

MODERATOR'S OPENING REMARKS BY PROF SHEHU JIMOH, UNILORIN.

It is a special privilege for me to be invited to moderate this symposium which has succeeded in attracting very significant stakeholders. I thank the organizers for this honour and commend their efforts in contributing to the actualization of the Nigeria of our dream.

History was made in Ilorin on September 12, 2006 about three months ago, when the Mustapha Akanbi Foundation was formally inaugurated. The summary of all that transpired on that day can be put this way. Nigeria has all it takes to be a great country—the men and women the resources and the climate. All that needs to be cultivated is the right attitude. In other words, what we need is a change of attitude. Today's symposium in my view is an offshoot of, or a follow-up to that September 12 Declaration.

My assignment this morning is a simple one: to set the stage for the great actors to play their parts [apologies to S.O.O. Amali, Professor of Performing Arts]. But permit me a space of five minutes to reflect on issues which I consider relevant or related to the theme of today's interactive session: Participatory Democracy and Good Governance as tools of Sustainable Development. In doing so, since I am not one of the lead speakers, I shall not attempt to answer questions; I will only question answers.

People talk of the law being an ass, I did not fully appreciate what meant until recently. I have now realized that, in Nigeria, the law can be interpreted, some of the time, to suit particular situations of individuals. I had always thought that, as they say, the law is the last hope of the common man. Is it still so in Nigeria? Is the law evenly applied? Is justice nearer or farther away from the people, to quote the theme of the Kwara NBA Annual Conference some 15 years ago?

And then, I am concerned about how we have conventionalized patriotism in Nigeria, particularly the leaders. With all that is going on around us, how many Nigerians today can rise their heads, as the Romans did, and say “*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*”? Not too many of our leaders come to serve. There is lack of consistency and coherence and continuity in our plans, programmes and policies, particularly those that have implications for the principles and practice of education. And talking about reforms, not even I, a professor of education, can boast that I fully understand the current reforms going on in the education sector! You must pardon my ignorance but I am ready to learn. Why do we always rush to introduce reforms and policies, particularly those that have implications for the principles and practice of education. And talking about reforms, not even I, a professor of education, can boast that I fully understand the current reforms going on in the education sector! You must pardon my ignorance but I am ready to learn. Why do we always rush to introduce reforms and policies without proper planning and adequate consultation with relevant stakeholders? Is there any wonder, then, that our reforms and policies hardly outlive the euphoria that characterizes their flamboyant launchings? Should programmes and reforms and policies only last the governments or administrations that introduce them? Indeed, do we not need a philosophy of national development, and enduring philosophy that should not change no matter how frequently

political power changes hands? And what about sycophancy? How much has this contributed to our attitude to patriotism?

Effective leadership is crucial to sustainable development, but so too is effective follower-ship. Nigeria is one country where, when people queue up, they queue up behind personalities rather than behind principles. How can we reverse this trend? How can we get the youth of this country to regain their faith in this nation when, in their view, the nation has no faith in them and no plan for them? In the past, students enjoyed schooling and when they demonstrated, they did so because they did not want the leaders to destroy their future. Today, when the school-going youth demonstrate, they do so because the present is unpleasant and the future is unsure. More than one million graduates are today unemployed or underemployed.

And talking about attitudinal change only two weeks ago, at an interactive session organized by the Kwara State Committee on Religious Matters, I stressed the point that mere sermonizing, sloganising and propaganda cannot change people's attitude. What we need are role models who can lead by example. Do we have such leaders in the Nigeria today?

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you to this symposium I hope I have not been a victim of my own hyperbole.

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