



**STATE OF SERVICE ADDRESS BY
THE CHIEF SERVANT, DR. MUAZU BABANGIDA ALIYU, OON (TALBAN
MINNA), THE GOVERNOR OF NIGER STATE AT THE NIGER STATE HOUSE OF
ASSEMBLY CHAMBERS, MINNA; ON TUESDAY, JULY 15, 2008**

1. Mr. Speaker, Deputy Chief Servant, Honourable Members of the House, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen;
2. Fellow Nigerlites; a little over one year ago, you gave us the mandate to steer the affairs of our great Niger State to prosperity. In keeping with the tenets of the 1999 Constitution, which states *inter alia* that “***the Governor of a State may attend a meeting of a House of Assembly to deliver an address on State affairs or to make such statement on the policy of government as he may consider to be of importance to the State***” (section 108; sub-section 1).
3. I am therefore delighted to attend this special session of the House of Assembly to present the ‘State of Service Address’ to update all Nigerlites on the progress and achievements we have recorded in the last one year, as well as the challenges and prospects ahead. Many of you may recall that when I was sworn in on May 29, 2007 as the Governor of Niger State I appealed that I should be addressed as ‘Chief Servant’, which to me best describes the job of an elected leader, who derives his power exclusively from the mandate of the electorates. Leadership, in my opinion should not synonymous to superiority complex or arrogance, but should be and reflect humility and ability to render services to the people in the most dignified and accountable manner.
4. Today’s event is significant to us, as it is in tandem with the principle of servant leadership, which requires us to account to the electorates for what the Government has done in the period under review. We intend to institutionalize this Address as an annual event.

5. I believe that Nigerlites have not forgotten that when we took over the administration on May 29, 2007, there was tremendous rot in the system; public utilities and infrastructure were virtually dead, our public schools and health facilities were in shambles, our farmers were in a hopeless situation in terms of access to fertilizer and other production inputs, and poverty had become endemic amongst our rural dwellers, among other failures.

6. Undoubtedly, our dear State faces many challenges. We will not deny, we will not ignore and we will not pass the buck on to other people. We will confront these challenges with focus, clarity and courage. During the last one year, we have seen what can be accomplished with determination and sincerity of purpose. In the priorities we set in education, health, agriculture, infrastructural development and social security, we have seen what can be achieved with resourcefulness, innovation and sound management practices. I have often heard people describe the last one year of our administration as a year marked by dynamism and action, when they compare ours to the state of affairs in the previous years. Whereas that may be true, I prefer to call it the humble beginning of a tough but purposeful journey. Today, I salute this Honourable House for the mutual respect and understanding we have enjoyed from you in the discharge of our collective responsibility of transforming our dear State into *one of the three best States in Nigeria, in all ramifications, by the year 2020.*

7. Honourable members of the Niger State House of Assembly, the success of the executive arm is the success of the legislature; the failure of legislature is the failure of the executives. We are to check one another; indeed we are to compete for agenda setting. That I recognize and I am very happy I have said it right from the beginning that we have a vibrant legislature and a House of Assembly made up of very intelligent members. Fellow Nigerlites, it is important to acquaint you at the outset with highlights of revenues that accrued to the State Government and the Local Government Councils as well as our expenditure profile between June 2007 and May 2008 so that you will understand the background to some of our decisions, our accomplishments and our limitations in discharging some of our responsibilities.

A. Revenue Receipts:

A total of #38,183,220,148:47k was received by the State Government as revenue during the period under review. This was made up of statutory allocation of #25,563,394,768:73k from the Federation Accounts (FAAC); #3,808,178,379:55k from Value Added Tax (VAT); #4,146,184,856:01k from the Excess Crude allocation; #2,774,165,817.60K as augmentation allocation from the Federation Accounts (FAAC) and #1,891,296,325:58k from internally generated revenues (IGR). In addition to these inflows, two bank facilities of #2.2Billion and #1.4Billion were taken in the early days of our administration to pay off clusters of bank overdrafts and outstanding liabilities of gratuities that were inherited from the last administration. By now it will be very clear that Niger state depends on the federation account for almost

95%. That is not good for us, because it means whatever happens to the federation account will affect us; if it is negative it means we will suffer drastically. We must therefore look for ways and means to improve on our Internally Generated Revenue.

B. Recurrent Disbursements:

During the period under review, Government made disbursements to Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) for discharging their statutory responsibilities. Consequently, Government made the following disbursements/payments from the revenues received:

- The sum of ₦10, 288,757,785.13k was spent on payment of salaries to civil servants while ₦648,127,646.08K went to payment of allowances to political and public office holders.
- Leave Transport Grants for year 2007 amounting to ₦497.52Million were paid to all civil servants. In keeping with our determination to motivate Civil Servants and raise their morale, Government paid 50% Salary Bonus amounting to ₦713Million in December 2007, while the sum of ₦211,958,831.69K has so far been paid for year 2008 Leave Transport Grants, which is expected to be completed by October, this year.
- Following the implementation of new salary increments for civil servants, which came to 27.3% against the 15% pronounced at the eclipse of the last administration, our average monthly bill for salaries and associated emoluments, including monthly pensions has increased from ₦930 million to ₦1.2billion. Meanwhile, we have fully commenced the implementation of the State's new salary structure for all public officers including members of the Legislature. Mr. Speaker sir; let me through you inform all civil servants in Niger State who are waiting for the three months arrears of salary increment, that it will be paid at the end of this month.
- As you are aware, our administration is fully committed to reinvigorating the Civil Service for efficiency and higher productivity. We also have a strong commitment towards the prompt payment of retirement benefits to our retirees for the contributions they made to the State while in service. We have therefore settled all backlogs of gratuities inherited, some dating back to 10 years. In furtherance of our determination to make our retirees enjoy a stress-free life in retirement we have flagged-off the contributory pension scheme (CPS) in the State, to enable us pool resources to pay people their full entitlements as soon as they disengage from service. In many countries the day you are leaving service, you leave with your gratuity cheque, while the pension follows after three months of your disengagement. We intend to do so in Niger state. I would like to note that in the last 12 months Government has incurred payments of ₦3.93Billion associated with retirement benefits. These payments include the release of the sum of ₦1,321,978,939.35K to the Niger State Pension Board for the take-off of the Contributory Pensions Scheme (CPS) in the year 2008. I believe Mr. Speaker that the Pension Board and the Commissioners in charge will educate people because they are still in confusion of what the new pension scheme is all about.

