***THE CRISIS OF NATION STATES IN AFRICA:***

SPEECH BY RT. HON RAILA ODINGA AT THE NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA 16TH NOVEMBER 2016:

Vice Chancellor Professor Joseph Ahaneku, FSA,

H.E. Atiku Abubakar, former vice President, Federal Republic of Nigeria,

Distinguished guests.

It is a great honour for me to speak at this forum, which is dedicated to the memory of one of Africa’s greatest sons H. E. Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe, whose life is a testimony that one man’s vision can change a nation, a continent and the world. That is what Zik did as a teacher, a journalist, a member of the Nigeria Youth League and a mentor to those who proceeded to lead their nations like Dr Kwame Nkrumah.

Dr. Azikiwe’s sojourn in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and the founding of a daily newspaper, the ‘African Morning Post,’ lit the fires for liberation in that country and inspired nationalists there to rise. Ghana’s liberation was as critical to Zik as was Nigeria’s and Africa’s.

As President and for many years Nigeria's elder statesman, Dr. Azikiwe was able to attain the rare status of a truly national hero, admired across the regional and ethnic lines that divide Nigeria.

Africa remembers him for introducing universal adult suffrage here and for the heavy investment in education that extended schooling throughout the country in the early stages of independence thus giving Nigeria a deserved head start in Africa.

When Nigeria's civil war erupted in 1967, Dr Azikiwe stood with the nation against the temptation to side with tribe and region that has been the bane of the Continent. He travelled far and wide across Africa soliciting support for the preservation of Nigeria as we know it today.

It is however a fact that the committed political leadership with long term visions that were typical of our founding fathers like Azikiwe, Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Sekou Toure, Jomo Kenyatta, Oginga Odinga, Abdel Nasser and, more recently, Nelson Mandela, has either been lost or is rapidly fading. This takes me to the question of what happened to the Africa that Dr Azikiwe was so passionate about?

That is the question of the Crisis of Nation States in Africa.

Africa seemed ready for takeoff in the first few years of independence; with democratic multiparty constitutions that offered strong checks on the emerging governments.

Within no time however, state after state came under one-party authoritarian rule or military dictatorship and a number of nations began experiencing irresolvable internal conflicts.

Some of the conflicts, like in the Congo (now DRC), were fueled by external interests and rendered the State an incapable arbiter and a partisan entity in the disputes it is meant to resolve.

At some stage in the 1960s, military regimes outnumbered civilian-led states at the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Soon, many civilian regimes joined the military counterparts in experimenting with authoritarianism.

As South African anti-apartheid activist and scholar Ruth First put it, it soon became a question of “when civilians begin to command, who is more qualified to command than the soldiers?” as coups took roots.

The State tried to exert authority and relevance by getting involved in almost every aspect of social and economic life of the citizens: from building highways to managing transport; to running hospitals, schools and media. In Mozambique, the State even owned barbershops. Unfortunately, State bureaucrats fed off these initiatives to build empires of personal wealth. The result was apocalyptic failure.

After about two decades of a painful struggle and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, change swept across the Continent with an avalanche of multi-party elections. From only three countries classified as democracies---Botswana, Gambia and Mauritius…at the fall of Berlin Wall, the number jumped to over 25 considered as democracies of varying degrees by the turn of the century.

This Second Liberation period saw the African State begin to succeed where it had failed.

It resulted in six of the world's ten fastest-growing countries being in Africa.

This was a monumental leap considering that from 1974 through the mid-1990s, Africa's growth was negative, reaching negative 1.5 percent in the 1990-94 period. Life expectancy increased by about 10 per cent and child mortality rates started falling in most African countries. Real income per person increased by more than 30 per cent. In the previous 20 years, it shrank by nearly 10 per cent. Foreign Direct Investment rose from $15 billion in 2002 to $37 billion in 2006 and $46 billion in 2012.

But then an uncomfortable truth has been sneaking in. When I gave the Coca-Cola World Fund at Yale Lecture in October 2014, I said that although Africa’s emergence as an economic force is a fact today and not an expression of hope or just a matter of faith, Afro-optimism may have swung too far.

In many African countries, the democratic transition has been in form, not in the spirit of a majority of our political leaders.

The democratic upsurge of the early 1990s is meeting tremendous resistance as new forms of authoritarian rule emerge and democratic gains stall or gets reversed. These reversals are once again undermining the authority and ability of the State in Africa.

Reversal have been seen in Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Mozambique and Guinea, among other countries.

Nearly every cycle of electoral politics has brought with it conflicts that at times threaten the very foundations of the nation state as happened in Kenya in 2007-2008. Resistance is coming largely from two fronts. First is the entrenched economic and political interests that have run the post-colonial state since independence and have been beneficiaries of the ethnic based politics of exclusion and self-gain.

Second, the elites who seek to remove the authoritarian system through skewed electoral processes and ethnic-based coalitions, which, by their very nature, aid and abet the politics of exclusion and corruption.

Authoritarianism and semi-authoritarianism, featuring states that swing between absolute rule and occasional stage-managed elections are re-emerging. The nations relapsing into that era are not necessarily reintroducing single party rules. Instead, they are investing heavily in strengthening the ruling parties while undermining the opposition and making it extremely difficult for them to mobilize support.

We are witnessing the return of the myth of the so-called “development” and not the people’s mandate as the reason for regimes to stay in power.

That was also the argument soon after independence that led to single party dictatorships.

Now as then, the “development” proponents see themselves as rulers with messianic missions for their countries and who must not be subjected to term limits and competitive, credible elections.

