



STATEMENT

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY ALHAJI ABUBAKAR TANKO
HONOURABLE MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS,
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA**

AT THE

**HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE 61ST SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

GENEVA, 16 MARCH, 2005

Mr. Chairperson,

Let me extend my heartfelt congratulation to Your Excellency Ambassador Makarim Wibisono on your election as the Chairperson of the 61st Session of the Commission. I wish you success in the task ahead and assure you of the full support of my delegation. I wish to extend my congratulations to other members of the Bureau. I would also like to commend His Excellency Ambassador Mike Smith and members of his Bureau for the excellent work done to guide the 60th Session.

My delegation would also like to congratulate Ms. Louise Arbour on her appointment as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. We wish her every success and would like to assure her of our complete support. We welcome her new initiatives for effective partnership with the African Union.

Mr. Chairperson,

In surveying developments since the Commission last met, it seems difficult to imagine a year in which so much has happened to alter the environment within which the Commission works. Some of these developments are one way or the other direct result of the Commission's recommendations and action or non action. The Nigerian Government recognises the Commission's pivotal role in the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Through both standard setting and

establishment of monitoring mechanisms, significant progress has been achieved since the proclamation of the universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we can all take pride in the Commission's unique contribution to this process.

Too many people continue to lack even the most basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, elementary education and health services. This threat to life's basic needs encompasses a broad spectrum of threats, ranging from those emanating on the one hand from human conflict, natural and manmade disasters to others like poverty, marginalisation, discrimination and diseases. The human society can never cease pursuing freedom from needs, that is, the right to food and development which are indispensable for promotion and protection of human rights.

International dialogue on promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights including the realisation of the rights to development has to be practicalised and should find expression in the political and economic empowerment of individuals and societies. We should be encouraged to find practical solutions to the perennial issues of poverty, underdevelopment, debt burden, economic disparities, social exclusion, instability and insecurity. We face the uneasy challenges of promoting and protecting human rights in this Millennium. Indeed, the time has come for us to move beyond lip service and genuinely demonstrate our commitment to the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) which we all, collectively, agree constitute practical solutions to the over-arching challenges confronting human kind today.

Mr. Chairperson,

Nigeria reiterates its call for this august body to adopt necessary measures to tackle these issues, including the realization of the right to development. Nigeria, as a nascent democracy, has launched a new development agenda, known as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The main elements of this strategy is to improve the living standards of our peoples through reduction of poverty, the expansion of agriculture and industry, privatisation programmes, the implementation of government programmes anchored on transparency, accountability, fiscal discipline, due process and fight against corruption and money laundering.

As a state party to the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, Nigeria recognises the important role the Commission plays in the realisation of the goals and objectives of the African Union. The challenges of development in Africa are grim and overwhelming. The continent is grappling with the imperatives of improving the infrastructural development, as well as the socio-economic well-being of our peoples in the globalising world that is increasingly disconnected and lopsided, with regrettable effect of widening the gap between the haves and the have nots. This is why the African Union adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development as a macro-economic programme for sustainable development of the continent.

Mr. Chairperson,

Creating the right environment for the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms requires the establishment of durable democracy and effective operation of rule of law. The Nigerian Government has taken necessary steps to consolidate the nascent democracy while ensuring that extensive political reforms are undertaken. Nigeria is fully conscious of, and will continue to honour her obligations to the various human rights instruments. Our resolute commitment to good governance, including the promotion of the rule of law, freedom of opinion and expression, independent judiciary and transparent political process have contributed to a stable and virile polity in the short period of time the present administration came to power in Nigeria. Our Government has also inaugurated the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) to allow Nigerians to discuss all issues of concern to them in the country, as a demonstration of our commitment to consult the people in our national affairs.

Mr. Chairperson,

Debt overhang has become an albatross for many developing countries including Nigeria. Although, a lot has been done in recent past to address the debt problem, practical measures are yet to be taken to solve the debt burden in order to provide the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights to our peoples. There is the need for a radical review of debt reduction or debt cancellation for Highly Indebted Poor Countries as well as for

middle-income indebted countries to free resources to strengthen mechanism for promotion and protection of human rights, particularly the rights to life.

Mr. Chairperson,

Nigeria continues to put high premium on the protection of the rights of the most vulnerable in our society, especially those affecting women, children and the trafficked persons. Our Government is paying particular attention to the advancement and improvement of the quality of life of all women and as a result hosted the African Regional Conference of the International Council of Women (ICW) in Abuja last year. It is noteworthy that the conference agreed that identified obstacles inhibiting women's development should be removed because women's rights are human rights.

As further demonstration of our Government's commitments, a bill against child trafficking has been passed by the National Assembly. The Commission should be unrelenting in its condemnation of the crime of trafficking especially women and children. It must continue to draw attention of States parties to their responsibilities to enact appropriate legislation and enforcement procedures to address such insidious practices which tend to affect the weakest and most deprived members of the civil society. Trafficked women and children are victims and deserve the attention of the international community if we are to eradicate this evil practice world wide.

Mr. Chairperson,

There is the need to strengthen the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to enable it implement the resolutions and decisions of the Commission. We need to provide more resources to the treaty monitoring bodies, the special procedures Working Groups and particularly those created to follow up on Durban Declaration on racism and racial discrimination. The duty to promote and protect human rights requires us not only to ensure implementation of standards and improve effectiveness of existing mechanisms, but also to be alert and ready to respond to new challenges.

The Commission must remain an uncompromising watchdog against human rights violations all over the world devoid of selectivity and discrimination. However, while we may well need to react to certain events, we must be proactive in adopting mechanisms for prevention. We also believe that the international community should cooperate through shared responsibility in the promotion and protection of human rights. This could be done through the strengthening of the Commission's mechanism for advisory services and technical assistance to States that request them to enable them build their machinery for advancing the course of human rights. This is why we renew our call for the speedy implementation of the recommendations of the Technical Assistant Needs mission to Nigeria in 2000.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, we wish to welcome the report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in which the Panel recommended the universalization of the Commission on Human Rights. My country feels that the main concern is the need to end the politicisation, selectivity and discriminatory treatment on the issues of human rights. Although this is a novel and interesting recommendation we do not support the call to universalise the Commission at this time. The Commission is a functional body of ECOSOC which has limited membership. We believe that the UN General Assembly Third Committee with universal membership is adequately positioned to take care of the concern of non-members of the Commission on human rights. There is no need to duplicate or devalue the work of the Third Committee in the Commission. However, we stand ready to find a durable solution to this at an appropriate time.

I thank you.