**KEYNOTE ADDRESS/FORMAL OPENING BY DR. (MRS.) ZAINAB SHAMSUNA AHMED, HONOURABLE MINISTER OF FINANCE, BUDGET AND NATIONAL PLANNING AT THE 19TH JOINT PLANNING BOARD (JPB) MEETING HELD AT THE NIGERIAN AIR FORCE (NAF) CONFERENCE CENTRE AND SUITES, ABUJA, ON WEDNESDAY, 24TH MARCH, 2021**

**Protocol**

It is my immense pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, to this auspicious Meeting of the Joint Planning Board (JPB) on “**National Development Planning in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges**.” This meeting is organised by the Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning in collaboration with the States’ Ministries of Budget and Economic Planning and other relevant Stakeholders. Let me seize this opportunity to acknowledge the presence of the Honourable Commissioners, Permanent Secretaries and Directors of Budget and Economic Planning. I thank you all for honouring our impromptu meeting invitation.

2. I wish to extend my deep appreciation to the Honourable Minister of State for Budget and National Planning, Prince Clem Ikanade Agba for supporting this effort to deepen the cooperation between the Federal and State Governments aimed at addressing issues and challenges in the formulation and implementation of National Development Plans in Nigeria. I am also grateful to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Budget and National Planning, for the invaluable logistical support provided by the Ministry in preparation of this meeting.

3. As you are aware, the JPB meeting provide economic development planners at Federal and State levels with a platform to discuss, debate and arrive at recommendations on how best to deal with our common development challenges. It also gives an opportunity to intensify and broaden our constructive engagement to mutual benefit.

**Honourable Commissioners and Distinguished Participants**

4. Sixteen months (16) have passed since the last JPB meeting in October 2019, at which the Honourable Minister of State for Budget and National Planning had the Privilege to chair the National Council on Development Planning (NCDP). A lot has changed since the last sixteen (16) months, especially in the global and domestic economic landscape. The most significant is the outbreak of Coronavirus (Covid-I9) pandemic globally. This was followed by the measures put in place by the Government at all levels to contain the spread of the virus including economic lockdown, restrictions of movement and control on social gathering. These measures created a set of challenges, leading to the inability of the Borno State Government to host the scheduled JPB/NCDP meeting in Maiduguri in 2020.

5. The measures also caused economic recession and fiscal challenges in Nigeria and several economies around the world. In addition, Nigeria witnessed a sharp fall in crude oil prices in the international market due to slower global demand during the period. As a mono-product oil economy, Nigeria’s revenue was severely affected leading to the economic stagflation and economic recession in the third (3rd) quarter of 2020.

6. The good news is that in the fourth (4th) quarter of 2020 the country recorded a positive GDP growth of 0.11 percent. This result would not have been possible without your quick implementation of measures to reduce the short-term economic consequences for companies and poor households in the country.

**Honourable Commissioners and Distinguished Participants**

7. Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate the State Governments for the completion of implementation of the Nigeria Growth and Recovery Plan 2017-2020. This Plan had helped the country to come out of the 2016 and 2020 economic recessions. With these few achievements we have once again demonstrated that together we can achieve so much but alone we can do so little. More is needed to be done on sustainable basis to ensure economic stability and to strengthen the families and businesses affected by the COVID-19 lockdown.

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8. Let me also inform you that during this long period, the Ministry commenced the preparation of the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2021-2025) and Nigeria Agenda 2050 to succeed the ERGP (2017-2020) and Nigeria Vision 20:2020 (NV2020). This is being done in collaboration with our key stakeholders including the State Governments.

9. Presently, we are at the level of producing the draft MTNDP (2021-2025) using the reports from the Technical Working Groups (TWGs). The process of identifying and costing projects to be admitted into the MTNDP has also begun. I would like to inform you all that we would be unveiling the MTNDP (2021-2025) by the end of first (1st) 2021. Let me seize this opportunity to commend our partners at the State level for their participation at the TWGs virtual meetings.

**Honourable Commissioners and Distinguished Participants**

10. In the context of charting a more ambitious and aspirational trajectory to prepare for a rapid changing world and domestic development challenges, the theme of this Abuja JPB/NCDP meeting is “***National Development Planning in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges***.” The meeting will also pave way for an exceptional engagement with the State Commissioners and Directors to examine the imperative and inclusiveness for a sustainable National development. I hope the Directors of Budget and Economic Planning at the Federal and State levels have done justice to the topics and came up with actionable recommendations.

