

The Federal Republic of Nigeria

Positions for the African Union

I. Examining the Challenges and Solutions of the African Debt Crisis

In April 2006, The Federal Republic of Nigeria settled its debt with the Paris Club with a US \$12.4 billion payment in exchange for the forgiveness of the remainder of its US \$30 billion in official debts. It was also exited from its London Club debts. As the first African nation to settle its debts with official lenders, Nigeria is prepared to assist and advise other nations with debt management. The economic reform plan implemented by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, and continued by President Umaru Yar'Adua, has greatly improved the international standing of Nigeria. However, in spite of advances, Nigeria faces changing world markets and additional external debts. As a member of the African Union, Nigeria is intent on assisting other nations in sustainable economic growth and debt resolution through solidarity and collaboration. The Federal Republic of Nigeria supports the settlement and forgiveness of all African debt.

Under previous and current administrations, Nigeria has reversed the trend of domestic mismanagement. By the end of 2004, the Nigerian debt portfolio stood at US \$35.94 billion. After its debts were cleared at the end of 2007, the external debt stock stood at US \$3,654. The Debt Management Office (DMO), established in 2000, is largely responsible for the consolidation and elimination of much of Nigerian debt. The DMO has worked to reduce debt stock and cost of public services through several means. This included the allocation of resources for poverty reduction programs; achieving positive macroeconomic management; improving the nation's borrowing capacity and ability to manage debt efficiently; providing opportunities for professionalism in nation building; and projecting a good image of Nigeria as a disciplined and organized nation that is capable of managing its assets and liabilities.¹ Developed by the DMO, the National Debt Management Framework established the policies for debt management within the nation. Within the Framework, the Medium-Term Public Debt Strategies (2008-2012) have been established. Through a shrinking external debt, Nigeria is able to focus on internal debts and projects to further strengthen it for positive economic growth and development.

As witnessed through examination of Nigeria's debt management actions, transparency and governmental responsibility are paramount in solving the debt crisis. It is only through real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and an increased standard of living that Member States will clear external debts. International perception is crucial to potential economic growth for nations crippled by debt. Nigeria will work with those nations that show steps towards increasing economic production and growth in order to foster deals with official lenders. Foreign investment is crucial to a sustainable government; thus, Nigeria encourages all Member States to be willing to move forward toward sustainable and lasting debt management. Nigeria supports the establishment of a multinational advisory and oversight board that meets annually. The Nations for the Elimination of Debt (NED) will work to connect Member States with foreign investors to eliminate external debts by 2015. Nigeria calls on all members of the African Union to take steps toward government transparency and accountability in debt management by becoming party to NED to find solutions to the debt crisis.

II. Further Defining the African Youth Charter

The adoption of the *African Youth Charter* on July 2, 2006, established the framework needed for African governments to address the growing concerns of young people throughout the continent. Roughly 40 percent of the population is under the age of 15, and therefore rapidly approaching the age group 15-32 which is considered "youth". The *Charter* emphasizes youth empowerment through education, promotion of talents in science and technology, as well as access to employment. Nigeria is party to the *African Youth Charter* and fully supports its adoption on a regional level to promote and encourage African youth.

Nigeria has successfully addressed the concerns of education, health initiatives, employment, and growth opportunities. With fifty-three universities, over 250 higher education and research institutions, and thousands of primary and secondary schools, the educational sector in Nigeria is one of Africa's premier systems. Most state governments spend, on average, forty percent of their annual budgets on education. Because of this, enrollment in

¹ Debt Management Office of Nigeria,
www.dmo.gov.ng/

schools has grown in recent years, and university funding has increased greatly. The education system has increased literacy rates, which are now at 86 percent among youth age 15-24.² Education is also the cornerstone of technological development of as Nigeria has placed great emphasis training youth in Information and Communication Technologies, expanding job opportunities and putting young people in charge of their destinies. Furthermore, the health of the entire population benefits from the emphasis on education. The National Health Policy (NHP) will bring about a comprehensive health care system with services, including the promotion of food supply and proper nutrition; immunization against major infectious diseases; prevention and control of locally endemic and epidemic diseases; and provision of essential drugs and supplies. Equipped with knowledge of basic sanitation and prevention, youth may pursue careers and meaningful work. This includes participation in programs such as the Niger Delta Human Development Report, which is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to strengthen the skills of youths in the Niger Delta. Projects like this one are in place across the country to show a governmental willingness to invest in the youth of Nigeria. It sets an example for all nations to put the same emphasis on their youth by promoting and ratifying the *African Youth Charter*.

It is imperative that Member States ratify the *African Youth Charter*. Students receiving education both domestically and abroad must remain in Africa to further promote education, health, and prosperity among the all African youth. Loyalty must be instilled in an educated country, and this can only be achieved through official acknowledgement of the vitality of students. Incentives and job opportunities must be provided to ensure that our brightest minds do not leave. Nigeria calls on Member States of the African Union to adopt the *Charter* so that youth both educated and undereducated will begin to become involved and concerned with the affairs of their home states. It is imperative that the youth are not neglected, further harming Africa's standing in global relations.

III. Uniting Africa: Enhancing Partnerships that Create Regional Cohesiveness

As an active member of several inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), Nigeria is focused on creating regional cohesiveness through enhancing partnerships. It is an active and influential participant in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), showing Nigeria's belief in the potential effectiveness of partnerships between Member States and IGOs.³ Nigeria firmly supports the collaboration and cooperation of all African nations to work together to implement effective programs that utilize regional similarities and strengths through individual, domestic, regional, and inter-state partnerships.

Nigeria's government is a regional model of an effectively organized bureaucracy, utilizing positive resources of its varied regions and peoples. The administrations of former President Olusegun Obasanjo and current President Umaru Yar'Adua have restructured all areas of government and focused on minimizing the overlap and ineffectiveness of organizations. Internationally, Nigeria has actively pursued regional stabilization for West Africa, as well as for the African continent. Furthermore, Nigeria has played major roles in peacekeeping processes throughout the region, and has contributed to the peacekeeping force, The ECOWAS Military Monitoring Group, ECOMOG. Shuttle diplomacy and round-table talks facilitated by Nigeria have also led to peaceful resolution of internal conflicts and political uprisings in West African countries, such as Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Senegal. Nigeria continues to provide stability and assistance to other nations as it looks to enhance regional prosperity, primarily through partnerships.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is of the position that the ineffectiveness and costly attributes of IGOs must be addressed. Effective economic, humanitarian assistance and international security IGOs are needed in Africa. Nations must form strong and lasting partnerships on both the domestic and international level. African Union leaders must step forward to foster the development of organizations that answer the issues of common currency, inter-regional trade, peacekeeping operations and intervention in violent conflicts. Nigeria calls all Member States to form regional committees, modeled after ECOWAS and Economic Community of West African States Military Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to address the specific needs of each Member State for sustainable partnerships. These regional bodies will then meet to address continental concerns within the African Union infrastructure to mainstream and reform bureaucracy to seek real and lasting solutions.

² United Nations Economic and Social Council, Institute for Statistics.
www.stats.uis.unesco.org

³ United Nations Development Programme, Nigeria.
www.undp.org