

THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY DR. MUIZ BANIRE, SAN, OON AT THE MEMORIAL COLLOQUIUM MARKING THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSING OF LATE PRINCE ADEMOLA ADENIJI-ADELE HELD ON THE 14TH DAY OF MAY, 2026 AT THE MARQUEE, LTV, IKEJA, LAGOS.

THEME: GOVERNANCE IN TRANSITION: SUSTAINING THE TRADITION OF SERVICE THROUGH LEADERSHIP, REFORM, MENTORSHIP, CHALLENGES IN GOVERNANCE AND GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, respected professionals, members of the political class, children and family members of the great Prince Ademola Adeniji-Adele in whose memory we are gathered here today, ladies and gentlemen, fellow Lagosians.

I stand before you today with profound honour, deep nostalgia and a sincere sense of responsibility as I deliver this keynote address in remembrance of a remarkable statesman, an uncommon democrat, and one of the finest political personalities ever produced by Lagos State and Nigeria, the late Prince Ademola Adeniji-Adele.

As we reflect on the theme before us, *“Governance in Transition: Sustaining the Tradition of Service Through Leadership, Reform, Mentorship, Challenges in Governance and Grassroots Engagement,”* it becomes immediately apparent that no personality could have provided a more fitting symbol for this conversation than the late Prince Ademola Adeniji-Adele himself. Indeed, the theme is not merely suitable for this colloquium; it is a direct reflection of the life he lived, the values he embodied and the legacy he left behind.

Ten years ago, Nigeria lost a political and administrative colossus whose contributions to democratic governance, grassroots politics, public service and progressive leadership remain indelibly engraved in the history of Lagos State and Nigeria as a whole. The story of democratic evolution and progressive politics in Nigeria can never be fully written without according Prince Ademola Adeniji-Adele his well-deserved place of honour. His name belongs permanently among those who sacrificed personal comfort in defence of democracy, popular participation and the dignity of the ordinary people.

Today, therefore, we are not gathered merely to mourn his absence as mortals often do when confronted with the inevitability of death. Rather, we are gathered to celebrate a legacy, a legacy woven deeply into the political, democratic and social fabric of Lagos State and Nigeria. We are gathered to remember a man fondly called the *“Prince of Hope,”* a man who

represented a rare fusion of royalty, intellect, simplicity, courage, political sophistication, humility, and uncommon accessibility to the masses.

From his emergence as Chairman of Lagos Island Local Government in 1989, where he distinguished himself through people-oriented governance and transformational leadership, to his courageous participation in the June 12 struggle and the defence of democracy during the dark years of military dictatorship, Prince Ademola Adeniji-Adele consistently stood on the side of justice, service, and the people. He remained fearless in moments when silence would have been safer. He remained principled at a time when compromise had become fashionable. He remained connected to the grassroots when many politicians had become detached from the people whose mandate they claimed to hold.

Indeed, one of his final political battles was devoted to the advancement of internal democracy within political parties. That struggle remains particularly relevant today as political parties increasingly drift toward imposition, exclusion, and anti-democratic tendencies. Prince Ademola Adeniji-Adele understood, perhaps far ahead of many of his contemporaries, that democracy cannot survive where internal party processes are manipulated and the voices of ordinary members are suppressed.

He understood governance not as an avenue for primitive accumulation or personal aggrandizement, but as a sacred trust and solemn responsibility to uplift communities, empower the weak, inspire younger generations, and preserve the enduring spirit of grassroots politics. He appreciated that leadership derives legitimacy not merely from elections, but from empathy, accessibility, accountability, and service to humanity.

Indeed, he was probably the first local government chairman in Nigeria whose fame radiated far beyond his office, not because of propaganda, not because of media manipulation, but because of visible performance and tangible impact on the lives of ordinary people. His popularity transcended Lagos State and resonated across Nigeria because the people could physically feel governance through his actions.

