

## President Obasanjo Biography



Olusegun Obasanjo served as President of Nigeria from May 1999 to May 2007. It was the culmination of a life spent on the front line of African politics. In 2008 he was appointed by the United Nations as a special envoy for Africa and has since overseen democratic elections on behalf of the African Union and Ecowas in countries across the continent. He has since emerged as an advocate for investment into the country and with the launch of his Foundation will tackle issues critical to advance across the Continent.

Obasanjo became President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1999, following the demise of the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha. After fifteen years of repressive rule that saw Nigeria slip into pariah status internationally, Obasanjo quickly emerged as the front-runner to lead the country's historic transition back to democracy. He had suffered firsthand the brutality of the Abacha regime, having been imprisoned in 1995 on fabricated charges of plotting a coup to depose him.

Leadership was first thrust upon him in 13th February 1976 when he narrowly escaped an assassination attempt that killed Nigeria's military ruler, Murtala Mohammed. As deputy he took over as head of state and vowed to restore civilian rule once the conditions for democracy were

established. True to his word he gave way to Shehu Shagari, the winner of elections held in 1979, to date the only voluntary handover from military to civilian rule in Nigerian history.

Obasanjo's elected term in office was characterized by a commitment to the rule of law, economic and political reform. He worked to rebuild institutions wrecked by decades of neglect, repression and mismanagement. This included the appointment of key, reform minded technocrats such as the finance minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and education minister Obiageli Ezekwesili - both internationally respected leaders in their fields.

Selecting Charles Soludo as Governor of the Central Bank paved the way for consolidation in the country's banking sector, transforming it into one of the most dynamic industries on the continent. Liberalisation of the telecommunications sector has allowed Nigeria to become Africa's largest and fastest growing markets for ICTs.

He created the country's first Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, which secured in excess of 275 convictions, including high profile members of Nigeria's elite, recovering a total of \$5bn in assets. This was the first time in the country's history that public officials were prosecuted for the misuse of state funds.

With high oil prices, Obasanjo's government oversaw a doubling of Nigeria's average economic growth rate to 6 per cent. Foreign reserves rose from \$3.7 billion in 1999 to \$45 billion in 2007. Sound economic stewardship helped Obasanjo secure \$18 billion in debt relief from Western creditors and his government used burgeoning state revenues to pay down a further \$14 billion in dues leaving Nigeria almost debt free.

He is also a role model for the youth of Africa. He established the African Leadership Forum, which organises workshops advocating African solutions to African problems through better leadership, state capacity building and the encouragement of private enterprise. The Presidential Library complex he is building in his home town of Abeokuta will be the first of its kind in Africa - an enduring testament to his leadership, and a model for the rest of the continent.

Outside of Nigeria he has been central in the regeneration and repositioning of the African Union. Together with former South African president Thabo Mbeki he led the creation of the African Peer Review Mechanism designed to engender and promote the ideals of democracy and good governance, and the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

After serving his country for eight years and restoring the respect of its continental peers and the international community, Obasanjo stepped down in 2007. His role as Africa's ambassador-at-large has continued.

In 2008 he was appointed special Envoy on the Great Lakes region by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and continues to be an integral actor in mediation efforts in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Obasanjo has also served as the African Union's Special Envoy for Togo's 2010 Presidential elections, as well as South Africa's presidential polls in 2009.

As the Special Envoy for ECOWAS, his role in diffusing the crisis that threatened civil war in Cote D'Ivoire 2011 was vital. When democracy was once again threatened in Senegal during controversial presidential polls in March 2012, he promptly led the joint African Union and Ecowas mission to resolve the standoff, paving the way for a smooth transition and pulling one of Africa's oldest democracies back from the brink.

Outside the political arena Obasanjo has been a catalyst in driving Africa's economic transformation. The region is now amongst the fastest growing in the world, rapidly becoming the destination of choice for international investors looking to emerging and frontier markets. Using his experience as a successful farmer and businessman in Nigeria he is actively engaging this community to facilitate more investment into the continent. Obasanjo will achieve this vision through the Africa Investment Council (AIC) a platform of distinguished leaders working to provide advocacy, thought-leadership, collaboration and best-practices on sustainable investment into Africa. He is presently an advisor to New World Capital; an investment advisory firm providing interested parties with market access, investment advisory and co-investment opportunities across the continent.

President Obasanjo is also Founder of the Olusegun Obasanjo Foundation, a UK based charity that has a mission of advancing Human Security for All. The Foundation has wide ranging initiatives of Feeding Africa, Youth Empowerment, Education for Girls and a health initiative focused on non-communicable and water borne diseases.

As Africa assumes an increasingly central role in international policy and business the continent will continue to have an unwavering advocate in Obasanjo.