**ADDRESS BY H.E. JERRY JOHN RAWLINGS, FORMER PRESIDENT**

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Ochiagha Ebitu Ukiwe, Chairman of the occasion,

His Excellency Governor Peter Obi,

His Royal Highness Obi Dr Nwosu Ezeuzu II,

Vice Chancellor Professor Egboka,

Professor Asisi Asobie,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me first express my gratitude to the Faculty of Social Sciences, headed by Professor Nnonyelu as well as my dear and distinguished friend, Senator Ben Obi, for inviting me to deliver the keynote address at the second in the Ziks Lecture Series - appropriately named after the great son of Africa Nnamdi Azikiwe of blessed memory.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I delve into the lecture allow me to make a detour and congratulate the Super Eagles of Nigeria for winning the recently concluded African Cup of Nations tournament in South Africa. It is particularly impressive that at a time when many are embracing foreign coaches, Nigeria under Stephen Keshi have proved everyone wrong. As we say in Ghana, Ayekoo!

It was our leader Kwame Nkrumah, who in expressing his faith in the ability of the African, staled at Independence that when the African is given a chance, he could show to the world that "he is somebody". Since today is International Women's Day, I had better add that, "she is also somebody".

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen: Kwame Nkrumah himself was an admirer of Zik. It was Zik who gave Nkrumah the idea to go and study at Lincoln University, where he himself had studied. To many of the younger generation, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe is remembered as the founder of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, a Pan-African political organisation, which became one of the largest parties urging for Independence for a unified Nigeria from British Colonial rule.

However it is Zik's role as a successful journalist and activist upon his return from higher education in the United States that impacted positively not only on the fortunes of Nigeria but indeed the rest of the continent. People like Zik give true meaning and essence to patriotism and Pan-Africanism.

Ladies and gentlemen, my key task today is to present my views on the theme, "Eradicating Corruption in Africa",

How do we eradicate corruption? And where do we start?

Corruption arises from a state of deviation from the moral or spiritual norm; it is a deliberate refusal to operate based on set rules, regulations and laws and with a wicked, if not evil desire to circumvent the punitive actions that come with such deliberate deviant action. Corruption manifests itself in many ways.

Corrupt practices include undue influence for selfish benefit. With respect to governance, from where the greatest power flows, this largely refers to improper interference with the freedom and integrity of several facets of governance in the form of bribery, coercion and intimidation. The end result is always impairment of the integrity of a political process.

It is widely recognised that 80 percent of Africans live on less than $2 a day. Transparency International elaborates how corruption perpetuates poverty and how the two combine to force people to make impossible choices.

Ladies and Gentlemen; there is a culture of corruption reaching down to the very roots of our societies, in which anyone with some kind of power uses it to extort money or favours from others; from the official who demands a bribe to do his job to the lecturer or employer who demands sexual favours from young women in return for high marks or a job.

Sadly the vulnerable are compelled, in their quest for survival to fuel corruption by willingly greasing the palms of persons with influence in order to receive a favour, goods or services, which under normal circumstances should be available to all members of the public through an equitable standard.

Ladies and gentlemen, corruption in our context has always been a complex discussion because some have even argued that the traditional concept of gift giving inherent in our culture makes it almost impossible to define where for instance gift-giving ends and bribery starts.

I beg to disagree, ladies and gentlemen. Traditional gift giving was borne out of two societal norms - reverence to traditional and religious leaders and secondly a concept of good neighbourliness and reciprocity.

Did we import corruption from a foreign influence? Did corruption creep into our societies because we were colonised and established most of our governance and business institutions on a certain imported model? Did our colonisers institute corruption as a basis of their operations on our territories?

These questions may all lead to one answer. However I see corruption more in terms of moral degradation and a greedy quest to outdo each other in terms of class, distinction and perceived respect in society. Such desires may be stimulated by Westernisation, but our various countries on the continent did have strict moral codes of conduct administered by our traditional authorities and their officers. Indeed in most societies there was a traditional unwritten religious edict that frowned on corruption - cheating, stealing and intimidation.

