

Afrika-Verein der deutschen Wirtschaft
6th German – Nigerian Business Forum
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Welcome Address
Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
To the Federal Republic of Germany

H.E. Ambassador Yusuf Tuggar

Members and board members of the German-African Business Association, guests from Nigeria, ladies and gentlemen!

It is a particular pleasure for me as the new Nigerian ambassador to Germany to address your Association's 6th German-Nigerian Business Forum. The extent to which associations like the Afrika-Verein der deutschen Wirtschaft contribute to the realization of our separate and mutual business interests cannot be underestimated. Associations like yours are key bridge-builders and facilitators. While nurturing and negotiating the business environment between our two market places, you must also be promoters of intercultural understanding and sensitivity.

In recent times the narrative on Nigeria has been a mix of oil, corruption and Boko Haram. These have in one way or another become the principal lenses through which many have viewed Nigeria. That narrow perspective – alongside long-standing erroneous stereotypes of Africa and Africans – are impediments we are committed to uprooting.

I am happy to proclaim that there are many reasons for us not to despair. Where we allow negative perceptions delivered in comfortable clichés free rein, we permit narratives that are riddled with distortion. We must not be diverted and deflected from fully engaging the opportunities that abound between us.

Transition, like other forms of change, is notoriously difficult to manage and can often be destabilizing. President Muhammadu Buhari's mandate to restore the primacy of the rule of law necessarily means an end to "business as usual". Our president has popular support and is resolute in his determination to make Nigeria better placed than ever to revisit its development trajectory.

My task in reshaping perceptions of the Nigerian narrative here in Germany is made infinitely easier by the passion and commitment of our government to renewing the basis of our domestic affairs as well as our global engagements. Nigeria is transitioning to a different kind of economic foundation, as well as a political culture more accepting of the scrutiny that comes with our commitment to transparency.

The centrality of oil to our economic disposition over the last few decades has proven to be a misadventure that we are consciously working to countervail. The Nigerian government has made a strategic decision to decouple our economy from inordinate dependence on oil, and is breaking new ground in laying the foundation for Nigerians and others to grow into new and more future-oriented businesses in Nigeria.

At every opportunity, the Nigerian government's commitment to renewing the country is evidenced in its approach to new challenges. The approach to renewal through the six Special Economic Zones spread across the country to pioneer advanced research, engineering and production speak of change.

The government's commitment to a functional and business-friendly environment is an assurance of cooperation. Aside from the quantum of misappropriated funds in the heyday of corruption, the compromise of our integrity and credibility that came with the previous way we conducted governance has been deeply corrosive and we are determined to reverse it.

As I stand here before you, a representative of my country, let me reiterate the Nigerian government's commitment to being unrelenting in the struggle against corruption. That fight will never be done until the cancer is excised from our body politic. Going forward, no area – not politics, not the economy, not domestic business, nor in international business and cooperation – in no area will there be immunity for corruption. Our objective is to make the business and regulatory environment user-friendly.

The current Nigerian government has set a course towards embracing business user-friendliness in a variety of integrated ways. The Nigeria of 2017 bears little similarity to the Nigeria of years gone past. Reform in all relevant fields has been outlined, decided upon and commenced upon.

There can be no denying that Boko Haram was for a long time able to project itself as an existential threat to our country. That is no longer the case. As a result of security efforts commenced under the guidance of our president – with the support of our international partners – the PMB administration has shown that the most brutal and unrestrained forms of terrorism can be overcome and vanquished. What has been demonstrated is that when politics does not constitute itself as an obstacle it can be a veritable partner for good in overcoming security challenges.

Those of you who are regular visitors to Nigeria and who closely follow Nigerian affairs will testify that real reforms are afoot across a range of key business-related sectors. The impulse for significant change is firmly embedded into a range of critical areas, such as the National Industrial Revolution Plan, the Integrated Infrastructure Master Plan, the National Action Plan and the Ease of Doing Business Plan.

Indeed, the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC) met yesterday in Abuja to consider new and specific initiatives to be implemented over a 60-day period in the National Action Plan 2. The Vice President chaired that meeting and it was attended by ministers, heads of agencies and leading companies in the private sector.

The Nigerian embassy is and will continue to be a place where information can be sought and gathered. We are committed to facilitating beneficial responses to all legitimate enquiries from the German business community. In line with this administration's fundamental and forward-looking reforms, we hope to reshape the Nigerian narrative here in Germany, and broader afield, in Europe. We will endeavour to share with you fundamental reforms periodically introduced by the Buhari government that will be of interest to you. In return, we look forward to an honest and healthy exchange of views, to our mutual benefit.

Before I conclude, let me echo the words of my president, Muhammadu Buhari at the United Nations General Assembly last week. Nigeria is the most populous and by far the fastest growing nation and is well aware of its meaning, role and responsibilities, in Africa and for Africa, as well as in the world and for the world. Nigeria and its government seek for partnerships but we do not expect anything free of charge. We accept the burden of responsibility that falls upon us by reason of our projective regional power and influence.

Transition to a different kind of economy, a different kind of political culture is always challenging. President Buhari's mandate is to restore the rule of law and to put an end to "business as usual". Transition is difficult and potentially destabilising - but a resolute leadership that has popular support, is better placed than any other to effectively manage the process. It will not always be easy but we know that a nation's destiny is rarely without complexities and complications.

There comes a moment in a nation's destiny when the status quo is universally recognized as unsustainable. That is the case with the way Nigeria has hitherto gone about its business. The prevalence of impunity, allied to a lack of transparency meant that our nation lost much time and wasted even more resources. There are no more resources to waste and no more time in which to waste them.

This is the spirit in which we are moving forward and the core understanding with which we are offering to intensify our relationship with the German polity and the German economy; and with the Afrika-Verein der deutschen Wirtschaft, in particular.

The sheer number of participants at today's Business Forum fuels my optimism that apart from the pure economic potential partnerships relations between our two countries promise, there is also much potential for partnerships through lateral opportunities for both our nations and even further afield, for Europe and for Africa as a whole.

On behalf of the Nigerian president, government and people, I would like to extend our very best wishes for successful deliberation. I hope you are able to widen and deepen existing areas of cooperation and provide a platform for new and inspired insights, investments and enterprises, to the benefit of both our nations.

Ich freue mich auf interessante Gespräche heute und auf eine erfolgreiche Zusammenarbeit in der kommenden Zeit. (I am looking forward to interesting conversations today and to even more successful collaboration over time.)

Thank you very much.