

**Speech by Governor Fashola, Rhodes House, Oxford
Monday 17 September 2011**

Thank you very much indeed for inviting me here tonight.

I am told that Cecil Rhodes, after whom this institution is named, was once asked how long he thought his fame would endure in memory. Rhodes replied, with that natural modesty and understatement for which the British are so famous, "I give myself four thousand years."

For the past four years, I have had the great privilege of being Governor of Lagos State. Unlike Cecil Rhodes, I have no great ambition to be remembered in four thousand years' time. But if by the end of the four years of my second term I've done something to enhance the reputation of the great city which I lead, I shall feel that I have spent my time in a worthwhile way.

We're all too familiar with the caricatures of Africa – a continent which gets itself into the international news largely because of wars, corruption and natural disasters.

Nobody would deny that there are huge problems and challenges in Africa – and indeed in my city of Lagos itself. But I don't have to tell this audience that alongside all these difficulties Africa can boast great assets, significant achievements and enormous opportunities.

And in all of Africa, I would contend that the place where the opportunities are greatest is my own city of Lagos.

Lagos is a megacity. The United Nations definition of a megacity is a conurbation of more than ten million people. Lagos currently has 18 million, and the UN calculates that in another three years' time, by 2015, it will have 25 million. That will make it the third largest city in the world – bigger than anywhere else except Tokyo and Mumbai.

Of course it's a challenge finding jobs, homes, roads, schools and healthcare for all those people. But as the city expands and flourishes, it offers huge opportunities – opportunities both for our own people and for international investors.

I am a Lagosian. I grew up in the city. I was educated there and went on to practise as a lawyer there. In short, I am an omo eko as we say in Yoruba, a child of Lagos.

And my confidence for the future of the city is rooted very strongly in my memory of its past. There were bad years, certainly, in that past. In the 1980s and 1990s, we saw great political upheaval. Democracy was curtailed. Corruption was rife. Investment stalled.

The authorities failed to build the schools, hospitals, roads and extra sanitation systems that were needed to keep pace with the rise in the population. And many of the brightest and the best emigrated to other countries.

But I'm old enough to remember a time before that. In the 1960s and 1970s, we enjoyed stability and prosperity. The schools that I attended were good ones. The electricity worked. I knew that when I went to the bus stop that the Number 88 from Yaba to Surulere would turn up reliably every half an hour.

During the bad years of the 80s and 90s, there were plenty of physical signs of decline: roads that were badly maintained and increasingly clogged with traffic; schools where class sizes became too big for even the best teachers to be able to give young people the education they deserved. But the most important change was in the attitude of people. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a spirit of optimism. People looked forward to their city becoming steadily better – to their lives becoming more prosperous – to their ambitions being fulfilled, their talents properly used. They looked out for each other. And they valued integrity and honesty. When I was at school, it was unthinkable, if you borrowed someone's pen, that you would consider for a moment hanging onto it instead of giving it back.

That spirit became eroded. Corruption and dishonesty started to creep in. And worst of all, people lost hope and confidence. Our economy declined. Our national currency steadily lost its value. We became less and less self-sufficient and depended more and more on imports. And some of those imports made our infrastructure problems worse still – foreign cars with inadequate roads on which to drive them, foreign fridges and washing machines without enough power to make them work. In this new millennium, we in Lagos have turned another corner.

And when I became Governor in 2007, I was determined that we would fully recover the attitude which I remembered from my own young years in the 1960s and 1970s.

There were big challenges in rebuilding the physical infrastructure of the city. But the greatest challenge was to rebuild its mental infrastructure – the values on which we base our society. To replace apathy and cynicism with hope and optimism. That's a challenge not just for Lagos but for the whole of Nigeria and indeed for the whole of Africa.

We used to have those values in Lagos – and we are, I firmly believe, well on the way to recapturing them. They are the values of hard work, honesty and integrity. They are values which mean that we must all subject ourselves to the law of the land without discrimination; values that entail that offenders are punished no matter how high the position they hold; values that earn us respect locally and internationally.

We are not there yet. There is still plenty of cynicism, plenty of defeatism, too much dishonesty. But, thanks to the very talented and hard-working team who support me, we are doing our best to change attitudes.

I've been described as a technocrat. I don't mind that description if it means that I am committed to efficiency and to getting things done. And there's certainly room for that kind of commitment in Nigeria.

Take timekeeping for example. One of the first things that I did when I became Governor was to insist that meetings started on time. I made it compulsory that members of the executive council - that's the commissioners and the special advisers - arrived on time so that our Monday agenda-setting meeting began PROMPTLY at 9am - not ten past nine, not 9.30 - nine o'clock on the dot. I once, after a very late night working, had to come to an early morning meeting without taking a shower. Showering is important – but punctuality in my book is even more important. I knew that, if I was ever late, it would be hard to persuade others to be on time. But don't worry – I don't make a habit of skipping my ablutions!