But Mr Chairman, we have over time neglected these traditional ideals as we embraced a secularist society, which made traditional authority less relevant.

Theorists have come in with various orientations on corruption. Donald Cressey's Fraud Triangle thesis makes reference to opportunity, motivation and rationalisation as the basis of corruption.

It refers to a situation where persons with access to assets and information are susceptible to fraud and its concealment. The theory also makes reference to motivation where a person believes there is a compelling need or pressure either financially or for results, that one has to illegally or fraudulently appropriate accessible resources.

Employees may rationalise this behaviour by coming to the conclusion that fraud is okay for reasons such as unpaid bonuses, feeling underpaid, or because a superior is earning a higher salary.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is the willingness to tolerate the intolerable that gives the motivation or momentum for persons or institutions with influence to perpetuate acts of corruption within our society. Corruption at the level of government directly affects the rule of law and debases the moral right of political leadership to serve as a respected regulator of the affairs of the state.

Corruption in our society is most prevalent whenever the private sector meets government over transactions of state - construction of roads, procurement of goods, equipment and services and provision of various forms of services for the state. As desirable as they may be, development projects and especially the huge modernisation projects, lend themselves to this form of corruption.

It is not uncommon for state institutions and personalities such as Ministers and various departments to award contracts not to the lowest bidder or the best-value-for-money bidder but to the one who effectively offers the highest bribe. The effect of such influences is that the quality of the finished project, be it a road or service provided, is below standard because the monitoring authority has been so compromised it failed to perform its supervisory roles effectively.

This form of corruption is now so entrenched that we may need to devise some kind of shock treatment to remove it after assessing the costs of projects. In the meantime, one effective strategy can be to give companies a grace period to come clean and repay their illegal gains into State coffers. But such an approach can only be spearheaded by heads of state who can stand on a high moral ground.

It will be a big battle, but not a battle that cannot be fought. And it is not a battle that we can afford to postpone if we want to avoid a sudden eruption, as occurred in Egypt or Tunisia.

Ladies and gentlemen, we speak of leadership by example, implying that a leader, whether at the national or local level, must not merely talk about truth, integrity and accountability but must demonstrate those qualities in his or her daily life.

However, a leader may be a person of impeccable probity and honesty and yet this alone is not enough.

Around every leader there are people who will try to work themselves into the leader's confidence in order to enjoy their own little piece of importance and influence. If they succeed, they will wrap the leader with a defensive wall, controlling the flow of information that reaches him and blocking access to anyone whom they perceive as a threat to their position. They become manipulators, using the leader to preserve their own positions and influence.

Ironically, the easiest target for such parasites is the 'good' leader - affable, tolerant, unwilling to believe ill of others until it is too late.

If corruption is not to creep in and become institutionalised at the higher levels of government, the leader in addition to personal integrity requires the courage to deal firmly with the first signs of unprincipled behaviour among his followers and supporters.

Most governments in Africa appear to feel intimidated by the strength of character of the people in expressing moral outrage. Yet the people are our greatest allies in the fight against corruption, if empowered to do so.

Profiting from untruths and falsehood not only violates our dignity but leads to intense social stress and pain. And yet to profit from what is truthful, just and meritorious generates a healthier socio-economic climate. Indeed, profiting from lies, eventually leads to degradation. What clearer example is there of this than the volcanic eruptions that arose in our countries, and more recently in Egypt and Tunisia? Though these countries boasted of admirable economic and infrastructural achievements they were achieved at the expense of the people's rights and freedoms.

These lessons suggest to me that we must learn to trust the ability of our people to fight corruption, and not only to vote for us. And in return for their votes, our governments must offer citizens a cushion from a combination of three factors that are changing our world. These are globalisation, the collapse of the bipolar world and the savagery of sections of the private sector.

Globalisation and the collapse of the bipolar world, has led to widespread impunity on our continent. At the same time, people's ownership of the political process has declined, resulting in loss of confidence.

