

Covenant University

10th Convocation Ceremony and Award of First and Higher Degrees
and the Presentation of Prizes holding at Covenant University,
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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

National Re-Orientation towards Transformational Leadership in Africa

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and

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*On the occasion of the Tenth Convocation Ceremony for the Award
of First and Higher Degrees of Covenant University*



PROFESSOR ADEBAYO OLUKOSHI,
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(Keynote Speaker)

Citation of Keynote Speaker

Adebayo Olukoshi is a Research Professor of International Economic Relations. Born in Jos, Plateau State, he had his primary education at Methodist School in Kaduna, his secondary education at Federal Government College, Sokoto, his advanced level education at School of Basic Studies, Zaria, and his undergraduate degree at Ahmadu Bello University, also in Zaria. Following his National Youth Service programme, which he undertook also at Ahmadu Bello University as a Graduate Assistant, he won both a Federal Government of Nigeria and a Leeds University Research Scholarship to undertake his doctoral Studies at the University of Leeds in England.

Professor Olukoshi went into secondary school in FGC Sokoto, having successfully passed the national common entrance for secondary education in class five, in primary school. He completed his secondary education with a Division One Distinction in the West Africa School Certificate. He also won the trophy for the best all-round graduating student at the School of Basic Studies; he completed his advanced studies also with distinction, winning the third place prize for the best all-round graduating student and the first place winner in the Humanities Section of the graduating class.

Professor Olukoshi completed his Bachelor of Science

degree in International Studies from Ahmadu Bello University with first class honours. He was also the winner of the Faculty of Arts and Social Science Dean's prize for the best graduating student of his year in the Faculty. Following his National Youth Service, Leeds University was to admit him directly into its doctoral programme based on the performance registered in his undergraduate transcript. Professor Olukoshi was exempted from first undertaking a Masters degree before going into the doctoral programme. The exemption came with a full university scholarship for his doctoral studies; he was one of three recipients of the prestigious scholarship awarded to the three topmost intakes into the Leeds University doctoral school at the time.

Following his Ph.D, which he completed in a record three years, Professor Olukoshi was awarded the first Rhodes African Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship at Oxford University. He exercised the fellowship alongside his first employment as a Research Fellow at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs in Lagos. In a record period of six years, Professor Olukoshi was appointed to the Professorial grade at the Institute. He also served as Divisional Head for International Economic Relations and, subsequently, Acting Director of Research.

Professor Olukoshi has also, during his career, served as Senior Research Fellow and Research Programme Officer at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden; Senior Programme Staff at the inter-governmental South Centre in Geneva, Switzerland; Executive Secretary of the Pan-African Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa(CODESRIA), Dakar, Senegal; Director of the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, Dakar, Senegal; and Interim Director of the African Governance Institute, Dakar, Senegal. Recently, he was named the Director, Regional Office for Africa and Liaison Office to the African Union of the inter-governmental International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Professor Olukoshi has held many residential research fellowships around the world over the last 25 years. He is the author and editor of 14 books, 10 monographs, and over 200 book chapters and journal articles. He has served or is serving on the boards of many international journals, international research institutes, and global think tanks. Currently, he is serving as the global chairperson of the third edition of the World Social Science Forum coming up in Durban, South Africa, in September 2015. He has served as external examiner in Universities in Africa and Europe and has examined

doctoral theses also in various African and European universities. He was named a distinguished visiting Professor at Rhodes University in South Africa for a three-year tenure and has delivered numerous keynote addresses at different scholarly, policy, and advocacy fora around the world, including the 2014 Tana Forum Meles Zenawi Memorial Lecture on the life and times of the late Nelson Mandela.

NATIONAL RE-ORIENTATION TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

Protocols

On a joyous occasion such as the one that brings us together today, namely, the convocation ceremony to celebrate the graduation of Covenant University's Class of 2015, it is natural to begin by sharing in the sense of pride and satisfaction among the parents and guardians of the graduating students. For them, sending their children and wards to Covenant University a few years back was an act of faith and hope that the huge investments and sacrifices they were about to make would culminate in this day when the proud graduands would receive the certificates attesting to their admission to the ranks of university-educated men and women around the world. Competition for admission was severe. Many hours were spent preparing students for the requisite examinations required to mark their transition from secondary school to the university. Savings and incomes were mobilized to pay the cost of going through the university as families considered that

no sacrifice was too much to make to ensure that their children and wards got the best possible education. In congratulating the parents and guardians of the Covenant University Class of 2015, I hope, whether they are physically present here today or not, they will feel a special kind of satisfaction that their sacrifices have not been in vain, and that in their own little way, they have not only made one of the most important investments in securing a future for one child but also for an entire nation and, indeed, all of humanity.

