



WELCOME REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, AMBASSADOR SOLA ENIKANOLAIYE, HONOURABLE MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, AT THE STRATEGIC RETREAT FOR NIGERIA'S AMBASSADORS AND HIGH COMMISSIONERS-DESIGNATE TO WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES, HELD AT CEEDAPEG HOTELS, UYO, AKWA IBOM STATE ON SATURDAY, 13TH JUNE 2026

I am particularly delighted to deliver this welcome address today at this Strategic and Special Retreat holding in this serene city of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State – The Land of Promise.

2. I would like to convey the sincere appreciation of the management and staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to His Excellency, Pastor Umo Enoh, the Executive Governor of Akwa-Ibom State for the logistics and opportunity provided to host this premium event in this beautiful city. Uyo was selected due to its tranquility, admirable reputation for peace, hospitality and top-tier infrastructure.

3. This One-Day Retreat is a follow-up to the induction program earlier held in Abuja from 27th April – 1st May 2026 which was organized to prepare Your Excellencies for your assignments as the principal representatives of His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR abroad. This event has been put together specifically for Ambassadors and High Commissioners-designate to countries in West Africa because of the strategic significance of our subregion in Nigeria's development and security calculus.

4. As I stated in my maiden address to Directors of the Ministry upon my assumption of office on Monday 8th June 2026, Nigeria's Foreign Policy

must continue to focus on our country's national interest in which the welfare and security of our citizens stand at the core. The realization of these objectives is intrinsically linked to developments in our contiguous neighbours and the rest of West Africa before projecting to the continent beyond.

5. Let me expatiate further on this. Nigeria's relations with West African countries are of immense interest in our social-economic and political development. As you all aware, Nigeria is an emerging power, hence, our commitment, pre-occupations and deployment of resources must be made to reflect our capabilities and interest. It is on this premise that our primary focus lies on the West African sub-region since any event occurring in this sphere has immediate impact on Nigeria's interest.

6. This strategic retreat has therefore, been designed to deepen your understanding of the place of Nigeria in the region and the critical role of our country in promoting regional peace and security, advancing economic integration, and upholding the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as a credible, and dependable institution. This has been the historical legacy manifested in Nigeria's contribution to the maintenance of peace, security, stability, democracy and socio-economic development of the subregion even before the advent of ECOWAS the birth of which brought these contributions to the fore.

7. Similarly, this event has been curated to sharpen the perspectives of Your Excellencies in aligning Nigeria's foreign policy with regional priorities. This is aimed at effectively reinventing Nigeria's leadership position in the West African sub-region. Rather than the notion that Nigeria's leadership in the sub-region has waned, I am convinced that our role is in transition from one era to the other in light of changing dynamics in the sub-region, Africa and the world. Nigeria continues to lead the sub region and the continent by the quality of its ideas. An example of this leadership by ideas, was the maiden West Africa Economic Summit (WAES) which Nigeria hosted in June 2025.

8. We are experiencing profound multi-dimensional transformation driven by rapid evolution of various phenomena in our subregion and the Sahel. Evidently, you have been selected by Mr. President to represent Nigeria at a time of profound geopolitical shifts. The current realities of the West African region require that special attention be paid to the subregion based on these priorities which must be projected with unwavering and unalloyed commitment.

9. The resurgence of unconstitutional changes in governments, the prevalence of insecurity characterized by the wild wave of terrorism across the Sahel, proliferation of small arms and light weapons of illicit origin, drug and human trafficking, unregulated transhumance, banditry and other transnational crimes and their attendant consequences are new realities that must be confronted frontally and with diplomatic dexterity.

10. In the same vein, the recent withdrawal of some ECOWAS member States from the fold of the community and the increasing presence of extra-continental powers in the region, require a cautious but stern approach in managing and mitigating the anticipated outcomes of these novel frontiers on the governments and peoples of the region. This retreat is therefore, not a mere bureaucratic ritual. It is a launching pad for a revitalized, proactive, and result-oriented engagement with our closest neighbours.

11. Our foreign policy direction is clear. Under the current administration, our diplomatic engagements are anchored on the 4D Foreign Policy Doctrine as recently reformulated by Mr. President: Demography, Development, Democracy and Diaspora. As envoys posted to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), you are the primary custodians of this strategic doctrine. West Africa is our immediate neighborhood. It is our primary sphere of influence.

12. On the economic front, Your Excellencies will be required to relentlessly promote economic integration through trade facilitation with the view of attaining economic prosperity for our people particularly our teeming

youth population. In this regard, you are all expected to build on the outcome of WAES and seek the actualization of the Summit's Garki Declaration. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) are your primary tools. You must assist to dismantle non-tariff barriers that impede Nigerian businesses in your host countries. Your Missions should function as hubs for economic diplomacy attract investments, promote Nigerian exports, and facilitate seamless cross-border trade.

13. As Nigerian ambassadors, your mission is to project Nigeria's values, protect our national interests, and foster stability across our borders and to excel, in all you say and do. Your diplomatic tradecraft must shift from passive observation to active engagement. You must engage your host governments to strengthen and deepen democratic institutions and the rule of law. You must seek to reposition Nigeria as a mediator, an honest broker, a peacemaker, and a stabilizing force in West Africa.

14. The welfare of Nigerians abroad is a core pillar of our 4D policy. You must build strong, collaborative relationships with the Nigerian diaspora in your host countries, to also ensure that their rights are protected and their businesses are secure. Your missions must be welcoming, responsive, and efficient. A Nigerian citizen in distress must find immediate succour in our Embassies. You are encouraged to leverage digital diplomacy to expand your reach to Nigerians and credible networks.

15. As you will find in the programme of this event, the six (6) presentations are deliberate and meant to be profoundly influential in shaping your views and understanding of Nigeria in West Africa. I urge you to tap from the experiences of presenters and actively seek clarifications where necessary.

16. As I conclude, I have no doubt that, at the end of this retreat, Your Excellencies would have been better equipped to deliver on Mr. President's vision and aspirations for a peaceful, prosperous and harmonious relationship between Nigeria and West Africa.

17. Thank you for your rapt attention.
18. I wish you fruitful deliberations.
19. God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.