And leaders must understand that when you take away the power of people to express moral outrage, you have effectively disempowered your capacity to tight corruption through the people. Let us have faith in our people and respect them. We have statesmen and women of integrity on our continent.

Our democracy and development cannot progress if we do not counter this cancerous growth. Right from local election for party executives to state/regional and national executives and even the election of presidential candidates, huge monetary and material inducements of offensive proportions are employed to sway elections in favour of the highest bidder. How can we then elect genuine, incorruptible leaders if right from the grassroots we have introduced influences over and beyond the competence and integrity of candidates?

I have since my days as head of government advocated the empowerment of the people at the local/grassroots level to enable them partake in the decision-making process on national issues. But this level of empowerment should not be a patronising feature by governments to create the impression that they are consulting the people.

Importantly the people would have to ensure that they do not become victim to inducements and sweeteners in a leader's bid to have his way. Poverty has an uncanny capacity to corrupt even the most morally conscious person in society. When one has a sick child in hospital, does he offer the nurse a 'token' so the doctor gets to see the child, or keep quiet and stay in a daylong queue while others bribe their way to see the doctor?

Our countries are strewn with anti-corruption institutions, with all manner of powerful mandates, but a cursory glance at their activities shows that many are tools of incumbent governments against their opponents.

Corruption can be properly combated when we also strengthen and clean lip existing security agencies such as the police, the Customs and Immigration Services. There must be a clear spelling out of procedures and processes for accessing government contracts and other services of state institutions.

Mr Chairman, these corruption-combating regimes cannot work effectively if the law does not protect them. National constitutions must clearly define corrupt practices and must unambiguously protect whistle-blowers who play the vigilante role and expose corruption even at the highest level of political and traditional leadership.

We cannot continue to pay lip service to combating a cancer that is eating up the fabric of our society and impoverishing us further. Once the constitution stipulates and defines clearly what penalties there are for persons found guilty of corruption it will be difficult for political leaders especially to circumvent punitive action and thereby perpetuate corruption with impunity. The practice of pardoning politicians committed for criminal offences and not political reasons ought to be critically looked at.

We need to take a hard look at our political systems, which in their present conditions favour bribery and corruption to win power and then more bribery and corruption to recoup the cost of winning.

Can we not redesign our systems to incorporate more of our traditional respect for consensus and the ideal of leadership, which looks beyond the next elections to the needs of future generations?

Can we change the nature of party politics, if party politics is the only valid system, so that each election is not a frantic and vicious battle between two giants? We must also embrace bi-partisan or multi-partisan considerations instead of the bitter rivalry, which is the order of the day. Perhaps we should be taking a look at proportional representation, which, despite its complexity, ensures that smaller parties and alternative views are not squeezed out of governance?

Advocates of anti-corruption have also mentioned the need for Freedom of Information Laws that guarantee the public free access to information on the actions of government and other public institutions as a way of ensuring that fraudulent activities are discovered at their early stages.

Many governments are hesitant to pass such bills into law citing security considerations, but these arguments do not hold water. Freedom of Information Laws, usually classify sensitive areas that are protected from public view for a defined period. Freedom of Information laws will be more effective if they are also enshrined in the constitution so the legislature does not use partisan considerations to determine the exact provisions of such laws.

But for the Freedom of Information laws to have due relevance, the role of the media cannot be overlooked.

Mr Chairman, one set of institutions that have inherent capacity to help expose and combat corruption are the news media.

The news media are responsible for disseminating information through various news channels to members of the public. Traditionally they are known as watchdogs of society and also have a gate-keeping role to ensure that whatever information is delivered to the general public is responsibly couched, truthful and devoid of the potential to have a negative effect on society. In other words the media have to apply strict ethics in the distribution of news and should desist at all times from being under the influence of third parties with respect to the quality and balance of their reports.

Classification of government and state information or data should make it possible for the media to access and publish public interest information without compromising state security.

Unfortunately like many sectors of our societies the media have also caught the bug, and petty competition, monetary and material influences, open political bias and falsehood have eaten into our media practice.

