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HIGH COMMISSIONER

***NIGERIA'S VISION 20-20 AND ITS CHALLENGES TO THE  
NIGERIAN DOCTORS IN CANADA.***

***REMARKS BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER OF NIGERIA  
TO CANADA,  
HIS EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR IYORWUESE HAGHER,  
Ph.D, OON***

***ON THE OCCASION OF THE CANPAD ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE IN TORONTO, CANADA***

***AUGUST 2, 2008***

Distinguished President of CANPAD  
The Executives of CANPAD  
Special Delegates and invited Guests,  
Fellow Compatriots, Ladies and Gentlemen

I stand before you today full of gratitude that you have honoured me by inviting me to this great gathering of medical professionals of the Nigerian Diaspora in my country of accreditation as Head of the Nigerian Mission in Canada. Mr. President I say thank you today on behalf of the President of Nigeria, Umaru Musa Yar Adua *GCON*, and the Nigerian people. First I stand here in total stage-fright, looking at some of the most intelligent, best and most expensively trained Nigerians, in the World. It is a feeling of pride mixed with I must confess jealousy. That same jealousy I felt thirty seven years ago, when as undergraduate in 1971 at Ahmadu Bello University I encountered for the first time in life, a feeling of near inferiority, seeing fellow undergraduates like me who read 24 hours a day, hung stethoscopes and white overalls over their arms. Most of the medical students wore glasses, due to I presume, over reading.

The Federal and State Government scholarships to study medicine were higher than in other courses. Male

medical students were best dressed and received the coveted attention of all female undergraduate students as future husbands. The medical students invariably dated their type and were totally taboo to those reading the other courses. But they also wore a deeper air of mystery because, even the youngest of them could spend nights with human cadavers and still bear a poker-face betraying no emotion of fear. Ladies and Gentlemen my fear of doctors has not abated since; because I also know, that their knowledge, of me can make the difference between life and death.

Mr. President's letter of invitation requested me to talk on any topic of my choice, and I chose not to lecture nor talk to you at all, but rather invite you to the New Vision of Nigeria to achieve health for all by the year 2020, in other words in eleven years time! In the short term, I equally invite you to share Nigeria's mandated vision of President Yar Adua; who in his Seven Point agenda has promised Nigerians that he will

- (1) Bring peace and progress to the Niger Delta
- (2) Reform the land tenure system
- (3) Provide Food Security

- (4) National Security
- (5) Provide Power and other critical infrastructure
- (6) Create Wealth in tackling poverty and
- (7) Develop Human Capital.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Hospitals, Health Educational Institutions and Universities, are the critical infrastructure, while the creation of a healthy middle-class population, of educated people with healthy minds in healthy bodies expresses the objective of developing human capital. Of the long, medium and short term goals of our Mission to attain health for all in 2020 and to be in the club of best operating economies, human Capital, is the most valuable and most important asset.

As I drive through the streets of Ottawa, Quebec, and Toronto I see Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, in the years ahead, when we would have through dogged determination, overcome our penchant for corruption and our hubris in tribal and sectarian divides and harnessed our energies collectively, each according to his ability, one person at a time, together, collectively pooling together our men and materials, to build a great nation in whom we would all be proud to call our home, and not a pariah country, the jest

and ridicule of the world. All of us have willingly and deliberately chosen Canada as our second home; and whether we came here as refugees or as students or as resident professional immigrants, we deliberately chose this beautiful country. As I look at all of you assembled, I apologize on behalf of Nigeria that we had at times joined those that insult Nigeria by calling you Nigeria's "brain drain". I don't see drained brains here at all. Instead I see Nigeria's brain reserve. The best Jewish scientists live outside Israel. They are not referred to as the "Jewish brain drain!" This is much more so, because they remain rooted to the State of Israel, and in which ever country they reside, they become ambassadors of Israel.

Israelites make their country of residence an ally of Israel and Nigeria expects of you no less. Everywhere you have found yourself in Canada, Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta etc. You have done well. In fact you have excelled. You have done Nigeria proud not just in Canada, the United States, Europe and elsewhere, I am confident to repeat the statement I made in 1995, when our soccer team won the World's Olympic Cup in 1995 in Atlanta, that our best is still the best anywhere in the world.

I salute Dr. Olatubosun our Guest Lecturer, the distinguished Professor of gynecology, I salute Dr. Bernard Rerri the President of Iroko-Mappletree Foundation, Dr. Abdulrahman and Dr. Ndur, distinguished professors and Pediatricians. I salute my friend Dr. Ahmed, the renowned psychiatrist and all of you here gathered.

Between our reality and our Vision is a wide gulf. In 2020, the vision to make Nigeria to be like Canada is today, for our children at least, can never be achieved if we do not come together, Doctors, Technologists, Engineers, Teachers, Administrators, Farmers, Businessmen and the Politicians. Let us raise a banner of hope for our children to give them the same base from which you have sprung to excellence. Of all indices of development, health is the most important of all. Without healthy minds in healthy bodies our country is lost. We shall forever recycle under-development, mediocrity, corruption, superstition, fear and death.

Our politicians in the past, military and civilian politicians, subverted the Nigerian constitution by massive looting of the Nations treasury and mortgaged the future of our children. Even our oil was in the past subjected to domestic and international pressures that led to failures and

mistakes in the policy implementation favouring unintended beneficiaries, with disastrous consequences like; poor infrastructures, prohibitive cost of energy, collapsed railways, poor road and housing infrastructural environment and sadly a general insecurity to life and property. This is why some of you have refused to travel to Nigeria for sometimes now, and whenever you venture to go, you seek the protection of the police or in extreme cases local thugs.

