

**TEXT OF AN ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, RT. HON. SIMON BAKO LALONG, THE EXECUTIVE GOVERNOR OF PLATEAU STATE DURING THE COMMISSIONING CEREMONY OF THE ITF MODERN LIBRARY COMPLEX, CENTRAL STORE AND CLASSROOM BLOCK OF THE ITF STAFF SCHOOL ON FRIDAY, 28<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2020 AT THE ITF HEADQUARTERS COMPLEX, JOS.**

**PROTOCOL**

It is with a great sense of delight and honour that I am pleased to welcome you all to Jos, the Home of Peace and Tourism for today's historic event, the commissioning ceremony of the ITF Modern Library Complex, Central Store at the ITF Headquarters and Classroom Block at the ITF Staff School all here in Jos.

I wish to especially welcome in our midst, the Special Guest of Honour for this great event and the number one investment driver of Nigeria, His Excellency, Otunba Richard Adeniyi Adebayo, CON, the Honourable Minister, Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, whose achievements and track record of success are beyond compare and has further driven the achievements of agencies like the ITF in the actualization of their mandates. Your Excellency, you are welcome to Plateau State.

I wish to start by commending the ITF for the giant strides it has recorded under the leadership of our dearest son and my brother, Sir Joseph N. Ari, who has transformed and refocused the organisation leading to the empowerment of thousands of Nigerian youths with cutting edge skills for entrepreneurship and employability in line with President Buhari's policy on poverty eradication and job and wealth creation.

I must note here that Plateau State, particularly since the assumption of Sir Joseph Ari as DG, has been a major beneficiary of the ITF. Permit me at this juncture to recount what Plateau State has benefitted from the ITF in recent years. It has benefitted from several phases of the Fund's flagship skills acquisition programme, the National Industrial Skills Development Programme (NISDP), with the empowerment of over 1000 Plateau citizens with skills and start-up kits. Most of the beneficiaries are today either earning a living in paid employment, or are successful entrepreneurs and even employers of labour. Impressed by the efforts of the Fund through the NISDP, the State Government sponsored additional number of trainees for the programme. We shall continue to sponsor such additional numbers for your programmes because I am convinced that skills acquisition is the way to go.

The State is also one of the few states, whose indigenes have benefitted from the Women Skills Empowerment Programme (WOSEP) that trained and empowered indigent women, who are today either employed or running their businesses. Again, the State sponsored additional trainees and equally gave all the beneficiaries start-up packs.

Another 200 Plateau youths were trained in culinary skills courtesy of the ITF's Technical Skills Development Project (TSDP), while the physically challenged were equipped with skills in mobile repairs and hair making under the Skills Training Empowerment Programme for the Physically Challenged (STEPP-C). All the beneficiaries were supported with start-up kits. In all, through our active collaboration and support, over 5000 citizens have benefitted from these ITF programmes.

But, beyond the empowerment of the youths with skills, the ITF has contributed in no small measure towards the upliftment of the living conditions of its immediate communities and the educational sector in the state through its Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes. I am aware that it has constructed and commissioned two boreholes for the Rantya and Hwolshe communities; trained for free over 200 teachers, donated a sick bay to St. John Vianney Seminary and renovated and equipped an ICT Centre at the Government Technical College, Bukuru and the beautification of the State Low-cost roundabout. There are so many others that I may not list in view of time constraint.

The commissioning of these projects today is yet another display of the magnanimity of the ITF to the people of Plateau State.

As Government, we are willing to collaborate and support all ITF initiatives especially as they concern Human Capital Development as this is in alignment with the State's policy goals. I also want to assure you that the doors of the Plateau State Government will always be open to the ITF for any collaboration. I am of the firm belief that only through the empowerment of our youths with skills, which the ITF is doing, will some of the problems including unemployment, incessant insecurity and other social vices be effectively tackled.

I wish to call on other state governments, the Organised Private Sector (OPS), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Faith-Based Organisations, stakeholders and other well-meaning Nigerians to collaborate with the ITF in efforts at tackling unemployment and poverty as well as job and wealth creation, so that together we can rid the country of the attendant effects of criminality and other negative social vices that are on the increase.

Once again we appreciate the ITF for its contributions to the development of the state and pray that the facilities that are being commissioned today will be utilized for the betterment of the state and Nigeria in general.

Thank you for listening and may God bless our collective efforts.