

“Looking Back: A Returning Diplomat’s Perspective on Nigeria Today”

Abuja Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines & Agriculture

Transcorp Hilton Hotel

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Ladies and gentlemen, I am new to the Embassy in Abuja, but I am pleased to say that I am not new to Nigeria. In 1998, after serving as the head of the Nigeria desk at the State Department in Washington, I arrived in Lagos to serve as the Embassy’s economic counselor. One thing I vividly remember from that tour is the great respect that Nigerians have for language and the art of public speaking. Having been trapped behind a desk in the Green Zone in Baghdad, Iraq, for the past two years, I am a bit rusty at the podium, so please allow me to take refuge in that time-honored Nigerian custom of declaring simply: “Good afternoon, and all protocols duly observed.”

In fact, I had such a great tour in Nigeria that I was truly delighted by the chance to return, this time as the deputy chief of mission. When I looked back at my service in Nigeria, I realized that my best memories were of my travels to the different states and regions of this great, vast country. Whenever I was on the road and needed help, someone would always step forward with directions, sound advice, or -- at a surprisingly reasonable price -- petrol on a side street.

Wherever I went, people were always generous with their time and their hospitality. Thus, I left with great affection for the Nigerian people, their music, their culture, and their sharp sense of humor.

There are always risks for a diplomat returning to a country for an encore assignment. He invariably knows less than he thinks he does and more has changed than he can initially grasp.