



Covenant University

14TH CONVOCAATION KEYNOTE ADDRESS



THE AFRICA WE WANT: THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Monisoye Sola Afolabi, Ph.D, FNCS.

Friday, July 19, 2019



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COVENANT UNIVERSITY

ANTHEM

We're a Covenant Generation	Covenant generation arise
Pursuing excellence	Light and knowledge to shine
Redeemed to reign	Glorious foundation stone
Learning to lead	Leadership skills to show
We are bound by an oath	Departing from knowledge
Obeying rules to rule	To empowerment Legalism
Making Kings of youth	To realism
Flying high on covenant wings	Wisdom's call for change
Wisdom's call for change	Inspired, on fire
Inspired on fire	With Courage Marching on in
With courage Marching on in	grace
Grace	God's own arrow
God's own arrow	Shot for glory.



Our Vision

To be a leading World-Class University, committed to raising a new generation of leaders in all fields of Human endeavour

Our Mission

To create knowledge and restore the dignity of the black man via a Human Development Total Man Concept driven curriculum employing innovative, leading-edge teaching and learning methods, research and professional services that promote integrated, life-applicable, life-transforming education, relevant to the context of Science, Technology and Human Capacity Building





Keynote Speaker

DR. MONISOYE AFOLABI

Chairman, Baobab Media and Baobab Think Ltd. & Former Director of Business Environment, USAID Trade Hub, Accra, Ghana

PROFILE OF DR. MONISOYE OLORUNSOLA AFOLABI,
*Chairman of Baobab Media and Baobab Think Limited,
and Former Director of Business Environment,
United States Agency for International
Development (USAID) Trade Hub, Accra, Ghana*

Dr Monisoye Olorunsola Afolabi has had a professional career of about 40 years as an academician, administrator, diplomat, computer specialist and international development expert.

After obtaining a first-class degree in Mathematics at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria in 1973, Dr. Afolabi was awarded a Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship to the University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada in 1974 where he obtained a Master of Mathematics (M.Math) Degree in Computer Science (1976) and a Ph.D. in Computer Science (1979).

Dr. Afolabi assumed duty in the Department of Computer Sciences of the University of Lagos in 1979 and later joined the University of Ilorin, in 1982 as Chief Systems Analyst and Head of the Computer Center and was appointed Director of the Centre in 1987. He served as Secretary of the Committee of Directors of University Computer Centres (CDNUCC) from 1983 to 1988.

Dr. Afolabi was appointed the Pioneer Director of the Community Computer Centre of the Economic

Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in May 1989. In 2005-2007, Dr. Afolabi served as Acting Deputy Executive Secretary of ECOWAS in charge of Integration Programmes. In this capacity, he supervised Technical Departments responsible for Human Development (Education, Health, Youth, and Gender, Drug Control, etc.), Infrastructure (ICT, Energy, Transport), and Agriculture including Rural Development. He retired from ECOWAS Commission in October 2010. Upon his retirement from ECOWAS, Dr Afolabi has served as a Consultant for ECOWAS, USAID, DANIDA, in the areas of trade and transport facilitation, business environment, intergovernmental relations, institutional collaboration, information technology, and strategic project development and management. Since 2008 to date, Dr Afolabi has chaired the meetings of the e-Governance Forum of Directors of ICT, and Heads of Service of the Federation and the 36 States, as a Consultant to the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria(ASCON). Dr Afolabi is currently Senior Regional Technical Advisor to the USAID Trade Africa Project in Accra, Ghana. Dr Afolabi was born in 1950 and is married with children and grandchildren.

THE AFRICA WE WANT: THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

PREAMBLE

It is indeed a great honour for me to stand before this august Convocation in these hallowed grounds to give the Keynote Address on the role of higher education in achieving the Africa we want. I have always wondered as to the special favours extended to me, from time to time, by the Presiding Bishop and Chancellor of the Covenant University. The goodwill has been largely unexpected, and certainly unmerited. But since we know that grace is unmerited favour, I stand before you as a testimony of God's grace, and goodness.

