 'The Week' magazine titled "If Congress is so unpopular, why do lawmakers keep getting re-elected?" Jon Terbush provided explanation on why, at almost every election season, between 85 to 98 percent of incumbent lawmakers get re-elected in the United States. According to him, most polls show that while Americans may dislike and distrust the Congress as an institution, they like their own representatives. "That helps explain why incumbents do so well, even when Congress as a whole is less popular than, say, cockroaches", said Terbush.

To corroborate that thesis, of the 44 different men who have been elected President of the United States, 18 of them had been in the House of Representatives. While two, James Garfield and Abraham Lincoln moved from the Congress to the White House, John Quincy Adams served in the House after being President. What that says most eloquently is that as individual lawmakers, you should worry more about the impact you make in your constituency, state and country as well as the kind of image you build for yourselves. With such array of accomplished your men and women educated from the best institutions in the world, I will like to see presidents of Nigeria emerge from this chamber, beginning from 2019.

As I take my seat, let me make a few suggestions. While I commend you for finally opening up the finances of the National Assembly, you must also understand that some of the choices members make tar this critical arm of government. Voting billions of Naira to order for new cars at a time the economy is going through a recession and majority of Nigerians experience difficult times, has not helped your cause. Therefore, most of the perception problems you have are self-inflicted and originate from this very House. You fight in the open, you spill on one another in the press, you take decisions that are not in tandem with public mood and some members throw irresponsible tantrums on social media. What is often ignored is that Image is less about what you say or how you think of yourself but more about what you do.

While conflict cannot be ruled out in a place with hundreds of members and is wired for less cohesiveness than the executive and judiciary, you can work on a more harmonious relationship. I believe it is good that there is increasing access to the parliament with the live television feeds and I must commend the leadership of this House for its effective use of social media platforms. Such engagements will deepen understanding of your role as lawmakers. But many Nigerians still believe that the dirty deals are done in executive sessions when you clear the gallery. Anytime you go into such sessions, be sure that suspicion is stirred.

There is also a general perception that many of the members are idle and hardly in Abuja while contributions are not deep. Perhaps you can begin by publishing the attendance list while instituting and enforcing sanctions of non-attendance. Again, members sit three times a week and for a few hours, and there is an increasing clamour for collapsing the two chambers and making your work part time. The only way to address that is to deliver more value to the country.

It is also important for members to take on important issues that will aid the country's progress. The Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) where the Senate must be commended is one important legislation on which so much time is being wasted by the House. Besides, you need to identify the issues that are critical to our country. You can commission focus group discussions, expert panels and even surveys to understand those issues that generally resonate with Nigerians and tackle them boldly and swiftly.

Mr Speaker, some of the issues I have identified are at the centre of the image and perception burden of not only the House of Representatives but the entire National Assembly. While I believe you are doing your best under the prevailing circumstances-given that you must also have your own constraints-let me add very quickly that it is better for our Honourable members and distinguished Senators to stir the nation with creative ideas and novel solutions than to continue to make news by scrambling over cars and making home videos.

Thank you for inviting me and congratulations once again on your second year anniversary.

(iii) The following invited Guests presented Goodwill Messages to the House:

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|-----|------------------------|---|---|
| (a) | Senator Ita Enang | — | Senior Special Adviser to the President, who represented the President, Federal Republic of Nigeria |
| (b) | Senator Dino Melaye | — | Represented the Senate President |
| (c) | Rt. Hon. Ghali Na'Abba | — | Former Speaker of the House of Representatives |

(iv) The following Members made presentations on behalf of their Zones and the Female Members respectively:

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|---|---------------|
| (a) | Hon. Mohammed Tahir Monguno | — | North East |
| (b) | Hon. Orker-Jev Emmanuel Yisa | — | North Central |
| (c) | Hon. Chukwuka Onyema | — | South East |

(d)	Hon. Leo Ogor	—	<i>South South</i>
(e)	Hon. Alhassan Ado Doguwa	—	<i>North West</i>
(f)	Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila	—	<i>South West</i>
(g)	Hon. Nnenna Ijeoma Elendu-Ukeje	—	<i>Representative of Female Members</i>

5. Vote of Thanks

Mr Deputy Speaker recognised the invited Guests and thanked them for honouring the invitation to the second year anniversary of the 8th House of Representatives. He noted that eighteen years of the country's democracy has reached a milestone of maturity which deserved a celebration. He also thanked the Guest Speakers for their presentations.

6. Prayer for Mr President

Mr Speaker invited Hon. Shuaibu Abdulrahman Abubakar and Hon. Onyemaechi Joan Mrakpor to render Muslim and Christian prayers respectively for the health of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

7. Adjournment

That the House do adjourn till Tuesday, 13 June, 2017 at 11.00 a.m. (Hon. Femi Gbajabiamila — House Leader).

The House adjourned accordingly at 1.19 p.m.

Yakubu Dogara
Speaker