

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE HON. COMMISSIONER FOR
AGRIC. HON. OLORUNTOBA KEHINDE, ON THE OCCASION
OF A TOWN HALL MEETING ON YEAR 2020 BUDGET**

I thank you all for honouring our invitation to be part of this year's Town Hall meeting, aimed at brainstorming and obtaining your contributions to the ongoing year 2020 Budget process. As you know, programs and projects designed by Kogi State Government for the wellbeing of our people are contained in the annual Budget. Therefore, as a Government that is truly committed to the welfare of our people, we are convinced that a stakeholders' meeting of this nature aimed at carrying our people along in this vital exercise of budget formulation is necessary. You will recall, that, this has not been the practice in the time past. As you may recall, we also went round to engage with the people when we were formulating the New Direction Blue Print. As a government, we are mindful of the fact that our existence is derived from the existence of the people and, by implication, government derives its legitimacy from the people. As such, we must work with the people and they must never be taken for granted.

Today's meeting is part of the ongoing reforms of key service areas in order to make service delivery outcomes to be more effective and efficient. There is a saying, that you cannot cut someone's hair in his absence. Therefore, this Government firmly believes in consultation and inclusive governance. Let me, at this stage, encourage you all, to keep engaging with the relevant MDAs on how you think we can serve you better. If you have been doing so, today's meeting would have been a mere formality.

Distinguished stakeholders, ladies and gentlemen, let me use this opportunity, to briefly highlight some of our modest achievements in the last 3 and a half years. On assumption of

office in 2016, the Government of His Excellency, Alh. Yahaya Bello, embarked on the reform of the civil service which, though, has its obvious shortcomings but has reasonably sanitized the service. The dark era of staff replacement regime without due process of staff recruitment has been corrected. The era in which a staff is receiving multiple salaries is now history. The era in which children of civil servants/public servants in schools were on government payrolls is over. Based on the outcome of this reform, salary regime has now been stabilized and we have resolved to sustain the payment of salary on or before 25th of every month. Many issues that called for the screening exercise have now been put behind us, despite the imperfection in the exercise.

As you know, this Government inherited high rate of insecurity, which it needed to combat head-on, if we are to provide the right environment for investment and free our people from the criminal elements. Thank God, our efforts yielded the desired results. In 2015 alone, before the coming of this Government, the state witnessed 250 kidnapped cases. Today, due to the strong commitment of government, kidnapping and other violent crimes have been brought to the barest minimum. As a result of this, the state, in 2018, was rated the 2nd most peaceful states in Nigeria after Osun and the most peaceful in Northern Nigeria by the National Peace Index (NPI).

In addition, this Government embarked on the reform of the State tax authority. Based on this, our average monthly IGR has increased from N350,000.00 to over N1 billion. Government is determined to sustain the reform in order to maximize our revenue potential in the State.

As part of our achievements, the World Bank also awarded Kogi State as the top performer in World Bank project portfolio. We were able to achieved this due to our commitment to the payment of our counterpart funding obligations to our development partners

Still in 2019, Kogi State was ranked 7th top performer in the country in basic education by Universal Basic Education (UBEC). This is due to our investment in the renovation/construction of over 375 basic education schools across the state. Also, our tertiary institutions have received many accreditations which, hitherto, were denied due to gaps in meeting the required standards.

In addition, in 2019, NBS, ranked Kogi State as one of the only 9 states that reduced unemployment.

This Government has delivered electricity to over 200 communities across the state. Only recently, precisely July 6th, His Excellency, Alh. Yahaya Bello, inaugurated the Project Light Up Kogi East (PLUKE) for electrification of at least another 200 communities.

Let me also stress that the partnership of the State Government with the Federal Government, has yielded 6 roads to the State in the first phase of the road for tax initiative under Executive order 7.

We cannot end this success story without mentioning the fact that, the second-largest rice mill in Northern Nigeria is ready for commissioning at Ejiba in Yagba East of Kogi West. It is supported with about 800 hectares of cultivated rice and will provide between 3000 to 20,000 direct and indirect jobs. It will

also serve as an off-taker for many of our farmers.

Distinguished stakeholders, ladies and gentlemen, let me pulse and leave further discussion about our achievement for another day.

Thank you for your time.