As we honour his memory today, may this gathering serve not only as a celebration of his life, but also as a challenge to all of us to sustain the tradition of purposeful leadership, democratic values, institutional reform, mentorship and compassionate governance for which he stood. May Almighty Allah continue to grant him eternal rest and sustain him in Al-Jannah Firdaus.

Ladies and gentlemen, governance in transition remains one of the most delicate and defining tests of statecraft in every modern democracy. Nations are not judged merely by the elegance of their constitutions or the eloquence of their leaders, but ultimately by their capacity to

preserve institutional continuity amidst political change. The true strength of governance is often revealed not during periods of stability and comfort, but during moments of transition, when administrations change, reforms are contested, economic realities shift and citizens demand renewed confidence in leadership and institutions.

It is during such moments that societies either deepen democratic maturity or descend dangerously into institutional uncertainty and instability.

In Nigeria, periods of political transition have historically generated anxiety, tension, suspicion, and widespread apprehension. More often than not, such periods are accompanied by ominous predictions of national collapse or systemic breakdown. Yet, interestingly, Nigeria has repeatedly survived these storms and emerged intact, even in situations where the political establishment lost power to opposition forces. That reality itself remains a remarkable democratic achievement when considered against the country's difficult political history.

However, as another political transition gradually approaches, apprehension once again fills the air. Tension is mounting across the polity. Insecurity in certain parts of the country is increasingly being linked, rightly or wrongly, to the uncertainties associated with the evolving political climate. These developments naturally provoke concerns about the resilience of our governance structures and the stability of democratic institutions.

Across the globe today, from Africa to Europe and beyond, governance systems are under unprecedented pressure. Economic instability, inflation, insecurity, migration crises, youth unemployment, technological disruptions, climate change and declining public trust in institutions have collectively transformed governance into a far more complex enterprise than it once was.

Leadership in transition, therefore, must move beyond ceremonial politics and empty rhetoric. It must embrace the deeper obligation of sustaining public service, strengthening institutions, mentoring future leaders, responsibly managing reforms, and reconnecting governance with the grassroots. These obligations have become increasingly urgent in response to the rapidly changing realities confronting modern societies.

The experiences of Nigeria and the United Kingdom offer two compelling case studies in this regard. While both nations differ significantly in political history, economic structure, institutional development, and democratic maturity, they nevertheless provide valuable lessons concerning governance continuity, reform culture, institutional resilience, leadership accountability, mentorship and the dangers inherent in disconnecting governance from the people.

In Nigeria, governance transitions have historically been turbulent and complicated. Since independence in 1960, the country has oscillated between military rule and democratic governance, with each transition carrying its peculiar tensions and uncertainties. Military interventions repeatedly disrupted institutional continuity and weakened democratic culture. Excellent example is the Nigerian police force. Even within democratic dispensations, governance has frequently suffered from policy inconsistency, personality-driven administration, and weak institutional memory.

Indeed, one of the recurring tragedies of governance in Nigeria and indeed in many African countries is our tendency to build strong individuals instead of strong institutions. Once dominant personalities leave the scene, the structures built around them frequently collapse. Governance becomes excessively personalized rather than institutionalized. Examples lie in the way and manner public servants pledge loyalty to the personality of the president than the country or her constitution.

Successive governments often approach governance as though national development commenced with their emergence into office. Projects initiated by predecessors are abandoned, reforms become politicized and institutional continuity is sacrificed on the altar of political rivalry, ego, and vendetta. Unfortunately, these have become common features within Nigeria's governance landscape.

Yet, despite these shortcomings, Nigeria has also produced commendable examples of governance reforms that survived transitions precisely because they were effectively institutionalized. Using Lagos that we are all familiar with as an example, one of the most notable examples remains the establishment of the Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA), alongside institutions such as the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA), as well as environmental initiatives like the tree planting programme in Lagos State.

LAMATA, established during the administration of then Governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu in Lagos State, represented a deliberate attempt to create an enduring institutional framework for urban transportation management rather than a temporary political project tied to a single administration.

