

LECTURE DELIVERED ON SATURDAY APRIL 28, 2018 AT EVENT ORGANIZED BY THE NIGERIA IN DIASPORA ORGANIZATION (NIDO) IN BEIJING CHINA.

Role of Diaspora In National Development and Bilateral Relationship

Protocols

Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be with you here today and exchange ideas with you on the role of Diaspora Nigerians in the development of Nigeria and the strengthening of bilateral relations with your host, the good people of China.

China is one country I always want to come back to because each time I come here, I see something different; something that challenges my instincts and mind; something that reminds me of the limitless power of the human spirit; something that tells me that there is nothing that humans cannot achieve so long as they put their hearts and mind focused. When I look around and see the diversity of the Chinese nation, and the open doors it keeps, I look back at our country and realize that we have a lot to learn from the Chinese. And I believe that is why your stay here is strategic to both Nigeria and Africa.

For this moment, I take myself as a fellow of the Nigerians In Diaspora Organisation (NIDO), because I am almost like a Diasporan, spending quite a lot of time outside Nigeria and shuttling back home to address issues that arise along the line of business, politics and community development.

So, to an extent, I share your visions and pains. Your visions because you have dreams about what your country and my country should be, and your pain because you are here enjoying the good things of life but still remember that your kith and kin back home don't get as much as you do here. I think that is the reason the demand for you from folks back home is huge. Many of you here are paying school fees of folks back home. You pick medical bills back home. You send money back to build houses for you and all sorts. In other words, you feel the impact of the sort of development we have back home. My simple argument would be that if all was well, you probably would not be here coping with the weather and pulling through daily struggles to make ends meet.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am not here to lament the situation back home. I am here rather to share views with you, enjoy your company and draw more ideas for the development of our

home. We all know that, for decades, things have not been very rosy with our country. It was simply for that reason that Nigerians started venturing out to other lands, including China, for self-development and national progress. The mass exodus of Nigerians from Nigeria in late 1980 led to the creation of a message, aired on national television, which I am sure many of you still remember. I am talking about 'Andrew'. You remember that advert strip where 'Andrew' said he was checking out because life had become exactly as Thomas Hobbes described it –nasty, brutish and short.

In that message, 'Andrew' was being discouraged from checking out. But he insisted that he would go. Those discouraging him from checking out told him that 'Nigeria Go Better'. 'Andrew' was told in the 1980s that 'Nigeria go better'. More than 30 years after, so many Andrews are also being told that 'Nigeria go better'. Of course, 'Nigeria go better'. That is a message of hope. Life thrives on hope. Without hope, we are doomed. Those of you, who moved out in search of places where the pasture is greener, did so with the HOPE that things would get better. Many have also returned home better than they were when they left Nigeria. So, wherever we find ourselves, we live with the hope that things will get better.

The movement of Nigerians to other lands created the need for organization. That need gave rise to the birth of NIDO which started like an unserious gathering of a few individuals but today has grown to become a very powerful group of Nigerians across all continents. It has chapters in almost all countries of Europe, America, Asia etc. NIDO has become a strategic development partner of Nigeria. The government of Nigeria, under Olusegun Obasanjo, granted it recognition as a body of Nigerians, professionals and non-professionals alike, in all parts of the world which must be harnessed for development.

A comment on the website of NIDO Europe said: "The Government of Nigeria recognizes the organization as an official platform through which individual Nigerian Diaspora, their Community Organizations, and Corporate Bodies can channel their developmental efforts to Nigeria. In this sense, the organization partners with Nigerian Community/Professional Organizations as well as public and private businesses in focused areas such as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), professional networking, stakeholder advocacy, medical missions, educational support and skills transfer to Nigeria."

The partnership between Nigeria's federal government and NIDO has created openings for Nigeria to access NIDO's human capital resource through which many Nigerian professionals have been recruited into leadership at different levels. Some had served as ministers,

commissioners, Local government chairmen and even Special advisers to both the federal and state governments. Many professionals from NIDO have also proved themselves valuable in helping governments at different levels to drive development. Therefore, the Nigerian Diaspora has been very invaluable to the Nigerian project.