11. The importance of Synergy between the States and Federal Government in the articulation and implementation of the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2021-2025) and Nigeria Agenda 2050 cannot be overemphasized. The benefit of this approach of development would considerably maximise synergies and minimise trade-offs between the National Development Plans and State Development Plans as well as their implementation across the Sectors and Levels.

12. The approach would also enhance the effectiveness and quality of outcome as well as contribute to the efficient use of our scarce resources. Unfortunately, in the previous Plans, the issues of synergies between the State and Federal were downplayed. As a result, achievements of NV20: 2020 and ERGP over the last ten years and five years respectively were dwarfed by lack of synergies in the design and implementation of the National Plans and State Plans. It is also the reason we were unsuccessful to address the booms and bust syndrome associated with the mono-cultural nature of our exports and revenue.

13. Apart from the ERGP that helped us to come out of economic recessions, the country did not grow more than 0.75 percent and 3.19 percent on average during 2017-2020 and 2010-2020 respectively. This could also be attributed to our collective inability to address domestic growth constraints. The Plan implementation was also affected by political & policy changes, less emphasis on inter-sector collaboration, weak link between the Plan and Annual Budget and absence of Coordinating Institutions for Plan implementation. We had issues with poor business regulations, over-dependence on oil, bad governance and policy design failures. We do not want these to happen again.

14. We want to ensure that the basic needs of the States are well captured in the National Plan as this is a major strategy to ensure that the Government at the State and Local levels are effectively mobilised for the implementation of the National Plans. A quick assessment of the TWGs reports shows that the States are partially missing in action despite their participation at various TWGs. Thus, this meeting is aimed at harvesting additional perspectives of the States to ensure that the programmes and implementation of the sustainable development objectives of MTNDP (2021-2025) at the Federal level are in line with the development aspirations at the State level. Our new National Plan is expected to provide the necessary coordination between the State and Federal Governments. If we do not use this Plan to solve the right problem of our country, we would all fail in our quest towards improving the well-being of our people.

**Honourable Commissioners and Distinguished Participants**

15. The objective of this MTNDP 2021-2025 is the elimination of Poverty and creation of jobs. It will not be focused on accelerating GDP growth alone. This Plan will be the first Medium-Term National Development Plan to implement the Nigeria Agenda 2050. It will also play a key role in delivering the SDGs 2030 and African Union Agenda 2063.

16. This Plan will support the implementation of the Nine (9) Priorities of Government during the first medium-term period. These priorities are: (a) stabilize the economy; (b) ensure energy sufficiency in power & petroleum products; (c) achieve agricultural & food security; (d) improve transportation & other Infrastructures; (e) drive industrialization; (f) improve health, education & productivity; (g) enhance social security & reduce poverty; and (h) fight corruption & improve governance.

17 We also intend to stabilise budget & Government expenditure, diversify the economy and close fiscal deficit. In addition, the strategy is to adopt proactive trade policies, prioritise self-reliance and home-grown solution. Infrastructural development will not be downplayed. Governance and Public Sector capacity will be strengthened by ensuring transparency in the utilisation of resources. Effort will be made to review the Public Sector Contract System. It will also pay attention to regulatory issues. Overall, this Plan and your supportive actions will help Government to deliver better living conditions to Nigerians.

**Honourable Commissioners and Distinguished Participants**

18. Considering the urgency to unveil the MTNDP (2021-2025) by the end of first (1st) quarter 2021, we have declared this 19th Abuja meeting as a workshop and place for us to brainstorm on the way forward. The States are expected to swiftly identify the programmes and projects that will deliver these Government priorities. You already know the socio-economic challenges we have at hand. You also know that we are having challenges with financing development programmes. We need the development support and cooperation at the State and Local Government levels to help Federal Government address the socio-economic challenges facing Nigeria.

**Honourable Commissioners and Distinguished Participants**

19. At this juncture, let me seize this opportunity to reaffirm our resolve to continue to work together to support each other to deliver on these priorities that will lift our people out of poverty and create opportunities for productive employment to our people.

***Honourable Commissioners, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,***

20. With these few remarks, it is now my pleasure to declare the 19th meeting holding here in FCT, Abuja officially opened and wish you all a successful deliberation.

21. Thank You for your attention.