

**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY NYESOM EZENWO WIKE,
CON, GSSRS, GOVERNOR OF RIVERS STATE AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2017 ANNUAL GENERAL
CONFERENCE OF THE AFRICAN BAR ASSOCIATION IN
PORT HARCOURT ON MONDAY 8TH JULY 2017**

Protocol,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all, especially those of you that are first-time visitors, to Port Harcourt, for the 2017 Annual Conference of the African Bar Association (AFBA).

2. As you may already know, Port Harcourt is the capital of Rivers State and the Garden city of Nigeria. It is a city we are so proud of for its history, captivating beauty and serenity.

3. Therefore, as you remain our guests for the next couple of days for this important conference, we encourage you to find some time to explore the city' and have a feel of the traditional Rivers hospitality. I can assure all our first time visitors that you shall return home with fund memories and pleasurable experiences.

4. Let me thank the leadership of AFBA for the opportunity to speak not only to such a quality gathering of legal minds from

across the African continent, but also, for the honour of sharing such a history moment with Jakaya Kikwete, the 4th President of the United Republic of Tanzania - a champion of democracy and good governance and one of Africa's rare and highly successful and inspirational political leaders.

5. President Kikwete, you are welcome to Rivers State, the treasure base of Nigeria and we hope you will enjoy your brief stay with us.

6. The appreciable presence of delegates from all parts of Africa to this conference clearly tells the progress the rebirthed AFBA has made, in so short a time, to establish itself as the foremost association for African lawyers.

7. With your pace and effort therefore, it is only a matter of time for AFBA to be fully embraced and respected by all as a leading voice for the defence of the rule of law, democracy and human rights in Africa, which are the values that define civilization and the essence of our humanity.

8. We are therefore happy to host this conference and be associated with AFBA for standing up for these values, believing

also that as a sub-State within a nation, we can count on you to come to our defence whenever our fundamental rights and freedoms are threatened or trampled in our country.

9. As social engineers, lawyers are known and appreciated for their devotion to justice and the good of society. And as ministers in the temple of justice we are called to be a shining light to the environment around us. This is the context to situate the relevance and possible impact of this conference for Africa.

10. Before now the story of Africa was readily told in commonly held stereotypes of poverty, hunger, violence, and hopelessness.

11. However, the upswing of stable democratic governments and appreciable investments in development infrastructure has contributed in no small measure to positively change the continent's economic narratives.

12. In deed, despite being weakened by the global recession, reports after reports continue to affirm Africa's positive economic outlook as one of the world's most attractive frontiers for trade and investments.

13. While we have every reason to be very optimistic about the continent's boundless opportunities, we must also realize that the

promise of economic prosperity can only materialize through effective macro-economic and investments.

14. Consequently, the great task before African leaders is to provide the enabling fiscal and regulatory environment for the private sector to create the jobs and provide economic prosperity and security for the people.

15. Although the efforts being made in this direction by some African nations are quite encouraging, all is still not well with Africa's business environment, which is regarded as one of the most problematic in the world.

16. It is against this background that we note with satisfaction the decision of AFBA to organize this conference, with the theme: "dissecting the legal and regulatory framework of doing business in Africa" to address the key legal and regulatory issues that are critical to Africa's business and growth agenda.

17. Although the conference is about Africa, it is equally relevant to sub-State entities, such as Rivers State, with responsibility for advancing the economic wellbeing of their constituents.

18. Accordingly, since taking over the levers of power a little over two years ago, we have devoted a great deal of our attention towards ensuring that doing business in Rivers State becomes less challenging but very rewarding.

19. For instance, in two years we have not increased taxes and levies despite the paucity of development funds at our disposal.

20. Instead, we have streamlined the tax regime and eliminated multiple-taxation so that business owners can now have more disposable income to save or invest in the State's economy to create jobs and wealth for our people.

21. Under our watch, investors no longer have to go through intricate and often irritating regulatory webs to obtain permits to establish their businesses in the State.

22. Also, in order to ensure that our people have secured legal rights to property, we have ensured the prompt issuance of certificates of occupancies or the grant of Governor's consent to deserving applicants within two weeks of payment of statutory fees.

23. Furthermore, we have tackled security with all the vigour and commitment it deserves in collaboration with the nation's security agencies and recorded tremendous success.

24. As we speak, Rivers State is adjudged to be one of the safest and secure States in the country. Our communities are safe. Our Local Government Areas are safe and secure; our businesses and investments are safe, just as our homes and neighbourhoods are also safe and secure, which was not the situation two years ago.

25. We cannot talk about real economic progress without also putting the indispensable role of the rule of law and the judiciary into perspective.

26. Here again, in two years of our administration, the judiciary in Rivers State is now truly independent, committed to expeditious conclusion of cases and determined to doing substantial justice with opportunities for alternative dispute resolution.

27. In deed, separation of powers and the rule of law, as fundamental principles of good governance have, never been as vibrant and effective in Rivers State.

28. We also recognize the critical relationship between infrastructure and economic growth. Accordingly, we have invested an unprecedented 130 billion naira in the last two years to build roads, bridges and jetties across the length and breadth of the State without introducing taxes or exposing the State to unmanageable debt burdens.

29. Our mission is to provide our State with some of the best available infrastructure you can ever find in the country to support our drive for rapid economic growth and development.

30. In doing all these and many other things, our central objective is to ensure that Rivers State remains among the most attractive destination for local and foreign businesses.

31. As the second largest economy in Nigeria, the economic potential of Rivers State in agriculture, oil and gas, mining, construction, manufacturing, education, healthcare, sports,

maritime, energy and tourism are manifestly extensive but still largely untapped.

32. We therefore invite private sector players to take advantage of the favourable investment climate to invest in the State and reap bountifully from the State's economic revival.

33. Ladies and gentlemen, Africa is our common heritage and we must all be concerned about its future progress and prosperity. We must not allow the inherent but surmountable challenges to becloud our focus and approach to its future.

34. As we therefore look forward to a stimulating exchange of ideas and feedback on the theme and sub-themes of the conference from the array of experts, I wish you all a highly successful conference and hope that the outcome turns out to be of benefit to the continent and its people.

35. With those remarks, it is now my singular pleasure to declare the 2017 Annual General Conference of the African Bar Association open.