

WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Text of the Address delivered by the new President of Association of African Universities (AAU), Professor Is-haq O. Oloyede, on the occasion of his inauguration at the Closing Ceremony of the 12th General Conference of the AAU at the Abuja International Conference Centre, Abuja, on Friday, May 8 2009

WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

I stand before you today, humbled by your confidence in electing me your President. I stand before you today with the awareness of the enormity of the responsibility you have saddled us with. I stand before you today with a conviction, deep and profound, that we all have what it takes to 'fix' Africa and rescue our today and our children's tomorrow from the myriad of problems assailing the continent. This conviction stems from the fact evinced in the question: 'if not us, then who?' Besides, as identified by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, in his address to us last Monday, ours is "the most qualified institution to provide the basic platform" for solving Africa's problems.



It is an open truth which assails our conscience that whenever Africa appears in global news, it is more often than not for the wrong reasons. Illiteracy, diseases, corruption, poverty and conflict appear to be major problems thwarting the development of Africa, the cradle of civilization, such that in the march of humanity towards development, most of Africa continues to lag behind. This situation must be redressed and with our commitment and hard work in doing our bits in our various beats and synergising, we can reverse the trend of these pervasive underdevelopment indices. It is not enough in our present age to lament *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* a la Walter Rodney, it is rather crucial that we direct our energies towards how Africans can “super-develop” Africa. It is through this that *we can make a difference* and ultimately liberate our beleaguered continent from its shackles of problems.



The role of scholars and intellectuals in this regard is both crucial and critical. This is because, as Muadh bin Jabal would say, “knowledge is life for the hearts against ignorance and a lamp for the eyes in darkness”. Those who referred to Africa as the *Heart of Darkness* like Joseph Conrad and his modern-day apologists should be made to realise that the light of knowledge has illuminated our path today. The blind cannot lead the way and posterity has placed the destiny of our peoples, our countries, indeed our continent on our shoulders. We Africans have all it takes to make Africa greater. We have the skills, which appear not to be matched by the will. If others can do it elsewhere, we also can, here in Africa. No sacrifice can be too much for mother Africa and no development can truly accrue to us if we are not ready to change. Let us be positively Afrocentric while not losing sight of the reality of globalisation because the fate of our continent lies in our hands and *we can make a difference* by resolving that only Africans can salvage Africa, ultimately.



Distinguished leaders of our continental intellectual community, AAU has come a long way since its establishment 42 years ago and it is urgent that we accelerate the drive for attaining its objectives more fundamentally. A starting point is collaboration and synergy, a long and enduring process. The relationship among African universities should be that of complementation rather than competition. It is high time we strengthened one another, supported one another and cooperated more with one another as institutions and leaders. In this process, I need to emphasise here, we need to carry our political leaders along. Through constant engagements, it is essential that various African governments realise the benefits of education as the driving force behind sustainable development. We live in a world where isolationism leads to a dead end whereas collaboration and partnership lead to a good end.



In essence, the problems confronting Africa can be addressed if there is cooperation with one another, learning from one another and supporting one another. There is surely a difference between a hopeless end and an endless hope. The endless hope lies in us seeing ourselves as a single family motivated by the same zeal for better a life for our peoples and nations, not just a few privileged fellows. If the problem of political leadership in Africa is tackled through its constant engagement, and more support is given to education at all levels, then the challenges confronting Africa are just fleeting.



Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me add that the achievements of the AAU since its establishment some 42 years ago could not have been accomplished without the dedication and commitment of its successive leaderships. While no movement or organisation can agreeably become greater than the thinking minds and consciousness of the people that constitute it, history bears testimony to the selfless services of our respected moulders of minds in AAU in the enduring task of improving “the quality of higher education in Africa and strengthening its contribution to African development.” For those of us who have been saddled with the leadership of this great Association, thus we have no excuse, if we must fail. A strong association has been bequeathed to us to manage. *We too can make a difference* by keeping its flag of progress aloft.



I want to thank my immediate predecessor, Prof. Njabulo S. Ndebele, for his resourcefulness, dynamism and sterling leadership qualities, which are legacies that shall continue to guide us. I want to appreciate the Secretary General, Prof. Goolam Mohamedbhai, whose vast experience garnered over the years as Vice-Chancellor and President of the International Association of Universities (IAU), has been of tremendous benefit to the AAU. The Vice-Presidents and Board members of AAU, especially my predecessor at the University of Ilorin, Prof. Shamsudeen O. Amali, have also etched their names in gold. I want to thank you all and solicit your support in taking our Association to the next level.



- Thank you for your attention.
- *Merci beaoucuop.*
- *Shukran lakum.*

