

## WELCOME ADDRESS

BY

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Mr President, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, His Excellency the Governor of Kaduna State, Hon. Ministers, Perm Secretaries, the Vice Chancellor, Ahmadu Bello University, ladies and gentlemen, all other protocols observed.

Let me start by saying how grateful we are to Mr President for sparing the time inspite of your extremely tight schedule and for blocking other important engagement just to attend this occasion being organised by the Centre for Democratic Development Research and Training, CEDDERT, in honour of Dr Yusufu Bala Usman. The occasion involves the delivery of two lectures by two eminent Nigerians, the presentation of a book and the laying of a foundation stone. May I take a few minutes Mr President, to give you a brief on our Centre.

In the last two years or so CEDDERT has been engaged in a major research project on *Impressions and Facts of Contemporary Nigerian* history, society and politics. This project, which was initiated by Dr Yusufu Bala Usman before his death in 2005, is premised on a critique of the veracity of much of the impressions currently in vogue in the print media, academic publications and in public consciousness and discourse, regarding Nigeria's national experience. There appears to be a lot of ignorance about what actually happened, how it happened and why things happened the way they did. Impressions about events that took place even recently, are often flagrantly inconsistent with the facts evident in the available sources. In some cases, these impressions are just pure fantasies. In others, some degree of deliberate and not so deliberate pervasions of the reality for some self-serving purposes may even be evident.

With such warped impressions, a rational review and assessment to establish exactly where we are coming from, and why, and where we are going, and why, is just impossible. With the political leadership of the past reduced to either demons, or angels, saints or sinners, the good and the evil, a balanced, rational and realistic assessment of this past is made very difficult. Society just flounders around and sinks into recriminations and denunciations, which serve no useful purpose in grasping what actually happened in the past, in mastering the present and developing the capacity for determining the future.

The real effect of the perpetuation of myths of various kinds about Nigeria as well as other Nigerian leaders and regimes is that it diverts attention from and prevents a proper understanding of the real nature of that regime, what it actually did or did not do and how this, for good or ill, has affected the Nigerian nation.

This day is an important date for us, for it marks a new beginning in our effort to continue along the path which was set out by Dr Usman. As he promised long ago, Mr President will today, graciously lay the foundation stone of the Yusufu Bala Usman Institute, at Zangon Shanu. This spacious piece of land, which is appropriately located close to Ahmadu Bello University, where Dr Bala spent all his adult life engaged in teaching and research, was magnanimously allocated to CEDDERT by His Excellency Arch Mohammed Namadi Sambo, the Executive Governor of Kaduna State, we thank you so much . When completed, the Institute will house CEDDERT, Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research, research libraries, a conference hall, seminar rooms and full-fledged residential facility for 50 visiting researchers.

The Institute will also link up with all Research Institutes all over the world so that we make it a centre for excellence in Nigeria. Bala when it comes to academics does not accept substandard jobs, he may patterned in the way he

lived his life but, he is more patterned in the pursuit of knowledge and that is what we intent to do.

Thank you very much and may God bless.