



NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS & TRADE UNION CONGRESS

***Another 100 Years of Struggle for Jobs, Dignity
and Social Justice in Nigeria***

**May Day Address of the
President of the Nigeria Labour Congress;
Comrade Ayuba P. Wabba, *mni***

And

***President of Trade Union Congress;
Comrade Bobboi Bala Kaigama***

**Presented at the 2019 May Day Celebration
Organized by the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade
Union Congress at the Eagles Square, Abuja**

Protocols

PREAMBLE:

On behalf of Organized Labour, it is our honour and delight to welcome Your Excellences, comrades, veterans, allies and esteemed guests to the 2019 Workers Day Celebration.

May Day is very significant in the life of workers world over. For the Labour Movement in Nigeria, May Day presents an auspicious opportunity to appraise the contributions of workers to nation-building. May Day is also an occasion to reflect on the progress and setbacks in the struggle to improve the lot of workers. I wish to use the platform of this year's May Day to salute the courage and tenacity of Nigerian workers in building a future of shared prosperity. I also salute our pensioners, veterans and allies for staying the course and for keeping the faith.

This Year's May Day coincides with the Centenary Celebration of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Organized Labour in Nigeria fully identifies with and celebrates the ILO on a day like this. Our history with the ILO, both as workers and as a nation, has come a long way. Nigeria was the first African Country to host the African Field Office (AFO) of the ILO through an agreement signed between the Government of Nigeria and the ILO on 14th January, 1959. Furthermore, Nigeria played host to the first ILO African Regional Conference from December 5 -16, 1960 in Lagos.

For us, the year 2019 is double celebration – 100 years of the ILO, and 60 years of the ILO in Africa, with its 1st African Office in Lagos. It is, therefore, quite fitting that we are honoured to have as Special Guest from the ILO the Assistant Director General and African Regional Director, our own Cynthia Samuel-Olonjuwon. You are welcomed back home.

Nigeria was also among the first African countries to ratify the core ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on Freedom of Association, Rights to Organize and Right to Collective Bargaining, respectively. Being progressive, Nigeria's founding fathers captured these conventions in our Constitution. We will come back later to the significance of ILO's Centenary in this address.

The year's May Day is highly significant coming on the heels of the recently concluded 2019 general elections, and NLC 12th National Delegates Conference. The TUC 11th Delegates Conference will also take place shortly after this May Day in June 2019. Clearly, you can see that is a season of Labour festivities. While acknowledging the difficulties associated with the 2019 general elections, we congratulate all those elected into public political offices during the last polls. We call on political leaders at all levels

of government to re-dedicate themselves to the task of governance by demonstrating genuine empathy and affinity to the suffering of the Nigerian people. We urge all elected political office holders to fulfil the promises they made to Nigerians. We implore those whose political aspirations were not realized at the last elections to demonstrate the spirit of sportsmanship. We also urge those who feel cheated at the 2019 polls not to overheat the polity but to engage the judicial process for justice.

At last year's May Day, we tried to put the history of the struggles of the working class in Nigeria in clear perspective under the themes chosen by the two Labour Centres – the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC). Our theme for the 2018 May Day most vividly enlivened our consciousness to the fact that despite the countless contributions of Organized Labour to Nigeria's development, our work is yet to be done. We reminded ourselves that in the face of escalating wage injustice, deteriorating economic situations, precarious work conditions, unsustainable livelihoods, diminishing returns on social capital, and increasingly constricted spaces for social dialogue, that the only recipe for our survival as a movement is to dare to struggle and to dare to win.

We can look back at our engagement in the past one year and agree that we have had some significant wins. A major milestone in our struggle was the campaign for a new national minimum wage of N30,000. The two chambers of the National Assembly passed the National Minimum Wage (2019) Amendment bill in the first quarter of 2019. President Muhammed Buhari gave his assent to the bill on 18th April, 2019. There is no better May Day gift as the N30,000 new national minimum wage. We commend the National Assembly and Mr. President for acceding to our demand for an increase in the national minimum wage, however, delayed. As directed by Mr. President during the signing ceremony, all employers of labour must commence payment of the new national minimum wage immediately.

2019 May Day - Celebrating the ILO at One Hundred Years

Comrades, distinguished guests, our choice of theme for this year's May Day, *"Another 100 Years of Struggle for Jobs, Dignity and Social Justice in Nigeria"*, is in consonance and in solidarity with the mood of the global working-class movement in the celebration of our own global institution – the ILO – which is the only agency of the United Nations with a tripartite structure representing workers, government and private sector employers. This year's May Day theme does not only grant us a window into the past century of excellent collaboration with the ILO but it also offers us a panoramic view into our collective responsibility to building workers'

power, advancing the campaign for decent jobs, and promoting the cause for social justice in Nigeria, the sub region, Africa and globally.

Like we earlier noted, the International Labour Organization has come a long way – one hundred years. We are not just celebrating one hundred years as mere numbers. We are celebrating one hundred years of global impact and quality service to the working people of the world. We are celebrating one hundred years of consolidation on the convictions of the founders of the ILO who arising from the ashes of the First World War sought to build the consciousness that social justice is the only foundation for sustainable world peace. So strong was the commitment of ILO's founders that by the time the United Nations (UN) was birthed in 1946, the ILO was the first specialized international agency associated with the UN.

We cannot ignore the social progress that has been made especially since the 1944 ILO Philadelphia declaration; the eight core Conventions of the ILO including the Conventions on Freedom of Association and Right to Organize, Collective Bargaining, Child and Forced Labour Conventions, and the ILO declaration on Social Justice for a fair globalization in 2000 and the successful launch and sustenance of the Decent Work Agenda.

Putting the hundred years of the ILO in perspective, the premier global labour institution can keep counting the many laurels on its cabinet. From an original membership of forty-four countries, ILO now has a membership base of one hundred and eighty-seven countries across the continents of the world. The ILO as the only tripartite agency of the UN has over the years remained unflinchingly committed to its mandate of setting the standards for industrial relations, technical cooperation to assist developing countries and systematic pursuit of research, education, and manpower development. Since 1919, the ILO has used its Conventions, Recommendations and Frameworks to push back aggressive advancement of industrial tyranny, social injustice and abuse of rights. The fruits of these commitments are self-evident not only across the globe but also in Nigeria.