It is appropriate also on this occasion to pay a warm tribute of appreciation from the outset to the entire leadership of Covenant University, and its academic and non-academic staff, both senior and junior, management and non-management, for the individual and collective efforts that they deployed in order to help the young men and women who are graduating today to make a success of their time in Ota. In more ways than one, the University authorities and staff assumed some of the functions of parenting on behalf of the families which sent children to Ota. Theirs was not just a duty of delivering quality educational instruction - for the best that money can buy in Nigeria - but also to complement parents in moulding the young men and women

entrusted to them into responsible adults fed on the seven core values on the basis of which Covenant University has forged its national and global ambitions. I, therefore, hope too that as the Class of 2015 is sent forth by the University, leaders and staff in all their different categories and ranks will feel as strong a sense of satisfaction and pride as parents and guardians that the sacrifices they made have all been well worth every bit of it.

If for parents and guardians, authorities and staff, the Covenant University class of 2015 has been a source of joy and pride, for the graduands themselves, this day is likely to remain indelible in their minds. After several years of concentrated hard work, they are at the end of an important leg of the journey of life, one which should usher them into the next phase where society can begin to reap the benefits of the investments that have been made in them even as they themselves strive to build their own livelihoods -and to do so observing and upholding the values family and Covenant imparted in them whilst simultaneously taking every opportunity that comes their way to make a significant difference. In their own ways, they too made sacrifices - not least the many midnight candles burnt - designed to ensure that

they made their parents, guardians, siblings, and friends proud, rose to the high expectations their teachers had of them, and earned the right to become a part of growing ranks of Covenant University alumni world-wide. They deserve our special admiration and commendation, together with our good wishes for a bright and brilliant future in all of their endeavours.

The Covenant University Class of 2015 is being sent forth at a very interesting juncture in the history of Nigeria - and indeed of Africa. It is a juncture that comprises an admixture of competing concerns about the prospects of the continent and its peoples. At one level, there is growing optimism that Africa is -finally- "rising" from its long night of decline and decomposition to begin the gradual process of its renewal and recomposition with a view to winning back a rightful place for itself in the rendez-vous of human civilization and progress. In evidence of this "rise", attention is drawn, inter alia, to the:

a) long and continuing run of economic growth which African countries have been enjoying even as much of the rest of the world appears to be faced with an involuntary slow down;

b) relative demographic youthfulness of the

continent, attested to by the fact that almost two-thirds of its burgeoning population is made up of citizens who are 35 years of age and younger;

c) rapid renewal and expansion of its middle class whose growing purchasing power serves as a major source of attraction alongside the market opportunities provided by the continent's present population of over a billion people that is expected to double over the next few decades;

d) accelerated processes of urbanization taking place across contemporary Africa and the opportunities associated with them for investments in infrastructure of different categories;

e) vast natural resource endowments of the continent, including the occurrences of some of the most rare and sought after commodities, which make it an important magnet for investors; and

f) last" or "Next Frontier" status of the continent and the multiple implications it carries for continental transformation.

At another level, however, there is disquiet with the fact that despite all of its natural resource endowments, Africa remains trapped in a state of underdevelopment and violent instability even as the

rest of the world - including the continent's erstwhile peers in Asia and Latin America - accelerates its progress. Thus, even as it is being proclaimed that the continent is on the rise, a major tragic drama is unfolding across the the Sahara desert and Mediterranean Sea in which thousands of Africans, most of them young, are perishing as they try to risk everything to seek "greener pasture" in Europe. Especially worrisome for critics of the notion of a "rising" Africa is the fact that the continent is still home to the largest number of poor people in the world.

Furthermore, much of the growth that is taking place is anchored on a narrow resource base and driven by a temporary boom in global commodity prices underwritten by China's expanding appetite as the new industrial workshop of the world. Sharp disparities in the distribution of the benefits of growth are driving African countries to new, unsustainable levels of income and asset inequalities; three African countries are ranked as the top three unequal societies in the world. Economies have been de-industrialized, unemployment (especially among the youth) averages 40 per cent of the labour force, underemployment is deep-seated and rife, infrastructure (including energy)

is in massive deficit, accountability by leaders is in short supply, and citizens feel disempowered and excluded.

If the overall state of Africa at this point in its history can be characterized as one of a continuing and widespread despair amidst fleeting glimpses of hope and the potentiality for the renewal that must come, it is legitimate to ask, as many have done, for whom Africa is really rising. It is equally important to challenge the basis of the purported rise and proffer alternative visions of how both a sustained and sustainable continental rebirth can be achieved. Furthermore, it is critical to go beyond a one-sided obsession with GDP growth to address the key issue of how growth can be leveraged to deliver structural transformation in a context of democratic governance, peace and stability. No where are these considerations about the shortcomings of the thesis of "Africa Rising" more in evidence than in Nigeria which is both Africa's most populous country and biggest economy. It is a country which, as has by now been well-established, embodies both the promise of a bold new future and the pains and discontents of repeated failure carried over from yesterday and woven into the fabric of the present in complex ways that give cause for concern about

whether a meaningful future can be secured for this generation and generations yet unborn.

