

**SPEECH BY THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF OSUN, OGBENI RAUF AREGBESOLA, AS THE VISITOR,
AT THE SECOND CONVOCAION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OSUN, AT THE MAIN CAMPUS IN OSOGBO
ON JULY 27, 2012**

Protocols,

Power is responsibility

It gives me immeasurable pleasure to be here and be part of the grand occasion of today, the second convocation ceremonies of this university. I congratulate the university on the joy of today and in spite of the teething problems it had at inception. I congratulate also the graduating students who, having toiled to complete their various courses, are looking forward to a bright and fulfilling future, irrespective of the gloom of the job market and other causes of anxiety in society.

At these ceremonies, the university will be rolling out 657 graduates from five of its seven colleges, 20 of them with first class honours. This is a vast improvement from last year when 362 students were graduated during the institution's maiden convocation ceremonies.

As these students are unleashed, so to speak, on society, it is in the womb of time how the products of the institution will turn out to be. It is my fervent hope and prayer that they will turn out to be of the highest quality such that the society and the graduates themselves would have been done a great deal and not short-changed.

This brings me to the pertinent question of the university and its place in society. To be sure, universities emerged as an offshoot of the educational arm of religious institutions but were basically academies for providing universal education and studying the universe and interpreting it. For a very long time, between the time the first university in Europe, University of Bologna, was established in Italy in 1088, and the Industrial Revolution in mid-19th Century, universities taught mainly natural philosophy, logic, medicine, theology, mathematics, astronomy (and astrology), law, grammar and rhetoric. It was not until the post Industrial Revolution era that science and technology emerged as serious disciplines. From then on, universities have set the pace for society and responded to challenges within society. Indeed, universities are saddled with providing high level manpower for government, arts and entertainment and the industrial society.

The first university in Nigeria, University of Ibadan, was established in 1948 as a campus of University of London. It was the main elite recruitment ground and manpower development centre for the colonial government, the emerging economy and the educational cadre. Even with this school, the bulk of graduates were still being trained in the universities in United Kingdom and later the United States and so all the graduates from Ibadan were being mopped up.

Those who went to Ibadan in the halcyon days would regale us with tales of how they were interviewed in their hostel rooms for jobs in their final year (or were they the ones interviewing the employers, since they would eventually sign up for the employer who provided better incentives which included a bigger and more prestigious car?).

The curriculum was not planned to suit national need. That probably explained why Latin was a very popular course and graduates of Physics were recruited as pioneer professionals in the department of government that was the precursor to Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). The medical school, the University College Hospital (UCH), was the only institution of the school whose relevance to society could never be subject to debate and will continue to remain so.

From a single university in 1948, there are now 37 federal universities, 37 state universities and 50 private universities, mostly offering generalist courses, with few specialising in Agriculture and Technology and recently a police college upgraded to a degree awarding institution. With the army of those educated abroad, including Ghana, there are hardly enough jobs for the graduates. We are back to how I began: what is (or what should be) the role of the university in society?

The committee on higher education in the United Kingdom, set up in 1963 and headed by Lord Robbins wrote a report which gave four main objectives for a university namely:

instruction in skills; the promotion of the general powers of the mind so as to produce not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women; to maintain research in balance with teaching, since teaching should not be separated from the advancement of learning and the search for truth; and to transmit a common culture and common standards of citizenship.

From this, it is apparent that universities are not just institutions for awarding degrees but a very central institution of control in a society. From the mid 20th Century to now, we have seen the dominant role universities have played in the developed world. Universities are usually in the forefront of any social challenge, especially with the power of research being focussed on areas that will promote human development and solve existential problems. From the ongoing AIDS conference in the United States, there are reports that mankind is just on the verge of conquering HIV and tuberculosis. Research is ongoing in their universities on all human challenges. For them, research is not just for promotion of lecturers but research findings are part of a society's knowledge base which is transmitted to students and industries. So then, a university must be an institution for the people. It must be a centre for knowledge and problem solving for society.

