

STATEMENT BY H.E. PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI AT THE PLENARY OF THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT STRASBOURG, FRANCE

ON 3RD FEBRUARY 2016

PROTOCOL

I wish to express my utmost appreciation to the President of the European Parliament, Mr. Martin SCHULZ, for inviting me to address the Plenary Session of this legislative arm of the European Union. I am honoured and humbled by my choice to address this occasion.

2. Let me also bring to the European Leaders, Parliamentarians and the good people of Europe, a goodwill message from my fellow countrymen and women. The Nigerian people acknowledge with deep appreciation, the material and financial sacrifices the European Union and individual friendly European nations made towards the conduct of elections and institutionalization of democratic norms in Nigeria.

3. As it had done before, the European Union has supported the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the smooth conduct of the last general elections in Nigeria whose outcome received worldwide acclamation.

4. Nigerians noted the huge contributions Europe made towards the realisation of acceptable, free and fair elections in our country. Today, I will, tell this August gathering that the European investments are beginning to bear fruits. I am one of the returns-on-the European-investments of a democratic Nigeria. Indeed, the present regime is the product of democratic choice consciously made by the people of Nigeria through the ballot box.

Mr. President,

Members of the European Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Democracy has come to stay in Nigeria. Sooner than many of us would have imagined, Nigeria will be counted among the most stable, strong and virile democracies in Africa. There may be strifes and stresses but these can be contained by the safety mechanisms of an electoral democracy.

6. Events leading to the general elections in Nigeria in the early part of the year 2015, give strong indications that the country was in trouble. Seeming anger, expression of vituperations and open animosities as well as threats and violence unleashed against the electorate, aimed at forcing them to vote for the status quo, were unpalatable developments that questioned the stability of Nigeria.

7. The drama that took place at the National Collation Centre was a momentarily frightening situation, unleashed by desperate agents of the status quo, with the purpose of maintaining their grip on the national resources for their selfish interests.

8. The maturity and patience, with which the officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), under Professor Attahiru Jega, handled the matter, saved the struggle for democracy and the huge European contributions. We must thank God that Nigeria survived this drama.

9. As I have stated in other fora, the action of Nigeria's former President, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, is commendable. For the first time in the history of Nigeria, a Presidential Candidate and sitting President, conceded electoral defeat in defiance of calls by strong forces and agents and benefactors of the regime not to do so.

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. I do appreciate the special relationship that exists between Nigeria and the European Union (EU). EU is Nigeria's main development partner, and the pillar of support for the consolidation of democracy and economic development of our country.

11. Mr. President, we in Africa appreciate that your problems are mainly managing prosperity and competition. However, our problems are poverty, disease and technological backwardness. It is not too difficult to appreciate the kind of challenges these problems pose: internal strife, refugees, boat people, drug and human trafficking e.t.c. Chaos is not a neighbour anybody would wish to have. It is therefore in our collective interest to cooperate and tackle these serious problems in Africa.

12. Mr. President, I am pleased that we already have the Nigeria- European Union Annual Political Dialogue, which has continued to strengthen our cooperation, based on shared values and interests, especially in the areas of peace and security, democracy and good governance. Through this forum, we have been able to continue, on a regular basis, to share perspectives on important regional, continental and global issues, with a view to forging common positions.

13. We are committed to intensify political dialogue and cooperation in the context of Nigeria—European Union Joint Way Forward. Both of us believe in peace and security, respect for human rights, democracy and good governance, equality and tolerance, as ways of developing prosperous and strong societies.

14. Furthermore, in the context of these European Union-Nigeria relations, I wish to acknowledge that the European Union had, severally, condemned the activities of extremist groups, including the Boko Haram in Nigeria, and the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

15. The European Union had noted and commended Nigeria's development of a National Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the amendment of the country's Counter Terrorism Act in demonstration of Government's commitment to find a lasting solution to the threats by the Boko Haram terror elements. Nigeria appreciates EU's collaboration, especially in the area of technical support, capacity building for Security Services and provision of development assistance.

16. For our part, we have updated our rules of engagement in fighting terrorism and pay very close attention during operations to the treatment of captured terrorists, civilians caught up in the conflict and in general, safeguarding property. Our aim is to use minimum force necessary in our fight against terrorists.

