

KU8: UNITY IS STRENGTH

Address Delivered by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin, Prof. Wahab O. Egbewole, SAN, at the Inaugural Meeting of the Eight Universities in Kwara State (KU8) at the Council Chambers, University of Ilorin, on Wednesday, January 11, 2023

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A Warm Welcome

It is my immense pleasure and honour to welcome you to the University of Ilorin and to this historic meeting. I appreciate you for creating time to honour the invitation, despite your tight schedules. It is my belief that our interaction today will not only be helpful to us as university leaders but also be beneficial to the various members of our communities as staff and students.

I welcome you with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty Allah because it is human to propose but it is His to dispose. The fact that this convergence of minds is taking place at all is an indication that the purpose shall be achieved. It is my hope that in future, today shall be a reference point for good in the annals of inter-university relations in Kwara state, the state of harmony. My joy to receive you is unfathomable.

Setting the Context

Distinguished colleagues, we all know that universities exist for the benefit of the universe. So, all universities that are worth the name are supposed to be universal in scope. They should not be limited to their immediate environment alone. This is why the issue of internationalization of university education is key and critical because despite the fact that each university has its character, what happens in one should impinge and impact on what is being done elsewhere.

It is on the basis of the foregoing that different levels of interaction exist around the world to deepen cooperation and promote intellectual synergy within the university system. For example, there is the International Association of Universities (IAU) that is the umbrella body for all the universities in the world.

There is also the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) with its members drawn from all the Commonwealth countries. At the continental level, there is the Association of African Universities (AAU) while at the regional level, there is the Association of West Africa Universities (AWAU). In Nigeria, we have the Committee of Vice-Chancellors (CVC) and the Association of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU).

While I am aware that there are other associations and committees that aim at bringing us all together with a view to making the university system better and stronger, I only cited the major ones that appear to be encompassing. I am definitely aware that state and private universities have their associations where they discuss issues and challenges peculiar to their systems and ownerships. We also have what started as U6, a consortium of six African universities that has expanded to U6+ universities cooperating together and strengthening one another.

If I may expound a bit on U6 as it may be new to some of us, its foundation was laid on Saturday March 10, 2012, at the University of Ilorin by the Vice-Chancellors of the member universities. These are Bondo University College, Kumusu, Kenya; Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), Cape Town, South Africa; Kwara State University (KWASU), Malete, Nigeria; the University of the Gambia (UTG), Banjul, The Gambia; University of Cape Coast (UCC), Cape Coast, Ghana; and University of Ilorin (Unilorin), Ilorin, Nigeria. U6 has become U6+ with more universities like University of Eldoret, Kenya, University of Calabar, Nigeria and Michael and Cecilia Ibru University joining the consortium.

All these groupings are good and I am gratified to remark that the University of Ilorin has been playing a role in making our universities function as rings of a

chain and not silos in a field. It is in this regard that apart from the University of Ilorin having been on the Boards of IAU and ICU in the past, it had also, through one of its Vice-Chancellors occupied the presidency of the AAU. The Ilorin Declaration was the instrument that led to formation of AWAU and our former Vice-Chancellor and current JAMB Registrar, Prof. Is-haq Oloyede, is its pioneer Secretary General. The University has also produced twice the Chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors in recent years.

As a university strategically located in the cultural confluence of Nigeria, we have realised that unity is strength and united we stand, divided they fall. It is our philosophy that with cooperation, coordination, collaboration, interaction and networking, we can only be stronger. Today's meeting is in furtherance of that philosophy.

From Globalisation to Glocalisation

Dear brothers and sisters, we all know that we are in the era of globalisation though a person like Thomas Friedman would tell us that it is not new, we are only in Globalisation 3.0. Defined as “a process in which geographical distance becomes a factor of diminishing importance in the establishment and maintenance of cross-border economic, political and social-cultural relations” which goes along with the empowerment of Western culture, it has made the world function as a whole.

