

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY, UMARU MUSA YAR'ADUA GCFR.
PRESIDENT, COMMANDER IN CHIEF, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2ND FORUM OF LAUREATES OF
THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL ORDER OF MERIT (NNOM) HELD AT THE
CONGRESS HALL, TRANSCORP HILTON HOTEL, ABUJA, ON 2ND
DECEMBER, 2008.

PROTOCOL

I am highly honoured and delighted to be part of this epoch-making event which marks the convening of the 2008 Forum of the Laureates of Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM).

2. The Nigerian National Merit Award (NNMA) was established through the enactment of Act No. 53 of 1979, as amended by Act 96 of 1992. Its primary objective is to confer the Nigerian National Order of Merit Award, on deserving Nigerian citizens who, through their intellectual and academic attainments, have contributed to national and global development. The award is made in four broad areas, viz:

- (i) Science;
- (ii) Medicine
- (iii) Engineering/Technology and
- (iv) The Humanities, Arts and Culture and any other field of human endeavour.

3. The Act which was amended by Act No. 96 of 1992 recognized the NNMA as an "Order of Dignity" that entitles the recipient to use

the designation “Nigerian National Order of Merit” (NNOM) after his or her name and enjoy “such other privileges as are enjoyed by recipients of high levels of National Honours”.

4. It is highly delightful to note that, since its inception over twenty-nine (29) years ago, the Nigerian National Merit Award, through the meticulous work of its successive Governing Boards and its four Specialized Committees of Assessors, has successfully identified and selected for the award, 54 distinguished Nigerians, all of which have been wisely and publicly acknowledged as men and women of great diligence and integrity. I am made to understand that the Award has, today, attained such a level of regional and global recognition that it is now keenly contested for by Nigerian citizens, both at home and in diaspora. This is how it should be. The pursuit of excellence is the best guarantor of greatness and as a government, we are fully aware of the implication of not protecting and projecting our brightest and best.

5. I heartily congratulate all of you, the worthy recipients of this highly coveted national award for intellectual and academic excellence. By your achievements, you have continued to be a beacon of hope that Nigeria will one day regain its position as a global leader in research and development. It is also my hope that you will, from now on, actively reach out to and collaborate with other Nigerian public and private sector researchers. This way we can develop the critical mass of researchers needed to propel our dear nation into the league of developed and industrialized nations

by the year 2020. In this regard, I urge your Board to continue the dialogue and cooperation which you have initiated with some relevant Federal Ministries and Parastatals, the Universities, National Academies and the Private Sector. It is also expected as provided for in the Act setting up the NNMA that you liaise with all the research institutions in the country for the purpose of promoting academic and intellectual excellence.

6. Government on its part will be committed to promoting excellence and I want to assure the distinguished laureates that we will not lower our guard in this regard.

7. The convening of this 2nd Forum of the Laureates of the Nigerian National Order of Merit will no doubt play a crucial role in actualizing the *Seven Point Agenda* of the present administration especially when one takes cognizance of this year's theme titled. "Developing a Road map for the Rapid Technological and Industrial Development in Nigeria" therefore, is very appropriate. Indeed, it becomes more assuring when one considers the fact that the forum is made up of reputable specialists in virtually all fields of learning and will no doubt at the end of this assist the government by articulating viable and cost-effective solutions to critical national issues and problems. In this regard, we look forward to receiving the communiqué as well as the published Proceedings of your discussions which, I have no doubt, will proffer solutions to some of the critical infrastructural and developmental issues that are articulated in my administration's 7 point development programme.

I assure you that the good ideas generated by you will certainly serve as beacons for policy decision-makings as well as in the resolution of some salient issues of national interest.

8. I wish to assure you that government will continue to give full support to your intellectual endeavours and assist you with the facilities and funds needed to make the forum an annual platform for bringing together Nigerian intellectuals, government functionaries, as well as the private sector. I wish to use this opportunity to call on the private sector to join hands with government in its effort towards harnessing the wealth of experience of these noble and talented Nigerians in our determination to solve the socio-economic and political problems confronting us as a Nation. The private sector I understand can do this by way of contributing towards the endowment needs of the NNMA.

9. Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to state that, in view of the success story so far recorded by the Board of the NNMA, as enumerated by the Chairman, it is my pleasure to:

- * State unequivocally that the Forum has come to stay,**
- * Inform you that sequel to your recommendation at last year's forum, a Presidential Committee headed by the NNMA Board Chairman, has been put in place to plan on the actualization of establishing a "National Research Foundation Fund" so as to encourage research efforts in Nigeria.**

10. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is my singular honour and privilege therefore, to now declare this Forum open and I wish you all very happy deliberations.

11. I thank you for your attention.