

6TH ANNUAL LECTURE OF THE STEPHEN OLUWOLE AWOKOYA FOUNDATION FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION - 29TH MARCH, 2001

WELCOME ADDRESS - OTUNBA OLABIYI DUROJAIYE

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellency the Guest of Honour, Chief Olusegun Osoba, Governor of Ogun State, Distinguished Senators and other elected representatives of the people, Our Revered Guest Speaker, Prof. Akin L. Mabogunje NNOM, My Colleagues on the Board of Trustees of Stephen Oluwole Awokoya Foundation for Science Education, My Lords Spiritual and Temporal, Your Excellencies and other Diplomats here present, Members of the Fourth Estate of the realm, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my duty to welcome all of you to this 6th Annual Lecture of the Foundation and Award of Post Graduate Scholarships. Let me start with an allusion to the word of wisdom of Lord Tennyson: -

"The life of great men all remind us, we can make our lives sublime
Departing we leave behind us Foot prints on the sand of time."

The man whose memory we intend to immortalise by establishing this Foundation is Professor Chief Stephen Hezekiah Oluwole Oluremi AWOKOYA, a very brilliant man who had a lot of Firsts to his credit. He was the first Nigerian to obtain a University degree in Chemistry. This was in the University of London in 1946. He was the first Principal of Molusi College Ijebu-Igbo of which three members of this Board are alumni - including myself. He was the first Minister of Education in the old Western Region of Nigeria. It will be recalled that the Bill that led to the Act of Parliament by which Free, Universal, Compulsory Primary Education was introduced, "First in Africa" was moved in Western Nigeria by Chief Oluwole Awokoya. Among his pioneering achievements was the first Principalship of the Federal Emergency Science School Lagos. He later became a Permanent Secretary and Federal Adviser on Education and a Director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). His last active beat was as a Professor of Educational Planning in the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

Professor Awokoya was an exceptional teacher. He was an efficient molder of character. Dedicated, hard working and versatile, he taught those who were fortunate to study under him a wide range of subjects including; Science, Mathematics, Music, Star-Gazing, Martial Art, Elocution or Speech Making and Politics. He was a patriot, a fair-minded and kind-hearted man. Happily married, he was blessed with many children and grand children who are virtually all university graduates and specialists in a wide range of disciplines such as Medicine, Nuclear Physics, Architecture, Engineering, etc. In fact one of them made a mark as the first female meteorologist in Nigeria and now the Vice President of this Country's Meteorological Society. I should remark, however, after Papa's trauma in party politics, none of his children has ventured into that slippery terrain. Not to worry; some of us his non-biological children do; and with good support from the young Awokoyas.

Ten years after Professor Awokoya breathed his last on 15th March, 1985, his children decided to put up a scholarship scheme to help brilliant Nigerian students in the field of Science and Science Education. This is considered a fitting way to continue the tradition of the old man's contribution in introducing the Free Primary Education in Western Nigeria in the mid-1950s and in establishing the ASPAU (The - African Students Programme for American Universities) in the mid-1960s. The beneficiaries of these projects have contributed immensely to virile manpower development and service to our great country.

Today is the Sixth Annual outing of the Stephen Oluwole Awokoya Foundation for Science Education. Later in today's programme one of my colleagues will present to you the profiles and persons of three exceptionally brilliant Nigerians who are recipients of the awards for this year. We have made fourteen such awards. We plan to make more. That is why we will continue to appreciate generous support and contribution from corporate and individual voluntary donors. In the process we will not only immortalize the dead but rejuvenate the living. Some envelopes are enclosed in the programme of events already distributed. Your generous donations in cheques, cash and promissory

notes will go a long way to help more students to acquire greater skill to build a greater country for this and succeeding generations.

In rounding up my welcome address last year, I briefly touched on two contemporary topics of national importance. These were the "Sharia" issue and the Delayed Budget of that year. This year, I have restrained the temptation to talk about Delayed Payment of Federal Government Workers' Salaries and delayed payments to pensioners and home-based contractors. I seek your indulgence to make brief observations on two other current national issues namely: Deregulation and "Resource Control".

