

**1ST ANNUAL LECTURE OF STEPHEN OLUWOLE AWOKOYA  
FOUNDATION FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION ON MONDAY MARCH  
18TH AT N.I.I.A.**

**CHAIRMAN'S OPENING ADDRESS - DR. MICHAEL OMOLAYOLE**

The Guest of Honour - Chief M. J. St. Matthew-Daniel, The Lecturer of today - Prof. Muyiwa Awe, The members of the family of Late Prof. Awokoya - Chiefs, Distinguished Ladies and Gentleman.

**INTRODUCTION**

First, I wish to acknowledge what great honour it is for me to be requested to be the chairman of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Lecture of Stephen Oluwole Awokoya Foundation for Science Education. When I was asked by Otunba Tade Ismail on behalf of the Trustees, I did not hesitate to accept.

For many reasons Professor Oluwole Awokoya was a man to whom I had wanted an opportunity to pay a public tribute. Although I had referred to his influence on me on one or two public occasions, I only did so in passing.

Now I have been given an opportunity to say many more things that I would have said before.

The first public tribute I wish to pay to his memory was the opportunity he gave me to teach at Molusi College in 1950, when I was an undergraduate at the University College Ibadan. In company of four other undergraduates one of whom was Mr., (now) Justice J. Ojoro, I had the privilege of observing a really talented leader in action. He had introduced the first and second year students of Molusi to the benefits and joy that come from avid reading.

He set up a competition among the students to see who could read the largest number of novels (the simplified series) within a year. I recall that the best boy read 106 novels that year. That to me was an incredible feat. The boys were so confident of their English language ability that each year set published its own School Journal every week. The journals were titled **Molusian Primus** and **Molusian Secundus**.

Of course I had heard of the great Science Master of Abeokuta Grammar School fame through many of the students he taught chemistry. Some of them with whom I interacted at the University College Ibadan were Rev (DR) Dupe Efunkoya, Prof. Esuruoso, Prof. Wole Sofoluwe, Prof. Akin Adesola former V.C. of University of Lagos, and Dr. Bangboye. All of them spoke in glowing terms of late Prof. S. O. Awokoya.

Before I went to the University College, Ibadan I had read a pamphlet which Prof. Awokoya had written about his impression of Britain when he was a student in London University. The book had the title “England as I saw her” It was so well written, and so popular that the Colonial Government had it serialized in the Lagos newspaper of that time. I started wondering how a Scientist could write English so impeccably well; and yet the wonder grew when I actually met the man, and listen to him speak. He was absolutely captivating and phonetically superb and like the proverbial poem and

“Yet the wonder grew that,  
that small head of his  
could carry all that he knew”

When he opted for a political career about a year after my stint in Molusi, I had no doubt that he would be eminently successful. And as fate would have it, he became the first Minister of Education, in the Government of Western Region.

He was part and one the leading lights in the pace setting political dream team that introduced free education in the West Region by the Mid 50’s under the leadership of the indefatigable sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo.

From my point of view he took a decision, which changed my educational and career orientation. I had been awarded a Western Nigerian Government Scholarship in October 1952. I was determined to go to Oxford or Cambridge for my postgraduate studies. So I applied to both places. I was admitted first at Corpus Christ College, Oxford and next at Queens College, Cambridge. I asked the Western Nigerian Government to allow me use the Scholarship at Oxford.

An expatriate lady who was the Scholarship Officer ruled against my request on the ground that education at Oxford was too expensive. I appealed to her to pass the request to the Minister to decide, even if her recommendation was against me. She passed the request to Prof. Awokoya as the Minister of Education. I was sure that if he saw my name, he would rule in my favour.

And so he ruled in my favour and I went to Oxford University. That singular event had affected my career most positively, because British employers have enormous respect for those who study at Oxford and Cambridge. You can imagine what advantage Prof. Awokoya's decision to let me go to Oxford conferred on me when I sought to join Unilever.

There was no doubt that my interview was smooth sailing!

So I owe a debt of gratitude to the late Prof. Awokoya for taking a decision that made me what I am today. The most fitting description of him will be encapsulated in the Words of **Arturo Toscanini**, the great conductor:

“His was a voice  
Such as one hears  
Once in a hundred years”.

As to the topic of the lecture today, I believe that the organizers of this lecture have put together a subject that is second to none in its relevance.

The restoration of the Nigerian University System is crying out for action.

I have myself delivered a lecture last year which was a strong indictment of the major stakeholders in the system namely- The various Governments-Federal and States, the Trade Unions within the University System, and the Students, and to some extent some of the parents. All of them have combined to wreck the Systems. That wreckage is what is now crying out for restoration.

I have no doubt that Prof. Muyiwa Awe, an erudite scholar, renown Physicist, and a product of two excellent institutions in his time namely University College Ibadan, and Cambridge will do more than justice to the subject.

I request the audience to sit back, relax and enjoy the intellectual feast which we are about to have.