- The Niger State Pilgrims welfare Board which had previously been characterized by inconsistency and ineffectiveness was mobilized to the tune of #50million naira. This made tremendous impact on the activities of the Pilgrims Welfare Board. The 2007 hajj operation was adjudged by majority of Nigerlites as the best and most successful hajj operation ever in Niger State. We hope to sustain this level of performance during the 2008 hajj operation and subsequently, *Insha Allahu*.
- In recognition of the need to adequately reposition and equip the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) for efficient and effective service delivery, we found it necessary to provide adequate resources to the MDAs for their overhead and running expenses. Total overhead costs therefore incurred by MDAs for the period amounted to #10,243,922,129:87k, including their monthly running costs. The permanent secretaries as the chief accounting officers, commissioners as the chief executive officers and the head of each MDA should be able to give account of expenditures incurred and should be able to defend whatever was allocated to the ministries/department/agencies.
- We have instituted a system of due process mechanism for approval of all expenditure to ensure prudent management of the limited funds. These include contract tendering and competitive bidding among other measures adopted to ensure accountability, transparency and value for money. That was one of the earliest measures taken by our administration to bring sanity in to the award of contracts and public procurements, in view of the revelations of contract scams in the previous era, which led to the setting up of Debt a Verification Committee, to ascertain the actual indebtedness incurred by our predecessors. I am sure that Nigerlites are very conversant with the events that led to the setting up of a Judicial Commission of Inquiry, which is still sitting and will continue to sit until its assignment is completed. Government will look at the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry seriously with a view to implementing them to the latter. It must be clear that our intention is not to witch-hunt anybody; our intention is to set up a standard to establish a transparent and corrupt free administration so that people will have confidence in government and governance.
- It would be observed that 69% of the total revenue received went for recurrent expenditures - salaries and other emoluments, retirement benefits, and running cost of MDAs.
- In addition, Government made total loan repayments of #5.95 billion to settle all outstanding loans; including settlement of overdrawn bank accounts, payment of ₦1.5b worth of fertilizers procured from Federal Government, ₦750m for Agricultural Loan, as well as ₦134m unpaid Nigeria Agriculture, Cooperatives and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) loan - inherited from the last administration.
- We had to establish a Debt Management Department (DMD) in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for proper documentation of our loans and debts, and to effectively manage the debt portfolio of the State. Anybody coming to make a claim must bring the right

documents and even if I give approval it must be properly documented or you will be held responsible for that action. We have been able to fully settle an inherited Paris Club Exit Payment Debt of #3.8 Billion.

Capital Disbursements:

During the period under review the sum of #4.9 Billion was released for the execution of capital projects and programmes in all sectors of the State economy. While highlights of our activities in this regard are contained in relevant sections of this address, we have directed all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to provide sectoral details of projects initiated and implemented and the expenditures incurred on them during the period under review. Any commissioner who is not capable of doing that is not with us; he/she should just give us a paper signing off and we would find a more suitable schedule for him/her. The publics have the right to know what Government is doing on their behalf, with their resources.

- We had to honour our commitments to International development partners for the counterpart funding of certain vital projects. We have lost a lot of funds and assistance from our development partners, because we could not convince them that we are capable and serious; these people will not come to you until they know you can deliver. As a responsible administration therefore, we found it expedient to clear all backlog of arrears of counterpart funds inherited from the past administration. We therefore made total payments of about ₦540m counterpart funds to meet our various commitments to UBE, UNICEF, UNDP, Fadama II Project and Health System Development Projects, among others. Niger state came first in Fadama II Project rating by the World Bank.
- The State Board of Internal Revenue (BIR) is being repositioned to improve revenue collection from the present monthly average of about ₦120m to a much higher figure. People must pay tax; the more people pay, the more they appreciate how their money is spent and the more they have the moral authority to ask questions about what government is doing with their money.
- Government expects that within the next eight (8) weeks, it will be in a position to access proceeds of ₦6b bond issues as contained in the 2008 Budget. The proceeds will be strictly utilized for execution of public infrastructural projects as reflected in the budget.
- Government will intensify the current computerization drive to cover not only the payroll system but also to include the entire government payment system. This will promote financial accountability and transparency in the financial conduct of government.
- Government is working in partnership with some financial institutions to facilitate the establishment of at least one micro-finance institution in each of our 25 Local Government Areas before the end of 2008. I therefore call on all our brothers and sisters to come home and contribute to the socio-economic development of our dear state. This is to boost local economic

activities in our rural communities through the provision of micro-finance credit facilities to our small scale entrepreneurs.

- Fellow Nigerlites, I believe that it is important to note that probably for the first time in the democratic history of Niger State; Government has been able to save over #4.46billion as bank balances from our revenue inflows as at May 30, 2008. This was made possible through our fiscal discipline and a culture of savings which we have cultivated with the aim of building up sufficient balances for the execution of projects. Consequently, we have placed the sum of #2.17billion out of the savings in a capital reserve account, for systematic execution of capital projects captured in the Budget.

8. For the Local Government Councils on the other hand we received, for the same period (June 2007 - May 2008) a total revenue inflow of ₦31, 306,960,668:43k from the Federation Account (FAAC). This included: #22,539,161,275.33K from statutory allocation; ₦3,135,213,693:34k from Value Added Tax (VAT) allocation and ₦5,632,585,699.76k from Excess Crude Allocation.

9. On the expenditure side, we were guided by the provisions of the Constitution and the State and Local Government Joint Account Law 2001 which provides for the disbursement of Local Government resources in the following order: salaries and emoluments (statutory first charge); Emirate Councils – 5% of total monthly allocation; Common Services – 0.5%; Training Funds – 1.0%; Reserve Funds – 5%; UBE – first line charge; and Pensions – 15% of total salaries of workers. We need to explain this, due to the misconceptions by people, who chose to simply divide the local government allocation advertised on pages of newspapers and ask questions why their local government gets lower. I believe the Commissioner for Local Government should provide all local governments and indeed the State Assembly members with details of how the disbursement takes place.

10. Consequently, salaries and emoluments gulped the sum of #13,307,465,993k which covered #6,758,230,155.95k paid as salaries to LG staff; #5,240,305,790.84k paid to the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) as Teachers' salaries and Leave Transport Grant; #722,076,464.03k and #586,854,582.23k paid to Emirate Councils and Local Government pensions Board respectively. In addition to the salaries and allowances of Emirate Councils, we expended the sum of #212,585,500.00k on renovation of the palaces, organization of cultural festivals including the Sallah Durbars, carnivals and fairs to enhance the welfare of our traditional leaders and to promote our rich cultural heritage and values.