But that was yesterday, the sad reality of a nation that gave its all so that other African nations could stand on their feet. We have been big brother to nearly all African countries that cried to us for help. We have even acted Father Christmas to some. We still do, and as a result of our effort to preach the ideology of "African brotherhood," spent scores of billions of dollars helping to contain Chaos in West, Central, South West and East Africa at various times in the past. We lost men and materials in providing leadership in Africa. We co-founded ECOMOG, the World's first regional peace-keeping force in the world. We survived a protracted Civil War. We are today in the first-ever-since-independence, civilian-to-civilian administration and can proudly say we have survived military rule. Former Generals

and Officers can today seek elective mandates and they are welcomed to seek for power through the ballot rather than the barrel of the gun. We built Abuja, our new Federal Capital. It is a modern city, to be proud of. Nigerians are enjoying a measure of prosperity and our economy is growing steadily, crime is being combated and corruption is being tackled frontally. We have a president who has avowed to uphold the constitution by his zero tolerance of impunity and illegality. We can now with your help uphold the rights of all Nigerians as enshrined in the Constitution Chapter II in the "Fundamental objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy", that our government "should harness the resources of the Nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, dynamic and self reliant economy in such a manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity". Clearly the constitution has given Nigeria the green light, by which, with your support, we shall transform our country to be the envy of the world. Canada is a great country which greatly inspires Nigeria due to its remarkable institutions that have effectively managed her diversity. Canada's indigenous

Indians who claim the land where oil is found are called first nation, our own Niger Delta indigenous are called rebels because previous administrations and oil companies have hardened their agitations through anti-people policies, callousness and perpetual unacceptable tokenism. Today, a Niger Delta son sits in the engine room of Nigeria's Presidential Power as, Vice-President. President Yar 'Adua has also challenged the nation to judge him by how much he succeeds in handling the Niger-Delta Question. He is serious and we need to co-operate with him.

It would be absurd today for any Nigerian to blame foreigners for unacceptable poverty and lack of equitable prosperity in our country. It will take Nigerians to fix Nigeria. The democratic environment is particularly right to do so. We have, thanks to the Reforms set in motion by former President Obasanjo, achieved a steady growth in our economy, which is growing now at more than six percent per annum. We have achieved remarkable growth in the banking sector, and our Banks are now world players. By the current United Nations statistics we remarkably improved our adult literacy rate from 55% in the military era of 1990-1999 to now 69% and moving higher. Primary school

enrolment has moved from 59% of the military era to 69% in this democratic era. The life expectancy of Nigerians has moved from the era of the military at 46% to 48%.

Yet, Nigeria should do much better when all hands are on deck. This is why I wish to on behalf of the High Commission, single-out for special recognition, the Iroko-Mapletree Foundation, whose members under the Leadership of Dr. Bernad Rerri, Orthopedic Surgeon, led teams of Doctors from Canada to offer free surgical services to Nigerians, every year. This is the convergence point between Nigerians dreams and realities and your role in actualizing the dream of Nigerians vision 20-20-20 when we also, like Canada can boast of having a health service delivery that will guarantee Nigerians a fundamental right to carry healthy minds in healthy bodies. Many of you here if not all should emulate the fine examples of Dr. Bernard Rerri. After-all many of you went to Nigerian Universities on scholarships. Many of you who did not benefit from University scholarships studied in good Nigerian secondary schools, which were either fully, or partially funded by taxpayers. Those who didn't, were beneficiaries of parents who benefited from Nigeria. At the very worst none of us

can deny the fact that we inherited our excellence and drive to achievement from the communal upbringing in Nigeria where it took the whole village to nourish one child to adulthood.

Since we owe Nigeria so much, let us join hands now that the climate is right, to reject the fact that while you are here subsidizing the Canadian Health Workforce, your mother country is one of the last countries of the world where children are dying of Poliomyelitis. While you contribute to make Canada virtually tuberculosis free there has been an increase in the prevalence rate of tuberculosis by more than 50% in Nigeria since 2000. While Canada enjoys the least Neo-Natal, infants, under five and Adult mortality rates, your country has unacceptable high mortality rates. Since our brothers and sisters at home have a healthy life expectancy of 41 years and Canada is 71 years, and ninety percent of us here in this hall are above forty one, why don't we say, that we got a "Jara" gift, so that we can lend a hand, to lift the downtrodden of our country, knowing that but for God's Grace, we like our dead brothers, parents, uncles, nephews could have been dead and buried now, from a plethora of debilitating diseases from Malaria,

hypertension, diabetes, tuberculosis or infections from poor water or sanitation.

Ladies and Gentlemen let me not depress you by drawing you back to the unpleasant past. I call on all of you to embrace the future, to remember the oaths of your youth, to "arise all compatriots, to serve with heart and might" and war against the bad image of the ugly Nigerian that lies sick and dying like an Aids patient. He is incapable of rational thought and through this pathology, corrupts his mind and thoughts through lack of integrity. Let us shun this image of the ugly Nigerian made even more ugly here by 419 scams and sundry crimes; all relics of our dark past.

Come with me to the new Nigerian of our dream, a remarkable intelligent player on the global arena, a proud hard-working, self-driven professional men and women, professors, teachers, artisans and politicians, asking not what the world owes us through slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and violation of our human rights through bad economic advice. Instead, provide Leadership to the World by building the world's institutions; its science, arts and technologies to the highest levels so that we can best provide the bench mark for Nigeria's future greatness.

Mr. President, Members of CANPAD, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen thank you once more as I wish you fruitful deliberations during the course of your conference.