

**ADDRESS DELIVERED BY H. E. AMBASSADOR AMOS
OLUWOLE IDOWU, EMBASSY OF NIGERIA, LEBANON, ON
THE OCCASION OF THE 51ST ANNIVERSARY OF NIGERIA'S
INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATION, 1ST OCTOBER, 2011**

- Distinguished Representative of the Government of Lebanon, H. E. Mr. Yassine Jaber,
- Distinguished Representative of the Foreign Minister,
- Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic and Consular Missions, and International Organizations accredited to Lebanon,
- Distinguished members of the Board of Trustees of Lebanese Nigerian Friendship Association,
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my honour and privilege to welcome you to the celebration of Our National Day, as the Federal Republic of Nigeria marks her 51st Independence Anniversary. Times like this calls for sober reflection, to take account of past events, with a view to planning for times ahead. We also wish to use this forum to thank you for, not only gracing the occasion, but also for the cooperation extended to us in course of our work and related activities and to crave your indulgence for the continuation of same and even closer rapport, as we seek to venture into new frontiers and strengthen existing ties.

The Nigerian Foreign Policy thrust had been afro-centric and the country had been the fulcrum of armed struggle in the continent to liberate colonized African States and more recently, within the West African sub region, end civil conflicts, notably in Liberia, Sierra Leone

and Cote d' Ivoire. This policy was carried out by sacrificing enormous human and material resources. Beyond well-worn diplomatic platitudes, Nigeria went beyond words, deploying battalions of military troops to help these countries in distress.

Without jettisoning that Africa is the centre-piece of our foreign policy, the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, through the Foreign Minister, Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru, has adopted a paradigm shift in the country's Foreign Policy thrust, which is now Economic Diplomacy. Explaining this nascent drive, Ambassador Ashiru stated that: "while upholding the democratic imperative and our leadership role in the continent, we would strive to redefine our foreign policy, and strengthen our diplomacy to support the domestic programmes of government. This would entail deploying our foreign relation instruments to propel our economic and industrial programmes, as clearly outlined by Mr. President. This would be done in order to sustain growth and economic development through the support for the real sector of the economy, for our mutual benefit. All these are aimed at employment generation, food security, as well as regional peace and security, all geared toward poverty alleviation." Unlike in times past, where the Organized Private Sector (OPS), was excluded from Nigeria's diplomatic initiatives, Ambassador Ashiru stated that one of the major pillars of this new foreign policy focus is the inclusion of the organized private sector in future diplomatic engagements within and outside the country. He reiterated that; " We will redress existing imbalances and forged a strong partnership with Organized Private Sector (OPS) to assist economic growth. Consequently, members of Organized

Private Sector (OPS) would frequently constitute part of any bilateral discussions between our governments and other foreign delegations, so that Nigeria can benefit from visits to and other countries.” Therefore, the Lebanese Business Community is advised to seize the moment and strengthen the existing trade relations with their Nigerian counterparts and conclude all outstanding Agreements.

I cannot end this address without mentioning the laudable accomplishments of President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration in the following areas:

- The creation of the Government Ministry in charge of Information and Communication Technology (ICT);
- The signing of the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, in a bid to eradicate poverty, reduce child mortality, fight Aids and develop a global partnership for development;
- The launching of an Eight-Point Development Plan aimed at transforming the country regarding the power sector Road-maps, food security and Agriculture, wealth creation and employment, qualitative Education and Security; and
- Most recently conducting a free and fair general elections in 2011;

Finally, I wish to state that, as a nation state Nigeria was 51 years two days ago and she was amalgamated as a territory for about 100 years. That in itself is an extraordinary achievement. I will tell you why. What

other country in the world has some 160 million people, more than 400 languages and is divided equally between the world's too main religions? No other nation state has that size of population with that diversity of cultures, language and religious divide.

I sincerely thank you for your kind attention.

Please join me in toasting to the health our two countries.

Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Long live the Republic of Lebanon.