11. We equally supported and co-funded other donor-led projects which we considered to be of immense value to the people in our various local government areas. These included payment of 2006 arrears of counterpart funding of UBE intervention projects to the tune of #1,183,737,836:24k; payment of

#50Million for 2007 counterpart funding to Local Environment and Empowerment Management Programme – LEEMP; and #12Million for FADAMA II project for year 2007.

12. In the area of joint projects and collaborations between the Ministry for Local Government and other MDAs in respect of community development services and overlapping responsibilities, we spent the sum of #316,500,000.00k. Projects and programmes financed included skills development activities of the SME/Micro-finance Agency, promotion of Culture and Tourism potentials, and sports development, among others. Just recently our primary school pupils came back in flying colours from an overseas sporting engagement. I was indeed very proud of that remarkable feat.

13. We also incurred expenses of #4,604,184,222.91k on servicing of loans and inherited debt obligations, pensions and gratuity arrears, settlement of entitlements of former Councilors (2003 – 2007), and remittances to Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), State Board of Internal Revenue (BIR) for PAYEE and withholding Tax.

14. The sum of #600 million was spent on the requirements of the last Local Government elections, while #400 million was incurred on hospitality and security logistics at the local government levels. We are humbled by the overwhelming support and encouragement of teeming majority of Nigerlites, which led to a most peaceful and successful local government polls in the history of Niger State.

15. Part of our essential priorities is the stimulation of economic activities at the grassroots level to create employment and reduce poverty. We have therefore made the initiation and adequate funding of capital projects at the local government a major thrust of our administration. During the last one year we have released the sum of #7,178,591,667.30k for project execution and overhead costs for all the LG Councils; out of this amount, the sum of #411 million went to projects executed by the Ward Development Committees (WDC). I am proud to announce to you Mr. Speaker many States are borrowing a leaf from our initiatives. Our primary concept is that at the local level people must be held responsible; people must be encouraged to do things by themselves and they should be made to understand government. When compared to the total sum of #714 million, which was committed to capital projects between 2003 and 2007 by the last administration, the local government councils now have more leverage to make meaningful impact on the lives of the people.

16. In order to instill fiscal discipline and a culture of savings for emergency situations in the running of our Local Government system, we have instituted a reserve fund, which has a balance of over #2 billion as at May 2008.

17. Fellow Nigerlites, you may have observed that about 50% and 40% of the total revenues accruing to the State and Local Governments respectively go into payment of salaries and emoluments, thereby limiting Government's capacity to execute certain developmental projects. This situation is worsened by an over-bloated civil service figure, made up a large number of 'ghost' workers. Whereas Government does not intend to cause more social problems in the society by retrenchment, it has become inevitable to conduct a staff verification exercise to curtail wastages and related corrupt practices. We have therefore embarked upon a Biometric data capturing exercise, which is on-going to establish the authentic nominal roll so that savings from that exercise could be used to deliver essential services to the people. Preliminary reports indicate that we shall be saving salaries of over 4,000 ghost workers, out of the present unconfirmed figures of 33,000 State Government workers. The exercise will also be carried out on all the Local Government personnel for the same purpose. Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members, we must appeal to our moral senses. When we started this exercise we said it should be a table payment but we discovered that many big men in Minna had their wives in the pay roll of their local government areas. We also discovered that some appointment letters were issued at that time, while some were changing people's names to suit their ill practices. Even looking at the Teachers Salary Scale (TSS) we have about 22,000 teachers out of which only 7,000 are qualified. We use this opportunity therefore to appeal to the teachers to come back to class room so that we can negotiate other allowances; but we will not negotiate with anybody under intimidation. The Federal Government cannot direct us on what to pay our state workers.

18. It is pertinent to observe that we would have received substantial incomes from the excess crude allocation, but our share of that disbursement was converted to servicing the inherited Paris Club Exit Payment Debt of #3.8 Billion, by the Debt Management Office (DMO) in the Presidency. The loan facility has now been fully liquidated and we hope that additional resources from the excess crude allocation shall enable us do more for the people from June 2008.

19. The picture we have seen portrays the difficulty Government faces in delivery services and executing development projects if we were to rely entirely on the revenues accruing from the federation or the IGR, which although admittedly rose from an average monthly collection of about #120 million to over #200 million, but still grossly inadequate to meet our developmental challenges. It became imperative therefore that we adopted the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) approach, which has been identified worldwide as a catalyst for infrastructural development and efficient service delivery.

20. In our quest to fast-track development and project financing therefore, Government has been facilitating PPP engagements by creating the enabling environment for private sector operators to partner with the public sector for mutual benefits. Such partnerships have resulted in the following laudable projects: the on-going mass Housing projects in Minna, Bida and Kontagora; the leasing of Badeggi Rice

Mill; we have also negotiated to have Rice mill in Edozhigi. The Minna Solar Energy Streetlights projects; the Garam Model City; the Zuma Rock Tourist development project; the development of Industrial Layout, at GARAM, Suleja; the construction of additional block of hostels in College of Education, Minna and the provision of internet facilities for students registration at the institution, among other projects.

21. We intend to vigorously use the PPP principle in collaboration with Federal Government to ensure the dualisation of Suleja-Minna road; the development of Gurara International Tourist Centre, the Baro ports, the Minna-Abuja railway network, as well as Zungeru and Guarara Hydro Power station projects. The issue of Bida-Nupeko road is underway.

22. Mr. Speaker, Fellow Nigerlites, our first major concern at the inception of our administration was the deplorable state of our educational system. I am sure the picture of what we inherited in the educational sector is very familiar to many of us. Mr. Speaker, we will recall that we have gone round schools with you and we have seen the dilapidation, the decay and the total collapse of our educational institutions. We have therefore embarked on aggressive intervention initiatives to bring back the glory of education, which used to be the pride of the Niger Province in the colonial period, and which Nigerlites are known for. We must sustain it. I believed we have paid all pledges to the Emirate Education Foundations, except those where no Foundation is in place. We are waiting for two Emirates to put in place theirs. We have reiterated that any community that starts any developmental project will receive government's support.

