Bissimilahir Rahmanir Raheem,

(PROTOCOLS)

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to start by reaffirming that all protection comes from Allah alone, and it is with His help alone that we can succeed over the evildoers. The believers have nothing to fear or grieve, and Allah is the best disposer of our affairs.

Today, I stand before you to emphasize the critical importance of regional cooperation and integration in combating the rampant insecurity plaguing the Northern region of Nigeria. In recent years, the Northwest particularly has faced an alarming surge in various forms of insecurity, including banditry, kidnapping, insurgency, and communal conflicts. These challenges have disrupted the lives of countless Nigerians and hindered economic growth and development in the area. Addressing this crisis requires a concerted effort and a unified approach, transcending state boundaries.

The Northwest region of Nigeria comprises seven states: Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kaduna, Kebbi, and Jigawa. The diversity within this region is immense, encompassing a rich tapestry of cultures and traditions. Yet, this diversity should not divide us; instead, it should serve as a source of strength and unity in our quest for peace and security. The governors of the Northwest agreed early on to cooperate on the issues of security and economic development in the region.

The North-eastern part of the country was bedeviled with insurgency and rampant terrorism and criminality for a very long period. The aftermath of Boko Haram and splinter organizations left a society that was completely displaced, permanently traumatized, and socioeconomically decimated. All thanks to Allah, we are now witnessing a reversal in the region, and people and communities slowly rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

To understand the significance of regional cooperation in the fight against insecurity, several factors must be considered. The first is the cross-border nature of insecurity. Our experience with bandits shows that they operate freely between Katsina, Zamfara, and Sokoto. Any effort to push them out of one state leads them to safe havens in neighboring states, and they often return to their original base. The lack of information sharing between states has also contributed to a poorly coordinated approach by the different federal government security agencies operating in the region. The region's collective decline in socioeconomic development is a significant driver of criminality. Lastly, there is no comprehensive framework for a regional or integrated approach in the fight against insecurity.

Alhamdulliah, in Katsina State, we have now seen a rapid decline in insecurity. I can tell you that the fight against insecurity is not easy, and it is not cheap, but it is not insurmountable. I decided

the fight against insecurity would be my priority the moment I decided to run for the office of governor of Katsina state. When I won the primaries, I consulted extensively with experts to develop the Katsina State Community Watch Corps. As a former local government chairman, I knew the power of supporting people to defend their communities. I did not want an unformalized, unregulated, and unaccountable group of people promoted to fight insecurity. Protecting lives and livelihoods is a religious and civic duty for all.

Because the Northwest governors are already aligned in their quest to fight insecurity in the region, the inauguration of the Katsina State Community Watch Corps had all the governors in the region in attendance or highly represented. As you now know, Sokoto and Zamfara States have launched similar outfits. The importance of regional cooperation meant that these states could learn from our mistakes and improve on our model. Subsequently, more cooperation would bring even greater effectiveness in our quest to eradicate banditry and all forms of insecurity in the region.

Regional cooperation to fight insecurity is not a new concept. Even in medieval times, kingdoms cooperated for the greater good. Most developed countries cooperate militarily and share intelligence for their collective security. In Nigeria, the Southwest has Amotekun, conceptualized as a regional security outfit. The elephant in the room when it comes to states taking charge of security has to do with establishing state police. It is essential to understand that the outfits the state creates to fight insecurity are not traditional law enforcement agencies. For example, they will not deal with disputes between two people, cases of fraud, or white-collar crimes. Their operations are usually joint with federal government agencies, and where arrests are made, they are mandated by law to turn over detained suspects to the relevant federal authorities. This high vertical integration between community-level defences and federal government agencies will be instrumental in the fight against insecurity.

We are committed to building a sustainable framework for regional cooperation in the Northwest and the entire country. The level of insecurity has now mandated the need to have open discussions about innovative solutions to fight insecurity. We must take into account all stakeholders and absolutely and immediately provide support and protection to the victims of insecurity. The regional approach requires targeted coordination towards socioeconomic development to reduce poverty and associated insecurity. To this end, the Northwest governors approached the African Development Bank to solicit investments in agriculture and power.

We are now embarking on an inaugural Northwest Peace and Security Summit in partnership with UNDP to bring all stakeholders and our best minds together to find solutions to the ongoing insecurity in the region. The next frontier for economic development in the North is the mining sector. I can assure you that it cannot be developed without absolute security for investors and their investments across the region. I want to conclude by asking you to imagine that this venue was under any form of security threat. At that point, all our differences would be set aside, and we would all fight it together. That is the importance and necessity of cooperation. Political and

personal aspersions do not have a place when it comes to securing the lives and livelihoods of Nigerians.

I thank you once again for having me as a guest speaker, and I look forward to a very productive engagement with some of you. I encourage you to continue with your determination in the fight against insecurity in the North and Nigeria.

May Allah guide and protect our leaders, security agencies, and all well- meaning Nigerians in the fight against insecurity.