The vision of NIDO Europe, as stated on its website is: “to bring Nigerians living in Europe together and to identify those willing to offer their skills (Education, Information Technology, Health, Economic, science, Administration, Law, Political and Corporate Governance, Management etc.) to assist Nigeria’s national development.” It also states that: “NIDO Europe provides the unique opportunity for Nigerians living in Europe to learn to work and collaborate with one another in the task of nation building of our homeland. The organisation strongly believes that Nigerians in Europe can make significant contributions towards Nigeria through programs, policies, and advocacy to harness their talents, expertise, and resources for Nigeria’s development and nation building.”

NIDO Europe further states that: It is structured to achieve the following aims: promote, support and encourage global trade awareness and moral consciousness that promote positive business climate between Nigeria and United Kingdom; improve image of Nigeria to reinforce business and investment opportunities; utilize Nigerian Diaspora Resources; leverage Nigerian Diaspora economic, human, and technology resources for Nigeria’s development; promote the spirit of patriotism amongst Nigerians living in Europe and encourage their participation in the affairs of Nigeria; encourage Nigerians living in Europe to be good and law-abiding citizens of Europe; promote knowledge transfer and information sharing among all Nigerians in Europe, and the public and private sectors in Nigeria.

It further states that it will “establish and maintain close liaison with the Nigerian and European governments and other representative bodies having objectives similar in whole or in part to NIDO Europe south; assist in promoting and enhancing a good image for Nigeria in the international arena in all areas, by whatever ethical and legitimate means that are feasible; encourage contacts and networking amongst Nigerians living in Europe, the Americas and elsewhere as well as with community groups, voluntary organisations, government departments, statutory and non-statutory authorities, businesses, individuals and all other organisations, and in particular based on pressing social, economic, democratic and cultural issues in Nigeria; serve as advisers and partners to the Nigerian government and other corporate bodies on

specific matters of business, social, economic and cultural initiatives in the interest of Nigerians and Nigeria.

It also stated that it will help create opportunities by developing “a list of Nigerian professionals in Europe, whose background, experience and contact could help facilitate the development of Nigeria; encourage and facilitate Nigerian professionals and any other humanitarian organizations in Europe to undertake free voluntary service in Nigeria; assist the investment plans of Nigerians in Europe, who wish to invest in the Nigerian economy; and also facilitate Nigerian professionals in Europe, who wish to take up positions in Nigerian Public or Private sector; serve as technical advisers, partners and act as catalysts with Nigeria with respect to development of policies, organisation and implementation of social and economic programmes; and, on specific requests from Government, NGOs and other bodies, incorporated or unincorporated, to provide services or give advice on specific matters of social, economic or cultural projects in the interest of Nigerians and Nigeria.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have no doubt that NIDO China shares these visions and objectives too. I also believe all other chapters of NIDO have same visions and objectives. I believe too that NIDO China should champion the objectives and visions as espoused by our brothers and sisters in Europe here in China and push it beyond the Chinese borders and incorporate Nigerians living in other countries that boarder China until they are able to inaugurate their own chapters.

Why is this important? The World Bank projected a financial \$22billion cash inflow from the Nigerians Diaspora community into Nigeria in 2017. It was put at \$21billion in 2013. In May 2017, the Federal Government disclosed that there were about 15million Nigerians in the Diaspora and from these numbers, it intends to generate cash inflow of about \$35billion to be used in addressing housing deficit. Specifically, it said the Federal Housing Authority would target the inflows to help it build what it called Diasporan Villages across the country. Imagine for a moment that we have \$35b for housing development and 35 states get \$1 each to build two-bedroom apartments for teachers alone? Imagine the impact! Before this in October 2016, our Finance Minister, Kemi Adeosun, disclosed that the federal government had its eyes on Diaspora remittances to help it shore up forex shortfalls and strengthen the money market.

