

**Speech by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, GCFR, President and
Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of
Nigeria on the Occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the International
Conference on African Legal Resources: Challenges and Opportunities
of Legislative Informatics**

Your Excellency Senator Ken Nnamani, GCON, The President of the
Senate of the National Assembly of Nigeria,

Your Excellency Honourable Aminu Bello Masari, CFR, The Honourable
Speaker of the House of Representatives,

Your Excellency, Senator Ibrahim Mantu, the Deputy President of the
Senate,

Your Excellency, Honourable Austin Opara, Deputy Speaker of the House
of House Representatives,

Your Excellency Dr. Gertrude Mongella, President of the Pan African
Parliament,

Your Excellency, Dr Veronica Macamo, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament
of Mozambique,

Honourable Members of Parliaments of Participating Countries

Ministers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria here present,

Clerk of the National Assembly of Nigeria,

Clerk of the Pan African Parliament,

Officials of the United Nations here present,

Distinguished Stakeholders, Resource Persons and Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to declare open this all-important and timely Conference tagged “African Legal Resources: Challenges and Opportunities of Legislative Informatics”. Africa like the rest of the world is moving towards the full harnessing of the benefits of ICTs in the various spheres of life and governance. This Conference, as I have been informed, seeks to highlight to Parliaments, the opportunities of ICTs and the strategic role of Legal Informatics. Legal Informatics, I was told is the discipline pertaining to the application of information science within the context of the legal environment and ICTs. The science automates the complete life-cycle of legislative documentation with the overall objective of empowering democracies in Africa. In addition within the next two days, African Parliaments and other key stakeholders will be presented with a set of tools and common standards for legislative drafting and documentation developed by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) under the “Strengthening Parliaments Information Management in Africa initiative”. It is envisaged that this august forum will provide the environment for the debate and subsequent adoption of these tools.

This initiative is indeed highly commendable and will serve as a concrete support for the harmonisation of the African Legal System promoted by the African Union, a process that can greatly support the economic integration and development of Africa. The achievement of these noble objectives will no doubt require the involvement and commitment of several institutions in each country, ranging from governments, parliaments, the Judiciary, to Academic, Research and Regulatory Institutions. African institutions, working together, need to pool necessary resources through a collaborative

effort of building capacity and modernization.

Although African nations have different legislative traditions, an offshoot of our recent history, for the ambitious goal of the Conference to succeed, it is important that African nations agree to adopt common legislative standards with regards to drafting legislations and documenting them so as not only to enable the formation of a unified legislative digital space but also seamless document exchange. I do think that the time is right and Africa is ready as is evidenced by our political willingness through such initiatives as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). It is therefore necessary that we pool together the technical tools available to us to achieve this. In this regards, I am pleased to note that this Conference also focuses on the huge collaborative potentials of ICTs and on the opportunities that we have not only to work together but also to build together more powerful and more effective information management solutions.

Information management indeed becomes a strategic issue. In particular an efficient management of legislative and legal sources can highly contribute to timely and fair administration of justice, to citizens' awareness of their rights and duties, to the accountability of public institutions in the delivery of public services. Thus, legal information management is at the basis of good democratic governance and provides the basis for accountability and effective public management of resources. The cost, however, of managing information is becoming heavier and heavier. It is therefore interesting to look at the proposals of this Conference that builds on Open Standards and Open Source Software. The potential that the use

of Open Source Software offers in lowering administration costs and enhancing local information technology skills is definitely an opportunity Africa should explore to the maximum.

On her part, the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is keen on enhancing accessibility of information as a way of promoting good governance and development. This keenness has led to the adoption of a National IT policy and subsequently establishment of the National IT Development Agency (NITDA) to implement the IT Policy. Various IT-initiatives are presently on-going directed at the 3 arms of Government under the e-government and e-governance schemes. Our judicial systems and processes are being computerized. The National Assembly under its comprehensive IT-infrastructure Development Project is upgrading its IT facilities. It was my honor to officially launch the National Assembly website 2 years ago.

The Government of Nigeria wholly supports the collaborative efforts of African Parliaments and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs under the aegis of the Pan African Parliaments aimed at strengthening their information management.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, It is therefore my honor to declare this Conference open and I wish you fruitful deliberations. Enjoy your stay in Nigeria and do take out time to explore our beautiful capital city, Abuja!

Thank you.