We commend the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work co-chaired by Comrade Cyril Ramaphosa, President of South Africa and Prime Minister Stefan Lofven of Sweden. The report is an important step on the road to the ILO Centenary Celebration. Anchored on the broad objective of a Human Centred Agenda for the Future of Work, the Report called for increased investments in peoples' capabilities, increased investment in the institutions of work and increased investment in decent and sustainable work. Overall, the Report's thrust was the strengthening of spaces for social dialogue, promotion of gender rights, adoption of a Universal Labour Guarantee to further protect the right of workers to organizing, collective bargaining, adequate living wage, safety at work and a Just Transition.

This year also marks 60 years of ILO in Nigeria and Africa. We shall join the ILO Area office in Abuja and the Regional Office in Abidjan to celebrate the dual anniversaries and will actively participate in all programmes lined up for these occasions in Addis Ababa, Abuja, Pretoria and Abidjan, including the 14th quadrennial African Regional meeting due in Cote d'Ivoire later in the year. There is indeed a lot to celebrate in the one hundred years of the ILO. We have asked all our State Councils to accommodate and reflect fully in their commemoration of this year's May Day lessons and activities that celebrate the centenary of the International Labour Organization.

As we celebrate the Centenary of the ILO and the institution of social dialogue, we call on the Federal Government to prevail on the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment to reactivate our own social dialogue mechanism via the functioning of the tripartite National Labour Advisory Council, which is the apex statutory body that advises on labour regimes and industrial relations in the country, under the chairmanship of the Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment. It is unfortunate that since the current Minister of Labour and Employment assumed office, this important advisory body has never met.

Organized Labour also wishes to use the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the ILO to call on the current Chairman of ECOWAS, our own President Muhammadu Buhari, to use his good offices to capacitate the regional Social Dialogue Forum to function properly. The Forum was created by a supplementary protocol of ECOWAS Heads of State in 2011, when our former President Goodluck Jonathan served as Chairman of ECOWAS. Nigeria being the first country in Africa to host the ILO, must continue to give leadership to the rest of Africa and the sub region in this regard.

The Nigeria Labour Congress, the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria, our affiliates, our allies in civil society and our social partners wish the ILO another 100 years of making the world a better place through advocacy and promotion of pristine industrial practices and decent work values.

Comrades, this year's theme also grants us the space for sober reflections on the state of the national economy, the quality of governance, the health of our democracy, the global labour-industrial dynamics especially from the binoculars of a nationalist labour movement and the need to rededicate ourselves to national renaissance. Our reflections should derive strength and focus from our past struggles for independence, workers' rights, enthronement of democratic rule, and campaign for good governance.

This year's theme charges us to keep being the voice of the voiceless. We can only do this by intensifying the struggle against every vestige of social injustice especially as manifest in the prevailing huge inequality gap, wage

disparities and poor working cum living conditions in our country. The pursuit of shared prosperity among Nigerians must remain our topmost priority. We must renew our commitment to strengthen our democratic values especially through the campaign for electoral reforms that would engender free, fair, and credible elections as the foundation for good governance, a stable polity and a progressive modern nation state.

STATE OF THE NATION

The Economy

According to the 2019 African Economic Outlook Report by the Africa Development Bank, Nigeria's economy is expected to grow at 2.3% this year. This would be an improvement on our country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) performance in 2017 and 2018. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product grew by 1.81% (year-on-year) in real terms in the third quarter of 2018. This seems slightly better than the growth of 1.17% achieved in the third quarter of 2017.

This is encouraging as it shows that our economy has made a complete rebound from the recession of 2014 – 2016. This pattern of growth is expected to sustain Nigeria's status as the largest economy on the continent contributing about 20% of Africa's Gross Domestic Product.

Comrades, distinguished guests, despite the promising nature of Nigeria's economy, our economy is yet to be weaned from import dependency. Our economy remains essentially rent seeking, subsistence, non-inclusive, vulnerable to shocks from the global commodities market, fraught to unwieldy inflationary trends and unable to create sustainable mass jobs. Despite the best efforts of government to diversify the economy, attract foreign direct investment, increase our foreign exchange revenue and create more jobs, these efforts are being frustrated by systemic challenges. These challenges include endemic corruption, institutional chaos, crises in our social sector, and disabling physical infrastructure - electricity supply, water, rail system, road network, inland waterways transportation etc.

Inflation

Fellow workers and citizens, official data from the Central Bank of Nigeria indicates that inflation on all items (year on change) had dropped from 11.44% in December 2018 to around 11.25% in March 2019. Yet, the unofficial reality shows that life is becoming increasingly excruciating today for the average worker and citizens. The phenomenal hike in the price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) otherwise known as 'fuel', or 'petrol' in

2016, the devaluation of the Naira in the same year and increase in the cost of electricity in the past five years have sustained high inflationary rates. The persistence of double-digit inflation and stagnant remuneration for workers has almost wiped off the purchasing power of Nigerian workers.

The impact of the prevailing hyper-inflation on our pensioners and workers is better imagined than experienced. Working families are unable to meet up with the basic costs of living especially feeding and decent accommodation thus plummeting living standards to an all-time low. The worse is that most Nigerians are not even enjoying utility services such as public power supply, potable water, public education and healthcare despite very high user access charges. In the absence of cushioning palliatives, it appears that workers have become the sacrificial lamb on the slab of all that is not working in Nigeria. This is indeed very unfortunate.

Unemployment

A 2010 British Council Report on Nigeria identified unemployment especially youth unemployment as a demographic time bomb. Today, the bombs are going off in all directions by way of upsurge in crime and restiveness. The National Bureau of Statistics reported in December 2018 that Nigeria's unemployment rate stood at 23.1% in the third quarter of 2018, up from 18.1% same period in 2017. At the last count, the combined unemployment and underemployment rate in Nigeria was 43.3%.

The Organized Labour notes the efforts by President Muhammadu Buhari to create mass jobs through the diversification of the economy particularly through the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP). We advise that these initiatives be anchored on a strong commitment to industrialization. We call for the revival of the intermediate and capital goods production segments of the Nigerian industrial sector, especially the auto assembly plants, the steel industry, the fertilizer and petrochemical industries in the context of a medium-term national development planning. We must develop a national consciousness and culture that frowns at exporting raw materials without value addition.

We call on all tiers of government in Nigeria to provide incentives to drive and sustain the growth of labour-intensive industrial sector. There are millions of jobs locked down in the untapped value chains in our agricultural, petroleum and mining sectors. Now is the time to unlock them and provide decent jobs for our youth. Now is the time to reconstruct the sour narrative of exporting jobs and prosperity to other climes and importing joblessness, poverty and misery into the motherland.

