

**Speech by Akinwumi A. Adesina,  
President of the African Development Bank  
at the Gala Dinner during the State Visit to Niger,  
September 26, 2017**

Prime Minister, Head of Government,

Distinguished Ambassadors and Heads of Diplomatic Missions,

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the Government,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to thank the Prime Minister and the Government of Niger for having raised me to the rank of Grand Officer in the Order of Merit of the Republic of Niger on behalf of the President of the Republic. You all surprised me – I had no idea, it may be better that way – but it is a great honour that you have afforded to me.

On behalf of the African Development Bank, I would like to thank His Excellency Mr. Issoufou Mahamadou, President of the Republic, for this State visit.

Thank you, Mr. Brigi Rafini, the Prime Minister, for all your hospitality and the excellent meeting today with the members of the cabinet.

I congratulate you on the passage of the government budget yesterday. And I know the Minister of Planning, Governor of the Bank, was so thrilled she could not hide her excitement as she announced this to me at 1:30 am when she met me at the airport.

I applaud all the efforts of the government on ensuring political stability since the elections of 2016. This stability is what has allowed Niger to overcome major challenges that it has faced.

Leadership is not for the weak or feeble-minded. In tough times, leaders always arise. That's what the President has done in the face of the brutal terrorist attacks that have faced the good people of Niger from the ruthless Boko Haram.

I know it has taken a heavy toll on you: we are saddened by the loss of lives of innocent people by these senseless terrorist attacks. Your government has had to increase the share of its military spending to 10% of the national budget. This of course has reduced the public expenditures for much-needed social services, schools, hospitals, electricity, roads and support to farmers.

The African Development Bank salutes the gallant armed forces of Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon for their bravery and successes in defeating the terrorist insurgencies. There cannot be any development without security. And the private sector will never invest in an environment of fear, panic and uncertainties.

I want to assure you that the African Development Bank stands with you, firmly in your battle for freedom, peace and stability of Niger and the entire Lake Chad region.

You've also faced major macroeconomic shocks which have affected your economy, with the sharp decline in the price of crude oil, gold, iron, uranium, all of which Niger depends on.

Nonetheless, Niger has done every well in a difficult economic environment. Niger achieved an economic growth rate of 5.7% in 2017 and expects growth to rise to 6.7% next year.

Niger also had one of the top 10 highest economic growth rates in Africa last year. I commend the government for its continued efforts to liberalize, and the reforms to support greater private sector participation, for the private sector is the engine of growth.

The African Development Bank has been a strategic partner with Niger in its drive to raise its economic growth and achieve inclusive development.

The Bank has been investing in Niger since 1970. That means that the African Development Bank and Niger have been married for 47 years. And any marriage that's lasted for 47 years is a very good marriage.

Since then the Bank has invested over \$1.2 billion in Niger. Currently the Bank's investment totals over \$580 million, with 40% in agriculture.

I know a lot about agriculture in Niger because I did my Masters and PhD theses on Niger, and lived in Maradi. So I am from Niger. President Issoufou often jokes with President Buhari that I am from Niger, but happened to have added "ia" to become someone from Nigeria! I feel very much at home in Niger.

I applaud the efforts of the government with its 3N initiative: Nigeriens must feed Nigeriens.

Your programme fits very well with the focus of the Bank to Feed Africa. The Bank will invest \$24 billion into agriculture in the next ten years to help turn agriculture into a business across Africa, to create wealth and make millionaires in Africa.

That's why I am very excited about the Kandadji dam and its potential for agriculture. The African Development Bank is investing over \$176 million in the dam, as the lead partner, supported by the World Bank and the French Development

Agency. When completed, the Kandadji dam will irrigate 45,000 ha. It will turn Niger into a food basket, right in the middle of the Sahel. It will produce 40,000 MT of cereal, 50,000 MT of vegetables, 10,000 litres of milk, about 750 tons of meat.

We all must put our hands together and make this project happen much faster. Let us turn Niger into a food basket. This project cannot be completed by 2030, that's too late. We've got to do it in less than 10 years. I want to assure you that the Bank will give even higher levels of support to this effort.

When I worked here, electricity access was a problem. I am surprised the situation remains the same, with only 10% of the population with access to grid electricity, and only 1% of the rural population with access to electricity.

We must change this.

Niger cannot develop in the dark. That's why – with its partners – the Bank strongly supports the efforts to generate 300 MW from Kandadji. The Bank will work with the Japanese Government, through its joint partnership on the Japan-Africa Energy Facility to support Niger to fully unlock its capacity to produce energy from clean coal, from coal it has in abundance.

With 600 MW we can produce from the Sakaldamna coal project, Niger can fully light up and power itself 100%. The African Development Bank will also support Niger to roll out a massive system of grid power that relies on solar to tap into its abundant solar potential.

As you know, the top priority of the Bank is to light up and power Africa and ensure universal access to electricity in Africa within a decade. The Bank will invest \$12 billion in the energy sector in the next five years and help leverage \$46-50 billion.

And just to be clear: lack of electricity promotes terrorists. Terrorists operate better in darkness. So, light up and power Africa, and we'll get rid of terrorists.

I am delighted to announce that the African Development Bank has just opened a full country office in Niger. We are here in Niger permanently to continue our development marriage to bear more fruits.

Our commitment is reflected in our allocation of African Development Fund to Niger, which increased from \$176 million in ADF 13 to \$260 million in ADF 14. And we provide an additional \$84 million from facility for fragile states.

And we will do more.

My trip here to meet with the President, Prime Minister and government, and with development partners and private sector, is to send a strong signal: The African Development Bank stands fully in support of Niger and we are here to stay and work with other partners to help this beautiful country unlock its full economic potential.

Thank you so much, Mr. Prime Minister, for hosting me at this lovely gala dinner. You brought back all the wonderful memories of when I was a young student doing my research in Maradi. And you can at least say the 3N programme is not just about Nigeriens feeding Nigeriens, but that Nigeriens fed a Nigerian!

I now raise my glass to toast to your good health, success of the government, peace and stability and economic progress of Niger and its people – and to a more prosperous development marriage between the government of Niger and the African Development Bank – your own Bank!