

ADDRESS BY THE ACTING GOVERNOR OF BENUE STATE, HIS EXCELLENCY, CHIEF STEVEN LAWANI OFR ON THE OCCASION OF THE POLICE SERVICE COMMISSION - 2014 RETREAT AT ROYAL CHOICE INN, MAKURDI ON THURSDAY, 30TH JANUARY, 2014

PROTOCOL

I am delighted to be here to express the friendship and solidarity of the Government and the good people of Benue State with the Police Service Commission, the Inspector General, officers and leadership of the Nigeria Police here present.

2. We are honoured for your choice of Benue State to host this significant soul searching retreat with the theme “**Sustaining Police Reforms in Nigeria**”. We in Benue hold the Police Service Commission and the Nigeria Police Force in very high esteem for very obvious reasons. Firstly, your role in providing security for the protection of life and property in our communities is sacrosanct. Secondly, as respected statesmen with the task of providing internal security, you have always shown uncommon patriotism in the safety, peace, progress and unity of our country, Nigeria. Thirdly, one of our illustrious sons, a seasoned administrator and technocrat is serving on the Police apex body as a Commissioner. With the above stated facts, we acknowledge and cherish your critical role as stakeholders in the attainment of a crime free, safe and peaceful society where progress and development is guaranteed.

3. More than ever before, the average Nigerian is today faced with various levels of insecurity which could dis-stabilize our socio-

economic life unless we act now. Our nation is currently facing serious national security challenges that necessitate reforms in policing in our dear country. Shocking new security threats now face us every day such as armed robbery, kidnapping, crude oil theft, vandalization of public infrastructure, communal skirmishes. Other crimes include politically and religious motivated clashes, trafficking and use of small arms, bomb blasts, acts of terrorism and cyber-crimes. This encumbered security system together with the unprofessional conduct of incessant intimidation, harassment, brutality, extra-judicial killings and extortion of the citizenry by some unscrupulous elements in the Nigerian Police makes it necessary to sustain the on-going reforms in the Police for better service delivery to the civil society.

4. It is therefore pertinent to appeal to your esteemed gathering of security front-runners to address some of these security issues of national interest and concern in the course of your retreat. Unless we act promptly, we may lose impetus and erode the gains of the on-going reforms in the Nigerian Police. The prompt response of the Federal Government, the Police Service Commission and the Inspector General of Police by initiating and sustaining relevant reforms will therefore go a long way in restoring public confidence and trust to the citizenry about the safety of their lives and property.

5. The challenges and factors militating against effective policing in Nigeria has for some time now been a matter of national discourse. The task of reforming the Nigeria Police is therefore too important to be left to government alone; instead police reform in Nigeria must be complemented with contributions from Civil Society/Non-Governmental Organizations as well as other non-state agencies and groups.

6. The vexed issue of violations of human rights, extortion, fraud and other acts of misconduct in the Police continue to be a matter of public concern. Although several solutions have been proffered; the government, the legislature and the public must remain resolute in condemning these atrocities. The leadership of the Police must therefore stand firm and remain vehement in condemning as well as punishing all cases of corruption, intimidation, harassment, brutality, extra-judicial killings and extortion of the citizenry by some unscrupulous elements in the Nigerian Police. Ending police abuses and increasing police competence, effectiveness and accountability will help to make our fledgling democracy more meaningful to the majority of the people, especially the poor and vulnerable.

7. Another matter of concern is training and other human resource development activities in the Police. There is no gainsaying the fact that until recently the training of officers and men of the police was lacking in professionalism and civility. Lack of specialization also impeded the capacity of the Nigeria Police to develop its personnel to become experts in different fields of policing and their ability to solve complex crimes. As part of the reform and transformation, I hereby appeal to your esteemed body to ensure that every police officer should be given adequate professional and specialized training. Such training should include new areas and specialty, such as crime scene management, forensic science, special victims, human rights, police prosecution, professional ethics and values, policing elections, public order policing and information technology. Thereafter, officers and men should be deployed to function in their areas of expertise as is done in services such as the military. Personnel of the Nigeria Police that no longer fit into the new reformed system and scheme of affairs

due to lack of training, declining productivity, age, indiscipline, corruption and/or disloyalty should be shown the way out of the force.

8. We are all witnesses to the growing political intolerance in Nigeria today. Many well-meaning leaders have spoken out expressing deep concern to ameliorating the violence engendered by politically motivated bitterness. Recently some of our political leaders have invoked sectional and parochial sentiments in politics, and sought to use same freely in influencing the polity and swaying national political and economic policies as well as governance. This is done with such impunity that we tend to ignore warnings about the inherent dangers of introducing violence in politics. This year - 2014 will surely witness increased political activities with its attendant security challenges. The Nigeria Police and other security forces are key players in the government's efforts to handle the expected challenges in the impending transition to 2015. I therefore urge the Police to be alert to her responsibility to check the activities of all individuals and political groups to ensure healthy politicking ahead of the general elections.