Industrialization and Creation of Decent Jobs

The de-industrialization of Nigeria as already identified is the reason for the plague of mass unemployment and poverty ravaging our country. Industrialisation is the key to delivering sustainable jobs and is crucial for the overall growth of the national economy; it is the foundation for good living standards. Unfortunately, the manufacturing capacity utilization (MCU) in our country has fallen headlong over the years. Nigeria might be the largest economy in Africa but the contribution of manufacturing to our economic size is appalling. From 75% manufacturing capacity utilization in 1980, Nigeria has fallen to 54.6% as at September 2018.

From statistics made available by Trading Economics, an international market research firm, Nigeria lags behind many countries in the sub region and on the continent in the area of manufacturing capacity utilization. As at the last quarter of 2018, South Africa leads the pack in Africa with 81.4% manufacturing capacity utilization. Our West African neighbour, Benin Republic has a manufacturing capacity utilization of 62.3%. Ivory Coast has a manufacturing capacity utilization of 63.5%. Senegal has an MCU of 72.7%. Togo has an MCU of 68.6% and Mali has an MCU of 73.3%.

We should emulate the tested and proven prototypes elsewhere in places as Singapore, Argentina, Brazil, India and China to attract relevant production lines and labour-intensive industries to Nigeria. This would help to engage the teeming population of our country in industrial production, build the skills of Nigerians and place Nigeria in a progressive manufacturing trajectory. Similarly, government should provide practical incentives and support to encourage large scale industries to develop networks of SMEs to be part of their production networks and supply chains. This is the most viable way to promote horizontal integration.

Textile Industry

There was a time when the textile industry was the highest provider of employment in Nigeria second only to the public sector. The story of our textile industry today has been reduced to a tale of tears. From more than 175 textile factories in the late '80s, we can only boast of less than 27 surviving ones. The greatest social tragedy in the near total collapse of our textile industry is the mass retrenchment of hundreds of thousands of workers and the attendant suffering that their families are exposed to. We cannot allow this sad state of affairs to continue indefinitely.

We demand the recovery of the cotton value chain. Government must also urgently revisit the issue of the textile revitalization fund. The Obasanjo, and later Yar'Adua administrations secured N100 billion intervention fund to revive our textile sector. We need to know what was responsible for the less than successful impact of this big fund invested to revitalize the sector and what needs to be done to avoid the pitfalls from that experience. Nigeria with almost 200 million people is a massive market for textile materials, and it is sad that we presently produce far less than 25% of our peoples' clothing needs. The infrastructural and other challenges that has continued to hinder the growth and development of the textile sector need to be addressed head on by the various governments of the federation.

Furthermore, we implore government to make it a policy that the Armed Forces, Police, Customs, Immigration, Civil Defence, Road Safety Corps and all uniformed services personnel should be kitted with locally produced textile and footwear. Also, appropriate directives should be given that the uniforms of all school children in Nigeria should be made from textile produced by local industries. This same gesture should be extended to all locally manufactured goods in order to guarantee markets for them.

Electricity to Power our Potentials

On 1st November 2013 the Federal Government privatized power generation and distribution to address the following challenges: end darkness by increasing generation, improve distribution facilities, and reduce government financial burden on power. While it is expected that the private investors will build more plants and improve distribution facilities, many years after, the situation has not changed. GENCOs and DISCOs continue to be huge financial burden to government and ruthless exploiters of consumers.

In 2015, we were told that the FG bailed out the private investors in the power sector with a lifeline of N233 billion. It is also being proposed that government is going to take over the burden of providing pre-paid meters from incompetent Discos at extra cost. Consumers have endured debilitating tariff hike – the DISCOs want tariff hike every six months. Consumers are being tormented with crazy fraudulent bills that have no bearing with electricity consumed. It is sad that five years into the power privatization programme, none of the key targets have been achieved

The Federal Government, GENCOs, DISCOs and even gas suppliers are locked in an endless buck passing over the failure of the system. Government blamed DISCOs for abysmal supply of gas and the DISCOs blame government for failure to implement tariff increase every six months.

We are in a situation where no one wants to accept blame for the failure of the privatisation scheme in the power sector. It is clear that the power sector privatization failed because incompetent investors were engaged.

It is sad that the Nigeria Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) appears soft on operators and hard on consumers. We call on the Federal Government now that the tenure of the DISCOs is due for renewal to review the entire privatization exercise and come up with the best approach to deal with this challenge. (Daily Independence: 18th April 2019)

The Ajaokuta Steel Complex and Other Steel Mills

The Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Company was conceptualized in the national development plans of 1962-68/1970-75 to lay the foundation for Nigeria's industrial development. Unfortunately, nearly forty years after work at the complex reached nearly 90% completion, the plant has been abandoned to rot and to be scavenged. Curiously, it has been reported that only US \$1 billion is needed to complete the Ajaokuta Iron and Steel Complex. We urge government to deploy the necessary political will and funds to salvage the iron and steel complex where over US \$6 billion had been invested.

The Federal Government should also revitalize the Katsina and Oshogbo Steel Rolling Mills and ensure the functioning of the Aladja Steel Complex within the overall master plan of the Ajaokuta Steel Complex. The potentials of a thriving Iron and Steel Industry for mass jobs, spare parts, industrial production and rolling stocks for our railways expansion cum renewal projects and as the ultimate springboard for the much talked about Nigeria's industrial development cannot be over-emphasized.

The Mining and Solid Mineral Sector

Part of the broad strategy to create mass decent jobs should include very ambitious drive to develop our mining and solid minerals sector. Nigeria is endowed with diverse solid minerals. Unfortunately, since the discovery of crude oil in 1956, Nigeria has progressively lost its pride of place as one of the mining destinations in Africa. The contribution of solid minerals to national GDP has plummeted from 4-5% in the first two decades following independence to about 0.46% or N400 billion contributions to GDP. The near extinction of our mining sector has resulted to major job losses thus exacerbating Nigeria's unemployment crisis.

We call on government to fund access roads to mining sites, provide water reservoirs in mining sites and training of artisanal miners and lapidarists to enhance their value to the industry. It is also important for government to increase funding on the sourcing of geo-scientific data on mining resources as against the current practice of depending on aerial geo-physical survey. We call for the modernisation and development of solid minerals sector with a view to ensuring domestic value addition, local beneficiation and use in other industries. In the context, the Federal Government should discourage export of any solid minerals in their crude forms.

