



Speech by the Honourable Speaker on the occasion of the formal opening of the 2nd 2020 Extra Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament

Protocols,

I wish to begin this address by expressing my profound gratitude to the Almighty God for sparing our lives and making it possible for us to interact once again, in the service of our dear Community and its people. This particular Session is not only extra ordinary in name, but even in conduct.

2. When on 9th March, 2020, the 5th Legislature was inaugurated in the beautiful city of Niamey and you elected Speaker, my immediate plan was to hit the ground running. Recall that during my inaugural address, I unfolded my vision for the Parliament and the mission of my stewardship as the Head of this great Institution. I planned to immediately visit the seat of Parliament in Abuja and consolidate my position by interacting with all stakeholders and to listen to all shades of opinions on the best way to handle my assignment. Unfortunately, that was not to be, because no sooner had we left Niamey that the Covid 19 pandemic became very serious in Africa and particularly in our sub-region. I honestly cannot imagine that we were unable to hold the 1st Ordinary Session in May. This was the first time in history that the Parliament would miss holding an Ordinary Session as scheduled. I also couldn't imagine holding an Extra Ordinary Session virtually. Many thanks to technology; at least we will be able to use this obviously imperfect avenue for a Parliament to meet.

Honourable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

3. The ravages of the Covid 19 pandemic have continued to afflict people globally; Africa and our sub-region inclusive. The rate of infection has continued to be on the rise especially in the United State of America, most of Latin America and India. European countries have at least been able to achieve some form of containment, even though the threat of a second wave is very potent. Death rates have continued to rise globally. The hope that the summer weather was going to limit the spread was yet to be achieved.

4. Here in Africa and especially in West Africa, figures have continued to rise. As at 16th July, 2020, the Continent recorded a total infection rate of 643, 887. In addition, it recorded 332, 888 recoveries and 13,982 deaths. In West Africa, figures for the same day indicated that total confirmed cases stood at 100,900. Total recoveries were 61, 326 and total deaths were 1,642. These figures appear gloomy and disturbing for us, especially since we operate our economies based on daily earning. Consequently, measures put in place, specifically the lockdowns to limit the free spread of the virus were unsustainable. Our people can simply not bear the burden of perpetual lockdown of economic activities with their attendant effects on their daily subsistence.

5. As a Parliament, we are impressed by the measures taken by our Heads of State, both collectively and individually to address the spread of the virus and to provide palliatives for the people. I was honoured to have been invited to attend the virtual Extra Ordinary summit of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government on Covid 19, held on 22nd April, 2020. The conduct of the summit was an evidence of the commitment of the Heads of State, not only towards protecting the people against infection, but bringing an early end to the pandemic. It also provided an avenue for them to exchange ideas on measures to be adopted to mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic. As part of their focus on the pandemic, the Heads of State unanimously appointed His Excellency President Muhammadu Buhari of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as the Region's Champion on Covid 19. I am happy to announce that His Excellency had since begun discharging his assignment, holding meetings with several stakeholders.

Honourable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

6. The picture of the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic is not entirely gloomy. Admittedly, infection rates are growing daily and deaths are still being recorded from complication associated with the virus. Furthermore, the world is yet to find neither a cure nor a vaccine for the virus. In the course of treating patients, however, our dedicated medical personnel are continuously learning the behavior of the virus. Across the globe, our sub-region inclusive, Doctors are becoming more familiar with the nature of complications that lead to death. Consequently, they are working towards ensuring that they treat symptoms as they appear. They have also identified certain existing drugs meant for other ailments to assist in limit damages to infected patients. With this continuous knowledge of the behavior of the virus, Doctors are optimistic that death rates of infected patients will reduce in the next coming months, since there would be improved management.

7. While we continue to praise and pray for our medical personnel, especially the Doctors fighting on the frontlines, we should continue to observe all the health protocols put in place, notable; regular washing of hands, use of Hand Sanitisers, observing social distancing, as well as limiting unnecessary movements. We should also strive to avoid crowded places and endeavor to use facemask at all public places. These non-pharmaceutical measures will immensely assist in limiting the spread of the virus and hence accelerate our transition away from the pandemic. We should encourage our people to help themselves and not rely on the Government for a daily reminder of the safety protocols.

8. The period of this pandemic has remained a trying period for us all. Its psychological effects on individuals are really enormous, as most people are living in anxious moments. People are unable to return to their normal lives and are under the threat of being infected daily. The economic effects are yet to be determined, since the pandemic is still raging. I am, however, hopeful that with collaboration and togetherness, we shall come out free and tell the story one day.

Honourable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

9. Away from the Covid 19 pandemic, we are holding this 2nd Extra Ordinary Session essentially to consider some important referrals from the ECOWAS Commission. We expect that the relevant Standing Committees would work assiduously to ensure that the views of the people are reflected in the decisions taken. As usual, the Commissioners and technocrats from the relevant directorate of the ECOWAS Commission are at hand to assist the Committees with relevant input on the subject matters. I am optimistic that we will do our best to represent the people and give them a voice.

10. As Members of Parliament, we have sworn to represent the people of the sub-region and to contribute towards improving their standard of living. We are going to continue to strive to do so, even with the limitations imposed on us by the prevailing situation. I am aware that the draft Strategic Plan for the 5th Legislature is about being concluded by the General Secretariat for onward presentation to us. While we patiently await its submission for our consideration, we will also pursue the 2020 work plan as vigorously as the situation permits us to. In collaboration with the General Secretariat, we are watching unfolding events as they relate to the safety of holding physical meetings. I wish to recall that we are yet to hold the 2020 1st Ordinary Session. We also need to organise several Committee meetings around our Member States as is customary. These activities would be held depending on the ability to organise physical meetings.

Honourable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

11. There is indeed a new normal around the globe, which everyone must respond to. We as an Institution have no option but to abide by it for as long as it remains unsafe to meet physically. I am, however, quick to add that Parliaments cannot perpetually hold their activities virtually. The task of representing the people, embarking on oversight functions, conducting parliamentary interpellation and providing a voice for the voiceless is beyond holding virtual meetings. We as a Parliament will do our best to discharge

our functions online, but will revert back to our physical meetings once the situation permits.

12. Finally, to all families that lost loved ones as a result of the pandemic, I wish to use this medium to convey to you our condolences and pray for the souls of all victims. May you all have the fortitude to bear the loses. May we see an immediate end to the current pandemic, so that together we shall achieve a West Africa of our dreams.

Honourable Colleagues, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

13. With the above remarks, I, therefore, declare the 2020 2nd Extra Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament open. I wish us all fruitful deliberations.

Thank you and God bless.

Right Honourable Sidie Mohamed Tunis
Honourable Speaker Freetown, Sierra Leone
20th July, 2020