But being a technocrat is not enough. You have to have a vision as well. And our vision is firmly rooted in those values which I have outlined and which we are determined to pass on to the new generation of Lagosians.

When I was young, like other people of my age, I was encouraged to join the Boy Scouts. Bodies like the Scouts, the Boys Brigade and the Red Cross do an enormous amount of good work in teaching young people the values of service, teamwork and leadership. I am proud that our Government has revived these organisations in all of our public schools today.

Lagos may be a megacity. But its future depends on the individual effort of each of its citizens. If we capture the hearts and minds of those individual citizens when they are young, we have the opportunity to make a huge difference for the future.

And Lagos is a city of young people. We mirror the demographic profile of Nigeria as a whole. About 70% of the population of the country are below forty years old. It means we have the qualities of youthfulness, energy and enterprise that any developing nation requires. It also means that there is a good proportion of people in the workforce earning money and paying taxes to support those who have retired.

Contrast Nigeria – the biggest country in Africa – with China, the biggest country in the world. China has accomplished a great deal in recent years. Its progress has been remarkable and its growth rate has been extraordinarily high. But in the coming decades, the Chinese face a real problem. Because they have pursued their one child policy for so long, their workforce is ageing and the proportion of retired people to those in work has been steadily rising.

That's a problem that Nigeria – with our young dynamic population – simply doesn't have. We hear a lot about the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – the countries which are forging ahead as the older economic powerhouses of the West falter. I want to make a prediction. I think we are on the brink of being able to talk about.... the BRINC – Brazil, Russia, India, NIGERIA and China.

Nigeria has great natural resources – land, forests, oil, gas, bitumen, coal, cocoa, gold and very plentiful supplies of water.

Even more importantly, we have immense human resources in our population of over 150 million people. And we're achieving an economic growth rate of almost 7%, which is the envy of most other countries in the world.

Good infrastructure is one of the keys to this. Let me tell you what we're doing in Lagos to contribute to all this. If you have had the pleasure of visiting my city in the past, you may have had rather longer than you intended to take in the attractions of some parts of the city because you were stuck in the traffic. We've made road building a major priority. In the past three and a half years, as a single city, we've built more roads than they have in two of our neighbouring countries – Ghana and Sierra Leone.

What makes that achievement even more significant is the nature of our geography. Lagos is a very low-lying area. When you build close to the coast, almost seventy per cent of the cost goes into drainage. The route of the new Lagos to Badagary expressway for instance goes through marshland. That means drainage which is three feet deep and three feet wide. But we've overcome the problems and the road is well on the way to completion.

I've also drawn on my schoolboy memories of that reliable number 88 bus to rebuild a modern rapid transit system. The rickety old yellow buses are a thing of the past. We now have a fleet of over a thousand new buses, driven by a team of 1,200 professionals, many of whom have returned from overseas.

And we're developing a light rail system as well to service the new free trade zone we're building in Lekki. Reliable and fast transport is only one of the many assets that this project will offer international investors. The zone will have a deep-sea port and its own airport and when it is finally fully built it may end up being the biggest free trade zone in Africa - four times the size of Manhattan.

Another essential aspect of any city – whether mega or micro – is that it should be clean and green. For a long time, Lagos was neither. It was known for its dirtiness and could best be described as a concrete jungle. We are well on the way to transforming that image. We've managed to establish a great many green parks and open spaces – good for health, good for the environment, and good for giving our young people the chance for sport and recreation.

We're cleaning the city up too. We are now recognised as the cleanest State in Nigeria and experts from the other states beat a regular path to our door to find out how we've done it. The short answer is through the entrepreneurial vision of our people – people like Jojolewa, a lady who worked as a street sweeper. The Lagos Government has awarded her a franchise to sweep her area of the city and she now employs over a hundred people to do it.

Meanwhile our waste managers have bought over four thousand modern compactor trucks to keep on top of the rubbish which a megacity like Lagos inevitably produces.

One of the huge challenges which we face is to provide enough decent affordable housing for our expanding population. Lagos is growing faster than any other city in the world – and space is not unlimited. We've undertaken two measures to help people get a roof over their heads that they can afford. First we're developing a comprehensive mortgage scheme to make more residents home owners. I have seen here in Britain the benefits of home ownership to the quality of life, and I am determined that Lagos should move in the same direction.

Secondly, we have just enacted a new tenancy law to protect the rights of tenants and landlords. You'll be surprised to know that until now Lagosians renting for the first time had to pay a full two years rent upfront. Even sitting tenants had to pay for a year ahead. The new law reduces the amount of rent a landlord can demand upfront by half.