With due deference to my academic superiors, I shall not attempt a discourse based on deep and empirical research. Please allow me to rely on statements at national and

international levels, that are available in the public domain. And on my humble experience in public administration, diplomacy, and consulting spanning a period of over four decades, my presentation shall, therefore, be both good and original. However, paraphrasing George Bernard Shaw, the English poet and playwright, you will find that the good parts are definitely not original, and the original parts may not be good.

THE AFRICA WE WANT

In striving towards the Africa we want, we need to remind ourselves of:

- Who we are
- Where we are at
- Where we want to be.

In doing this, we shall need to start by emphatically stating who we are not. We are certainly not a people of wars and famine, of political perturbations, of unhealthy habits and cultures, of unsettled borders, of

uncounted and uncountable demography, of social and economic disorder. If this is the way it has pleased some to portray us, we need to, by our words and actions, demonstrate who we really are.

Africa is the cradle, the origin of humans, a people of distinctive colour and intellect, highly resourceful, undaunted by the cards that nature and history have dealt us, and confident in making the best, both in the present and for future generations, of the opportunities, partnerships, technologies, and social dynamics available to us.

Africa is the second largest and most populous continent on earth with an estimated population of 1.4 billion inhabitants. 54 countries make up the continent of Africa with the population growth in most countries in excess of 2% every year. Many consider Africa's population growth a bit frightening, with more than half of the population under 25 years in some countries. The median age in

Africa is estimated at 20 years compared to a global average of about 30 years. Indeed, it is estimated that by 2022, the population of Africa will surpass the population of India and China. But this can be turned into an advantage: the vigour and resilience of youth, coupled with a purpose-driven educational agenda, can raise the economies of the continent to enviable heights, resulting in improved welfare of the African citizen.

Where we are at is not a particularly happy zone. We have largely become consumers of what we do not produce, and have very little control on the global standards and prices of what we produce. We have deluded ourselves with the promises of globalization, relying overly much on foreign aid and technical assistance in trade, education, governance and social development. We have lost the respect that we had during the early days of independence from colonization and occupation, when our collective economies

were strong, indeed stronger than any Asian country. We exported expertise to Asian countries, and benefitted from the united voice of our statesmen-leaders. It is obvious then, that what we require at this time is a fast-forward to the past of strong economies, noble ideals, dedicated leaders, of pride in ourselves, our history and our destiny. We must return to the glory days of yesteryears, when hopes were high and the sky was blue, before all hope is lost, captured by the dark skies.

Fortunately, rising from the glorious ashes of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Union has promulgated the "Agenda 2063: the Africa we want...Africa's blueprint and masterplan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future. It is the continent's strategic framework that aims to deliver on its goals for inclusive and sustainable development and is a concrete manifestation of the Pan-

African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance”.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), for which the operational phase was launched in Niamey in early July 2019, is a flagship project of Agenda 2063. It is aimed at “accelerating intra-African trade and boosting Africa's trading position in the global market by strengthening Africa's common voice and policy space in global trade negotiations”.

We are cautiously optimistic of the attainment of the noble objectives of these initiatives. We believe they are doable, but the devil will be in the details of the implementation strategies. For one, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) established in the early 80s is still facing serious implementation hurdles. On a practical note, if after almost four decades there are still serious concerns about cross-

border trade between Benin and Nigeria, if there are issues with the rights of residence and establishment of ECOWAS citizens in ECOWAS countries, if educational and professional qualifications are not easily tradeable among ECOWAS countries, one could be pardoned for doubting there would be seamless and free movement of persons and goods between, say, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The AfCFTA needs to have a well-funded Secretariat, well spelt out responsibilities, and penalties for default. It is gratifying that the African Development Bank has made seed funding available for compensation for losses in revenue under the AfCFTA regime. This mode worked well at the inception of ETLs, and net-importing countries received compensation from ECOWAS for losses incurred under the scheme. Since the compensation scheme ended the scheme has suffered serious implementation hiccups

resulting in unilateral rules and regulations at national borders, as “losing” countries try to bridge the revenue gap induced by the scheme.

But perhaps what is required now is a new set of leaders devoid of the sit-tight syndrome, leaders who are more of statesmen than politicians. We need leaders who make their people, who show the way and follow (sometimes) unfamiliar trails, leaders who are more concerned with the well-being and upliftment of their people, rather than winning the next election. We need serving-leaders who serve their people while retaining leadership, not servant-leaders who are dictated to by their people and the latest opinion polls. We do not need leaders who own and reign over their people, whose only preoccupation is the protection of their social and material interests. We need leaders who know the essence of power in forging a better life, and not the acquisition of power for the sake of power.