23. A major thrust of our educational intervention is the free education initiative for boys and girls at basic education level. This implies non-payment of tuition and other fees by pupils except voluntary contribution in the form of PTA levy. The sum of #287,346,080.00k has been released by Government for free education for women and children, during the last one year, to enable us achieve our objective of providing quality basic education to women and children. The 'Education for All' initiative, which is expected to increase school enrolment by 30%, will cost Government over #2 Billion annually. We have also set up a high level committee to collate public opinion and advise Government on how we can integrate the *almajiri* Islamic schools system into the western educational system with a view to harnessing their potentials for societal growth and development. We must discourage street begging in our society, because begging is dehumanizing and unIslamic. This was why we carried out the resettlement of beggars in the capital city by removing them from the streets and relocating them to places of their choice, where they could live better lives.

24. In addition, we paid **NECO** and **WAEC** examination fees for all secondary school graduating students as part of measures to assist parents in the education of their children. We have expended the sum of **#300Million** for these examination fees as well as for procurement of examination materials,

laboratory reagents and chemicals to prepare the students adequately. Only children in public schools will benefit from this scheme because taking a child to private school is a matter of choice. When we had a discussion with proprietors of private schools recently, we asked them to draft a law on how government can assist, so we will soon bring that for deliberation.

25. In order to situate education properly as a catalyst for the transformation of the State, we embarked on major reforms which have led to the splitting of the State Ministry of Education into two inter-related and complementary ministries – with two cabinet Commissioners – of Basic and Higher Education, among others. We hope to keep a close eye on the standard and quality of education at the primary through senior secondary levels; and at the same time to develop the tertiary educational system in the State to position the institutions properly for the attainment of our developmental goals and aspirations.

26. We recognize the role tertiary institutions play in articulating the solutions to the complex problems of society. It is in this context therefore that Government is reappraising the objectives of our tertiary institutions and refocusing them to meet our specific needs, because education must relate to the common needs of society. While it seeks to solve problems, it must also aim at higher sense of value of the given community. There must not be a dysfunctional relationship between education and society.

27. We intend to pay serious attention to all state-owned tertiary institutions, especially IBB University, to situate it properly to enable it meet the aspirations of our State. The State must feel its impact through the quality of management, teaching staff and employable graduates from the institution. We need to attune our minds to some of these pertinent questions, for instance, should we be satisfied with a University that runs conventional courses or a University with a special focus of producing graduates that are in high demand by the business sector? Should we continue to mop up resources of the Local Government Councils in running IBB University? Do we refocus the institution with specific mandate of say, producing medical graduates or teachers? Or should Schools of Remedial/Preliminary Studies in Agaie, Ibetu, New Bussa and Teginu concentrate on preparing students to pass the entry examinations into any University or tertiary Institution of their choice, while Government pursues the multi-campus strategies for IBB University, with College of Education, Minna playing a key role in hosting the faculty of Education, among others. This way, we can mobilize resources to cater for the needs of other tertiary institutions in addressing the middle-level manpower situation of the State? The scientific and pragmatic approaches to the issues highlighted above are some of the challenges that our pioneer Commissioner for Higher Education will face in his new schedule.

28. But our focus goes beyond developing just the tertiary institutions at home. We are also developing excellent relationships and supporting Universities within the catchment areas and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria to enable them discharge their responsibilities. After all, Universities worldwide are known to follow the market, to produce what is in high demand, if they must be relevant and sustainable. To this end, we have endowed two professorial chairs, one, the Niger State Chair on Good Governance at Igbinedion University, Okada, and secondly, the Abdulsalami Abubakar Chair in Agriculture at the University of Ibadan, as well as rendered financial assistance of over #55million to a few tertiary institutions in Nigeria. We will complete the Engineering faculty project in Bayero University Kano started by my predecessor.

29. We are similarly interested in seeing that the national examination bodies, NECO, WAEC & JAMB are reformed to reflect the curriculum and courses that meet the needs of society; and that the Teachers Grade II certificate is re-introduced to strengthen manpower development at the primary school level through the provision of a corps of teaching assistants in our primary schools. After two years, these teaching assistants will be required to proceed for further studies and obtain the National Certificate of Education (NCE) qualification. Our educational sector reform programme further includes plans to de-merge the Junior Secondary School (JSS) level from the primary school and run it as a stand alone programme as is currently being proposed in a review of the National Education Policy.

30. We have also invested substantially in the upgrading of school infrastructures and the rehabilitation of the physical environments. For instance, we have constructed a total of 238 classrooms for Basic and Senior Secondary Schools and renovated 171 classrooms; provided 11,774 sets of school furniture for pupils/students and 867 sets of furniture for teachers; and sank 20 boreholes in various schools, among others. This does not take cognizance of the constituency projects executed by honourable members of the State House of Assembly and other capital projects executed by the local government councils as well as the Ward Development Committees.

31. We have reviewed Scholarships payable to our students because we found that the allowances were ridiculously too low to be of meaningful assistance to the students. We therefore made upward reviews of the bursaries and released ₦150m for payment of outstanding scholarship allowances to both local and foreign students, while the sum of over #200m is being spent on fresh applicants.

32. But we are also are looking at a more sustainable arrangement of financing education through the Student Study Loan Scheme (SSLS) which will enable students secure loan facilities for their education, repayable after their graduation over an agreed length of time. Government is studying the feasibility of the idea and the necessary safeguard measures to guarantee recovery from the beneficiaries. The idea is

that students should be able to raise loans to augment whatever meager resources government provides as bursary, thereby making them grow with a sense of responsibility and commitment to a course.

33. Our policy on foreign sponsorship is now strictly on merit and in areas of critical need to the State. Only gifted students with exceptional talents will be sponsored by government to undertake specialised courses abroad. However, government will monitor the progress of all Niger State students whether at home or abroad with a view to supporting them where necessary and creating opportunities for their employment on successful completion of their studies.

34. Our second goal is to promote agricultural production to enhance food sufficiency to meet domestic, industrial and export demands. We are determined to exploit our vast natural potentials to make Niger State produce sufficient food to feed Nigeria and to export. With about 8.6million hectares of arable land and ideal environment for livestock and fisheries development, we believe that Niger State can indeed feed the Nation. We shall make agriculture the dominant facilitator of our economic re-engineering project and ensure that the sector becomes the largest employer of labour, thereby making farming attractive to our teeming population of unemployed youths, with concentration on the cultivation of rice, sheanut butter, groundnuts, cotton, and sugarcane. We would encourage mass production of seedlings for distribution to our farmers in order to facilitate their outputs in this direction.