The significance of LAMATA extends beyond transportation infrastructure alone. Its real significance lies in governance continuity itself. Successive administrations in Lagos sustained and expanded the institutional vision, eventually culminating in transformational projects such as the Blue Rail Line and the Red Rail Line commissioned on February 29, 2024, by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR.

The continuity of these rail initiatives across multiple administrations represents one of the rare but commendable examples of governance sustainability in Nigeria. It proves conclusively that where institutions are properly structured and leadership embraces continuity over ego, developmental projects can survive political transitions and ultimately benefit society.

Similarly, the Lagos State Security Trust Fund provides another compelling example of governance innovation sustained through institutional continuity. Established in 2007 as a collaborative funding mechanism involving government, the private sector, and civil society, the initiative emerged in response to growing insecurity and the inadequacy of traditional budgetary allocations for security operations.

Over time, the Trust Fund evolved beyond the administration that conceived it and transformed into an enduring governance structure supporting security logistics, equipment procurement, operational efficiency, intelligence coordination, and inter-agency collaboration. Its survival across multiple administrations demonstrates that reforms rooted in institutional partnership rather than personal political ownership are far more likely to endure transitions successfully.

However, Nigeria also presents numerous painful examples of governance failures resulting from poor transitional management. The implementation challenges surrounding the Oronsaye Report remain a classic illustration. The report, conceived to rationalize government agencies and reduce the cost of governance, generated enormous public interest because it directly addressed one of Nigeria's most persistent governance problems, bureaucratic duplication and fiscal inefficiency.

Yet, despite repeated acknowledgments of its importance by successive administrations, implementation has remained inconsistent, hesitant, and politically contested. This exposes one of the greatest governance challenges confronting transitional societies: the inability to convert policy recommendations into sustainable institutional action due to vested interests, bureaucratic resistance, and political hesitation.

Indeed, many of the rail projects Lagos State currently struggles to actualize would probably have become realities decades ago but for the truncation of earlier initiatives during the administration of Admiral Ndubuisi Kanu, successor to Alhaji Lateef Jakande, alongside subsequent policy reversals that undermined continuity. The lesson remains painfully obvious: governance suffers gravely whenever transitions become opportunities for dismantling rather than consolidating previous achievements.

The crisis of policy inconsistency is equally evident in sectors such as education, petroleum, power, healthcare, and local government administration. Each administration often introduces

entirely new policy directions without consolidating previous reforms. The inevitable consequence is fragmented governance, wasted public resources, institutional confusion and declining citizen confidence.

No nation can achieve sustainable development where governance lacks continuity and long-term institutional planning.

Interestingly, the United Kingdom presents a contrasting governance culture shaped substantially by stronger institutional traditions. Unlike many developing democracies where governance is heavily personalized, British governance operates fundamentally through enduring institutions and constitutional conventions.

Governments may change. Prime Ministers may resign. Political parties may alternate in power. Yet the institutions of governance continue functioning with remarkable stability. The British civil service, parliamentary traditions, judiciary and local government structures collectively sustain continuity irrespective of political transitions.

The recent transitions from Prime Minister Boris Johnson to Liz Truss, and subsequently to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak within a relatively short period, offered a practical contemporary example of institutional resilience within the United Kingdom. Despite the instability generated by leadership changes within the Conservative Party, government institutions continued functioning without constitutional collapse.

Financial markets may have reacted nervously during certain periods, particularly following the controversial mini-budget under Liz Truss, yet institutional safeguards quickly responded to restore confidence. Parliamentary oversight, civil service continuity, party accountability and media scrutiny collectively ensured that governance remained functional despite political turbulence.

This underscores one of the most critical distinctions between mature democracies and fragile governance systems. In strong democracies, institutions absorb the shocks of political transitions. In weaker systems, transitions themselves often become existential crises because institutions are excessively dependent on personalities instead of systems.