9. The community based policing initiative that was launched some time ago is a laudable reform and a fundamental departure from the previous policing strategy which is highly commendable. This project includes training and reform to implement policing with close links to community and a crime prevention approach. On our part as stakeholders and key actors in the task of policing, members of the public should continue to actively collaborate with the Police in exposing crimes and societal ills, including ills within the security agencies. We must therefore strive to maintain these principles of

community policing for as the saying goes; **“security is the business of all”**.

10. Terrorism is not good for any country as it retards socio-economic development of a nation. Recently religious and ethnic terrorism have been a security bane to the Nigerian society especially in northern Nigeria. Government efforts to tackle this menace have just started yielding some positive results. Our country Nigeria has been listed among terrorist nations by the United States of America. This situation can be reversed if individuals and communities in Nigeria work together with security operatives. The persistent, incessant and unrestrained terror attacks by Boko Haram and other marauding gunmen killing innocent citizens in parts of the North West, Southern Kaduna State, and some locations in Plateau, Nasarawa and Benue States are despicable. The Nigerian government, the legislature and the public must remain resolute in condemning these atrocities. These acts of terror also call for the Police and political leadership to rise to the occasion and effectively bring the situation under control.

11. The introduction of State Police into Nigerian policing system has been widely suggested by many as the only solution for the curbing of the incessant security challenges in the country. The mantra has gained popularity as a result of the surge in the rate of highly sophisticated crimes in the country, and the inability of the federal police command to contain these challenges. The issue of whether or not the component states of the Nigeria federation should have their own police forces has become a contentious issue in recent time.

12. While the Federal Government has insisted that Nigeria is not ripe for multiple police forces, the position taken by some State governments is that the solution to security problems of Nigeria is an

amendment to the constitution to permit the states to own their own Security out-fits. Like the Federal Government, it is my candid opinion that State police will lead to a situation in which there will be two rivaling institutions of the same responsibility, duty and nature in the country. Also, the State police controlled by an inconsiderate State Chief Executive could also become an institution of oppression and suppression. Such a force could be used recklessly by politicians for selfish political gains as was the case in both the northern and western Regions when the Native Authority Police were freely utilized to oppress political opponents and rig elections.

13. It is on record that states and local governments might have been outlawed from creating State police. Their recourse to ethnic militias like **Bakasi boys** , **Egbesu boys** , **the O.P.C** etc. to wreck havoc on political opponents surely foretell how dangerous it would have been to legally allow State and local authorities to control the use of force. The revelation that members of the dreaded Boko Haram have sponsors among prominent politicians in Nigeria is also an issue that is of serious concern. I am, therefore, of the opinion that our country Nigeria is not yet socially ripe to operate State Police as being agitated for by some of my colleagues and other persons.

14. With no fear of contradiction and intention to neither indict nor absolve any security agency, I wish to state that the Nigeria Police needs reforms. The seeming lack of intelligence and operational capability; the loss of public confidence and inability of the police to secure/protect life and property all provided a veritable backdrop to the public clamour for the sustained reforms and transformation in the Nigeria Police.

15. In order to ensure the success and sustainability of the on-going reforms therefore, the leadership of the Police ought to be accountable to its multiple constituencies of the law, the executive, the judiciary and the people through their elected representatives. Community support and participation are also critical to improving police performance, and if the people are not consulted and their priorities factored into the reform process, their support for reform programmes cannot be guaranteed.

16. I, therefore, call on the leadership of the Police gathered here to brace up to her sworn responsibility of transforming and re-invigorating the Nigeria Police for better service delivery that will guarantee a safe and peaceful society. All of us must therefore co-operate with the Police to checkmate the activities of political and religious zealots in our communities. We must also be vigilant to fish out persons of questionable identity and extremists who may infiltrate our communities for purposes of perpetrating crimes and carrying out terrorist attacks on unsuspecting citizens. Terrorist attacks on communities and reprisals must also be condemned in totality.

17. Ladies and gentlemen, officers of the Nigeria Police here present; you represent the critical pillars on whose shoulder the security and socio-economic advancement of our country Nigeria rests. We are, therefore, happy to identify with you and to convey the goodwill of the government and the good people of Benue State at this event.

18. In addition, I want to thank the Almighty God and to appreciate the efforts of the Police in partnering with government to achieve and sustain security and peace in Benue and our dear country, Nigeria. I, therefore urge you to come up with recommendations to address the

serious challenge of attitudinal change and for improvement of the Nigeria Police so as to ensure the needed security and to restore public trust in the institution.

19. Finally, I pray for God's guidance as you deliberate on matters of security and the overall wellbeing of our citizenry. I once again appreciate your choice of Benue for this retreat and wish you the best as you enjoy the renowned hospitality and delicacies of Benue - the **Food Basket of the Nation**.

20. Thank you and God bless.