In order to add value to our vast mineral resources and move our country from primary to secondary and tertiary levels of production, research and technology is key. While we commend President Muhammadu Buhari for inaugurating the National Research and Innovation Council (NRIC) in January 2016, we call on Mr. President to go a step further to assent to the NRIC Bill (2019) which had been transmitted to him by the National Assembly. The NRIC Bill 2019 has been described by many stakeholders as very vital to our quest for technological revolution, industrialization, human security, inclusive national development and shared prosperity.

The Agricultural Sector

We commend the Federal Government and a number of State Governments for showing commitment to the revamping of the agro-allied sector. A few weeks ago, Nigeria was rated as the largest rice producer in Africa with an annual rice turnover of 4 million metric tons upstaging Egypt which used to be Africa's number one. We believe more can still be done. We call on government to focus on improving the agriculture value chain especially agro-processing. We must now make the critical transition from primary production to secondary and even tertiary levels of production. It all starts with adding real value to our agricultural products. By so doing, we would not only unlock huge potentials for the creation of decent jobs, we would also be creating more wealth for our people and for government.

Organized Labour commends the plans to recapitalise the Agricultural Development Bank. This is a good step but the Federal Government should extend the recapitalization to all existing development banks. In fact, it is important to create new ones to fill clear and identifiable gaps. The recapitalized development banks should work with a network of commercial banks to secure loan facilities of adequate term structures and at reasonable interest rates. We are convinced that the prevailing double-digit interest rates and the wide interest rates spread are inimical to industrial development and should be comprehensively addressed.

The Wharf-Apapa Gridlock

Despite the efforts of government to solve the perennial traffic gridlock in the Apapa-Wharf axis in Lagos State, the problem remains intractable. We call for the deployment of short to medium term measures to immediately alleviate the sufferings that Nigerians are going through in this critical national economic artery. We are alarmed at the reports of extortion of innocent workers and users who ply the Apapa-Wharf road by the Task Force deployed at that axis. We condemn such practice and urge relevant agencies to stamp out this indiscipline. We also call on all stakeholders to work towards freeing this important corridor from all obstructions.

Public Governance, Institution Building and Good Governance

The Public Service

The public service is the engine room of government policy articulation and the implementation of public programmes. Unfortunately, the public service in Nigeria is marked by low pay and huge salary disparity in the core civil service when compared to other MDAs. This needs to be addressed as it negates the ILO's principles of equal pay for work of equal value. There are also the challenges of delay in the payment of promotion arrears, transfer allowance and other legitimate claims of workers and the dearth of working tools and conducive workspaces for workers. Also, of paramount concern to workers is the policy that discarded the tenure system for the top echelon in our civil service making the civil service top heavy and promoting career stagnation and indiscipline.

We call on government to ensure adequate and timely payment of the salaries for public sector workers especially those at the state and local governments. This would make the public service attractive to top talents and minimize the lure of official graft. Government should remedy the huge salary disparity in the core civil service compared to other MDAs. Government should reinstate the tenure policy in the civil service, stop the overly dependence on consultants and improve the work environment.

Education Sector

Education is the cornerstone and foundation of human capital development in any society. I will not end this address without making a case for the revitalization of our education sector. We urge our political leaders to take the bold initiative and tackle the challenge of poor funding, decay of infrastructure and teaching aids in our public schools especially universities. We cannot expect to catch up with this 21st century and the next one if we fail to diligently apply ourselves to building human capital.

Health Sector

Our public hospitals that used to be referral centres across the continent are now shorn of their former glories and pride thus compelling our citizens to take to very costly medical adventures to hospitals around the world. The principal factors responsible for this decline include funding issues, poor motivation of health professionals and decay in infrastructure.

Industrial action in the healthcare sector is becoming more rampant these days. This is not because our health professionals are callous but because government has failed to prioritize the healthcare of citizens. The failure of government to honour collective bargaining agreement is becoming legendary. The situation is compounded by preferential treatment to one division – and the minority – of the healthcare workforce over majority of the healthcare human resource team. This is totally unacceptable. The issue of CONHESS 10, skipping allowance and appointment of health professionals apart from medical doctors to management positions continue to threaten the stability in our healthcare delivery system.

Government must do all it can to quickly meet the legitimate demands of workers in the health sector and save the health sector from total collapse. We also call on government at all levels to make it mandatory for all public officers to patronise our schools and health facilities for their children's education and the medical needs of themselves and their families.

We reject any covert or overt machinations by some interests to privatize and fully commercialize our public hospitals and tertiary health institutions. We want to warn that such a move will not only escalate the chaos already prevalent in our public healthcare system, it will also send a clear signal to Nigerians that government has abandoned the masses to a gloomy fate.

It is gratifying that Mr. President shares our sentiment. He once said "health and education will not be privatized because they are the only things left for the poor and their children. If the children of the poor can access quality education and healthcare, they will find their level in the society."

National Development Planning

Nigerian workers are worried by constraints imposed by the dearth of deliberate planning of our national economy for many years. Nigeria started her development progression with the 1946 Ten-Year Plan for Development and Welfare in Nigeria. The successor Development Plan for Nigeria 1955-1960 ushered independent nationhood. From 1962 to 1985, the government carried out four other national development plans. The

fifth national development plan was in the final stages before the coup d'état of 27th August, 1985 led by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida regime. It is unfortunate that the 1985 military coup not only ended the era of national development planning but also, instituted the disarticulation of the annual budgets from discernible milestones of economic development in Nigeria.

We urge all the Governments in Nigeria to make deliberate efforts to return to national development planning. The advantages in doing so are many, including fixing the weak plan-budget link and thereby addressing the poor coherence in programmes and projects implementation. There is need for the systematic and credible monitoring of the execution of development programmes to ensure that government projects meet set targets and service identified needs. The Ministry of National Planning is very critical in this regard. We call for the professionalization of the Ministry of National Planning. Mr. President should appoint a Cabinet Minister with the requisite training and experience to administer this crucial Ministry.

Budgetary Framework

Our budgetary framework remains frail as appropriation bills stall longer than necessary before they are passed into law. This is particularly the case with our Federal budgets. The 2019 budget is a case in point. It is still trapped in the National Assembly four months into the year. When the budgets are eventually passed, release of capital budgets are hardly tied to performance or based on feedback reports. This is worrisome. There should be laws to fix the period of budget presentation and passage into law.