The resilience demonstrated by American institutions during the aftermath of the 2020 United States presidential election, particularly during the January 6 Capitol crisis associated with supporters of former President Donald Trump, further reinforces this important lesson. The ability of institutions to withstand enormous pressure and still preserve constitutional order demonstrates why institutions must continually be nurtured, strengthened and protected.

Another powerful example from the United Kingdom concerns the National Health Service (NHS). Established in 1948, the NHS has survived numerous governments under both Labour and Conservative administrations because healthcare delivery is fundamentally treated as a national institutional responsibility rather than a partisan political project.

Although debates continue regarding funding challenges, privatization concerns, waiting times, and operational reforms, no government can simply dismantle the NHS because it has become deeply embedded within the institutional and social architecture of British governance. This reinforces the importance of building governance structures capable of transcending political cycles.

Nigeria still struggles profoundly with this culture of institutional permanence. Many governance initiatives remain vulnerable to political disruption because they are excessively tied to individuals rather than enduring institutional frameworks. Roads, schools, hospitals, and public projects are frequently branded politically instead of nationally. Consequently, successors sometimes abandon beneficial projects simply to avoid giving credit to predecessors.

Such governance immaturity undermines national development and wastes scarce public resources. Across the country today, abandoned public projects litter the landscape, not necessarily because of inadequate funding, but frequently because of political ego and institutional intolerance.

Mentorship also remains a critical issue in governance transition within both societies. In the United Kingdom, political parties consciously invest in grooming future leaders through parliamentary exposure, local government participation, policy engagement, and structured party development. Many British leaders emerge gradually through institutional political processes that expose them over time to the realities and responsibilities of governance.

While this system may not entirely eliminate incompetence, it nevertheless creates a more structured and sustainable leadership pipeline.

In Nigeria, however, mentorship within governance frequently suffers from transactional politics. Young people are often mobilized vigorously during elections but excluded from meaningful governance participation afterward. Political godfatherism frequently replaces genuine leadership grooming. Competence is sacrificed for loyalty, while public offices are distributed through patronage rather than merit.

The inevitable consequence is recurring leadership crises, institutional mediocrity and declining governance quality.

The #EndSARS protests of 2020 exposed this dangerous disconnect between governance and youth engagement. Beyond concerns relating to police brutality, the protests reflected deeper frustrations among young Nigerians concerning unemployment, exclusion, corruption, governance insensitivity and the absence of institutional trust.

Rather than dismissing such expressions merely as dissent, responsible leadership must recognize them as warning signals concerning governance legitimacy itself. Governments that fail to meaningfully engage younger generations risk deepening political alienation and social instability.

By contrast, the United Kingdom has increasingly emphasized youth inclusion, civic participation, and local governance engagement within democratic discourse. Although challenges still remain, British political institutions generally provide clearer pathways for participation through councils, party structures, policy forums, student unions, and community engagement systems.

This once again demonstrates the importance of reconnecting governance continuously with citizens at the grassroots.

Indeed, grassroots engagement remains one of the most critical yet neglected pillars of governance sustainability in many developing democracies. Governance disconnected from ordinary citizens inevitably loses legitimacy.

In Nigeria particularly, many local governments remain structurally weak despite constitutional recognition. Excessive centralization has weakened community participation and undermined local accountability. Citizens frequently perceive governance as distant, elitist and inaccessible. Consequently, virtually every Nigerian now looks toward the federal government for solutions even to localized challenges.

Yet, sustainable governance cannot exist without effective grassroots participation. Policies designed in isolation from local realities often fail during implementation. Effective governance requires constant interaction between leadership and communities. Traditional institutions, civil society organizations, youth groups, women associations, professional bodies and community stakeholders must remain active participants in governance processes.

The United Kingdom's local council structure offers valuable lessons in this regard. Local governments there play substantial roles in housing, waste management, social welfare administration, education support, local planning, and community services. Citizens therefore

experience governance not merely through Westminster politics but through visible local institutional engagement.

This strengthens accountability, responsiveness, and democratic participation at the grassroots level.

