

LET'S DO IT TOGETHER: THE BIGGEST ROOM IN THE WORLD

Text of the Address Delivered by the new Registrar of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Prof. Ishaq O. Oloyede, OFR, FNAL, on the Occasion of the Handing Over Programme held on Monday, August 8, 2016 at the Board Room, JAMB Headquarters, Abuja

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1.0 First of All

Let me begin by asserting that if a star gazer had accosted me two weeks ago saying that I would be before you today to give this address, I would have dismissed him as a fraudster extraordinaire. I did not see this assignment coming, yet I consider my being here before you at this moment in history as divine. It is therefore on that premise that after thanking the Almighty God Who makes everything possible and those who repose their confidence in me, I reconciled myself with the daunting task that the current assignment engenders. I ultimately applied myself to a component of my state's anthem, "ise ya", meaning "work has started." I enjoin you to join hands with me as we all know that a tree does not make a forest.

While also appreciating those within JAMB and outside who have congratulated me one way or another, I want to state that my position still remains the same. I recall that when I was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin in October 2007 and congratulatory messages started pouring in, I said that I deserved no congratulation for the same reason for which you do not congratulate a medical doctor that is about to perform a surgery. It is only after a successful operation that such a person can be congratulated. I congratulate Prof. Dibu Ojerinde (OON). To tell the truth, those who I appreciate most are those who sympathize with me, based on what they know of the enormity of the task, and those who pray for me. Therefore, congratulatory messages are better deferred till, if God wills, this assignment comes to a successful end.

2.0 A Confession

Throughout my public career, I have always had the grace and fortune of being preceded by great men whose previous efforts served as the basis of what is considered my achievements. On many occasions, whether as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, Chairman of the Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU), President of the Association of African Universities (AAU), Secretary General of NSCIA, or even as National Coordinator/Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Inter-religious Council (NIREC), my task has always been made easy by the quality of what I met on ground.

This Board has had the fortune of being led by a galaxy of eminent and world-class Nigerians. From my predecessor as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, Prof. Emeritus Oladipo Akinkugbe (CON), who was the pioneer Chairman of JAMB at inception in 1978 to my immediate predecessor, the well-acclaimed Prof. Dibu Ojerinde (OON), each Chief Executive had worked assiduously to make this Board greater and better. My own plan, with your collective support, is using the University of Ilorin mantra, to make it “better by far” based on the solid structure I am inheriting.

Alluding to the University of Ilorin again will be excused by you please as you all know that another distinguished former Vice-Chancellor of the University, Prof. Shuaibu Oba Abdulraheem (OFR) served meritoriously on the Board of JAMB for a number of years. You will agree with me that I am familiar with JAMB at least with my association with the two former Vice-Chancellors I mentioned. For those of you who know, the familiarity with JAMB is even not limited to the two former Vice-Chancellors as until last year, I have also been part and parcel of JAMB by marital connection.

3.0 Setting the Stage

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I strongly believe that no organization can be greater than the

quality of its manpower just as no country can be greater than the quality of its citizens.

Fortunately, JAMB has this quality manpower in superabundance, as epitomized by your distinguished selves. My hope lies in faith in God and belief in the strength and qualities of you all, which I believe will adequately complement mine and in due course, we shall take this respectable Board, an institution upon which the future of millions of our youth depends, to a new height. Let us do it together.

Given my full awareness of the transiency of life and its phenomena, it is my resolve to put my best in any task before me since I fortunately won't be doing it forever. It is even more relevant on this occasion because this work may be short, truncated or long. Whether my period here is short, truncated or long, what is important is to do my bit and leave the stage better than we met it, just as my predecessors have done. Setting the stage is a collective responsibility and we all have to make this great Board even greater.

4.0 The Agenda

Part of my agenda is to key into the "change" mantra of the current Government by continuing to build on the legacy left behind by my illustrious predecessors and "change" whatever deserves to be changed because the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement. The change begins from individuals as we often realize that we can't change anything except we change ourselves, a point stressed by Mahatma Gandhi when he said you should "be the change you want to see in the world." Life is all about change and it is good to have a positive mental attitude to change as a vital component of development. The point I am making is that I am inheriting a great JAMB but there is still sufficient room for improvement so that the Board can even be greater if we all change accordingly. My agenda will be anchored on five main crucibles, which I explain briefly as follows:

4.1 Welfare

I am a firm believer in staff welfare because one sure way through which people can be motivated for higher efficiency is by catering for their welfare. Unlike how it is in the dictionary, it is logical that reward comes after work. We shall ensure that staff promotion, staff salaries and emoluments are given due consideration so that no deserving staff will be left behind.

