“WE MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN”

My dear fellow members of the all Progressives Congress, I salute you.  My name is John Odigie Oyegun and I am highly gratified and honoured to be standing before you tonight as the newly elected National Chairman of our Great Party.  I am humbled by the great honour you have conferred on me and the sacred trust you have reposed in me.  And with extreme humility, I accept this responsibility that you have entrusted to me, to lead our Party onto the next phase of its evolution and onwards to the fulfillment of its destined mission as the liberator of the Nigerian people.  This is a heavy responsibility, but I assure you it is a responsibility I will not take lightly.  I pledge to do my utmost, God being on my side, to justify the faith and confidence you have reposed in me.

Before I go further, I will like to express my deepest sympathies to the Borno State delegation and families of those that lost their lives in the unfortunate accident that occurred on their way to this convention.  May God in His infinite mercy rest their souls in perfect peace.  I assure all gathered here today and the nation generally that the blood they have shed will not be in vain.

I congratulate and thank you, my fellow party men and women, for your maturity and orderliness at this our historic national convention, and for the personal sacrifices you all made to ensure the success of the occasion.

I thank especially all my co-aspirants to the office of National Chairman and all other aspirants to other National offices.  Our individual desires to serve our party at the highest level underscores our collective passion for the success of this endeavour.  I congratulate all those elected into the National Executive with me, and on their behalf extend a hand of fellowship to all our co-aspirants to rally round and continue to donate their passion and talent to our common cause.

I wish to thank the visionary architects of our party who worked diligently to build this great national party we have today.  Through personal sacrifices and patriotic vision, our party leaders assembled an impressive array of patriotic Nigerians and welded them into this great party and thus, for the first time in the modern era of Nigerian democracy, built a truly national party that provided a robust alternative to an oppressive ruling party.

I wish to especially appreciate the role played by Chief Tom Ikimi. I recall that for six long months he hosted and chaired the Merger Negotiations Committee and finally succeeded in bringing into being the APC, a feat that has never before been successfully accomplished in Nigeria. For this singular feat his name will go into political history of our dear nation.

I would also like to thank our Interim National Executive officers who undertook the extremely difficult task of getting our party up and running, and keeping it on its feet in its infancy, even as our opponents tried every trick in the book to knock us down. It is a testimony to the faithfulness of our members and the doggedness of our interim Officers at both the national and state levels that our party overcame all the hurdles of mischief.

Ladies and gentlemen, our party has much work to do. The state of our nation is highly disturbing. It could be said with some justification that our great country Nigeria is on the ropes. A nation blessed by the Almighty with all the key endowments to make any nation great has been virtually brought to its knees by corruption that is unbridled and will qualify for the Guinness Books of Records, resource mismanagement, directionless and what some have described as cluelessness.  As if these woes are not enough, our situation has been compounded by the amazingly visionless national leadership that has been inflicted on Nigerians by the People’s Democratic Party since the dawn of our latest democratic dispensation. In this past decade and a half of genuine suffering, Nigerians have been frustrated by the fact that there was no alternative national party of comparable strength to rescue them from the clutches of the PDP.

Tonight I say to Nigerians: “Your wait is over. Your prayers have not been in vain. Help is on the way”. The APC is here! In 2015 Nigerians will finally have the opportunity to kick out a long-ruling party that has, among other things, failed to provide them with stable power supply, failed to provide them with security that will enable them sleep peacefully on their beds at night, failed to provide employment for millions of Nigerian youths, and failed to stem the tide of corruption that is robbing Nigeria’s children of their future. In 2015, the All Progressives Congress will provide Nigerians with a visionary, dedicated and people-oriented leadership that will liberate the nation from PDP’s rule of poverty and oppression. Under the stewardship of the APC, Nigeria will progress and Nigerians will thrive. This is our sacred pledge to Nigerians tonight.

But we must not be under any illusion: our work will not be easy. The very task of salvaging Nigeria will, on its own, be hard because the rot is deep. But the task will be made even harder by the fact that we have, as opponents, a Political Party that will stop at nothing to frustrate our mission. We know the make-up, the habits, the philosophy and the mindset of our opponents. We know the extent they will go to cling on to power. And we know the immensity of the resources at their disposal. But because the resources they misuse are resources that should rightly be used to improve the lives of the Nigerian people, those resources will not be effective in frustrating the people’s hopes for liberation.

But for us to succeed, dear brothers and sisters, we must pledge this night to work together as a team. We must embrace the ideals of unity, oneness and harmony, and the spirit of give and take. We must learn to let go of past grudges and previous grievances and move forward together as members of the same family. And so tonight, I call for the healing of rifts and the smoothening of cracks. I call for forgiveness of offences and injuries.

I call for unity in our great party. I call for our collective embrace of a common vision. I call for a commitment to work hand in hand to accomplish the task before us. If we fail in our task due to disunity and acrimony, it is not only ourselves we would have let down. We would have betrayed the hopes and aspirations of long-suffering Nigerians. And we must never lose sight of the fact that the collective destiny of the Nigerian people is far more important than our individual or group interests, ambitions or grievances.

Because the road ahead of us is long and hard, we must heed the wise advice of our esteemed Nobel Laureate Professor Wole Soyinka that “we must set forth at dawn”. And so, whereas tonight we party to celebrate the successful conclusion of the National Convention of our Party, early tomorrow morning, we must rise with the dawn and set forth on our patriotic mission to set Nigerians free, and usher in the New Nigeria of our dreams.

Once again, I thank you. God bless you all. God bless the APC and God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.