"DEREGULATION" is a euphemistic way of packaging what in real terms is Government desire to increase the price of fuel and other petroleum products. The general public sees this as a cruel design to further pauperise an already impoverished population. Organized Labour and the Press are up to their task of venting the feelings of the masses. They foresee further suffering in terms of high transport costs both in urban and rural areas, more expensive food which may further reduce their eating formular from 0-1-0 to 0-½-0. I am not sure any Government can feel comfortable when the entire public is pitched against its policy or policies. In my opinion, if the devilish choice of "higher price" or "non-availability": of fuel were put before the Nigerian Public, the obvious choice would be "higher price". What fuels the anger of most Nigerians is the possibility of the double calamity of higher prices and non-availability of fuel. So, the surer even if the longer route out of the quagmire is for the Federal Government to re-order its priorities. First the apparent leakages and sip-pages in the flow of oil should be blocked. Why should we tolerate ghost workers in the public and ghost filling stations in the private sectors of the Nigerian economy? Government should fish out whatever cabal is behind cornering our local and imported fuel supply and diverting same across our borders for selfish ends. In this abnormal case, the burden of proof rests on the Federal Government to disprove the widely held belief that such fuel smugglers exist. The Government should remember that one of the very first democracy dividends Nigerians earned shortly after the change of Government in May 1999 was the steady flow of oil and sudden disappearance of endless queues of vehicles around most fuel filling stations.

But alas, and lamentably too, the incidence of excessive queues has worsened in recent months.

Another relevant question is whether all our refineries are now fully operational? Are they producing good quality fuel to their installed capacity? Must we really lose any part of our hard-earned Foreign Exchange in importing sometimes sub-standard grade of fuel in a land that is so richly soaked with high-grade oil minerals?

Once things are put right, Nigerians will probably take another bout of price increase in their stride. When I bought my first car in 1960 fuel was readily available at three shillings and six pence (call it 35k) per gallon. I repeat "per gallon" not per litre! That really comes to about 8 kobo per litre. Then it gradually went up and stabilized at 77k per litre. Suddenly it shot up to N11, then N14, then briefly perched at N20 and now N22. Today there is the speculation of another 50 to 100% rise to about N30 or N40 per litre all within six years! Who wouldn't grumble and shout in such circumstances? Things have gone so bad that people keep up to 40 hours vigil in uncomfortable queues for fuel. Some touts get so desperate as to sell highly inflammable fuel in nylon bags!! A few have died in the process of lighting cooking stoves unknowingly fuelled by adulterated mixture of kerosene and petrol! The Government will have their price increase someday. But first lets be sure of ready availability of good quality fuel.

As for the second issue of "Resource Control", let me summarize by saying that I agree with the Southern Governors' stand. The argument of the Progressive School of Thought in Politics right from the time of Independence till today is one of "economic justice" if I may coin a phrase. The Biblical maxim that "The labourer is worthy of his hire" boils down to giving every political unit a fair deal. The goose that lays the golden egg must be well-fed. The clamour is not for wholesale control of revenues accruing to your own state or area of the country. The argument is for higher compensation or a bigger slice to the bakers of the cake while others share the rest in the spirit of good neighbourliness or national unity; and in reasonable foreseeability that the leading source of revenue may shift to other areas who should do likewise. It should not be so quickly forgotten that

Nigeria once experienced a Derivation Formula of 50% in terms of revenue allocation when true Federalism was practised. Then the Military chiseled and pecked it to an all-time low ebb of 3% before they grudgingly raised it to the current level of 13%. I can bet that Nigeria will fare better than worse on a derivation principle of at least 20% to the source of supply. Even areas which do not produce oil as yet can derive 20% of VAT collection in their areas.

I would have preferred political rather than a legal solution to the matter. While I admit that what the Federal Government has gone to the Supreme Court to do is for "Interpretation" or "declaration" and not a judgment or award. But how many people will accept what boils down to a distinction without a difference? Realizing that in International Law, especially the law of Continental Shelf what is referred to as a "state" and terms like littoral extension to states etc is a whole country and not a part like a local government or a state or group of federating states. So, even if the Federal Government obtains a favourable judicial declaration it may turn out to be a pyrrhic victory, an expensive or hollow win or a purse with a curse! Let wiser counsel prevail. A national conference or other political jaw-jaw-jaw will be a good avenue to resolve many of these issues.

It is so tempting to go on. But the most relevant thing to say is a 'HEARTY WELCOME' to you all - well wishers of our Foundation and valued supporters of our venture to increase the tally of scientifically educated Nigerians.

Thank you and God bless us all.