We call for an overhaul of our budgetary system, improved relations between the legislature and the executive and cutting down of wastes in government. We also call for the scrapping of service-wide votes as they encourage arbitrariness, undue discretion, and abuse of public financial management tools by dishonest public officials. Furthermore, the release of capital budgets should be tied to performance based on job certification. This is a fundamental way of tackling official graft and ending the regime of arbitrariness and indiscretion in public finance management.

Anti-Corruption Fight and Fiscal Discipline

We commend the commitment of the present government to fighting official corruption. There is an increase in the number of public officials and their collaborators in the private sector who have been successfully prosecuted and convicted on charges of corruption. It is important for all Nigerians to see the fight against corruption as a collective battle which must be fought in a transparent and holistic manner. Corrupt persons in

and outside government must be dutifully tracked and diligently prosecuted. This requires a reformed judiciary. We also reiterate our demand for specialised courts to speed up the prosecution of all corruption cases. Corruption cases must be dispensed with in a specific period of time.

Organized Labour in Nigeria views the huge severance payment and pension to political office holders as a form of corruption. It is even more disturbing when many of the recipients of these self-sponsored and self-benefitting allowances are State Governors who left office with piles of unpaid salaries, gratuity and pension liabilities. Furthermore, we demand that recovered looted funds must be transparently accounted for and utilized to revitalize the economy and attend to the welfare of citizens.

The Mounting Debt Profile

We are concerned over the increasing debt accumulation by governments at all levels. The Debt Management Office (DMO) disclosed that as at December 31, 2018, Nigeria's debt burden stood at N24.387 trillion. A breakdown of the debt stock revealed that the Federal Government of Nigeria's (FGN) external debt increased by 42.69%, from N4.527 trillion in 2017 to N6.460 trillion in 2018. About two-thirds of the government's revenues go into servicing interest payments, with the principal still waiting for redemption at maturity. Even the Central Bank of Nigeria through the Monetary Policy Committee recently cautioned the Federal Government against Nigeria's rising debt level. The committee warned that except the Federal Government came up with measures to address the situation, Nigeria's debt might rise up to the pre-2005 Paris Club level.

Nigerians would recall that in October 2005, Nigeria and the Paris Club announced a final agreement for debt relief worth \$18bn and an overall reduction of Nigeria's debt stock by \$30bn. The deal was completed on April 21, 2006, when Nigeria made its final payment and its books were cleared of any Paris Club debt. While noting that there is nothing wrong in borrowing in order to invest in physical infrastructure with the capacity of enlarging the public revenue base, Organized Labour cautions government to ensure that our debt profile does not get toxic and return Nigeria to another milieu of debt trap. Once bitten, we must be twice shy!

Tax Justice

Available records show that only workers' pay the correct taxes in Nigeria through the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) system. Given the penchant for Nigeria's rich and powerful to evade and avoid taxes, Nigeria's tax-to-GDP ratio hovers around 14%. Our stand on tax justice is that tax policies should

not impoverish the already poor; rather they should place more responsibility on the rich. Congress is concerned about the plethora of tax waivers, concessions and holidays enjoyed by powerful multinational companies in Nigeria. This situation does not only rob government of funds for development but also further widens the inequality gap.

It is in this vein that we completely reject proposals to increase the Value Added Tax (VAT) as a means of funding the 2019 budget. We warn that any increase in VAT or PAYE would not only rob workers of the minimal relief from the increase in the national minimum wage but would also leave our economy in dire straits. We urge government to consider other progressive ways of financing the budget. Government should adopt progressive taxation in a manner that captures more people in the tax net and also ensures that the rich and luxury items are properly taxed.

The Upsurge in Insecurity:

The gains made in the first two years of this administration are being eroded by an upsurge in armed robbery, kidnap for ransom, militancy, terrorism and other armed attacks. Boko Haram elements now operate from fall back positions to maim and kill civilians and security personnel. We must do something now to stem the tide of pastoralists-farmers clashes, attacks by armed herdsmen cum cattle rustlers and the terror of kidnappers which is clearly on the rise.

The consequences of the prevailing upsurge in insecurity for communal relations, the rural economy and image of the country demands an urgent intervention by government at all levels. We call on the Federal and State Governments to urgently rejig our security architecture, structure, and management. We also call for a robust and sustainable response to renewed security concerns in Nigeria even if that means an increase in the budget for internal security so long it is judiciously and transparently used.

Local Government Reform

The NLC as a pan-Nigerian trade union centre has continued to strongly identify with the untiring campaign by NULGE to restore political and financial autonomy to our local governments. We use the occasion of this May Day to call on the incoming lawmakers at both federal and state level to initiate a constitution review process for the purpose of granting full political and financial autonomy to local governments.

National Conversation on Elections in Nigeria

Organized Labour in Nigeria notes with disappointment that despite several appeals to our political class to display maturity, civility and total compliance to our electoral laws, rules and guidelines, the conduct of the

2019 general election left a lot to be desired. Unscrupulous politicians still tried to impose their own rule of brigandage and terror on the electoral process. There were reports of widespread incidences of hate speech, vote buying, and abuse of provisions for manual accreditation. Even the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was not spared of perennial logistics tardiness which contributed to the spate of inconclusive polls that trailed the 2019 general election.

Organized Labour is alarmed that the electoral infractions that trailed the 2019 general polls did not only erode some of the grounds won as a result of the push by Organized Labour and its allies during the 2007-2011 campaign for electoral reform in Nigeria but also presented new threats to the efforts to consolidate and deepen our democracy.

We call for a fresh national conversation on election management in Nigeria. This must be anchored on an urgency to fully implement Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Committee's Report especially recommendations for the democratization of appointment of INEC leadership, establishment of an election offences tribunal and unbundling of INEC for increased professionalism.

STATE OF THE STRUGGLE

The New National Minimum Wage

Fellow workers, distinguished comrades, our recent struggle for a new national minimum wage of N30,000 has been one of the most arduous and long drawn in both our history as a movement and in the annals of our country. This should not be so. Well, as it is said "it is better late than never". I salute all our comrades especially our leaders at the state level who astutely discharged the burden of leadership by mobilizing our workers during our different campaigns, rallies, protests and strike actions on the account of our demand for a new national minimum wage. It was your steadfast commitment and dedication to this struggle that won us victory.

