

A SPEECH DELIVERED BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS, DR. HALIRU YAHAYA (*Emir of Shonga*), CHAIRMAN BOARD OF TRUSTEES, HEALTH REFORM FOUNDATION OF NIGERIA [HERFON], DURING THE BOARD'S COURTESY CALL ON HIS EXCELLENCY, ALHAJI UMARU MUSA YAR'ADUA, *GCFR*; PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF ARMED FORCES, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA; 24 JANUARY 2008

[Protocols]

On behalf of the Board of trustees, members, supporters, partners, collaborators and workers of the Health Reform Foundation of Nigeria (HERFON), I am expressing our delight and gratitude to Mr. President, for granting us this audience. We also congratulate you on your assumption of office as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the giant strides you are taking to move the country forward. Kindly accept our deepest sympathy on the death of **Hon. Dr. Aminu Safana** who served you during your days as Governor of Katsina State, and who until his death on active duty, was a member of the House of Representatives.

WHO WE ARE?

HERFON is an independent non-governmental foundation committed to working for better health outcomes, especially for the poor and vulnerable, in Nigeria through health advocacy, research, policy analysis, capacity enhancement and leadership development activities; working on its own as well as in partnerships.

HERFON is a membership organization with nationwide distribution which cuts across all strata of society.

We are always guided by our core values of Quality, Equity, and Evidence-based approaches, Sustainability, Transparency and Accountability.

WHAT WE DO

HERFON'S main focus is on the Health System, Immunization, HIV/AIDS and Health related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In order to achieve our goals, we strive to be a valuable leading resource (think-tank) to people working in the health sector, offering advocacy and leadership development programmes; researches and evidence-generation; policy development and capacity building; inter-and-intra sectoral collaborations; conferences, seminars and workshops; publications; information, library services and meeting facilities; etc. HERFON is increasingly expanding its network of Change Agents/members throughout the federation whilst building strong relationships in the health sector, with the National Assembly, Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH), State governments, a range of Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Businesses, etc.

We also have a number of publications. Our most recent publication is a report of our study of the 'Impact, Challenges and Long-term Implications of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) Programme in Nigeria'. Suffice it to say that all our publications are available on our

website (www.herfon.org), and hard copies can readily be obtained on request. Some of our other contributions include:

- i. Expansion of HERFON's network of Change Agents/members throughout the federation whilst building strong relationships in the health sector;
- ii. Organizing immunization capacity building tours to for traditional and religious leaders in Northern Nigeria, service providers and policy makers; to Zambia (13-19 August 2006), Egypt (10-15 December 2006) and Malaysia (27 March – 1 April 2007), in collaboration with EU-PRIME;
- iii. Provision of technical assistance to the Senate Health Committee in the preparation of its strategic plan;
- iv. Supporting the FMoH and NASS in the preparation of the National health Bill;
- v. Evaluation of Nasarawa State Health System to provide evidence for appropriate health actions to produce better outcome; and
- vi. Publication of the first-ever Nigeria Health Review (NHR) which has become a reference document on health in Nigeria. We are pleased to inform your Excellency that in support of your government's renewed emphasis on primary health care, the 2007 edition of the NHR has been strategically focused on primary Health care (PHC), and will soon be released to the country and international health community.

WHY WE HAVE COME

We have come to intimate your Excellency, about how HERFON and its partners/funders can support the Federal Government to achieve Nigeria's health care and poverty reduction objective and targets, including the health related Millennium Development Goals (HMDGs). The outcome of this meeting will enable us to factor our support into our 2008 annual budget/work plan, and within the context of our 2008-2012 Strategic Plan.

We have noted your Excellency's 7-point agenda which comprises Energy; Security; Wealth Creation; Human Capital Development; Land Reform; Mass Transit and the Niger Delta Situation. By inclination, our major area of interest is the development of healthy human capital which focuses on life expectancy at birth and total literacy rate. We believe that health (and education) constitutes the engine that drives the development of human capital which is needed for creating wealth and sustaining economic growth and social development.