Part of our problem is that our society is not knowledge driven. We have problem with finding jobs for young people. In most of our states, the government is still the major employer and accounted for 80 per cent of those in the formal sector. We have problem with agriculture since we cannot feed our teeming population; our agriculture is still largely primitive. Such things as improved seedlings (high yielding, disease resistant, early maturing seeds), modern farming implements and methods and farm financing are still strange to most of our farmers. We have problem with the economy such that it is difficult to identify trends and predict direction of the economy. This is why it has been difficult to get serious players to jump in the Nigerian economy.

These problems have persisted and are burgeoning because the universities are largely out of sync with society. In plain term, we are not being ruled by ideas.

Increasingly, our universities continue to issue bland certificates to graduates who are barely literate, if we take literacy literally to be the ability to read and write (good prose). The education is bland and not tied to need of society. Education must be woven into life with a common thread running through life and society. This is how universities can be relevant.

Physician, heal thyself. Universities themselves are as troubled as society. But a university is supposed to be a centre of excellence that stands above society, passes judgement on it and ultimately impart excellence into it. In our case, universities can hardly provide municipal services for themselves. Such things like safe water, electricity, security and waste disposal are still huge challenges for them. Instead of spending billions on diesel to power generators, why can't the universities devote themselves to research in alternative and cheap sources of power for their campuses? With all the Physics and Electrical and Electronics departments, why must the universities be part of the diesel guzzling society? Universities engage contractors for buildings and road construction and are largely part of the contract driven economy. Why are their civil

engineering and ancillary departments not involved with research on constructing roads and building at a fraction of today's cost? If the universities are not indeed, centres of excellence, how can they impart excellence on society?

To address this issue of isolated disconnected pseudo citadel of learning, our government is endowing this University with a professorial Chair in Building a Knowledge Based Society: Innovation, Infrastructure and Quality of Life (BKBS: IIQL). The philosophy behind this is the slogan of Action Group in the 50s; "Freedom For All, Life More Abundant."

Administration and governance are still serious challenges in our ivory tower. On a regular basis, students go on rampage over matters that astute administration could have taken care of. Many do not even understand basic economics of admitting only the number of students that existing facilities and resources can support. In most cases, they would have overstretched existing facilities before seeking to expand them, and after severe crisis would have brewed from this indiscretion.

Most of our universities can still not grapple with the challenges of finance. The only strait-jacket approach they have is charging students cut throat fees and going cap-in-hand to their proprietors for subvention and with a mix of blackmail. In the United States, University Presidents are appointed on their capability to raise funds and administer effectively. I think we have something to learn from this.

The leadership of this university has tried to make the best out of the operational constraints the institution finds itself. Nearly doubling output in just two years is really ambitious and this is worthy of commendation. However, I am still not satisfied that the University is in the best shape it should be. The reality however is that with the financial position of the state amidst other competing demands, hardly could we fulfil our dream of the ideal University. When we look at a University really, we should be making global comparison and should position UNIOSUN to compete globally. This will require a change of paradigm in terms of its structure, operations, philosophy, funding and even ownership.

I have made the point before that my vision for a University is regional. Each state in the South-West should host a specialised campus of a Great Western University (GWU) where character would be built, life skills taught alongside the cultivation of the intellect. What I am looking forward to therefore is unification of existing tertiary institutions on a creative basis. The future therefore is of linkages and integration. If the campuses in our state specialises in a branch of knowledge such as Information Technology/ Medicine etc, I want it to be ranked among the best in the world.

I make no claim to any grand idea. The notion that a University should be one in deed is ordinary, but it is the ordinary that makes the greatest impact on life.

Let me once again congratulate this University on its second convocation and especially the graduating students, their parents and well wishers who look forward to a bright future. My prayer is that your expectations shall not be frustrated.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Power is responsibility.