Nigeria's overcentralized governance structure continues to undermine similar effectiveness. Local governments frequently lack genuine financial autonomy and operational independence, thereby limiting their capacity to address grassroots needs effectively. Prior to the landmark Supreme Court judgment championed by the current administration under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, local government allocations were routinely subjected to state-level interference and control.

Meaningful governance reform in Nigeria must therefore include effective decentralization, stronger local governance structures and genuine financial autonomy capable of bringing governance closer to the people.

However, autonomy without accountability merely transfers inefficiency from one level of government to another. The enormous resources accruing to local governments since the assumption of office by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu have not significantly translated into visible democratic dividends in many areas. Financial independence must therefore always be accompanied by transparency, accountability, and measurable service delivery.

Another important area of comparison concerns leadership accountability and public trust. In the United Kingdom, public officials frequently resign over ethical breaches, policy failures, or public controversies. Ministers are subjected to rigorous parliamentary scrutiny and intense media interrogation. Though the system is by no means perfect, accountability culture remains institutionally stronger.

In Nigeria, unfortunately, accountability mechanisms often appear selective, inconsistent, and politically influenced. Public officials sometimes remain in office despite serious allegations, while oversight institutions struggle under political interference. This weakens public trust and fuels widespread cynicism toward governance itself.

Citizens cannot sustain confidence in institutions where accountability appears compromised or selective.

Economic governance equally presents significant transitional challenges in both countries. Nigeria currently confronts inflationary pressures, unemployment concerns, debt management challenges, currency instability, subsidy reforms and broader economic restructuring.

Transitional reforms such as fuel subsidy removal and foreign exchange liberalization illustrate the complexity of governance decisions during periods of economic transition. While such reforms may indeed be economically necessary, leadership must equally manage their social consequences compassionately, transparently, and responsibly.

Citizens are more likely to support difficult reforms where governments communicate honestly, demonstrate sacrifice, and provide credible social protection mechanisms.

It is within this context that the savings derived from fuel and electricity subsidy removals ought to be visibly invested in concrete developmental projects and infrastructure capable of improving the welfare of citizens, rather than dissipated through opaque distribution mechanisms vulnerable to abuse and diversion.

The United Kingdom similarly experienced economic governance turbulence following Brexit. The transition out of the European Union generated complicated trade, immigration, labour, and economic adjustments. Political divisions intensified, leadership changed repeatedly and public discourse became deeply polarized.

Yet, despite these tensions, institutional governance structures continued functioning, once again illustrating the importance of resilient democratic institutions during periods of transitional uncertainty.

Ultimately, the experiences of Nigeria and the United Kingdom reveal one fundamental truth about governance in transition: institutions matter far more than individuals.

Charismatic leadership may inspire temporary excitement, but only strong institutions can sustain governance continuity across generations. Nations progress when governance becomes institutional rather than personal, participatory rather than exclusionary, ethical rather than transactional and service-driven rather than power-driven.

In conclusion, sustaining the tradition of service through leadership, reform, mentorship, grassroots engagement, institutional continuity and democratic accountability remains one of the defining governance challenges of the twenty-first century.

Nigeria and the United Kingdom, despite their obvious differences, both demonstrate that governance transitions inevitably test the resilience of institutions, the sincerity of leadership, and the maturity of democratic culture.

For Nigeria particularly, the pathway toward sustainable governance lies in strengthening institutions, deepening accountability, empowering grassroots governance, prioritizing mentorship, protecting policy continuity and restoring public trust in public institutions.

Leadership must rise above the narrow pursuit of political survival and embrace the broader obligation of nation-building.

Governance, ultimately, is not about the temporary occupation of office. It is about preserving, strengthening, and improving institutions for future generations. Leaders are merely custodians of public trust. Their greatest legacy is not measured by the number of titles they acquire, but by the strength of the institutions they leave behind and the quality of service they sustain for posterity. This again is what the late Prince stood for.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless Lagos State, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the enduring memory of Prince Ademola Adeniji-Adele.