Under the guise of independence of the media, responsible reportage has given way to irresponsible and sponsored reportage and this has to be curbed by the media fraternity itself if it is to win back the confidence of the ordinary people who are confused daily by the contradictions they are fed with. Truth, or principles rather than profit should be the focus of our reportage.

Given that we are looking for ways to combat corruption, it is imperative that machinery is put in place to raise the standards of our media practice and also to tighten disciplinary procedures through journalists associations and media regulatory bodies.

I commend those media personnel who still maintain the standards and do not allow all manner of influences to cloud their judgement as far as news dissemination is concerned. The height of excellent journalism is when you can report what is newsworthy without having to consider a third party whose influence may compel you to twist the facts. And when the general public is better informed this drives national developmental initiatives.

More importantly to expose corruption, diligent and truthful investigative journalism has to take place so the public can be informed of the wrongs of individuals and institutions while the necessary punitive action is taken.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have stated on several forums and wish to reiterate here that the quality of justice is the major ingredient for effectively combating corruption.

The judiciary has to gain society's respect by permanently remaining impartial and forthright in its role. The judiciary should always delink itself from political intrigues and must operate based solely on the dictates of the law and a clear moral conscience.

From the point of view of the State, we need appointments of men and women ready to put loyalty to political principle before loyalty to political power. And in this regard I must commend the government of Kenya for its bold step in appointing an activist Chief Justice, unafraid to say the buck stops here.

Justice should never be denied the ordinary people of our beloved continent. We can successfully eradicate corruption only when we provide unbridled justice to the people. When the people are denied justice, injustice perpetuates itself and perpetual injustice is the most corrupt and corrupting situation in which our continent could find itself.

Our countries must not be the preserve of an untouchable powerful few who consider themselves above the law - a flagrant disrespect of due process.

Mr Chairman, there are a few too many successful thieves in our various countries. When businesses are built on corruption it leads to a system of unsustainable development. Systems must be put in place to encourage business to profit from truth, honour and integrity. The value of merit must override everything.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I alluded at the beginning of my speech to the self-confidence of the Super Eagles. If there is an aspect of Nigeria's national character that we can learn from in other parts of Africa, it is the huge confidence and self-belief of Nigerians that appears to be able to withstand even the forces of globalisation. Whereas much of Africa seems incapable of resisting assimilation through globalisation, Nigeria is a rare example of a country that is able to stand firm or when accepting assimilation, does so on its own terms.

The confidence of Nigerians in their own abilities is the kind that says to outsiders. Don't think you can come here and trample on us.'

This contrasts with some other parts of the continent, where even corruption is only partially owned by Africans while foreigners acting with impunity account for the bulk of corruption. Adding to the stress and tension that is building up, is the behaviour of those scrambling for Africa, who look down on our people, reducing them to second or third class citizens.

Which is not to say that all foreigners behave badly. Indeed I am full of praise for those who do not disrespect our people.

As political leaders we cannot allow ourselves to become cut off from these humiliating realities confronting our people.

Can we begin a national or Pan African debate about what must be done?

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen: I have heard some eminent persons describe President Jonathan as weak on the manner he has handled the situations of violence in Nigeria.

Like President Mahama of Ghana, President Jonathan does not waste time dwelling on the rituals of power and also places value on respect as opposed to subservience. The fact that these two leaders are liked by many and not feared enhances the opportunity to foster a democratic culture. I wonder if those who criticised President Jonathan for being weak were expecting him to institute the shoot-on-sight policy they employed when they were in power?

The democratic disposition of Presidents Jonathan and Mahama should be used to strengthen democratic institutions. They have to use the presidency to empower and to strengthen these institutions or we will revert to the steep and negative authority gradient with its attendant consequences.

Nigeria and indeed West Africa have a problem that requires a tactful and holistic approach. Let us not overlook the role corruption has played in leading us to this point.

This is some food for thought, my dear brothers and sisters.

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen; my gratitude to all who have made this Lecture possible. Thank you for your wonderful audience and good luck.