Let us pray, therefore, for more leaders than rulers, more statesmen than politicians, more true followers than idlers.

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The Chancellor, Board of Regents, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is indeed apt that discussions on the role of higher education in the Africa we want is being championed by Covenant University, a citadel of learning and the development of the complete man (and woman). But, I crave your indulgence as I approach this topic in the context of higher education as a manufacturing industry. Basically, education teaches how to learn and to acquire certain useful skills. Industry is concerned with the production of goods and services for an economy.

My thesis is that the main role of higher education, and academia in general, is to produce goods (workers) and services (ideas) for the African economy.

The higher education process:

- Takes raw materials (of different grades)...**new students**
- Processes the raw materials (manually, or with mechanical and electronic support)...**teaching, research, practicals..machine assisted, or manually (cane assisted)**
- Grades the quality of the products (quality control)...**examinations, continuous assessments**
- Releases products to the market in different packagings...**graduation (first, second, third, and pass grades)**
- Re-introduces some products into the manufacture process for further refining...(resits, repeats, or post-graduate)
- Rejects some products as waste....**drop-outs, dismissals**

- Markets the grades of products effectively...**publicity, adverts for students, scholarships, bursaries, sabbaticals.**
- Grows the market by creating an acquired taste for the product(s)...**new course programmes, new grades,**
- Makes profit..**higher annual operating and research budgets, NUC and global recognition, national and international appointments.**

Inherent in the process is the need for governments at national and continental levels to set economic and social goals and targets to enable academia to tailor the products of higher education. This makes it imperative for an academia-industry collaboration: industry helps academia to help industry. This will result in higher education producing readily useable

graduates with the knowledge and skills to fully participate in the Africa we want. Just as an industry does not produce for production sake, but keeps an eye on the needs of the end-user market, so must higher education as an industry align itself with the social and economic aspirations and targets of the host communities.

An effective and solution-oriented higher education system must:

- Assess the market...what type and number of graduates are required for the professions?
- Improve the quality control at input, processing, and final product stages
- Grow the market at national and sub-national levels, develop plans WITH TARGETS to consume the products of academia (e.g in rail, roads, agriculture, law, medicine, engineering, public service, and academia)
- The public and private sectors must

reward adequately by paying remuneration commensurate with knowledge and skills, not longevity.

ACHARGE

May I now address a few words to the newly released Eagles. I recall that in the 70s, the vehicle number plates of Quebec Province in Canada bore the inscription “Je me souviens”. Literarily, this means, I remember, I bring to my remembrance, I know who I am, I know where I come from. Being the only French-speaking Province in Canada, the citizens of Quebec always reminded themselves of their origin in France, their culture, their separateness. As you set out in life, I charge you to always remember where you come from, from this noble institution, from your family and religious heritage. Remember that you are Eagles and commit yourselves to being part of the solution towards the Africa we want.

As you are now, so I was 46 years ago, full of life, of zest, of plans, and of dreams. I had a fairly clear picture of the future and a reliance on the grace of God to guide me. And, as I am now, so you will soon be, 50 odd years from now, reliving your memories, counting your blessings, and (sometimes) wondering what life has all been about.

It is important to know yourself, your strengths, your weaknesses, and calibrate your dreams and aspirations in line with these realities, and not have your two feet firmly planted in the air. But it is far more important to know your God, to walk with God, and to do exploits in His Name and to His glory. For by this you will have “good success”, the essence of a God-driven life.

SUMMARY

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The hopes and aspirations outlined and pursued by Agenda 2063 are dreams, and

will remain so until and unless we wake up and remain awake to our individual and collective responsibilities. The first step in realizing a dream is to wake up. And keep awake. And we have the examples of the statemen that have gone before to guide us. But we must remain committed to the tasks we have set for ourselves. We must work to ensure that the African flag shall be a symbol that truth and justice reign, honoured in battle and in peace, and that we leave for our children a banner without stain. So help us God.



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