

Chairman's Opening Remarks by Rt. Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, CFR, Governor of Sokoto State, at the Arewa Research and Development Project Conference on The North and The Future of the Nigerian Federation, at Arewa House, Kaduna on Tuesday 11th October, 2017.

Protocols

1. I would like to begin by thanking the Convener of this Conference, my dear brother and long-time associate, Dr. Usman Bugaje, and his great team at the ARDP for organising this event and for giving me the honour to chair the Opening Ceremony.
2. Dr. Bugaje and I go back a long way and we have fought many battles together, winning some and perhaps losing a few. As anyone close to him knows, Bugaje is a patriot of the first order and his constant striving for the progress of the North is very remarkable. Over the years, his name has become a byword for intellectual rigour and personal integrity.
3. I have no doubt therefore that participants at this conference can expect a level of discourse that is rich in research, resolutely progressive and devoid of any form of bigotry. I am sure that at the end of the day, we shall all be better informed about the kind of restructuring we need in Nigeria and the way the North can best benefit from any such arrangement.
4. Only recently, the Northern States Governors' Forum and Northern Traditional Leaders Council Committee on Restructuring of the Nigerian Federation which I chair inaugurated a technical committee reflecting the amazing diversity of Northern Nigeria to look at the issues surrounding the call for restructuring and get the aggregate views of the North and present same to the committee for use during the proposed Town Hall/Public Hearings across the 19 Northern States.
5. We have ensured that the technical committee members are personalities who have proven themselves in various fields, people with the intellectual ability and experience to contrast, aggregate and analyse the views of the North and how they impact on the growth and development of this country.
6. Therefore, the idea that the North is against restructuring because it benefits most from the current state of things is circumscribed and patently false. The fact that some people continue to parrot such a lie only help to give credence to the flawed argument. Let us be clear: the North wants restructuring as much as anyone else.

However, as a people we do not easily jump unto the bandwagon because we are always there for the long haul. We believe that any decision we take must be inclusive, and respect procedures and processes so that the outcome is sustainable.

7. I think we should first, as a country, agree on a mutual definition of the term restructuring. In my view, if restructuring means taking stock of our arrangement to ensure that no state takes a disproportionate amount of the resources, or most of the available space in the education or job sector, or subjugate the others' culture or religion, or lords it over the other so that the number of the poor and uneducated whose future is circumscribed by their circumstance is shared proportionately, then we are game.

8. We all want a country where there is peace and progress, where justice is a given, where all lives are safe and people can pursue their legitimate livelihoods wherever they choose. I believe each state in this country has areas of comparative advantage and life is a cycle so that what was once the largest revenue earner can in time become less so while something else takes ascendancy.

9. As a country we must look to the future and agree on what in the long run will benefit us all. I must give kudos to the organisers for choosing such an appropriate theme for this conference, The North and the future of the Nigerian federation.

10. I am glad to see that the organisers have noted the critical role that education must play in any part that the North eventually chooses to take. The truth is that the modern world is one that puts premium on human capital rather than natural resources. The development of that capital therefore must take precedence over anything else we want to do as a people.

11. I want to assure participants that the outcome of this conference will form a critical part of the aggregate views of Northern States on restructuring and will be useful to our current effort at ensuring that we do a thorough job on behalf of our people.

12. I therefore call on everyone who has any view on the matter or any suggestion that will make this great country move forward and strengthen our unity to come forward and express those views.

13. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, with your permission; I now declare this conference open for business.

May God guide us all.