

Thank you Ambassador!

Chairman of this occasion and Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for West Africa, Mr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas

Distinguished guest speakers

The Founder of the Gusau Institute, General Aliyu Mohammed

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning!

It gives me immense pleasure to be here today, share my thoughts with you and discuss from the perspective of a politician about Security in the Gulf of Guinea – a subject that is very important for my country and for the sub-region.

As most of you here are aware, I come from Sao Tome and Principe. We speak Portuguese in my country and since not many of you here speak Portuguese, I am going to punish you with my English.

We are two islands in the Gulf of Guinea on the Equator, located geo-strategically facing Western Central Africa. All south Atlantic maritime routes from this region pass through our waters. All routes going via Cape from this region pass through our waters. If there is a disruption at the Suez Canal, all east-west routes to Europe and North America will pass through our waters as well.

We did not choose the geography. The geography chose us and we have to play our role. The size of our country is small, the population is small but our maritime territory is very big and much larger compared to that of our neighbours such as Gabon, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Infact there isn't such a thing as a small country or a big country in the matter of security. It is of utmost importance to everyone equally.

I come from a country of about 190,000 people living on a land mass of 1000 square kilometers. I am completely at ease interacting with a country of about 190 million people. Nigeria is a very welcoming country and I enjoy being here.

We understand that nobody can avoid Nigeria. Nigeria also needs to understand that Nigeria cannot avoid the rest of Africa. Nigeria has a responsibility and a role to play in African stability and the future of the continent. Nigeria needs to get it right. If Nigeria gets it wrong, Africa will get it wrong too!

Today, around the Gulf of Guinea, within less than 2 hours of flying distance, we have a vast market with a GDP of over 750 billion US Dollars. Annually the sub-region trades over 80 million tonnes of bulk and over 6 million TEUs of containerized goods. Close to 4000 vessels call at various ports in the sub-region.

Business is happening in the sub-region and we have a growing middle class that is getting richer. We have over 300 million consumers and a significant majority of them are a young population.

Drug traffickers, weapons traffickers and criminals know this too. They go where there is a market for them, where there are young impressionable people.

We are all part of a blessed sub-region in terms of population and resources and as people say in the Gulf of Guinea – If you can swim in your neighbours oil basin – at the very least your skin won't be dry!

We also have oil theft, illegal fishing, security concerns for ships, cargo and crew, increasing insurance premiums and costs estimated between 1 and 2 billion US Dollars annually. Vulnerabilities exist due to weak surveillance systems and controls, resistance and threats to naval patrols. Nigerian Navy and NIMASA adopted measures that reduced incidences drastically in waters near Lagos but then increased in Benin waters. Again Nigerian assistance saw that incidences moved out of Benin but now they have moved to Togolese waters. Niger delta is also greatly affected.

Active intervention by the Nigerian Navy and NIMASA, an array of coastal sensors, satellite surveillance and information sharing protocols initiated by Nigeria have resulted in a decrease in illegal activities. However piracy network in the Gulf of Guinea is highly adaptive and single state solutions are only short term fixes. We believe that we need preventive deterrents. An integrated Maritime Strategy for the subregion that includes elements of a shared comprehensive intelligence and surveillance, rapid response, a strong judicial process and enforcement of punishments is required.

Sao Tome and Principe is a nation with Tourism as our key strength and for this sector to thrive, we have no

choice but to open our country and increase our air connectivity. We have made entry to our country, visa free, if one holds an EU, US or Canadian passport or has valid visas from these countries. This requires us to take additional security measures at our borders so we can have the enhanced levels of protection required for the tourism industry.

Our location can also enable better logistics in the sub region. We are building a deep water port for transshipment to complement and contribute to the growth of the subregion. This can drastically reduce costs of doing business in the subregion.

Collectively we can develop avenues where security can be combined with economic efficiency. Allow me to make one illustration here. Sao Tome Island is located at less than 1 day sailing distance from Apapa. When we have our storage tank terminal for petroleum products operating in our country, we can store strategic reserves even for Nigeria. Economic benefits are derived from cost efficient storage location with no congestion and demurrage losses, while strategic near-shore reserves mitigate risks and provide the economic security.

We have chosen to pursue these economic activities, and because of this, we have implicitly also chosen to do whatever it takes to cooperate with our neighbours and secure the Gulf of Guinea. Security is vital for our prosperity.

We need to address them, rather urgently. Because if we don't, it will only be a matter of time by when companies and individuals will mobilize their own private defence systems for protecting themselves.

Government systems cannot fail and democracy and authority of the State must prevail. We cannot be under constant pressure, seek short term fixes and outsource our duties and responsibilities.

You can easily comprehend that Sao Tome and Principe, is very keen to cooperate with Nigeria, cooperate with other countries bordering the Gulf, cooperate with the United States, NATO and all other willing partners to secure the Gulf of Guinea. At this point we believe strongly that we should create a South Atlantic Treaty Organization which seem to be an instrument that can be effective to cooperate with South American countries.

Our country can implement electronic surveillance systems given our location. We can have systems that gather intelligence and share them with our neighbours. Being in the middle of the Gulf, we will be able to see threats that need time to reach mainland shores. We can develop advance warning systems.

You see

When you are better prepared the battle is half won.

Every country would like to have its own navy, its own airforce and its own security infrastructure. Can we all afford that? The countries that can afford, is it possible for them to do it all alone? Is it prudent to think they can go alone? We live in an inter-dependent world, a connected world. Each of us have something to bring to the table.

