

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, DR. ALHASSAN ZAKU, AT THE 10TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL SPACE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (NASRDA), 23RD JULY 2009:

**Secretary to the Government of the Federation
Gentlemen of the Press
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am particularly delighted to see in our midst the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, who, as the government's scribe and the one at the very centre of the implementation of government programmes, has taken time off to grace this occasion. I also welcome all our important stakeholders including distinguished members of the National Assembly, academicians, scientists and engineers, journalists as well as those well-wishers who were very supportive of NASRDA during the formative years of the Agency.

Ten years after the establishment of the Agency, a question that still resonates among many Nigerians is why a space agency when we have a myriad of problems to contend with? The need and importance of space exploration had been recognized centuries ago when Socrates wrote that *"Man must rise above the Earth to the top of the atmosphere and beyond, for only then will he fully understand the world in which he lives"*. Though the purpose and the situation under which he made the statement is unknown, it has been acknowledged that one of the most significant events of the 20th century was when humanity left its ancestral home and stepped on the surface of another planet.

When we think of the many space-based solutions to human problems and challenges, we cannot but acknowledge the need for Nigeria to join the space age in order to be able to deploy space application techniques for our socio-economic development. In full realization of the need for space science and technology for sustainable development in an increasingly interdependent world, *Donald Williams*, an American astronaut said *"For those who have seen the Earth from space, and for the hundreds and perhaps*

thousands more who will, the experience most certainly changes your perspective. The things that we share in our world are far more valuable than those which divide us" This is certainly an acknowledgement of the enormous benefits that space technology can bestow on mankind irrespective of borders and levels of development.

If we take into account the huge gains and advantages from space exploration including its spin-off benefits, we will certainly come to the full realization that space technology has become integrated into everyday life so deeply that modern society cannot function efficiently without it. Today, space technology is employed in a variety of ways in our day-to-day living - weather monitoring, telecommunications, environmental analyses, agriculture and water resources management, global positioning, navigation, search and rescue, disaster management, and national security. It is against this background that the National Space Research and Development Agency was established ten years ago by the Federal Executive Council, *"to enable Nigeria build indigenous competence in space science and technology as an essential tool for harnessing space-based information for the socio-economic development of the country"*. Since then, the Agency has moved from a mere end-user of space applications to launching satellites. This has also enabled us to train and engage Nigerians to be in charge of the command and control systems of these satellites.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Within the last ten years, NASRDA has taken some landmark steps towards achieving its goals. In 2003, Nigeria launched its first earth observation satellite - Nigeriasat 1- making it the first African country south of the Sahara to launch a satellite. The satellite, with a life span of five years, is still in orbit and will be replaced by Nigeriasat-2 in 2010 with the capacity for data continuity, better resolution and wider application. Nigeria also launched a communication satellite in 2007, which unfortunately, as you are aware, suffered a setback due to a failure in its power systems. The good news, however, is that the satellite, which was fully insured, is being replaced by the Chinese manufacturers

and will be ready for launch by 2011. We will not allow this kind of setback, which is common in the industry, to kill our spirit or dampen our resolve to develop technologically. We shall remain undaunted. These satellites including the communications satellite before it was de-orbited have been utilized to address several areas of our social and economic lives including agricultural land mapping, water resources management, early warning systems for disaster mitigation, communications, tele-medicine, tele-education, transportation as well as provision of satellite imageries for research in our universities. The Director General of NASRDA will address in detail, the utility values and the benefits derived from these satellites in a special presentation.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Globalization has turned our world into a global village through the instrumentality of information and communications technology (ICT). You can be in Nasarawa and transact business in New York, you can be Lagos and watch wildfire in Los Angeles and you can be in Abuja and monitor the ships on the high seas or print pictures of a tsunami in Asia. All these are possible through space technology. We in Nigeria do not want the power of technology to elude us and that is why NASRDA was established to vigorously pursue a space policy that will improve the quality of life of the peoples of this country.

With ten years behind us, the journey has just begun and we will work assiduously, tirelessly and creatively to deliver the dividends of space technology to the country whether in the area of agriculture, environment, communications, transportation and even disaster management. I want to assure you that NASRDA is poised to deliver in these areas and will rise up to the challenge of delivering quality service in a timely manner with the kind of energetic young scientists and engineers that are trained to turn these aspirations to reality.

I thank you.