35. To achieve these objectives, we have introduced two core programmes to ensure self-sufficiency in food production for human and export purposes. These are: "Niger State Feeds the Nation" and "Protein for All – Talba" Initiatives. The programmes will involve mass production of Rice, Maize, Sorghum and Sugar-cane in Zone A; Yam, Cassava and Tree Crops in Zone B; Cotton Ground-nuts and millet in Zone C; Shea butter and locust bean trees will also be domesticated for large scale production.

36. Agriculture must be prioritised through the recruitment of qualified extension-service workers, provision of improved seedlings, farm implements and inputs, and the encouragement of farmers to cultivate large farmlands for commercial farming. We must find ways and means to encourage and empower majority of our farmers to go beyond subsistence farming. We must also open the markets by provision of access roads and adequate means of transportation.

37. Homestead fisheries, aqua-culture and development of livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, poultry, etc) would be facilitated in the "Protein initiatives" to provide sufficient protein for the nation. We must encourage also the civil servants to engage in farming. Indeed, Niger State would be a leading provider of meat to the Southern part of Nigeria, as healthy meat would be processed for delivery to the residents of the South-west and south-east, thereby reducing the risks associated with the transportation of live cattle and other animals in trucks.

38. Under the planned support, Government is looking at boosting agricultural yields through adequate supply of infrastructural facilities such as water, irrigation schemes, markets, storage facilities, processing facilities, and the adoption of new and effective production technologies. We have therefore commissioned a feasibility study of the 12 irrigation schemes in the State with a view to reactivating them and boosting both wet and dry season crop production. The five silo complexes in the State have been assessed and Government plans to reactivate and upgrade them over a period of two years. Indeed we have started sales of grains in the state; let me advice those who hoard food stuffs to bring them out because government is aware of their actions and will flood the market with grains.

39. We do not believe that our agricultural policy should narrow its view to the procurement of fertilizers and tractors alone. However, while having a broader view of an agricultural policy that guarantees food sufficiency and food security for our State and the nation, we had to purchase 222 tractors with implements worth ₦1.38 billion for partial mechanization of farm operations. The Ministry of Agriculture has procured 7,800 metric tons of assorted fertilizers and acquired extra 27,000 metric tons from the federal government at a total cost of ₦2.2 billion. We have also gone some extra mile to ensure that farmers have direct access to fertilizers at our distribution points in each of the 274 Wards of the entire State, at the official prices of ₦1,700 per bag of NPK/Urea and ₦1,500 per bag of SSP, despite the difficult logistics to reach some very remote locations/wards.

40. We are also embarking on a reorganization of the Agriculture Ministry to maximize the full potentials of the sector, for the economic transformation of our State. Thus, we now have the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development.

41. In addition to these efforts we shall strengthen and support National Cereals Research Institute at Badeggi, Federal University of Technology, Minna and the agricultural extension services of Niger State Agricultural Development Project (NSADP) by providing adequate logistics and co-funding of relevant research, where necessary. I have always said that any Federal institution in our neighborhood is here to add value to us; we must therefore support and assist them.

42. Our major deliverables (targets) in the agricultural sector within the framework of Vision 3:20-20, include; an annual distribution of 30,000mt of fertilizer to farmers; provision of 1,000 tractor units, 100 units of Boom Sprayers and combine harvesters by 2011; rehabilitation of 12 irrigation schemes and the development of five new ones by 2015.

43. Other targets are the rehabilitation of grains storage silos at Wushishi, Pandogari, Salka, Badeggi, and the completion of Kutigi silos by the year 2011; developing ten (10) Ox-bow Lakes in each

senatorial zone for fishing; rehabilitation of Tagwai and Wuya hatchery farms; procurement of 7,000 assorted fishing nets and gears; renovation of State veterinary Centres and livestock clinics; and improving the infrastructural facilities at Shayi Grazing Reserve and three (3) integrated grazing reserves in the State.

44. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to note that about 3,162 Rice Cooperative Farmers have been registered into clusters. This initiative will give the groups access to credit facilities to boost quality rice production, processing and packaging. Our ultimate desire is for Niger State to become a major rice exporter within the nearest future; an ambition we view as realizable if we compare Niger State with a landmass of 86,000 square km (9.3% of Nigeria's total land area) with Taiwan – a leading rice exporting nation, which has only 35,980 sq km. of landmass. We must get our priorities right and make Agriculture attractive to our youths and other able-body men and women, so that land utilization for agricultural purposes would increase from the present 20% to at least 40% by the year 2011.

45. Similarly, as part of measures to forestall the harsh effects of soaring food crisis, we have procured 3,500 metric tons of assorted grains from farmers at the cost of ~~N~~200million under the Buffer Stock programme. The sale of the grains has been flagged-off, and would be a continuous exercise. We wish to reiterate that Government will flood the markets with subsidized grains ahead of the Muslims period of Ramadan fasting to forestall the artificial scarcity that may be caused by shylock entrepreneurs, who will be interested in making prohibitive profits through hoarding of the commodities.

46. In the area of agricultural manpower development, we are boosting the capacity of the College of Agriculture, Mokwa with the sum of ~~N~~21million to improve infrastructural facilities to meet its accreditation requirements and to reposition it for future challenges. Indeed, Government is studying a proposal for the upgrading of the College into an Agricultural Training and Research Institute. We are also collaborating with Maizube International Training Centre for a number of capacity building training programmes at the cost of ~~N~~15million.

47. Furthermore, we are discussing with a number of commercial banks, development partners and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to find innovative ways of financing our agricultural programmes. To this end, the Badeggi Rice Mill is being resuscitated, among other initiatives to make Niger State the largest rice production hub in West Africa. Government has also issued a Certificate of Occupancy for the establishment of the Edozhigi Rice Mill by the private sector. We have invested the sum of ~~N~~4million as counterpart contribution to ECOWAS Artisanal Fish production; the sum of ~~N~~2.5million as counterpart contribution to UNICEF-Assisted programmes and ~~N~~100million for the Ethanol Project.

48. We are very proud of our participation in the FADAMA II Project, as we have been able to impact positively on the lives of many benefitting communities, as attested to by reports of monitoring groups, including the visit by the World Bank African Regional Vice President earlier in the year. Accordingly, we have paid the State government's counterpart contribution of ₦45million for year 2007, and the arrears of years 2005 and 2006 respectively.

