

**BEING A SPEECH BY DR. GOODLUCK EBELE JONATHAN,  
FORMER PRESIDENT, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA AT:  
“A CONVERSATION TO DISCUSS SOME OF THE ISSUES  
RELATING TO THE PROMOTION OF YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP”  
AT THE OXFORD UNION  
24<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2016**

Protocols.

1. It is my pleasure and a great honour to be in the hallowed chambers of the Oxford University, one of the world's most prestigious universities, not just to speak, but to exchange ideas and answer questions from you, some of the world's most brilliant youths and future leaders.

2. It is instructive to note that since 1823, the Oxford Union has consistently presented this platform for scholarly and social congregation of the student population, the interchange of ideas, propagation of views in the enhancement of knowledge, and for the overall good of mankind.

3. This is highly commendable.

4. This discussion is topical for our global search for development and security. The issue of youth entrepreneurship in Africa is very critical, as Africa is the only

continent in which we will witness a population boom in our lifetime.

5. Studies reveal the symbiotic relationship between youth unemployment and youth restiveness. Accordingly, most violent crises in Africa have been traced to a lack of education among its teeming youth population.

6. Genuine search for development and sustainable peace must therefore begin with youth empowerment and entrepreneurship.

7. When I was Governor of Bayelsa State and later the President of Nigeria, I asked myself some critical questions;

- Why are some nations rich and some poor?
- Why do individuals that grow up in similar circumstances end up differently, with some as successes and others as failures?

·Is the wealth of nations a result of geography, weather, culture, destiny, etc.?

·What could a leader do to effectively lift a people out of the depths of poverty, and enable them to achieve prosperity?

8. After much soul searching, my conviction in regards to these questions is this: wealth is a creation of the human mind properly prepared by education.

9. It is my firm belief that any Nation that does not spend its wealth and resources to developing the capacity of its youth will eventually be forced to devote its resources to fight insecurity amongst those same youths.

10. As a leader, you can decide through your policies to educate the youths, or face the consequences of failing to do so. The problem all African leaders have is how to manage the youth bulge. Do we consider this a ticking time bomb or an opportunity?

11. To me there are two key areas we must invest our resources if we are to convert this perceived time bomb to the opportunity I believe it is. The first is requisite education and capacity building. This should be followed by enabling youth entrepreneurship. Allow me to share with you a brief account of the implementation of my vision to empower the youth.

12. Within a year of my stewardship as the Governor of Bayelsa State, I gave Education a top priority.

13. I provided infrastructure in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions and gave undergraduate students financial assistance in the form of Bursary awards.

14. I started building two special post primary schools for gifted and talented children. The relevance of the gifted children school is obvious. For the talented children, the idea is to develop their natural talents in addition to sound

education so that at graduation they can make a living from their God given talents if they choose to do so.

15. While construction work was on-going in the special schools, we initiated a program to encourage the best brains of the State. We selected through competitive entrance examinations the most brilliant pupils in our primary schools and sent them to the best secondary schools in the country.

16. The idea was for the State Government to take care of the best brains from the post primary through the tertiary level of their educational career and ensure that they attend the best institutions anywhere in the world. It was designed for a minimum of 100 pupils to be selected for this program annually. I left the State after one year and five months to contest election as the Vice President, and therefore could not see the idea through.

17. Upon assumption of office as President of Nigeria, I launched a similar program called the **Presidential Special Scholarship Scheme for Innovation and Development**. [PRESSID] This scheme nurtured a select cadre of

professionals, to serve as facilitators for accelerated, sustainable, economic and technological advancement.

18. Each year, through competitive examinations, we selected between 100-to-120 first class graduates and sent them to the top universities in the world to study for higher degrees. These students were drawn from various STEM disciplines. Let me mention here that Oxford University was an integral part of this program and indeed, a favourite for most of our applicants.

19. The essence of the program was to get a crop of youth over a period of time that will advance our course technologically. When I launched the program, I did mention that we were training young people that will take Nigeria to the moon.

20. In addition to this, my administration also gave a series of educational incentives to university students across the country.

21. We established twelve conventional Universities and a specialized Maritime University. To assist the disadvantaged children in Northern Nigeria, we built 165 special schools known as "Almajiri School" that integrated Islamic culture into Western education.

22. The foundational theme of my Administration was '**The Transformation Agenda**'. It was conceived to engage the latent potential in the entire nation, and to stimulate and enable higher productivity. And this was also the foundation of our youth development drive.

23. The Transformation Agenda sought to address the problems of youth job creation, with emphasis not just in getting our young citizens employed, but in assisting them in acquiring the right skills, and providing the requisite support. This was to enable them set up and run their own businesses; thereby becoming employers of labor themselves.