Another huge challenge has been healthcare. We've developed a community health insurance model that takes account of the particular nature of our population. The majority of people in Lagos work in the informal sector of the economy where incomes tend to be low and irregular and where few have bank accounts. We piloted a scheme that encouraged citizens to pay insurance contributions in return for a guarantee that they will be looked after if they fall ill.

Between us, the State Government and local government subsidise the cost of healthcare that we buy from private providers. The scheme, which is based on global best practice, is being steadily rolled out to the whole population.

So health, transport, the environment and housing are all big priorities. But when I embarked on my second term earlier this year, I put another issue right at the top of the list – law and order. That is the pre-condition for us to achieve all our aims and aspirations.

We have made progress. We have a security model – the Lagos State Security Trust Fund. It's released far more resources for the police and it's become a blueprint in Nigeria for other states to copy. We have reduced armed robberies by over 80% and cut the murder rate by 75%. The police

now get back 85% of the vehicles that are stolen. Before 2008, bank robbers were carrying out successful raids every month, and getting away with it because the police did not have the capacity to respond.

There's not been a single successful bank robbery since that year.

But we have further to go in reducing crime. I want to see a society in which everyone plays by the rules – in business and in their private lives alike, where people pay their taxes, drive in the proper lanes, build only where the regulations say you can build – and a society where all these rules apply just as much to the rich as to the poor.

As we deal with all these issues, we appreciate the help that we have had from the international community, and in particular from the Department for International Development in Britain. Tonight's event in this beautiful hall is just the latest example of the close cooperation we have enjoyed with the British Government. Yes we are proud to be Lagosians and Nigerians, but we are not inward looking.

We value international contacts and particularly the chance to trade internationally. I have recently been host both to the British Prime Minister David Cameron and to the Lord Mayor of London Alderman Michael Bear.

Nigeria has long ties with Britain. Many aspects of our society – our democracy, our education, our legal system – are very close to British models. There are many Nigerians settled and working in Britain. Nigeria as a country and Lagos as a State offer huge opportunity to British investors. Lagos, incidentally, now has the largest economy of any sub-region in Africa. Like the British Government, we are strong believers in public-private partnerships.

They are essential to our vision of the megacity of the future. So we do everything we can to encourage international companies to join us to build new roads, new schools and new hospitals. Look around Lagos and you'll see how much these partnerships are changing the face of the city. I hope that Lagos can become something of a role model for the rest of the continent. We generate 70% of our resources ourselves.

We look to the Federal Government for a smaller proportion of our public finance than any other Nigerian State. And we have done that not by increasing taxes but by increasing our tax take. When I became Governor, the tax burden fell almost entirely on those in the public sector and in large companies where tax was deducted at source from staff pay packets. Large numbers of people in smaller companies – some of them quite wealthy – were able to avoid tax. We've tightened that up very considerably, so that the tax burden is fairer and that public funds are greater.

And the response we've had has probably surprised me more than anything I've seen in my time as Governor. It's been on the whole very positive. People have actually come to us and asked where and how they can pay. It's remarkable. What it illustrates is that so long as Lagosians can see their taxes at work – see the new roads and hospitals and schools being built - they're proud to play their part in providing the resources needed.

In Lagos and in Nigeria, we've watched closely the remarkable events of the past year taking place in the Middle East and in particular to the north of us in Libya. As your Prime Minister said in Lagos recently, "The future of Africa is yours. But you have to seize it." He went on, "I hope that, with the Arab spring, the countries of North Africa and of other parts of the Arab world can look to countries

like Nigeria and cities like Lagos for inspiration.” Let me assure David Cameron that we in Lagos have every intention of doing our best to rise to that challenge.

We live in a global community. As a consequence, countries as diverse as the United Kingdom and Nigeria share many of the same problems. There’s one sense in which we are perhaps becoming closer. Anyone in public life in either country is all too aware of the low esteem in which politicians are held. In Nigeria, to my knowledge, none of our politicians has cleaned a moat or built a duck house out of public funds. But in the past they certainly abused their positions in all kinds of other ways.

It will take a long time to change public perceptions. But I happen to believe that politics is an honourable calling. The opportunity to serve the people is the greatest honour that anybody can have. And if the people you are serving belong to the community where you grew up and have lived your whole life that makes the job even more worthwhile.

I admit the role can be exhausting. I haven’t taken a holiday since I was first elected in 2007. There’ve been many late nights and early mornings. But I am fortunate in having a very patient and supportive wife!

And the rewards are immense – when you can see the difference that your policies are making. We are fortunate to be living in extraordinary times, times when change is perhaps faster and more profound than ever before. Amidst all the challenges that those times pose, there are great opportunities for transforming people’s lives for the better. And that is what I am determined to do in the next four years.

Not the least of the rewards that go with my role is the chance to come to places like this and to exchange views with people with a great interest and a wealth of knowledge about Africa like yourselves. So I thank you once again very sincerely for inviting me here.