

## **CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS**

*The Stephen Oluwole Awokoya Foundation for Science Education, 26th Annual Lecture.*

Venue: Agip Recital Hall, Muson Centre, Onikan, Lagos.

Date: Tuesday, 19th March, 2024

Time: 2.00pm

*Salutations:*

### **The Guest Lecturer:**

**Prof Folasade Ogunsola O.O.N. (unife alumna)**

### **The Guest of Honour:**

**Prof. and Very Reverend Koyinsola Ajayi, S.A.N. (unife alumni, passionate advocate of Artificial Intelligence in Nigeria)**

### **Our Honourees:**

**Prof Oladapo Ashiru OFR, (Unilag alumni)**

**Rear Admiral A. Afolabi Macaulay(rtd) (Jos University alumni)**

**Mr H. Sola Oyinlola (University of Ghana alumni)**

### **The Stephen Oluwole Awokoya Foundation:**

**Permit me to use the Executive Director Dr Omolaraeni Awokoya as the point of contact.**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good Afternoon all.**

It affords me a great pleasure to welcome you all to this Annual Lecture of the Stephen Oluwole Awokoya Foundation.

In the infinite wisdom of our Creator, each generation is provided with a leading light, a forerunner, to tender and guide humanity as they struggle to understand their environment, adapt and grow within. We have such a leading light in Stephen Oluwole Awokoya.

The death of Stephen Oluwole Awokoya (1913-1985) removed a prime architect of education from Western Nigeria, where he fashioned the most ambitious program for the development of formal schooling in sub-Saharan Africa in the runoff to independence in Nigeria.

Six decades after Awokoya served as first minister of education of Western Region in 1952, the experimental character of the indigenous educational scheme he introduced continues to resonate.

Since then, others who followed in his footsteps have vested Africa's hopes for economic development goals in the provision of mass public education. That pioneering effort still, forms a benchmark today for governments all over the federal republic.

Nigeria's Western Region established a very early, ambitious, original education policy when self-government began in 1952, adopting the African nationalist wisdom that education could spearhead a development strategy for genuine independence.

Special retrospective emphasis is accorded its chief architect Stephen Awokoya, regional Minister of Education, 1952-1956, whom scholars of African education and development have neglected, and the similarly neglected features which his policy incorporated alongside its best-known detail, free universal primary education.

Prominent Africanists, particularly in Ghana since 1960 question the basic assumption equating education with development, on grounds of performance and cost. Awokoya and his Western Region legacy is assessed from this critical perspective, and the verdict is that it has never been faulted.

Let me quote in extenso some excerpts on Awokoya:

***“Awokoya’s approach to education was to be less derivative in structure and approach of knowledge dissemination but should introduce more indigenous methods and ideas. He also sought a less inhibiting educational program.***

***He attacked what he felt was the primary motive of colonial education: to limit the minds of indigenous Africans in achievements in science and technology and to imbibe in them the benefits of agriculture and farming. He felt, the result was leading to a dependency on imports, with little base for industrial growth and confining traditional Africans to the background in knowledge and production.***

***Awokoya's policy was to make education a necessary catalyst for local production of goods, the development and acquiescence to modern science and technology and upliftment of the minds and souls of Africans. A major critical measure of the policy was also to produce indigenous graduates who can administer the various local, regional, and central administrative organs and structures. Awokoya also challenged the dominance of males in education; at the time the ratio was about 4:1.***

*Most of the education policies of the era led to the doubling of major indices including budgetary allocations to education. Primary school enrollment, number of teachers and primary schools all showed significant growth.*

*His Universal Education Scheme won him public accolades, and many, to the chagrin of Awolowo fanatics, called the schools “Awokoya schools.”*

*“Tension between him and his boss came to a head in 1956 when he resigned his position. He left his position as minister after arguments with Awolowo about education funding; Awokoya desired free UPE while Awolowo was skeptical. “*

After politics, Awokoya was appointed principal of the Emergency Science School (later called Federal School of Science) in Lagos from where he became Federal Permanent Secretary and Chief Federal Adviser on Education. He was also a Director at the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris for many years. Because of his rich experience in education, he later secured appointment as professor of education at the University of Ife.

**Stephen Oluwole Awokoya** (1913–1985), was a great man and we are gathered here today to honour and pay tribute to his memory.

From the foregoing, my charge, for the consideration of the Foundation, is to examine ways of teaching STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) in our indigenous languages for a firmer rooted and more inclusive engine of growth. Since the Holy Bible was translated into Yoruba and published in 1884 are we now in the need for a fresh challenge?

This year's lecture is aptly themed: ***A look into the future: Providing fit for purpose education for National Development.*** Our future begins...now.

Again, I welcome you all to The Stephen Oluwole Awokoya Foundation for Science Education, 26th Annual Lecture and look forward to an intellectually impactful afternoon.

Thank you for your attention.

Baba Oba Oladele Fajemirokun