Once again, we recognize the solidarity of some of our Comrades and friends of Labour in the National Assembly who stood by us throughout the struggle for a new national minimum wage. We acknowledge the efforts of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation for easing social dialogue between us and the government while this process lasted. We also applaud President Muhammadu Buhari for being a promise keeper. He promised to sign the minimum wage into law and even after securing a second term in office, kept true to his promise by assenting to

the new national minimum wage bill. That was another demonstration of labour-friendliness by Mr. President. We will recall that it was President Muhammadu Buhari who asked State Governors “how do you sleep at night when you have not paid the salaries of workers?”

We urge government to quickly finalize salary adjustment across the payroll of civil and public servants. We have already wasted a lot of time arriving at the new national minimum wage, we should not waste a single more second implementing the new national minimum wage across board. We urge workers to remain vigilant till total victory is won.

Withholding of Contributory Pensions Deduction by Employers

Incidences of unlawful and illegal withholding of contributory pension deductions from workers’ salaries and not remitting same to their Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs) still abound. In Ogun State, deductions from workers’ salaries were unjustly withheld for close to one hundred and five months. It took the mobilization of workers in Ogun State and beyond to make the State Government to budge. We will never allow such unjust treatment of workers and infractions on their rights to linger that long.

The unpleasant situations where workers retire from public service and are forced to wait for several months for their pension benefits to be processed still persist. The lethargic and non-payment for those who are already pensioners – especially by state governments continue to militate against the smooth operation of pension administration in our country. We call on all employers of labour and the three tiers of Government to promptly remit all contributory pension deductions to workers’ PFAs.

Salaries, Pension and Gratuity Indebtedness

Your Excellences, dear comrades, some states still owe workers and pensioners salaries and pension, respectively, in arrears. Some states owe pensioners many months of pension arrears despite the bailout funds, budget support fund and the Paris debt refund. The inhumane treatment of pensioners has exposed many of our senior citizens to unnecessary hardship. Many of them have gone down with avoidable ailments and even died untimely while waiting for their pension allowances. This situation is deplorable and sends wrong signals to workers still in active service.

Outsourcing, Casualization of Labour and Anti-Unionization

The struggle against casualization and outsourcing is a priority for our domestic and global campaign. It is an avenue to build workers’ power.

Workers' value cannot be a commodity that can be discarded at will. We will strive to always uphold the dignity of labour. Our priority going forward is to ensure that casualization and outsourcing of labour becomes a thing of the past in Nigeria. We call on the Organized Private Sector to continue to work with us to engage employers that want to enslave Nigerian workers. The truth is that where you allow casual work, you cannot have decent work, workers' wages are unduly withheld, workers' maternity privileges are frozen, in addition to many other injustices.

Of concern to us is the pattern of anti-unionization posture by employers of labour in the public and private sectors. We wish to remind all employers that our laws allow all workers to exercise their freedom of association to belong to unions of their choice in line with the provisions of ILO Convention 87 and Section 40 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. There are many telecommunication companies yet to comply with our laws on industrial relations. We warn such companies that they should expect organized labour soon at their doorsteps as we will increase picketing activities against such roguish corporate entities.

The Pump Price of Petroleum Products

Organized Labour in Nigeria is perturbed at the recent return of long queues at petrol stations in many of our cities. We believe that the current chaos was induced by the unsolicited advice by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that our government should stop subsidizing petroleum products especially the Premium Motor Spirit (PMS). Well, what the IMF means by subsidy removal is increase in the pump price of petroleum products and the transfer of the cost of government's failure to the masses. The working-class in Nigeria notes that the intervention of the IMF in Nigeria has always been about three issues – the removal of the so-called "petrol subsidy", naira devaluation and opening our borders to allow the influx of foreign goods. These three economic prescriptions by the IMF do not have the interest of the Nigerian people at heart as they are tailored at further impoverishing the Nigerian masses. We urge government to take every step to pre-empt another episode of petrol scarcity as a guise for fuel price hike. We will resist such! We posit that the current regime of petrol subsidy is an adventure in corruption – a fact corroborated by President Buhari who asked the trillion-dollar question "who is subsidizing who?"

None Inauguration of NSITF and Dr Ngige's New Dance.

Comrades, distinguished guests, a number of you might have followed our recent exchanges with the Minister of Labour and Employment Dr. Chris Ngige over his several manoeuvres since 2017 to prevent the inauguration of the NSITF Board under the chairmanship of Chief Frank Ovie Kokori.

In 2017, the Federal Government approved the reconstitution of various boards including National Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) and appointed Chief Frank Kokori as Chairman. The Minister of Labour and Employment congratulated him more than four times, invited him for discussion on the date for the board's inauguration and subsequently forwarded his name alongside with others for security screening at the DSS. Chief Frank Kokori was duly screened since last November. Yet, the board of NSITF has not been inaugurated and it has been one story after another.

First, the Minister claimed that he was waiting for Mr. President after he returned from his medical leave to revalidate the nomination of Chief Kokori as the Chairman of the NSITF board. The Minister told us later that Mr. President actually did re-validate Chief Kokori's appointment. The Minister then proceeded to set up an inauguration committee under the Ministry's Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Odusote, which slated 29th July 2018 for the inauguration of the NSITF under Chief Kokori's chairmanship.

In January 2018, after waiting for four months for the inauguration to no avail, Chief Kokori at the Gani Fawehinmi memorial lecture in Lagos voiced his dismay at the deliberate delay tactics of the Minister. The Minister took this as an affront on his powers, and set out to frustrate the inauguration of the board all together. Because the non-inauguration of the board was affecting the corporate governance of the NSITF and the Trustfund pensions, both of which the NLC has substantial interests in, we had earlier written to the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) to prevail on the Minister to do the inauguration. This letter was dated 15th December 2017.

The SGF's office directing that all boards must be inaugurated by supervising Ministers by March 9, 2018. Dr. Ngige failed to inaugurate the NSITF board, while inaugurating other boards supervised by his ministry. He told reporters he wanted to clean up the corruption in the NSITF before inaugurating the board. He went on to set up a 9-member Administrative Panel of Inquiry into the finances of NSITF, under the chairmanship of the Assistant Director Finance and Supply of his ministry, and asked the agency to provide N18 million for its work. This was captured in a correspondence by the Permanent Secretary of the ministry dated 12th March 2018.