49. Our third goal is the provision of high quality affordable healthcare for all Nigerlites. At the inception of this administration Health care delivery system in Niger State was in a state of decay that required urgent intervention. The health facilities were in a dilapidated state with the attendant risk of complete collapse of the sector. Some hospitals e.g. Bangi, Kagara, Mokwa etc. were abandoned for over ten years; the medical equipments were grossly inadequate and where they existed, they were obsolete. Public confidence in the health sector was eroded. The morale of health personnel was low, which resulted in the mass exodus of doctors to neighbouring States and other organizations. There was a high prevalence of some preventable diseases such as blindness, cancer, common childhood killer diseases etc. I want to appeal to our parents to cooperate with health workers particular during the polio vaccine exercise in order to have a polio-free society.

50. Primary Health Care services were neglected as the facilities were in a state of disrepair. Educational and training facilities, such as Schools of Health Technology, Nursing and Midwifery were not accredited since their establishment in 1976; the Schools existed under provisional registration. Counterpart funds that should augment the support from donor agencies were left unpaid. On the whole, there was no commitment to the provision of qualitative health care delivery services to the people. I believe that by now the House is looking at those bills to establish these institutions.

51. As part of our intervention measures therefore we have embarked on a comprehensive rehabilitation of the health sector, including installation of medical equipment at Bangi Rural Hospital, which has been upgraded into a General Hospital and would be commissioned within the next few weeks. We also commenced the renovation, rehabilitation and upgrading of the following hospitals which are at different stages of completion: Suleja General Hospital; Agaie General Hospital; Mokwa General Hospital; Kontagora General Hospital; Mariga Health Centre; Kagara General Hospital and Sarkin Pawa Health Centre, at the cost of ₦3.2 billion.

52. We have also commenced the construction of three new 110-bed hospitals with staff quarters in the three senatorial districts, which are located at Nasko, Sabon Wuse and Gulu. The hospitals which are at advanced stages of completion will be equipped with modern medical equipments, in a PPP package worth over ₦2billion.

53. As a response to the high prevalence of certain diseases such as preventable blindness, we have provided free eye treatment for about 5,500 patients. Not less than 540 patients had free cataract operation while over 100 patients benefited from free cancer treatment. There is an on-going general awareness campaign on cancer-related illnesses and prevention strategies. Free eye and cancer treatment services will continue to be provided to Nigerlites at senatorial district levels in the State in due course.

54. We are also strengthening the Primary healthcare delivery at community level through the on-going construction of six new Primary Health Care Centres at different locations across the state will strengthen also. We are renovating the old Airport road health Centre, Minna, which would be upgraded to a district hospital. We are also supporting all Non Governmental Organisation (NGOs) that are doing a good job in the State.

55. The modalities for the commencement of sustainable free medical care for children 0 – 5, pregnant women and the old, 70 years and above, are being worked out, while Government has sustained free immunization services against the common childhood killer diseases as well as commenced free treatment for certain critical childhood illnesses such as sickle cell disease and cleft lip/palate.

56. To improve our healthcare services, the stage is already being set through our collaboration with international partners; we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with an American Consultancy firm for the establishment of Niger-American Medical City in Minna. The US\$300 million dollars hospital, when established, will cater for the referral and specialized healthcare needs of Nigerians and West Africans at large. At the same time we envisage that the ultra-modern hospital facility will take advantage of the location and facilities in IBB Specialised Hospital and serve as the Medical College of IBB University when fully established, in due course.

57. We shall also establish one comprehensive Primary Health Care Centre in each of our 25 Local Government Councils, to serve as treatment Centres for people living in remote rural communities. We are also proposing the establishment of a Women and Children Hospital in Bosso. This is to stem the current high infant and maternal mortality rates in the state.

58. Our next priority is infrastructural development, where we have embarked on the aggressive development of our cities and towns in phases to bring them in line with our Urban/City renewal aspirations. In Minna, we have awarded contracts through public bidding for the dualisation and street lighting of the following roads: a) 2.5km Yakubu Lame/Ibrahim Aliyu roads at the cost of N543,028,478:00; b) 4.91km Muazu Muhammed/Zarumai-Onigbende roads at the cost of

N809,139,700.00- the two projects are at 95% and 80% completion stages respectively. We have also awarded another road dualization contract for a 2.2km road (AP-Kpakungu to Mobil Round-about) in Minna at a total cost of #570,109,434.50k, and for the rehabilitation of 3.5km road in Agaie at the cost of #220, 215,665.00k We also reconstructed some collapsed culverts along Darachita area, retaining walls and embankment along Bangaie and Fogun wards in Bida Town at a cost of N23,918,796.00 through direct labour. It is noteworthy that in line with our stance on transparency, accountability and observance of Due Process, these road contracts as well as all other contracts being awarded by this administration are duly advertised, bidden for and awarded accordingly, to the most suitably qualified contractors. We are committed to the completion of the few road contracts inherited by our administration. This includes an outstanding payment of over #200 million for the rehabilitation of Bida township roads. Gulu road will also be completed

59. It is also the intention of Government to provide dualized roads fitted with streetlights in all the Emirate headquarters of the State. Contracts for the dualization of Kontagora township roads and the rehabilitation of selected roads in Kuta will soon be awarded. In addition to this, five roads in Mina have been identified for rehabilitation.

60. In order to ease traffic flow in Minna, solar-powered traffic lighting systems will be installed in some busy junctions in the capital city. This facility will also be extended to other urban centres in the State. Similarly, in line with our determination to enhance the aesthetic value of our cities and to improve lighting for security purposes, we have awarded contracts for reactivation and installation of new street lighting projects. The first phase has commenced in Minna Township, covering a total distance of 72.8kms at a total cost of #574,993,475.63k, made up of conventional type and solar powered street-lighting systems.

61. We recognize the strategic importance of good roads and adequate infrastructure in the realization of our Vision 3:20-20. Under the State Roads Project therefore, Government intends to rehabilitate the 55km Lumma to Babanna road, 11km Batati to Daban road and the 2km Suleja to Gauraka roads. Plans are also underway to connect Zamfara State with Niger State from Kotonkoro through the inter states road networks.