Muammar Gaddafi, for example, regarded elections as a nuisance and advised leaders that revolutionaries seize power to liberate people from poverty and imperialism and can therefore not leave office until they complete the revolution. Nobody really gets to know when the revolution is complete.

In South Africa, the trust that the people had in ANC has faded, replaced with mistrust because its leadership is seen to be trapped in personalization of state authority, the consequent corruption, and disregard for the rule of law.

South Africa appears to be moving further away from the Rainbow Nation, a country united in diversity, that the founding fathers of the de-colonized nation looked for.

In Mozambique, after a two-decade lull, the animosity between the ruling Frelimo and opposition Renamo, the two parties that fought decades of civil war, has resurfaced.

One party is demanding autonomy in governing a region, and refusing to participate in the electoral processes. Mozambique has been one of Africa’s fastest growing economies. The economy, that was booming led by the discovery of gas, has virtually collapsed.

These reversals across Africa are eating into the capacity of governance structures like Parlia­ment, the Judiciary and paralyzing the accountability bodies and other public agencies.

Reversals are taking away account­ability from the political leadership and crippling provision of public ser­vices including security.

The reversals are aiding the return of big time corruption that in turn necessitates and aids the reversals.

The reversals will once again cripple the capacity of the State and spark off more inequality and marginalization, fueling frustration and possibly rebellion.

That is how Tuni­sia exploded in 2010 with ripple effects on other countries in the region including Algeria, Egypt and Libya.

There are already worries about the Sustainable Development Goals agreed on by the United Nations a year ago, calling on countries to improve across 17 issue areas, including economic growth, accountable institutions and reduced inequality, among others.

A study just published by the Pew Research Center just about a week ago indicates that economic sentiments have turned sharply negative in South Africa and Nigeria since 2015. Around seven-in-ten South Africans and Nigerians now say their economies are in bad shape while in Kenya, just over half say the same, according to the study.

The Pew Research Center survey indicates many in these three countries believe the political and economic system is stacked against them.

Majorities in all the three countries name government corruption as a very big problem. Most South Africans, Kenyans and Nigerians believe that government is run for the benefit of only a few groups of people in society.

Only around a third of South Africans and Kenyans say government corruption will be better in their countries when today’s children grow up. Nigerians are more optimistic that there will be less corruption in the future, with 60 per cent expecting things to improve, an indication that some work is at long last being done about the scourge of corruption in Nigeria.

In the middle of these reversals, it is gratifying that democracy is taking firm roots in key countries in West Africa.

Citizens rejected a coup in Burkina Faso early this year.

Nigeria elected President Muhammadu Buhari, making him the first opposition candidate to defeat a sitting Nigerian president through the ballot, and the defeated incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, conceded defeat.

The Presidential Elections in Nigeria Tanzania, Ghana, Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire renewed our hope for democracy in Africa. Credible elections have enabled Nigeria to act on corruption.

We are encouraged that the country will champion democracy across the Continent.

Our citizens have seen and endured so much pain and betrayal, they are marching ahead, sadder but wiser. I am therefore not predicting Africa’s return to the dark days. I believe people will not allow it again.

It is however necessary for us to understand why nations fail as virtually all African counties did after gaining independence.

For the author of *Africa Betrayed*, George B.N. Ayittey, Africa failed because the state was taken over by civilian or military dictatorships. Colonial rulers were replaced by African elites, and the institutions that had been set up to extract wealth for the colonial power remained to enrich the Africans in power.

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, in *Why Nations Fail*, say a nation fails when it is governed by “extractive institutions” where the state, economy and community connive to enrich a few and drive people to poverty. Conflicts arise in a nation when certain groups -- ethnic, religious or regional -- are marginalized in the allocation of public resources for education, health, water and electricity, or are deprived of land; forest or mineral resources that they believe belong to them.

To me, nations fail when the state is captured by a few politicians and business kingpins, and by ethnic or other groups that they purportedly lead.

Nations fail when leaders are not accountable to the people. Whether a leader is benevolent or not, having one person in absolute power for decades is not conducive to development.

What must Africa do to steady the ship of state?

We must complete the democratic transition. The wind of change proved that democracyprovides an enabling environment to ensure that public goods and resources are put to much better use by the government. This will require the establishment of electoral institutions which all can believe in.

Second, we must establish truly independent and respected Judiciary whose rulings everyone has to adhere to.

Third, we must reduce centralization of power in any one person or agency, including the presidency. Devolution is an effective way to bring government and decision-making closer to people and make government more inclusive.

Fourth, we must minimize inequalities between ethnic, racial, religious or regional groups, with particular focus on those that have been marginalized. Here, we mean inequalities in terms of not only income but perhaps more pertinently, in access to education, health care, water, and electricity.

Fifth, we must ensure that a country’s natural resources, including land, water, forests and oil, are shared fairly by all.

Finally, we must fight corruption openly and honestly. We need not look far for examples. Rwanda has done it under the leadership of President Paul Kagame. The new President of Tanzania is doing it. President Buhari is showing the way. It is not a matter of creating new anti-corruption institutions or revamping the existing ones. It requires a change in the political landscape. The key is a President or a Prime Minister who (a) is genuinely committed to eradicating corruption; (b) commands the trust and confidence of the people; and (c) is prepared to lead from the top.

It is my hope that our leaders will be wiser and that nations like Nigeria, Botswana, Ghana, Tanzania, Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire who have shown keenness to stay on the democratic path, will hold the torch and show the way by standing up against a return to dictatorship.

Thank you.