

After the Transaqua Breakthrough, Nigeria Comes to the Fore

H.E. Ambassador Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to Germany, spoke on Panel II of the Schiller Institute conference, on June 30, 2018.

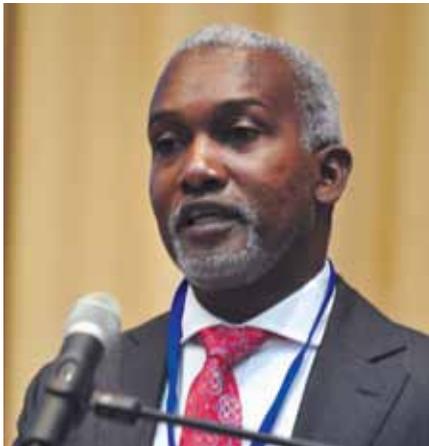
Thank you very much! Let me begin by commending the organizers, the Schiller Institute, for hosting such a conference, which seeks to discuss something that the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and I in particular, hold dear to our hearts, which is the inter-basin water transfer from the Congo Basin to the Lake Chad Basin.

When I was first invited, it was to a panel discussion, so I focused on simply having a discussion. The topic was to be, “After the Transaqua Breakthrough, Nigeria Comes to the Fore.” I decided, instead of preparing a speech, to just stick to my discussion, which is what I’m going to do while I stand here, so I hope you will not mind that.

Inter-Basin Water Transfer to Save Lake Chad

The inter-basin water transfer, like I said, seeks to transfer about 100 million cubic meters of water per year from the Congo Basin to the Lake Chad Basin, and in particular to Lake Chad itself, which has been shrinking over the years. It has been the subject of international discussion, because it underscores what most of us are concerned about, which is climate change, desertification, conflicts, because it happens that the Sahara region, and the Lake Chad Basin area in particular, is an area where a lot of these issues are coming together. So it’s the nexus for conflict, for migration, and for hydrocarbon exploration, because oil and gas have been discovered in Niger Republic, and in Chad. There are pipelines being built.

And of course, everyone knows about the Boko Haram conflict that was going on there. Thank God, it has been surmounted by the requisite collaboration between African countries, because the region happens to



Ambassador Yusuf Maitama Tuggar

be in one of the most complex cross-border areas in Africa, if not *the* most complex, where four countries meet: Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria. One of the reasons why there was a lag or delay in tackling the Boko Haram problem was that there was a failure to define it the way it is, which is a cross-border conflict, and to use the collaboration of the countries in the region to solve the problem.

Now this, thankfully, changed when the current President, Muhammadu Buhari, was sworn in, in 2015. Five days after his swearing in, he

embarked on a visit to Niger, to Cameroon, to Chad, and essentially said, “Look guys, we have to come together. We have to collaborate and solve this problem.”

Now this was no fluke, because he happened to also be a former governor of Borno State, which was ground zero for this conflict, so he understood the region very well. And he knew that historically, going back to tackle such problems, such as the case of Rabih Zubayr in 1897, and other such cases, you needed the collaboration of all the countries. At least since 1964, there’s always been an organ to tackle this sort of problem.

The water transfer issue is being spearheaded at the moment by the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Thank God, the foremost expert on this water transfer happens to be part of the panel, so I was happy to see his name there: Mr. Mohammed Bila. In fact, truth be told, he ought to have spoken before me so that I can just cruise after that, but be that as it may, I will do my best. But the technical details, the deeper insights into what is to be achieved, I’m sure he will explain.

China, Europe in African Development

I don’t want us to look at this project, or indeed, other developmental projects that are going on in Africa, and in Nigeria in particular, through the binary lens of China versus Europe—the sort of binary approach that is perhaps some sort of Cold War lag, where we think that if



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The Council of Ministers of the Lake Chad Basin Commission conference, February 2018.

China is playing, then Europe is out, or if Europe is playing, China is out. We need the cooperation, the collaboration of all three, because it's not just Europe and China either; Africa is also at the table and there is a need to ensure that Africa is always represented, and is part of the discussion that develops any solutions, be they infrastructure, development, migration, what-have-you, Africa needs to be a part of it.

One of the reasons why, with the Lake Chad issue, we need the full collaboration and participation of Europe, and not just China, is because this will be a part of the One Road, One Belt Initiative, which fits in *perfectly* with the concept of globalization, because it's about interconnectivity, which is the way we look at the world. This is what has happened over the course of human history. We have to redefine the map of the world, or the part of the world that we know, as we did before we even discovered that the whole world was a globe. So, we've gone from Terra Ruleriana, the Idrisi map which was actually upside down. He looked at it differently. So we also need to start looking at globalization, that connectivity.

We need to perhaps lay more emphasis on maps that highlight infrastructure lines, rail lines, transmission lines for electricity, roads, and so on and so forth, as opposed to more of the Halford Mackinder type of approach, which is to have a Eurasian World Island and then everything else beyond that is a Rim Land, it's a Shatterbelt; it's all of that. We need that collaboration, and the only way you can achieve these sorts of developmental and infrastructure leap-frogging initiatives in Africa is when you utilize the existing knowledge, the existing database.

And this is where Europe has a critical role to play, because, I have to say, it is for me, it's perhaps *kismet* that we happen to be holding this gathering in no less a place than Germany. Because some of the earliest irregular migrants that were received in the Lake Chad Basin area happened to be from Germany! It was Heinrich Barth in the 1850s, it was Gustav Nachtigal; it was his nephew (I forget his name now), a priest who did a lot of extensive studies of the flora and fauna, the culture and much more about the Lake Chad area. Perhaps there is a need to tap into all that knowledge and data that was gathered, to be able to transfer huge volumes of water from the Congo Basin to Lake Chad, which would completely transform the sub-region, if not the entire continent. With such a feat, you would generate elec-

tricity, you would provide water for irrigation, provide transportation and fishing activities—so much. Work would be provided for the teeming youth, who are always looking to make that desert crossing—so the issue of irregular migration would also be touched by such a project.

Quite a bit of ground has been covered. I remember when the President of Nigeria was sworn in. Shortly after that, I had a meeting with him, and I was emphasizing the need for the current administration to make progress on water transfer. I talked to him about the 1990s, when some of these efforts were initiated, and 2000, when on the legislative side in Nigeria, a committee was created that was meant to be a regional committee for the Lake Chad, to tackle some of the funding issues, some of the sensitive issues, so each member country would have two legislators representing them on the Lake Chad Basin Commission. He told me, "Look, I became involved in this and took up interest in this in the 1970s." This was when he was Petroleum Minister, when he flew with then President Obasanjo, and the Foreign Affairs Minister Joe Garba, to meet with Ahmadou Ahidjo in Cameroon.

So you see, it goes all the way back. It's something that needs to be done. These are the sorts of transformative projects that we need to be able to achieve what we keep mentioning, sustainable development. Sustainable development is not going to be achieved by simply listing goals. We need to identify these sorts of transformative projects, to fund them, support them, see them through to fruition. The only way that we will be able to achieve that is if we all put our hands together—hands and heads. So it's China, it's Europe, it's Africa.

Thank you very much.