

# Buhari affirms Nigeria's commitment to keep West Africa peaceful and secured



President Muhammadu Buhari has reaffirmed the commitment of Nigeria to keep the West African sub-region peaceful, secure, politically stable in partnership with the region's partners while also reiterating his avowed commitment to ensure free, fair and transparent elections during the 2023 elections, including a smooth transition. Speaking during the opening ceremony of the Second Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Parliament in Abuja, Buhari said that since the formation of ECOWAS 47 years ago, the organization has evolved in many aspects as well as recorded changes that have affected the demographic composition and the social fabric of the population. He further said that the West African sub-region had seen its challenges increased in the face of growing aspirations and the expectations of the people. The Nigerian President however said the good news is that the sub-region has continued to wax stronger as a community and had remained strong and resilient and a shining example of regional integration and solidarity.

Buhari stated that at the moment, the biggest concerns of the West African sub-region were threats to peace and security, political instability and the adverse impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the region's economies and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

He further said it was on record that the region has not rested on its oars as it had always striven to evolve

effective regional mechanisms to address these challenges. "For example, at the height of the pandemic, Heads of State of ECOWAS appointed me as the ECOWAS champion on COVID-19. Working with three Ministerial Committees comprising Member States' Ministers of Health, Finance and Transportation, we developed an effective response by mitigating the effect of COVID-19 on our citizens. "Our efforts yielded positive results as the ECOWAS region became one of the sub-regions least affected by the pandemic, in terms of mortality rate.

"Let me reaffirm Nigeria's commitment to ECOWAS efforts, with the support of our Partners to keep the region peaceful, secure and politically stable. In this regard, Nigeria remains committed to supporting ECOWAS to restore democratic rule in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso. "We are convinced that the sustenance of democracy and the rule of law should remain the norm in this promising region. As you are aware, there will be multiple political activities in some ECOWAS Member States, including Nigeria, where general elections are due to hold in February and March 2022. Let me seize this opportunity to reiterate my commitment to free, fair and transparent elections and smooth transitions. This is one legacy that I want my administration to bequeath, not only to Nigeria, but to the region as a whole,"

Buhari also said at the regional level, Sierra Leone and Liberia are also preparing for elections, saying that as in the past, Nigeria is ready to stand by any country in the region that is committed to organising free and fair elections. Earlier, the Nigeria President said he was aware of the progress that has been made by the ECOWAS Parliament since the inception of the 5th Legislature, in March 2020. In his words "Specifically, your contributions to the efficient and effective implementation of the objectives and policies of the Community, including the strengthening of representative democracy, have been outstanding. I must also commend you for the tremendous efforts you have invested in making the Parliament visible and relevant to the people of the ECOWAS region. I am aware that over the period of the tenure of this legislature, our people have begun to regard the Parliament as the true representative of their voice and a dependable ally. I, therefore, seize this opportunity to thank the Leadership and all Honourable Members for a job well-done. As this Second Session of the ECOWAS Parliament will be expected to consider the Community Budget among others, let me emphasize that the global economic downturn has

deeply affected the economies of our sub-region and resulted in dire economic hardships for the citizens of the Community. I, therefore, urge you to perform your sacred responsibility of considering the Community budget with diligence, while bearing in mind the sacrifice of various countries in the payment of Community Levy. I urge you to remain conscious of the many challenges besieging the region and be sensitive to the needs of the people,"

He said further. 'Speaking on the issue of election of Members of the ECOWAS Parliament by Direct Universal Suffrage, I recalled that I gave Nigeria's assurance to support the process, provided it is conducted with minimum or even at no cost at all, to the Community.

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"Let me underscore that the ECOWAS Parliament can only fulfill its true mandate when it has a set of directly elected and dedicated Members. I believe that a membership of the ECOWAS Parliament, not drawn from serving members of Parliaments of Member States, would be a good step towards injecting our regional integration with new energy and initiative. "As a country that believes strongly in regional integration and cooperation, let me emphasize that Nigeria will continue to support all the ECOWAS Institutions domiciled within the country. Our pledge to construct a new permanent headquarters for this Parliament remains as irrevocable and strong as ever. I had hoped for the completion and formal commissioning of the project before leaving office.

"The desire to create an ECOWAS complex, housing the Commission, the Parliament and the Court all in one arena, led to the delay. I have been informed that harmonization in drawings and other technicalities have been concluded and that the ground-breaking ceremony of the ECOWAS Commission's headquarters to be constructed by the Government of the People's Republic of China has been scheduled to take place on 5th December 2022. "As I conclude, let me remind us

that the vision of the founding fathers of ECOWAS was to have a West Africa that is integrated economically with harmonized policies and enjoying free movement of persons, goods and services, as well as seamless right to establishment. We must continue to strive harder to attain those objectives. "Let us take advantage of existing mechanisms and our enterprising population to turn our dreams into reality. We have the capacity to do so. Let us collaborate more and remove our outdated physical and psychological boundaries and other colonially-inspired differences so our region can fully attain its full potential,"