We saw through this as a deliberate tactic to further delay the inauguration of the board under Kokori. We petitioned Mr. President on March 20, 2018, and adduced reasons why we did not believe that Minister Ngige could institute a credible administrative probe, when the EFCC had already

concluded a probe of the agency up to 2015, and was already prosecuting persons including the then permanent secretary that represented the Ministry of Labour in the NSITF Board. The EFCC had obtained court judgement to seize over 600 million Naira worth of assets of Mr. Ilo, the Permanent Secretary as a result of the corrupt enrichment. While the Managing Director and four other directors are being currently prosecuted in various courts by EFCC as a result of these investigations.

We drew attention to the “hasty recruitment of hundreds of people at the insistence of the Honourable Minister, majority of whom were from his immediate community among other corporate governance issues. We also argued that being the supervising minister, setting up an administrative panel to probe the period after 2015 amounted to self-probe.

In June 2018, Dr Ngige again attempted to ambush the NSITF without a board by writing directly to the Managing Director of NSITF to within 7 days of his letter dated 14th June 2018, constitute the NSITF membership of Trustfund board. He gave the 4 nominees as: “(1) Managing Director of NSITF (or the chairman of the Fund’s Board) ;(2) The Executive Director, Finance and Investment -NSITF; (3) The General Manager Investment and Treasury Management -NSITF ;(4) The General Manager, RISK -NSITF. “

The Minister in taking this policy decision, usually the function of the Board, directed in his illusionary display of power, that “this being a policy decision shall henceforth remain the format for NSITF (Federal Government) representation on the Board of Trustfund Pension (TFP). Management Board of NSITF are not authorized to change this format of representation”.

Mr Michael Akabogu, Dr. Ngige’s former special assistant whom he forced on NSITF management as General Manager, RISK, happened to be one of the two personal aides of Ngige that the Pension Commission (PENCOM) had refused earlier to confirm as Directors of Trustfund Pensions, when the Minister directed the Ag. Management of NSITF to submit their names.

Ngige and the Aborted Inauguration of the NSITF Board on April 18 2019.

With less than two months to the end of his tenure as Minister of Labour, Dr. Ngige decided to invite members of the NSITF board for inauguration on April 18, 2019 in the ministry’s conference room. In the invitation letters sent to our two representatives and those of NECA, the position of chairman was left blank. We immediately knew from our experience in the proceeding years that something was amiss.

We however went with Chief Kokori for the inauguration on the appointed date, and waited for over two hours before an officer of the ministry came to announce the indefinite postponement of the event. To our shock and dismay, the Minister later in the day authorized a statement accusing the Labour leadership led by the president of Congress, Comrade Ayuba Wabba and his NUPENG counterpart Comrade William of being “thugs” and “hooligans” and importing “violent thugs” in their hundreds to disrupt the inauguration.

Dr. Ngige went on live programme on Channels Television a few days later to spread further blanket falsehood by saying we made a recommendation for someone to be chairman of the board, claiming it was not within our remit to do so. As if this cooked falsehood wasn’t enough, he authorized his aide to claim to the media that Kokori’s name was never sent to the presidency for appointment, but that “The NLC president Ayuba Wabba visited the Minister in his office to tell him that they visited the presidency and submitted Kokori’s name for an appointment...” (see Vanguard of 29th April 2019).

The Nation of 29th April 2019, also reported the Minister’s Special Assistant, Nwachukeu Obidiwe in a statement claiming that “Chief Frank Kokori’s appointment as NSITF Chairman never got presidential approval,” claiming further that “Kokori lacks the requisite experience to lead the Fund.”

In all our years of dealing with ministers of the Federal Republic, we have never come across one as dishonest and deceitful as Dr. Ngige. From our account of what has transpired since September 2017, it is very obvious that the Minister has been bent on manipulating the situation and bringing up one deceit upon another to enable him remain the sole manager of the NSITF, as long as he remained Minister of Labour and Employment.

It is, however, the most dishonourable thing for a minister to tell bare-faced lies like this. It is also very disrespectful of Mr. President to lie so blatantly that the President never approved Chief Kokori’s appointment as NSITF chairman. During the ceremony honouring the Heroes of June 12 993, at the Aso Rock Banquet Hall, President Buhari openly assured Chief Kokori that his appointment as NSITF Chairman stands!

The Minister wants Nigerians to believe that Chief Kokori does not have what it takes to lead the NSITF. This is a very laughable claim, because chairmen of parastatals and agencies have nothing to do with the day to

day running of these organizations. They are appointed to ensure that the Board performs its oversight function of the management of these organizations. The executive management of these organizations are made up of all requisite professional to run the organization successfully. The above notwithstanding, Chief Kokori ran one of the most complex trade unions in Nigeria, to national and international acclaim. Chief Kokori got a Masters degree in Development Studies from the prestigious Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands, 35 years ago, in 1984. The Minister was surely only engaging in mischief by trying to cast aspersions on the ability of Chief Kokori in this regard.

We wish to conclude this segment of the speech on this NSITF saga by saying that we have tolerated Ngige and his antics long enough. From this May Day, we will henceforth not allow him to toy with the funds of NSITF which are contributions on behalf of the toiling workers of Nigeria in the private sector. Enough is Enough!

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic Struggle for Emancipation

The Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (Western Sahara) is the last outpost of colonialism in Africa. Organized Labour in Nigeria insists on democratic freedom and respect for human rights of the Western Sahara people. We use the occasion of this May Day to call on Morocco to recognize the unconditional sovereignty and independence of the people of Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. We also call on Nigeria in spite of the economic relationship with the Kingdom of Morocco to urge Morocco to respect the sovereign rights to self-determination of the people of Saharawi. The same appeal goes to the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), and the United Nations. They should continue to mount pressure on the Moroccan and French governments to respect international conventions and court judgements that uphold the political and economic sovereignty of Western Sahara.

Solidarity with the Cameroonian Trade Union Movement

The plight of our comrades in the Cameroonian Trade Union Movement who face horrifying harassment in the hands of the state will continue to attract our empathy. It is sad that many of the teachers, civil servants, activists and even some members of the Cameroonian Parliament

especially in the North West and South West English-speaking regions of Cameroon are still detained for prolonged periods in very inhumane conditions for calling for political referendum on a system of government they believe suits them better. We call on the Government of Cameroon to halt the harassment of our comrades and other citizens. There is already a growing refugee crisis around the axis bordering Nigeria due to the displacement of people. We call on our government to accord Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria all the necessary support and assistance.