Compared with the best indices around the world, permit us to call your Excellency's attention to Nigeria current position among 177 countries, as reflected in the UNDP's Human Development Report 2007-2008. Overall, our country stands at 158th position among 177 countries (in descending order) on the human development index (HDI), while Egypt and South Africa (SA) stand some distances ahead of us, at 112th and 121st positions respectively. In clearer terms, Nigeria has a life expectancy at birth of 46.5 years against Egypt's 70.7 years and SA's 50.8. Whereas Egypt and SA have adult literacy rate (for ages 15 and older) of 71.4% and 82.4% respectively, Nigeria trails behind with 69.1%. Sir, our country's combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%) is

56.2 against Egypt's 76.9 and SA's 77.0. The list goes on. Painfully, our country is only able to stand ahead of such countries as Tanzania, Guinea, Rwanda, Angola, Benin, Malawi, Burundi, and other war-torn, famine-stricken and far less endowed countries of Africa and developing world.

We appreciate that the federal Government used the past four years to streamline the country's health policy and planning, which has yielded several tools and documents including the Revised National Health Policy, The National Health Sector Reform Programme, Presidential Blueprint on Health-MDGs, Blueprint on Primary Health Care and many other programmes –specific policies and strategic plans. We agree that it was important and appropriate to embark on policy making and planning in order to show clear direction for the reforms and revitalization of our health sector. We believe that it is high time we shifted emphasis to the IMPLEMENTATION of these existing strategies and interventions. Ingenious and effective ways must be devised in engaging the States and Local Governments if significant progress is to be achieved.

In November 2006, HERFON facilitated a group of partners/key stakeholders including The Presidency, National Assembly, State and Local Governments and their agencies, Federal and State Ministries of Health and other line Ministries, Policy makers, Community leaders, Traditional leaders, The United Nations System/WHO, Development Partners including DFID, Professional organizations, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Parastatals and institutions, Health care financiers, Health care providers, Facility owners, Nigerians in the Diaspora, Pharmaceutical manufacturers/suppliers and clients/patients, **organized** Nigeria's first private-sector-led National Health Conference, to develop a Health Agenda for Nigeria in the twenty-first (21st) Century and disseminated this Agenda to all Stakeholders at all levels of Government, Private Sector, Development Partners and NGOs, nationally and internationally'.

In addition to other decisions arrived at the conference towards ensuring better health services for all Nigerians beyond 2007, the conference requested your Excellency and all aspiring political leaders to:

1. Ensure the approval and signing-into-law of the National Health Bill without further delay
2. Without further delay implement the universally agreed budget allocation of not less than 15% of the total annual budget to health by all levels of government in Nigeria
3. Take measures to drastically reduce the current very high and unacceptable deaths of Women and Children due to poor health care services, and
4. Irrevocably strengthen Nigeria's current Health Sector Reform Programme

Permit me sir, to on behalf of these stakeholders, present to you, copies of this consensus document and the report of the 2006 National health Conference (NHC).

OUR SUPPLICATIONS

Sir, We support the primary health care fund as provided in the national Health Bill now in the National Assembly, and fully agree with your Excellency's recent statement that primary health care should be owned by all tiers of government, especially since your position reaffirms HERFON's 2008-2012 strategic plan which focuses on primary health care. We also believe sir that States have no need to strive to provide tertiary health in any part of this country.

In the continuing effort at reforming the health sector, we agree with your Excellency on the need to restructure the FMOH toward more effective functionality in order to deliver its mandate. In doing this, an effective mechanism for collaboration and cooperation with States and Local Governments needs to be articulated. Your Excellency's government is requested to lead advocacy to States and LGAs to enhance resource allocation to primary health care, in order to get it working better.

Sir, we suggest that your government revisits the National health policy and urgently review the Health sector Reform Programme (HSRP) to reduce our country's burden of disease, with special attention to Integrated Maternal and Neonatal Child Health (IMNCH); to be provided as part of a guaranteed minimum package of health care for all Nigerians. In particular, we urge that the review of the HSRP be geared towards the effective implementation of existing policies, in addition to a deliberate long-term approach to the National Health Investment Plan (NHIP). We are of the opinion that the National Primary Health care Development Agency (NPHCDA) needs to be strengthened in order to accomplish the above.

We also plead with your Excellency to urgently spare time from your crowded programmes, to pay attention to the recommendations of the 2006 National Health Conference. It is our hope that when the 2008 national health conference holds later this year, your Excellency will honour us with your (personal) presence.

CONCLUSION

In concluding, accept our thanks once more, for accepting to receive us in audience today. Kindly accept our assurances of support and loyalty, in your onerous task to permanently uplift the health and living standards of Nigerians.

Long live **HE President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua**, GCFR
Long live the **Federal Republic of Nigeria**

Thank you, sir.

HRH Dr. Haliru Yahaya (*Emir of Shonga*)
Chairman, BOT
HERFON