17. In light of this, I wish to seize this opportunity to thank individual EU Member States for their various assistance towards the success of the Nigerian military onslaught against the Boko Haram terror elements. Many European Union Member States have pledged to support our efforts towards the rescue of the kidnapped Chibok School Girls. It may interest you to know that in a recent meeting, I had with parents of the Chibok Girls, I assured them that Government would not rest until

all the Girls are rescued alive and reunited with their families. I remain fully committed to this pledge.

18. Since my assumption of office in May last year, we have re-organised the Nigerian Armed Forces and repositioned them to deal decisively with the Boko Haram terrorists. Indeed, all the Local Government Areas that were hitherto under the control of the Boko Haram terrorists in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States in the North-Eastern flank of Nigeria, have been recaptured.

19. The Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are gradually returning to their communities. The Federal Government is committed to rebuilding schools, hospitals and other vital infrastructure destroyed by the fleeing terrorists. Currently, the activities of Boko Haram have been reduced to the Sambisa Forest and their capacity to launch major offensives has been degraded. Boko Haram has now resorted to attacking soft targets such as markets, mosques and churches using innocent under-aged hapless children to detonate locally made Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

20. I must express our serious concern about the alarming situation in Southern Libya, which is becoming a strategic time bomb for Africa and indeed Europe. The ungoverned swath of land of Southern Libya has become a thriving arms bazaar, which threatens the security of the Sahel-Sahara region as well as the West Africa region and beyond. We must therefore intensify our efforts to find lasting solution to the Libyan crisis.

Mr. President,

21. Nigeria is a peace-loving nation and has played a critical role in conflict management and resolutions within and outside Africa.

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

22. Peacekeeping and peace-building have been part of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence. Nigerian troops have participated in almost all United Nations sub-regional and regional peacekeeping and peace-building operations. In spite of our current security challenges, Nigeria is among the ten top troops contributing countries to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations around the world with huge financial and human commitment.

23. Nigeria's first outing on peacekeeping operations was to the Congo, as part of the 20,000 strong United Nations Operations in the Congo (ONUC) in July 1960 (of which I was privileged to be a member of the contingent) barely three months before Nigeria's independence. Nigeria participated in United Nations Operations in the Congo for only three-and-a half years. She contributed the third largest national force in the Congo, after India and Ethiopia. Since then, Nigeria maintains a presence in the global peacekeeping efforts.

24. Nigeria has indeed participated in the maintenance of law and order following a mutiny in the Tanganyika Army in 1964. In 1979 and 1982, soldiers of Nigeria's 21 Infantry Battalion and the 202 Recce Regiment were deployed to Chad as a Peace-keeping Force to monitor a ceasefire and inspire confidence in the on-going peace process.

25. In addition, she contributed the largest contingent when Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was moved to Sierra Leone on a peacekeeping cum Peace-enforcement mission. Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group recovered

most parts of the country from the rebels and returned the ousted President Tejan Kabbah to office on 10th March 1998.

26. Under the mandate of the African Union, Nigeria embarked on a peace-building mission in Sao Tome and Principe (ST&P), where she succeeded in persuading dissident soldiers to subject themselves to constituted authorities. Besides, Nigeria has also deployed her personnel in Rwanda and in the Darfur Region of Sudan, to maintain the peace in these two countries.

Mr. President,

27. Nigeria has, additionally, deployed her contingent to the following African countries: Angola; United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM), Namibia; United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), Mozambique; United Nations operations in Mozambique (UNOMOZ), Western-Sahara; United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), Somalia; United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) and the Aouzou strip; United Nations Aouzou Strip Observer Group (UNASOG).

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

MIGRATION FROM AFRICA TO EUROPE

28. Nigeria wishes to acknowledge and share the concerns expressed by the European Union with respect to the influx of migrants from Africa, through the Mediterranean Sea, with its attendant loss of lives. In this regard, Nigeria will collaborate with the European Union to address illegal migration to Europe.

29. Government is making concerted efforts to address the push-factor that propel migration, especially from Nigeria, as both destination and transit country. In this year's budget, the Government has provided for over Five-Hundred Thousand graduate employment in the teaching profession alone. We are equally collaborating with the States and Local Governments, to strengthen Skills Acquisition Centres, in order to train the teeming youth in various vocational skills, so that they can be self-employed, and eventually, become employers of labour.