We Stand with Comrade Lula da Silva and Workers Party of Brazil

Nigeria workers stand resolutely with President Luiz Inacio Lula Da Silva in his current travails. We extend our solidarity to Brazilian workers for their sustained support for Comrade Lula da Silva.

President Lula's legal harassment heightened the moment it became clear that he was the leading candidate for the October 2018 Brazilian general polls. Political rivals who could not stand Lula's towering popularity used the courts to get what they could not get through the ballot box. It is a shame that a man who through his famous Bosla Familia (family allowance) and Fome Zero (zero hunger) social interventions led close to 40 million Brazilians out of poverty could be so cruelly hounded.

It is a shame that a President who left power with an approval rating of 82% could be treated like a common criminal. The conspiracy against President Lula is no longer in the realms of speculation. Judge Sergio Moro who superintended over Comrade Lula's trial and conviction, same as the removal of his successor, President Dilma Rousseff, also of the Workers Party from office has been well rewarded by the incumbent President with the position of the Minister of Justice of Brazil.

Are we surprised? Certainly not! Red hot cruelty, iron clad vindictiveness and messy pettiness remains the global badge of organized capital. Organized Labour considers President Lula's persecution as an attack on the global working class. A section of the international community has already described President Lula as a Prisoner of Conscience and called for his immediate release from incarceration.

We urge Brazilian workers and people not to capitulate. We urge our Brazilian comrades to continue to stand strong. We will win!!!

Free Lula! Free Lula!! Free Lula Now!!!

Solidarity with the Cuban People

We commend the resoluteness of the Cuban people against the fifty-eight years of United States' economic blockade. Despite isolation by Western countries, the Cuban social infrastructure especially the schools and the healthcare have continued to take good care of Cuba's teeming population. But there is a limit to which you can push a people. We call for the removal of all blockades against the government and people of Cuba.

The Situation in Venezuela

Nigerian workers reject completely the meddling, intrusion and intervention of Western countries especially the United States of America in the internal political affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The political destiny of Venezuela can only be determined by Venezuelans through democratic processes which are clearly in place in Venezuela.

We stand in solidarity with the Venezuelan people and the political leadership under President Nicolas Maduro. We call on President Maduro to continue to uphold with dignity the democratic mandate freely given to him by the Venezuelan people. We also call on the Venezuelan military and other sections of the Venezuelan armed forces to continue to subject themselves to the constitutional authority in general and to the wishes of the Venezuelan people in particular.

We call on governments bent on using the current economic challenges in Venezuela to create civil strife to desist from igniting a cauldron of fire in Venezuela and thereby precipitate a humanitarian disaster of inestimable proportions. The global community is yet to recover from the aftershocks and spill-overs of the Syrian civil war particularly as manifested in the deterioration in global migration and terrorism crises. The world cannot afford a similar conflagration in the heart of Latin America.

Violation of Trade Union Rights in Zimbabwe

Organized Labour is highly concerned about the brutality and barbaric crackdown by Zimbabwean security forces on protests against the hike in commodities prices. The action of these security personnel led to a number of arrests, disappearances, displacements, with attendant physical and psychological injuries to victims, including trade union leaders.

There is no doubt that the fundamental human rights and basic dignity of Zimbabweans have been trampled upon by the members of the Zimbabwean armed forces and security personnel. We call on the government of Zimbabwe to immediately stop the cycle of pogrom against defenceless citizens by calling the security forces to order. What has been going on in Zimbabwe is out of tune with democratic tenets and certainly not in tandem with the promise of a new Zimbabwe.

This unfortunate scenario of state oppression against unarmed workers and law-abiding citizens was also recently witnessed in Durban, South Africa. This is condemnable and totally unacceptable.

Commiseration over Deaths caused by Cyclone Idai

We wish to express our deeply felt grief and commiseration with the workers and people of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Madagascar affected by the horrendous landfall of Cyclone Idai in March 2019.

Cyclone Idai left in its wake death in hundreds, thousands of displaced persons and largescale destruction and disruptions of public infrastructure, social facilities, property and livelihood. In Beira, the second largest city in Mozambique, Cyclone Idai left its most devastating footprints as it is estimated that nearly 90% of the city was destroyed. Similar waves of destruction impacted other cities and communities in different parts of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Madagascar where Cyclone Idai bared its monstrous fangs. There are lessons from Idai. First, Climate Change is real! We can only mitigate and adapt to its realities. Second, there is need to make provisions for early warning systems and robust architecture of rescue resources to deal with disasters of such nature.

CONCLUSION

Comrades, this address cannot be complete without once again saluting the courage, resilience and patriotism of Nigerian workers, pensioners and their families who have continued to endure the profligacy and profanity of an unrepentant ruling class. Our fists struck in collective commitment to the struggle are sufficient to achieve the social justice we all desire.

We specially dedicate this May Day to Nigerian workers who lost their lives, a limb or their means of livelihood in this past one year. I dedicate this day to our senior citizens who despite humiliation by the country they served faithfully still turned up today swinging to our solidarity songs. You truly embody the finest aspects of our humanity. You continue to inspire our younger comrades that there is virtue and honour in honest service!

We also appreciate the steadfast solidarity and partnership of our allies in the civil society and the international trade union movement particularly those of LO-Norway and LO-Sweden. In the same vein, we appreciate other socially conscious unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral organizations such as the Fredrich Ebert Stiftung, Solidarity Centre, Turkish Federation of Trade Unions and others for their right hand of fellowship over the years. We look forward to strengthening these partnerships in the years to come.

We appreciate immensely our mother global union – the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) especially the member trade union centres for giving me the rare privilege of leading the ITUC at the global level. This honour belongs to all of us and is a clarion call to do more at every level.

Finally, on the epochal occasion of the celebration of the ILO Centenary, we pay tribute to the memory of our past leaders especially Pa Michael Imoudu, organizers and shop floor members of the working-class family who lived their lives in the service of the labour movement and some of them even going as far as paying the supreme price in the struggle. We assure you that that by the grace of God Almighty your struggle shall not be in vain.

**Long Live Nigeria Labour Congress
Long Live the Trade Union Congress
Long Live Working-Class Solidarity
Long Live International Solidarity
Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria**

**Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni
President, NLC**

**Comrade Bobboi Bala Kaigama
President, TUC**