The Administration will vigorously pursue what will bring happiness to staff as I belong to the school of thought that believes that motivation engenders efficiency. In this regard, we shall be operating a no door policy that would make everyone a stakeholder in bringing up ideas and suggestions that would be in the interest of staff and the system. I like the slogan of one bank which says, “happy customer, happy bank”; for us, it is happy staff; happy Board. As long as what will bring us joy is consistent with law and morality, I will be number one union official promoting staff welfare.

4.2 Discipline

The first rule in heaven is order and the bane of our development as a nation is indiscipline. Distinguished colleagues, indiscipline begins from attitude to time but it does not end there. Discipline requires that the right thing is done at the right time for the right purpose. Discipline requires that we all clean our corners in our respective capacities. Lateness to work, laziness at work, disrespect for deadlines, insubordination and so on are viruses that often cripple an organization. I will implore you to hold discipline sacrosanct because indiscipline is corruption and many people who criticize others are also corrupt by virtue of their sheer indiscipline.

4.3 Technology

We live in the Age of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and technology exists only to make life easier. In this regard, we shall deepen what I once called the “trendy tradition”.

When we introduced Computer-Based Test (CBT) at the University of Ilorin for the conduct of our screening exercise in 2007, we had no doubt that it was the right thing to do. It is gratifying that JAMB had subsequently transited to the use of technology for the conduct of its examinations and I salute the resolve of Prof. Dibu Ojerinde (OON) in that regard as well.

We shall partner the relevant stakeholders and develop a robust technology infrastructure that will ease our task. We shall ensure that everyone is computerate because the illiteracy of the 21st century, as Alvin Toffler said, is the inability to learn, unlearn and relearn. Specifically, in his book, "The Third Wave", Toffler noted rather pungently thus: "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn". We shall deploy technology to learn and teach new things, unlearn the expired information we had taken as fait accompli and relearn new ways of doing things better. All of us are involved.

4.4 Transparency

There is a notion among many Nigerians that all civil and public servants are corrupt. This notion is amplified by the perceived secrecy that underpins their operations. As we live in an era where information is the engine of civilization and absence of information inexorably leads to rumour-mongering, we shall keep our activities in the open. Anyone is free to ask questions about what is spent on what, and even financial details will be available to you weekly as it is the practice at the University of Ilorin. In addition, a regular publication that would make our internal and external publics know about us will be put in place in due course or repositioned for better efficiency.

4.5 Networking

As I earlier hinted, we live in a world different from the past and information technology has made the world even shrink to a virtual room now, everyone operating from its four corners, beyond what McLuhan referred to in 1966 as "global village". In this interconnected world, thus, no one can be an island to oneself. Training programmes, seminars, conferences and roundtables are tools

that facilitate networking and we shall encourage this as a matter of operational philosophy.

In doing this, we shall ensure that right pegs are in the right holes and teamwork is enhanced.

Team, I learnt, actually means “Together Everyone Achieves More” and the more we collaborate, network and synergize, the better we become. If you have soup and I have pounded yam, the two of us will have a good meal. Networking is important since a hand cannot effectively place a load on one’s head. I will share a story about “The Turtle and the Rabbit” with you to illustrate this (video clip).

5.0 Conclusion

The journey of a thousand years begins with a step. My own journey here, which may be for a few days, or a few weeks, or a few months, or a few years, unlike the University of Ilorin where I knew I would spend five years (all things being equal), has also begun. The time is short and we need to hit the ground running, with the fervent hope that the same support you accorded my predecessors which was instrumental to their success, will be accorded me too.

I cannot but thank, at this juncture, Prof. Dibu Ojerinde (OON), for all what we have shared. One thing I want to assure you is that I won’t spoil the good work you have done. We have been very close though many people did not know that when we disagreed some years back on policy, he was doing his work as the JAMB Registrar and I was doing mine as the Chairman of AVCNU. Each of us was being patriotic to his constituency at that time. I sincerely believe that when you look back, you won’t have a cause to shake your head in contempt of what the JAMB you left has become.

No! I, with the support of these distinguished ladies and gentlemen, will only strive to keep the flag of JAMB flying and its banner aloft. This is my hope. This is my commitment; may God help me; may God help us all.

Thank you very much for your rapt attention.