One of the dangers that globalisation poses, if care is not taken, is the neglect of self, the immediate, and an obsession with the other, the foreign. For instance, there are Nigerians who are more conversant with what is happening at the international scene than what is happening in their own states. There are many of us whose primary sources of information are CNN, Aljazeera and BBC, not

Channels, NTA or Radio Nigeria. Globalisation has often engendered *xenophilia*, the love of the foreign, and the increasing rate of self-loathing or self-hatred.

Within the university system, some scholars have no local relevance as they seek international recognition or validation. It is to balance this tendency that our system allows local relevance and international reach, which is the essence of glocalisation, referring to situations that allow products homegrown to have global appeal. Rather than us always fixated on the far and the foreign, why can't we connect from the immediate and aim for the ultimate? The implication of the aforesaid is that charity begins at home but it should not end there still.

In other words, while it is good and welcome to associate and interact internationally, it is more crucial for us to associate locally so that together, we can strengthen one another, deepen our cooperation and impact more on our hosting communities and thereby accelerate development. This way, the much-touted South-South partnership will be taken to another level and there will be more academic robustness impacting on the society.

The KU8 Initiative

Though there are strong potentials for growth, Kwara state currently has eight universities which are, according to age, the University of Ilorin, Ilorin (1975), Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin (2005), Kwara State University, Molete (2009), Landmark University, Omu-Aran (2011), Summit University, Offa (2015), Crown-Hill University, Ilorin (2016), Ahman Pategi University, Patigi (2021), Thomas Adewumi University, Oko (2021) and the University of Offa, Offa (2021). Apart from Kwara State University, which is a member of the U6, and the fact that private universities have their association, I am not aware of any forum that brings us together. This initiative is borne out of the need to fill the vacuum.

To some of us, a neighbouring university within the same state is a “*terra incognita*” or “unknown land” since we do not often meet. This is why I commend the Vice Chancellor of Ahman Pategi University, Prof. Mahfouz Adedimeji, who I read led his team to visit some of our universities in 2021 in Kwara as a way of courtesy and familiarisation. Based on the information available to my office, he was here at Unilorin where he was received by my predecessor. He was also in KWASU, Crown-Hill University, Al-Hikmah University and one or two more universities in the state.

The need for closer interaction is even more compelling this time that the Nigerian university system through the National Universities Commission (NUC) is deploying the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS) which requires the development of a percentage (30%) of curriculum by the institutions. I am of the view, which the NUC also expressed, that universities that are contiguous can even offer the same courses in relation to their geographical and environmental peculiarities. More association will also help in assisting one another so that the young shall grow. No doubt, we share common characteristics, common challenges, and we have same developmental aspirations in the light of our geographical location.

It would be clear from the foregoing that the purpose of KU8 (or eight universities in Kwara) is mainly to develop closer relationships, promote academic linkages and establish institutional collaboration which will allow joint activities in delivering the university mandate of teaching, research and community service. This is necessary in order to avoid one of the ironies of today’s world in which human beings are so advanced that we go to the moon but we are so backward to visit or assist our neighbour. The essence is to pursue the global without

compromising the local because ultimately, all development permeates from the rear.

The Meaning of TEAM

The crux of this meeting aligns with the operational philosophy that I champion. I told the Senate of the University of Ilorin in my inaugural address, “Together Everyone Achieves More”, that TEAM is just an acronym depicting that. As unity is strength and we cannot clap with a hand, we can support one another to overcome challenges and deepen the training of our teeming young ones. A broom sweeps only when the individual broomsticks come together and work together. The University of Ilorin extends its hands of fellowship to all Kwara universities as it looks forward to a future where members of the KU8 will be emerging the best in several areas.

Through this process, the University of Ilorin, which is an institutional mentor appointed by NUC some of our universities here will also be able to support us more directly. The university publications, conferences, seminars and activities will become fora through which our academics and staff can network and engage in joint activities. Except we suggest otherwise, I would think a quarterly or bi-annual meeting of this forum will be in order.

I want to thank you most sincerely and I enjoin us all to reflect together more so that we can all achieve more. It is better to see sister universities as partners, not rivals. If we are cooperative, we shall ultimately be competitive. I welcome you to KU8 and I believe that in due course, we shall be KU8+.

Thank you for your rapt attention.