So far, we do not have statistics on what the remittances back home from Diaspora is, but let us assume that it stands at \$22billion from about 15million people. I am sure you know that there are countries that do not have a population of 15million and also cannot boast of a national

budget of \$22billion. So, let us for a moment visualize a country of 15million people with a national budget of \$22billion prudently managed. I am sure you are already having ideas. However, the injection of \$22billion into the Nigerian economy is no mean feat. It simply tells you that the Nigerian Diaspora is not letting anything to chance in pushing the development of Nigeria. This goes a long way to tell you how important Nigeria views its Diasporan community. And I will urge you not to relent. Never mind the shortcomings, 'Nigeria go better'. Luckily we have an administration led by President Muhammadu Buhari that wholly believes that the country can be lifted out of the woods.

Ladies and gentlemen, I, Orji Uzor Kalu is boldly telling you that " United Together Stronger". Let me invite us to work with this my slogan and create something for us. Let me say that together, we can make Nigeria stronger again. At the moment, Nigeria is not in its best of times. Our economy has suffered a recession with its debilitating effects on the livelihood of the people. These people are your parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts etc. and I am sure that quite often you get either a message on 'wechat' , Whatsap or on your email telling you how tight things are back home. At such moments you are faced with a choice –to make a remittance or not to make. While you are faced with the choice, you are also left with the consideration of your own bills here. In any case, it is a reality you face and a choice you must make. Those you left back home are living with hope that their son or brother or uncle in China will help lighten their burden. They look forward to you.

The situation therefore places a burden on you. It is a burden that leaves you with a choice –to work hard or not to work hard. Whichever decision you make, you must remember that you are a Nigerian. That tag –Nigerian- means a lot. It means you are not here just as yourself. You are in China as an ambassador of Nigeria carrying along with you all the cultural and national values of our country. Your host does not see you as Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Efik, Idoma, Edo etc. They do not take notice of your religious affiliation. The only thing they know about you is that you are a Nigerian. It means that you bear priceless identity which places a burden on you. The burden it puts on you is the burden of sustenance.

It means you must sustain your identity. It is very important to Nigeria because with it you build and project an image of Nigeria. It is through you that the world in China sees and knows Nigeria.

Therefore, your actions and inactions say something about the identity you carry. If Igbo or Yoruba people in China get involved in crime and are found guilty and jailed, the news out there

will be about Nigerians jailed in China –You know I am not a journalist but I own newspapers and by associating with managers of these newspapers, I have come to imbibe certain realities about perception. Therefore, in your daily outing, you must seek to excel not in crime and dehumanizing conducts, but in scholarship, in business, in research, in enterprise. I will be glad to return here at anytime the Chinese government will be inducting your members into a hall of fame and not a hall of infamy.

By building yourselves up positively and contributing to the development of your host community, you are also improving bilateral relations between your home country and your host. In my business travels around the world, I have come to realise that bilateral relations are best improved when foreign nationals do not constitute themselves into security headaches for their host. Every country's immigration officials enjoy the company of a peace loving people. Every country's Police and security apparatus love the comradeship of nationals who do not add to their crime index. Every country's customs like to do business with foreign nationals who do not cut corners but engage in genuine business and pay due taxes to the state. This is the least that is expected of you as our national envoys to China. Nigeria will be happier if you help promote relations between both countries by being law abiding and staying away from crime. Your kith and kin back home will be proud that you were not deported on account of engagement in crime or shady activities. Like they say, if you make a good bed, you sleep peacefully.

Finally ladies and gentlemen, this is just a keynote address. Not a professorial inaugural lecture. So, let me not bore you further with my thoughts. But one final word! You are all ambassadors of Nigeria to China. You are also ambassadors of the various names you bear. Remember, good name is better than gold. Work for a good name and gold will come along. Your families want to have you back better than you were when you left. Do great things. Explore all mountains. Go beyond rivers and seas to find your laurel. But as you do that, keep that name –Nigeria- in view. Keep also your family name in front and be for all of us a goodwill envoy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my task is to deliver the keynote address. I have delivered the note. Can I now go home with the key?