We understand that we must cooperate, integrate with the sub-region and pool resources for common benefit. This concept of mutual cooperation was recognized and the

Gulf of Guinea Commission was established in 2001. President Obasanjo, late President Omar Bongo from Gabon and President Miguel Trovoada from Sao Tome and Principe led this initiative.

The key component of any cooperation on security is a complete comprehension of the fact that we can save us all together or die alone. Political will is essential and leadership is critical. However it is unfortunate that in most multinational organizations in Africa poor execution is the reason for below average performance.

In some cases there is no performance at all!

We struggle for the location of the headquarters, we inflate overhead expenses and privileges. At each and every summit, we avoid or postpone decision making. Finally there are defaults in making the contributions and organizations suffer mere existence on paper.

In contrast, Criminal organizations, terrorist organizations and all kinds of mafias are already coordinated in such alliances. They have integrated and sophisticated systems, cooperating and sharing resources and sometimes technology as well. Their goals seem more aligned while we Governments – legitimate powers who are responsible to conduct our nations, struggle to get it right.

Why?

I believe introspection is required.

First we need to be clear that pirates, terrorists and traffickers are all illegal criminals and they all need to be

dealt with as a whole. Next we need to understand that the development of criminal networks and the threats are in some ways a result of our failure in Governance. The threats are no longer outside our borders. They are within. The worm is in the mango! This has limited our ability to pursue surgical or radical solutions.

As we have seen in other parts of the world, only military action is not sufficient for conflict resolution, whatever be the nature of the conflict. We have to understand that a multi-lateral approach and holistic actions are required to deal with the issues. We must act on all fronts: military, intelligence, social, economic and political.

Allow me to share our experience.

You see, we in Sao Tome and Principe have had 25 years of democracy. However democracy in itself is not sufficient to ensure development and happiness.

Participation of the people in the development process is essential for social cohesion. Our Government today is formed with an absolute majority, with 60% of the Parliament and was voted to power on three pillars:

1. A Government that will deliver on its electoral promises
2. A Government that is and will be close to the people.
3. A Government that functions with utmost sincerity, integrity and honesty.

The person who stands before you today is proud of his Bantu blood but also has a bit of Portuguese blood. I am married to a lovely Fulani lady from Mali. I am the son of a former President who was also a political prisoner. I am a muslim leader in a country where 99.9% of the population

are catholics; elected by a – never-seen-before majority in Sao Tome and Principe after 2 years of political persecution. This is me. I am standing here because the people of my country have sent a clear signal that they want a leader who cares. They don't care what he is; they care that he cares for them. They want sincerity and truth from the Government. They want the Government to work for them.

Today, we have chosen a powerful tool called “The Citizen Budget Process”. This tool has taken the Government to the people. The tool is essentially a participatory process where the National Budget is built up from the grassroots. We have a dialogue with the citizens, the local Governments and the civil society. We understand their needs and they understand our constraints. They prioritize Government expenses and investments and that's how we build our budgets.

This has brought the Government **of** the people and **by** the people – **to** the people and **for** the people. Confidence levels have risen significantly, partly due to expectations matching perceptions and reality. As for tangible benefits – we have improved the quality of expenditure and the social impact of the National Budget is higher. Hard and tough structural reforms have been passed with relative ease as there is higher confidence that the Government is working to do the right thing. Reforms and increased confidence levels has allowed the Government to bring private sector on board to participate through PPP, BOT and other models therefore balancing funding requirements.

Once again, we will not win against criminals, terrorists and socially premeditated disturbances if our policies are

not built for the people and by the people. We can have free and fair elections and we can also alternate power between major parties and avoid violence. However if the essence is not of the people, by the people and for the people – then not much will work.

We all have been witnessing the migrant crisis in Europe. One of the reasons for this is that we are unable to keep the youth in Africa, generate employment for them and give them the life they seek. They get desperate and reach out to Europe. But Europe has not been able to integrate them into their societies either. Some of these youth, who are then frustrated turn to terrorism, criminal activities or revolution.

This is an unfortunate situation.
Let us be the one leading a revolution. Let us lead the change.

We are happy to see that our biggest neighbour Nigeria, has had free, fair and credible elections. We are delighted that Nigerians have elected their President based on promises to fight corruption and terrorism. We are also happy that His Excellency President Buhari made it his priority to visit countries that share borders with Nigeria and straighten relations within the subregion. We hope Sao Tome and Principe will soon be on his agenda.

Today we still have time to pursue policies for the social and economic development of the sub-region and fight criminal actions. We must seize the opportunity and not be constrained by time frames of political mandates and other short term goals. A long term strategy, multi-lateral approach and a holistic action plan is the need of the hour.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very optimistic. We will secure the Gulf of Guinea. We will improve the business climate and assist entrepreneurs and businesses to create more wealth. We will help them succeed and create more jobs. We will help them pay more taxes!

These taxes will allow the Government to expand hospitals, build schools, pave roads and give access to clean water for everyone.

Taking the stage after me is a successful African Leader. I wish him the best with his new appointment as the GMD of NNPC. I am sure we are all keen to hear his views on the Oil Industry. Geneva and Singapore are keenly listening as well. However please let us not forget that we have to also focus on Agriculture, Tourism, the Culture Industry and I C T industry.

Sound economic development leads to social development and all of this is a step closer to regional peace, stability and ultimately results in strong social cohesion.

This room is filled with experience, expertise and network. I see people who are vested with people's mandate, people's vote and people's hope. We have to internalize the responsibilities given to us.

We count on our Western Partners and our South American Partners. We understand that we have an obligation to take care of our own, take care of ourselves and I know we are quite capable of doing it. Thank you!