24. In Nigeria and most African countries, there are well-educated young people. The problem is how to create

opportunities for them. My Administration came up with various programs to encourage young entrepreneurs. The most popular is the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria "YouWIN".

25. It was a unique intervention launched in 2012, which targeted youth with unique business proposals in startups and expansion of existing enterprises. YouWin is structured as a competitive cyclic initiative which invites and reviews Business Plans submitted by Youth. Young people who wanted to be entrepreneurs were asked to submit their business proposals. The best business plans were chosen based on relevance, profitability, demand and practicability. The winners were trained and given grants.

26. YouWIN was multi-sector- cutting across light manufacturing, food processing, and the service sector.

27. The motivation for this program is for young people to go into SMEs, create jobs for other young people with the expectation that some would grow to large scale businesses.

In addition to YouWin, under our broad based **Agricultural Transformation Agenda**, we developed the **Youth Employment in Agriculture Program [YEAP]** – and like many of our other youth programs, we incorporated the youth themselves in its design.

28. This took a complete value chain approach from farming to processing and marketing. Just like in the YouWIN initiative, my Administration gave young farmers grants and training. The young people who were involved were called "Nagropreneurs".

29. We also launched **The Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS)**. The objective of this program was to provide temporary work experience for fresh graduates, to enhance their capacity to attract permanent jobs. Eligible graduates are posted to corporations and companies in the private and public sectors. They received practical training and mentorship for a one-year period, within which remuneration

is paid by the government. This enabled the young graduates to acquire relevant experience.

30. We also increased the allowances due to Youth Corp members by more than 100% in 2011. This was in line with our policy of youth empowerment and development.

31. To ensure that the Nigerian youth benefit massively in the ICT revolution, we created a special Ministry of Communication Technology. We wanted the Nigerian Youth to be self-employed and exploit the advantages of ICT. The Ministry, among other things, improved broadband penetration, set up ICT incubation centres in Lagos and Calabar.

32. The efforts of the Young software engineers at the Lagos Co-Creation Hub (CC Hub) became so successful that it did not only give birth to many thriving start-ups, but their activities also attracted the attention of Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg who chose it as his first stop during his first ever visit to Africa.

33. One sector we deliberately encouraged to stimulate job growth for Nigerian Youth was the Nigerian entertainment industry. We identified Nollywood as a sector that can employ many young people. We provided a grant of \$200 million and for the first time, Nollywood became a major contributor to our GDP. In 2014, Nollywood contributed 1.4% to our GDP.

34. The sporting industry was also not left out. We encouraged our young people in that sector. I was to launch a Fund to encourage sporting activities in the Country but I had to bow out by 29th of May 2015. Nigeria has a crop of talented youth but the nation has not properly keyed into the global sports industry. The Fund would have been a catalyst to promoting the Nigerian sports industry by promoting training, welfare of athletes and manufacturing of sporting equipment among other things.

35. Distinguished audience let me conclude my speech by urging contemporary African leaders to see youth

entrepreneurship as a collective project transcending national boundaries.

36. I believe in the Nigerian youth and indeed African Youths. My conviction is not only an emotional one, but one grounded in my experience with youths from all over the continent. You will agree that foremost in the minds of many youth, is a desire to develop their dreams and potentials. Placing them closer to the driving wheel, does a lot for their confidence.

37. Despite incredible challenges, Nigerian youths are achieving great things and placing Nigeria positively in the world map. Nigerian youths are an inspiration to their leaders.

38. I once said that I was not elected President of Nigeria to spread poverty, I was elected to generate and spread wealth. My belief in this regard is that getting a job or being a worker cannot completely cure the disease of poverty. It is

only your own business that can provide such security and give you the financial freedom you need to prosper.

39. That was why my Administration introduced these initiatives and policies, to enable Nigeria's youths take their own destinies in their hands.

40. You can appreciate that there was a lot of emphasis on education during my time at the helm of both my State and my Nation. This is because the richest people today are those who develop ideas and commercialize them. Viable ideas can only come from educated minds, and money pursues ideas. My three flagship programmes i.e. the gifted and talented children schools in Bayelsa State, the Presidential Special Scholarship Scheme for Innovation and Development and the ICT Incubation Centers (Co-Creation Hub) were geared towards developing that calibre of youth.

41. We may not have been perfect, but we did our best, and our best yielded an era of unprecedented economic growth for Nigeria.

42. A growth that proved the truism that a Nation's wealth is not underneath the ground but between the ears of her people.

43. Under my watch, Nigeria was projected by CNN Money to be the third fastest growing economy in the world for the year 2015 and rated as the largest economy in Africa and the 23<sup>rd</sup> in the world by the World Bank and the IMF, with a GDP above half a Trillion US dollars.

44. These in a nutshell are some of the ways we were able to promote youth enterprise; a topic that I know is of utmost interest to many of you here.

45. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me.

46. I shall now take your questions.