62. In addition, under the Local Government Roads Project, a joint project funding system between the State Government and Local Governments has been developed that will provide at least 5km surfaced roads in each of the 25 local government areas. The township roads shall be provided with street lights. Already, feasibility studies are being carried out on the existing situation of these roads preparatory to the design, costing and production of tender documents.

63. Over the years, we have realized that little or no attention was paid to the maintenance of our infrastructures, especially roads; this has resulted in the failure of these roads with attendant high cost to Government. In order to curtail these wastages, the State Government establishing the Niger State Road Maintenance Agency similar to the Federal Road Maintenance Agency (FERMA). This Agency shall be fully responsible for the maintenance and development of all state roads. With the establishment of this Agency, our engineering personnel will now be effectively utilized as they shall now be exposed to more challenges. A major breakthrough will be the fact that through the proposed Road Maintenance Agency, Government would be able to access roads maintenance funds from FERMA.

64. In an effort to reduce the high cost of road construction and maintenance, Government has signed a memorandum of understanding with a South African based Asphalt Production Company, Messrs. Carboncor Roads Technology Nig. Ltd. for the establishment of a Cold Asphalt production plant in Minna, with capacity to produce 300 metric tons per day of cold asphalt. In order to facilitate the take-off of this company, Government has issued a Certificate-Of-Occupancy for the land earmarked for the establishment of the asphalt plant. In addition, a two million dollar bank guarantee had also been issued in favour of the company. Any investor who comes to the State will have his Certificate Of Occupancy (C-Of-O) within two weeks of submission of application. This is aimed at encouraging foreign investors into the State. Government is also paying full compensation for any parcel of land acquired for investment purposes. It is expected that by October 2008, the company will commence production in Niger State. It is noteworthy to mention that the market for cold asphalt is already available as this company shall be a source of supply of asphalt to our neighbouring Northern states, FERMA and Abuja.

65. Mr. Speaker, may I use this opportunity to appeal to individuals and groups with the network of connections to influence the federal government's intervention in our roads maintenance and development. It is sad to note that with the longest federal roads in Nigeria, none of the federal roads in Niger State roads have been rehabilitated in over 20 years.

66. In order to expand Suleja town and to ensure easy and alternative access to Abuja, a bye pass is to be provided from Maje to Zuba fly-over on the western part of Suleja, covering a distance of about 20.4km. This is part of this administration's vision for a Suleja New City. A number of developers and financiers have already indicated their interest to partner with Government in this project.

67. We also have a vision of a twin city to Abuja, which will bring Suleja at par with the Federal capital City in terms of first class infrastructural facilities and social amenities. This project is being packaged through a PPP arrangement, to be located along Madala to Kaduna road, comprising 30% high class, 50% medium and 20% low cost houses as in the city's master plan. This will complement the high class tourism activities that will take place on and around the Zuma rock. The housing and other facilities will

also help in curtailing the scramble for residential accommodation in Abuja and in return boost the socio-economic development of the State.

68. Fellow Nigerlites, we feel a high sense of responsibility in improving water supply throughout the State, to enhance the quality of lives of our people. As a result we have released over #970million in the water sub-sector for supply of equipments, chemicals, water pumps and the reactivation of pumping stations. In order to further improve water supply to the State capital, we have just signed a contract of #299,914,300:00k for the rehabilitation of Tagwai Dam, that was originally designed to last for 21 years, abandoned for 31 years after its construction without any maintenance, and another contract of #210million for the reactivation of Bosso Dam to complement efforts aimed at improving water supply to the capital city. In view of our commitment to the development of the water sector, we have assigned that responsibility to the Deputy Chief Servant, as the Commissioner for Water Resources.

69. We similarly embarked on the construction, rehabilitation and renovation of some public facilities and buildings to make them habitable and befitting whether as official residences or offices. In this regard, contract was awarded for the construction and furnishing of a new SSG's office; renovation and furnishing of the office of the Head of Service (HOS); renovation and furnishing of 14nos. type 'A' Commissioners' quarters; renovation and installation of 120kva standby generating set at the NYSC Temporary Orientation Camp, Paiko, renovation of a burnt block at Mobile Police Barracks, Minna and the comprehensive rehabilitation of U.K. Bello Arts Theatre, among others, at the total cost of about #236,464,000.55k.

70. We equally have a deliberate Power and Energy policy primarily centred on Urban and statewide Rural Electrification Programme. Under the Urban Electrification programme, Government has procured and taken delivery of a total of 84 distribution transformer and associated installation materials out of which 64 (sixty four) have been distributed to various communities through the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), at the total cost of #269, 940,421.00k. Discussions are, however on-going with the PHCN Authorities on modalities for reimbursing the State Government the cost of the procured transformers and the associated materials.

71. Under our State-wide Rural Electrification Programme, Government is desirous of completing all the on-going rural electrification projects, to minimize rural-urban drift and, by extension work towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Vision 3:20-20. In this regard, Government has finalized arrangements to commence work on the electrification of villages across the three senatorial Zones of the State at the total cost of #1.5billion, from an on-going PPP engagement.

72. We also intend to pursue aggressively the development of conventional and renewable energy sources such as Hydro Power, Solar Power and Wind Power generation. Already, Government has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with a leading Hydro power generation company Messrs. Trans Atlantic Investment and Development Co. Inc., Atlanta, to generate power from Gurara Water Falls. Preliminary investigation carried out by the company showed that about 250 megawatts can be generated in the first phase. The package which includes a high class tourism component is estimated to cost about \$400 million dollars, under a PPP initiative with a three-year completion target.

73. On Solar Energy Development, the Niger State Government has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Nanergy Company, a renowned Solar Production Company, based in USA under a Public-Private-Partnership arrangement. In line with the agreement, the Niger State Government and Nanergy Inc of the USA have agreed to set up two-pronged commercial activities in the State, for the installation of a manufacturing facility to produce 5MW of amorphous silicon photovoltaic modules (PV) and approximately 100,999 Kwh of lead acid batteries. To facilitate the take-off of the project, Government has issued a certificate of occupancy (C of O) and the Company has mobilized for the installation of the machinery. The company has also carried out a survey of the identified Government schools, health institutions and selected Government offices where stand-alone solar power equipment will be installed.

74. An institutional arrangement to co-ordinate and propel the State's New Energy Development Strategy to re-position Niger State as a real Power State is now in place. In this regard, a Bill for the establishment of Niger State Electricity Agency has been approved by the Executive Council and will soon be forwarded to the House of Assembly for passage into law.

