

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY, ALHAJI UMARU  
MUSA YAR'ADUA, GCFR, PRESIDENT, COMMANDER-IN-  
CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC  
OF NIGERIA AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 44<sup>TH</sup>  
ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON  
HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS HELD IN ABUJA ON MONDAY,  
10<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2008**

**Courtesies**

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all, on behalf of the people and Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to our country for the Opening Ceremony of the 44<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights holding in our unity city of Abuja.

I wish to commend the Chairperson, the Honourable Commissioners and indeed, the Secretariat of the Commission on the successful convening of this Session. All African are justifiably proud of the monumental strides which the Commission has made since it was established in 1983. The vision of its founding fathers was that the Commission would become the foremost institution on the African continent for the promotion, protection and advancement of human rights on the African continent. I am happy that you have lived up to these original expectations and have become one of the most prominent organs of the African Union in the crusade to make the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Africa's era.

Nigeria has a long period of association with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. It is on record that we were one of the first countries to ratify the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in 1983. Subsequently, we domesticated the Charter through the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification & Enforcement) Act of 1983. By this action, the Charter became binding on all authorities and persons within the Federal Republic of Nigeria. I wish to assure you that Nigeria's commitment to the goals of human rights protection and promotion within our borders and across the whole world remains unshaken and non-negotiable.

As a Government, we have committed ourselves since assumption of office on May 29, 2007, to the absolute subservience of all Governmental authorities and persons to the Rule of Law and due process, which we believe is the highest guarantee for the protection of human rights. My administration's governance philosophy is founded on the belief that the welfare of the people and the guarantee of their security and prosperity should be the primary responsibility of Government. Happily, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has provided a firm foundation for the protection of the human rights of all persons within our borders, while the Nigerian Judiciary has acquired a reputation for the courageous and impartial protection of these and other rights of the citizens over the years, even during the dark days of military rule.

Africa is beset with several challenges of both human and material character. A deep examination of several of the crisis which afflict our continent today reveals that they have their roots in policies and attitudes which foster the dehumanization of sections of society either on political, social or economic grounds. The reality of the world today however is that Africa cannot afford any more crises. We can no longer afford to remain an object of sympathy or paternalistic assistance from other parts of the world. On the contrary, we must re-dedicate ourselves to a new vision of prosperity, solidarity and mutual security. The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by all African countries must remain a primary objective of all African Governments in the interest of our people.

To achieve this however, we must realize that societies essentially are about people and their empowerment to alter their material conditions. The rights of the people must therefore be respected if we are to expect them to contribute maximally to this crusade for Africa's economic and social rebirth. In this direction, I therefore urge the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to re-dedicate itself to a higher level of human rights education, promotion and protection in Africa. Nigeria notes with satisfaction, the commendable efforts being made by the newly-elected African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights which is another major milestone in the desire by the African Union to make Africa a human rights-friendly continent. We must work together to remove any remaining vestiges of a culture of impunity in any part of Africa and demonstrate that African authorities and people will henceforth have no tolerance for all abusers of the human rights of the African people.

I wish to assure you once more that the Nigerian Government remains committed to your work and will continue to support and identify with your Commission. Our decision to host the current Ordinary Session of the Commission in Abuja is a further reaffirmation of our renewed commitment to the protection of human rights in Nigeria and Africa. In this task, we shall continue to give Civil Society Groups the latitude and opportunity to carry out their activities for the promotion of human rights in a responsible, objective and mutually-engaging manner.

As you continue your deliberations over the next two weeks, I encourage all the participants to use this opportunity to strike new bonds of friendship and renew old acquaintances as this is one of the paths to the dream of an integrated continent which we all share.

May I equally invite you to experience the traditionally rich hospitality of the Nigerian people during your stay. It is my hope that you will go back with fond memories of your stay in our country at the end of this Session.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, may I now wish you happy deliberations during this Session in the interest of our people and to the glory of Africa. It is now my pleasure to declare this Session open.

Thank you very much and God bless you.