30. We are also making efforts to diversify the economy, giving impetus to agriculture and solid minerals exploitation, to create wealth and employments.

31. Nigeria welcomes the outcome of the Valletta EU-Africa Summit on Migration, including the launching of 1.8 billion Euros Emergency Trust Fund to address the root causes of migration from Africa to Europe. Nigeria will work with the countries of the Sahel and Central Africa, to submit to the Board of the Emergency Trust Fund, our identified projects for funding in due course.

32. The Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM), which Nigeria signed on 12th March 2015 was, indeed the first country to sign from the sub-Sahara Africa, is a demonstration of the positive spirit of our cooperation with the European Union in the field of migration and development. It is in the light of this understanding that I wish to propose the reciprocal visa waivers for holders of Nigerian Diplomatic and Official Passports attending official Meetings and Conferences in Europe.

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS (EPAs)

33. The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPAs) between the European Union, African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), collectively endorsed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), is yet to be signed by Nigeria and few others. During Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations, Nigeria raised some pertinent technical issues that were yet to be addressed.

34. Giving due consideration to the mismatch of the two regions (Europe-ECOWAS) in terms of technology and manufacturing experience, the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) and Associated Trade Unions, raised concerns over the negative impact of the EPAs on Nigeria's industrialisation programme. Nigeria is working towards addressing her own side of the issues.

35. I am therefore urging our European Union partners to also address our own concerns to allow for Economic Partnership Agreement that are mutually beneficial and contribute to the prosperity of our people, in the context of our shared values and interest at promoting cordial bilateral trade relations.

OIL-THEFT AND ILLEGAL BUNKERING

36. Nigeria is facing the challenges of oil-theft and illegal bunkering in the Niger Delta as well as recovery of illicit funds. It is therefore expedient to raise these issues with you, Distinguished Parliamentarians. In this regard, Nigeria solicits the cooperation of the European Parliament to support the efforts aimed at stemming these vices.

37. Our attempt to restore security, curb corruption and fight crime will result not only in improving social stability in Nigeria but will re-open the doors for full economic relations with Europe and outside world, those who wish to invest in our country have vast opportunity and we intend to guarantee the security of people and investments brought to Nigeria.

Mr. President,

38. The whole world had recently converged in Paris, France, for Climate Change Conference (COP 21). Positive approach to the issue resulted in mutually acceptable decisions. The world leaders had forged a common platform in addressing the devastating effects of Climate Change, particularly on the underprivileged countries across the entire length and breadth of the globe.

39. During this all-important global event, I declared my country's position on Climate Change. I reiterate, here, that it portends serious threats to Nigeria's security and development. Nigeria is watching helplessly as Lake Chad is drying up. This has monumental consequences on the people living in the Lake Chad Basin, whose livelihood has, for generations, been dependent on the resources of the lake. These resources are fast dissipating, throwing communities out of jobs.

Mr. President,

40. It is pertinent to mention that all the Lake Chad contiguous states are facing the effects of Climate Change. Collectively we are under obligation to face these common challenges. Our collective efforts may not be enough as we are constrained by the dearth of funds, technology and manpower to initiate the right solutions. We are therefore, calling for quick global actions to address the issues. Indeed, these will serve in part, as panaceas to the issues facing the countries sharing the Lake Chad resources.

41. In an effort to find a lasting solution to this problem, Nigeria had contributed the sum of Five Million USD, which had already been used in the conduct of holistic study for Inter-Basin Water Transfer from Congo Basin to Lake Chad. The study has revealed that the project will require the sum of Fifteen Billion USD to reach completion.

42. I wish to state that this study has indicated that the proposed Lake Chad Project would be able to pay back this huge investment, if it is private-sector driven. Against this background, let me invite the Parliament to use its good offices by lending its support towards the realisation of this laudable project.

Mr. President,

Members of the European Parliament

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

43. I wish to, once again, express, with all sense of humility, my profound appreciation to the President of the European Parliament, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), European Leaders and the people of this continent for the honour personally extended to me and by and large the people of Nigeria to address the Plenary Session of one of the largest group of democracies in the World.

I thank you all for this rare honour.

May Europe—Nigeria relations continue to blossom.