75. In line with the Government's desire to transform state's capital, a proposal for the development of the Minna city centre has been completed. The proposed city centre project shall improve the central part of Minna (Mobil/Minna Market area) by providing the following site attractions: (i) a 45m high 15 story observatory tower, with a view of 24km radius around the city; (ii) a five star hotel with a grand pavilion; and (iii) a multi-storey car park and mega shopping Mall. Similarly, the proposed city centre will occupy a 6.5 hectare space of land in the central part of Minna. We are happy to note that through government's PPP initiative, many private developers have shown serious interest in the project.

76. Furthermore, we have developed excellent relationship between Government and the Labour Unions to facilitate mutual understanding and inter-dependence. We have always recognized the Civil Service as the vehicle through which we can deliver democracy dividends to the people. We have therefore been building the capacity of the civil service through regular in-service trainings, seminars,

workshops and our e-compliance training programme, at the total cost of about #177,283,631.95k. I understand that the e-compliance training has been suspended; it will soon be in place again.

77. Mr. Speaker, we do not believe that there should be graduate unemployment in our State, because we are still in a situation where we beg our children to go to school, where we cannot fill our quota in some national Universities. We have therefore embarked on a graduate recruitment scheme which would provide employment to all registered graduates of Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education to reduce the social tension in the society. The first phase of the project is costing Government the sum of #42,550,000.00K on monthly allowances for the 3,940 candidates who have registered for the Scheme and #40.7million for payment to the two institutions organizing the six month training exercise.

78. Related to the above is our desire to embark on realistic and aggressive poverty reduction programmes that will put food on the table of Nigerlites and improve their quality of life. We have thus been co-funding NAPEP in Niger State to enable it live up to its responsibilities of eradicating poverty in the society. Specifically, we have bought into NAPEP's concept of Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), the Village Economic Development (VED) and the micro-credit finance Schemes, for which we variously released the sums of #60 million and #300 million. We are committed to all NAPEP's counterpart funding obligations in the future. Indeed, in demonstration of our commitment to poverty eradication and social security of our people, we now have a Ministry of Poverty eradication and Value Orientation. This Ministry is charged with sensitising the people on all aspects of societal values in our communities; the need for people to appreciate each other and living together in harmony.

79. We are also committed to assisting our rural communities to plan, execute and maintain environment-friendly and socially inclusive micro projects. Through our counterpart contribution of #41 million and investment of #588 million in LEEMP projects, we have been able to lay a solid foundation for the sustainable poverty reduction and capacity building of 125 rural communities in 11 (eleven) communities, where numerous projects have been executed.

80. Similarly, in the spirit of mutual respect and interdependence, we have been enjoying a cordial relationship with this Honourable House and the Judiciary. While we shall continue to accord the two other arms of government, maximum support and cooperation, we further solicit their continued collaboration and understanding in moving this great state forward. We shall ensure that both the Legislature and Judiciary are provided with the conducive environment to discharge their responsibilities in the overall interest of Nigerlites. Meanwhile, we have provided the sum of #405 million to enable members of the Legislature execute constituency projects in their communities, with a view to bringing democracy dividends to the people.

81. Mr. Speaker, at this juncture, may I note that as we march into the future, our administration intends to remain more focused and rededicated to excellent service delivery for the peace, progress and prosperity of all Nigerlites. To achieve this objective, we shall be carrying out some reorganizations and reforms in the structure of government to make the machinery of governance more vibrant and result-oriented. In this regard, a few Ministries have been created and some principal officers of Government are being moved around to inject fresh ideas into the administration. Accordingly, the new structure of the Ministries is as follows:

- 1) Local Government, Community Development and Chieftaincy Affairs
- 2) Water Resources
- 3) Finance and Economic Planning
- 4) Lands & Housing
- 5) Science & Technology
- 6) Information & Communication
- 7) Women Affairs and Social Security
- 8) Tourism & Culture
- 9) Health
- 10) Justice
- 11) Poverty Eradication & Value Re-Orientation,
- 12) Agric & Rural Development
- 13) Transport & Infrastructural Development
- 14) Environment & Forest Resources
- 15) Youths and Sports Development
- 16) Investment, Commerce & Cooperatives
- 17) Livestock and Fisheries Development
- 18) Basic Education and
- 19) Higher Education.

82. Similarly, in line with respect for the rule of law and adherence to the principles of transparency and accountability, we have directed that all MDAs must align their annual budgets to the Development Action Plan – DAP - (2007 – 2011) which covers all aspects of our development aspirations in the short and medium terms. The DAP will however be reviewed periodically to update its scope in line with changing realities.

83. In addition, it is our resolve to recognize and appreciate the sons and daughters of Niger State (at home and in the Diaspora) who are excelling and bringing glory to our State through their meritorious services and accomplishments. We have therefore instituted the Niger State Productivity and Honours Award for celebrating those Nigerlites who have made and are still making outstanding contributions to

the development of Niger State and Nigeria at large. We shall make the Awards a permanent feature in this State to encourage and inspire the younger generation to imbibe the virtues of hard-work, diligence, honesty and patriotism. We shall send a draft bill to the House of Assembly for institutionalizing the awards in the State.

84. Mr. Speaker, honourable members of this House, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, fellow Nigerlites, to end my address; I will like to pay special tributes to our respected Royal fathers, members of the Niger State Traditional Council, under the excellent leadership of HRH Etsu Nupe, Alhaji Yahaya Abubakar, CFR for their unflinching support for our administration. We also applaud the support of the leadership of our religious bodies for their continued prayers for the peace and stability in Niger State. We shall continue to count on the support and encouragement of the generality of Nigerlites who have kept an abiding faith in our administration. Today, we reaffirm our pledge to serve all Nigerlites diligently, transparently, and with utmost dignity. Special tributes must be paid to our prominent statesmen, Generals Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar, who have contributed tremendously not only to Niger State but to the stability of Nigeria, as former Heads of State. And General Mamman Kontagora and General Gado Nasko - all of you have done your best, we must say thank you. But we ask for more from all of you. We must also pay tributes to all our former ministers, commissioners and those who have contributed to the growth and development of Niger state in one way or the other. We need more of your contributions now.

85. May I thank Allah (SWT) for giving us this opportunity to Niger State. May I also call on Nigerlites to continue to pray for the success of the State and Nigeria at large.

Thank you and May Allah bless us all.