COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE FEDERATION OF AFRICAN PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATIONS (FAPRA) AT THE END OF ITS 17TH ALL AFRICAN PUBLIC RELATIONS CONFERENCE HELD AT THE NICON HILTON HOTEL, ABUJA, NIGERIA, 24-26 MAY 2004

A. PREAMBLE

The 17th All African Public Relations Conference of the Federation of African Public Relations Associations (FAPRA) held at the NICON Hilton Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria, from 24 - 26 May 2004. The Conference, which focused on "**African, Good Governance and the Challenges of Public Relations",** was declared open by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, represented by the Honourable Minister of Information and National Orientation, Chief Chukwuemeka Chikelu.

A total of 18 papers and speeches were presented during the three-day conference with over 300 participants drawn from Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, United Kingdom and the United States of America. The syndicate and interactive sessions enabled the participants to examine critically all the papers in a frank, responsible and systematic manner.

B. RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the deliberations, the following resolutions and recommendations were considered and adopted.

1. Good governance, founded on high level of transparency, accountability, honesty, social responsibility, respect for human rights and the rule of law, is essential for the effective development of Africa. African leaders and governments were, therefore, called upon to embrace the principles of openness, transparency, accountability, and respect for the rule of law and fundamental human rights in governance to impact positively on the lives of Africans.

2. Empirical studies clearly show that Africans generally prefer democratic rule to dictatorship and would support any good government that promotes democracy. Consequently, African leaders should be more transparent and accountable as well as providing good services and infrastructure to the citizens.

3. There is a need for planned, focused and sustained efforts at creating, maintaining and

sustaining cordial relationships within and outside government in order to achieve good governance. African leaders should, therefore, use effective public relations to regularly evaluate public opinions, attitudes and perceptions of all stakeholders within and outside their countries.

4. African leaders do not adequately involve their people in decision-making processes, hence apathy is prevalent among the populace. African leaders should therefore create an enabling and conducive environment for popular participation through openness and transparency.

5. Public relations practitioners in Africa tend to rush into designing actions and communication programmes without adequate environmental scanning. The Conference enjoined public relations practitioners to be more pro-active in the analysis of issues and events and provide early warning signals to governments for the sustainable of good governance.

6. Globalization has created an urgent need for African countries to observe certain international standards to remain competitive in the global economy. All African countries should, therefore, endeavour to conform to international standards in order to attract more foreign investments.

7. Compared to other regions of the world, Africa has not been able to attract sufficient foreign investment because of factors, including high level of corruption, poor infrastructure, political instability and insecurity. The Conference called on African governments to institute measures to counter all the negative factors that impede the flow of investments into the continent.

8. Conference observed that the investment promotion efforts of African Countries were hampered by the multiplicity of agencies and spokespersons who often expressed conflicting and divergent views on similar issues, thereby confusing potential investors. To attract foreign investments, therefore, African countries were advised to ensure proper coordination of all relevant agencies concerned with

investment promotions to ensure that only consistent messages are disseminated to all stakeholders in and outside their countries

9. Considering the vibrant quest for international investments, African countries should be conscious of the negative perception of the continent in the global community, and so adopt corrective measures based on well-informed research. In this regard, African governments were urged to carry out regular country image studies which would provide essential information for promoting tourism, investment and trade; as well as collectively ensuring a new, desirable image for Africa.

10. Generally, Africans seem to have a negative image of their continent. There is the need for a re-orientation of Africans to change their perception of the continent to highlight and emphasize its positive attributes rather than the negative ones. Public relations practice should be applied to demonstrate solutions rather than continuously identifying problems. Therefore, in marketing Africa, while acknowledging the problems of the continent, public relations practitioners and other communicators should focus more on highlighting the successes and achievements of the continent rather than its shortcomings.

11. Good governance anchored on NEPAD, Africa's home-grown development initiative which has the support of the G8 and the UN General Assembly, should be pursued vigorously by African countries to ensure enhanced development and full participation by civil society. Therefore, African governments should embark on rigorous publicity and enlightenment campaign on the activities and programmes of NEPAD so as win and retain public support.

12. The regional economic blocs in Africa do not seem to be vibrant enough to meet the needs of the continent. Therefore, Conference called on African governments to revitalize and strengthen them to enhance their potentials as engines of development on the continent.

13. Political instability, ethnic and communal clashes are rampant in Africa and tend to

portray the continent in bad light internationally, as scare potential investors. Consequently, in managing the various crises in their countries and the continent, African leaders should put in place effective and efficient strategies for managing conflicts and ensuring lasting peace, stability, and economic development.

14. Governments in Africa tend not to be imaginative, innovative and pro-active in their diplomatic efforts to protect and project the image of their countries. African governments and public relations professionals should adopt the **public diplomacy strategy** in projecting their country's image abroad as opposed to the traditional **government-to- government diplomacy.**

15. There is a glaring paucity of documented African indigenous public relations ideas, strategies and approaches. African public relations scholars and practitioners should, therefore, strive harder to develop an authentic African body of knowledge in the art and science of Public Relations.

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