The dimensions and depths of failure and underperformance in Nigeria as an important subset of Africa's problems are too well known to merit being repeated here in any detail. Suffice it to note that as in much of the rest of Africa but on a scale that is even much bigger - and, therefore, much more frightening. Nigeria has combined socio-economic underdevelopment with long-standing challenges of governance that added up in the recent experience of the country to threatening a wholesale unravelling of the political edifice. It was a threat of wholesale systemic collapse which was too frightening to contemplate and which the 2015 elections helped in some ways to avert in what many within and outside the country have characterized as nothing less than a very Nigerian miracle of pulling back from the brink at the very last minute. The key challenge that has been posed through much of Nigeria's post-independence history remains the same, however: What will it take to make a key and strategic country like Nigeria to stop repeatedly underperforming its potential and, in so doing, assume its leadership role in Africa both to the benefit of its

citizens and for the advancement of the continent?

Debates about Nigeria's past, present, and future were brought into the mainstream of discussions about Africa's own prospects over the medium to long run by the 2015 elections. The elections were fought and winners and losers are settling into their new situations amidst legitimate expectations that the new governments at the federal and state levels will rise to the challenge of delivering much anticipated change for the country and the African continent. But there is change and there is change and it would be fair, given the long history of cosmetic change that has taken place in the country to expect that the change which citizens are eagerly awaiting at this time is the type that will be as coherent and comprehensive as it is deep-rooted and socially-anchored as to be able to lead the country, and through it, the continent on the path to structural transformation. No such change has happened in human history without a leadership commitment to a goal and vision of wholesale national renewal and re-orientation. And it is here that we, as Nigerians, to whom much has been given and from whom much is still expected in spite of yesterday's many squandered opportunities and disappointed hopes, have our work

clearly cut out for us.

The challenge of national renewal and re-orientation that is before us calls for more than the empty sloganeering that we have learnt to perfect in our recent history but which really does not get to the root of our problems. From the so-called Ethical Revolution that deflated by the ruling politicians of the Second Republic to the WAI and MAMSER campaigns of the military years, and the attempts made to resuscitate some form of mass civic education in more recent years through the National Orientation Agency, we have been witnesses to a plethora of half-baked and half-hearted attempts at national re-orientation that were marred as much by poor conceptualization as by poor elite commitment to their realization even when citizens have been eager to embrace such initiatives coming from their leaders. In the face of the repeated failure of the initiatives - at huge financial and non-financial costs- it is understandable that cynicism has set in among the populace even as the country summersaults from one new high of immorality in the public sphere to another, with corruption, nepotism, and indolence assuming epidemic proportions in all levels of society, but most scandalously amongst those who, ordinarily,

are entrusted with leadership responsibilities.

Nigeria's historical experience teaches us that it is not possible to achieve national re-orientation without a clear project and vision of society in place, one that is capable of providing a framework within which we can define bold goals and ambitions for ourselves, mobilize the resources necessary for achieving our collective national objectives, and set standards of behavior and performance for ourselves. To put it in another way: No programme of national re-orientation can be meaningfully undertaken in the absence of a visionary leadership that is able to mobilize society for an all-round programme of change that is transformational. Such a programme of change must also, by definition, be based on a social contract between state and society, rulers and those whom they govern. It should, by its nature be radical enough to inspire citizens to work for the dawn of a new era in the national history. It should also become the framework for the forging of citizenship and national identity. Properly conceived, an agenda of national re-orientation that will deliver transformative change will also decisively shift notions of leadership from self-enrichment and aggrandizement to a much greater focus on sacrifice

and example of that type that citizens can both respect and draw inspiration from.

Time and space will not permit a much deeper elaboration of the pre-requisites for successful national re-orientation and the critical role of transformational leadership in it. It bears pointing out though that what is true for Nigeria is true for the rest of Africa, with appropriate allowance made for local contexts and histories. We also know from history and the experiences of state and nation-building for greatness that if leadership does not emerge that makes a resolve derived from a broad social contract, to break with an unhappy past and chart a path of renewal, desired programmes of transformation cannot be achieved and sustained. The flip side of a transformational leadership is an active citizenship, one that is drilled in core national values and is engaged in the affairs of the commonwealth both to exact accountability from rulers and make inputs into the public policy process. Transformational leadership may thrive where there is a broad elite consensus on what constitutes the common good and how best to secure it on a continuous and incremental basis; it cannot, however, endure where there is no active and engaged citizenry that is able to

hold leaders accountable for their actions and compel regular resets in the social contract as demanded by changing times and circumstances.

As Covenant University sends forth the Class of 2015 to exercise the training given to it over the last few years, I want to challenge the graduands to remember that though a chapter in their lives is closing today, another one is being opened immediately and it is one which is already pregnant with expectations that this cohort will become part of a battalion of change agents who have been socially prepared to lead Nigeria and Africa to destiny. In going out into the world, you will do well to remember the key moral and life values with which you have been equipped to take on the world: love and patriotism, honesty and integrity, courage and boldness, and a spirit of innovation and invention. Like the philosopher and theologian St. Paul, be sure at all times to fight a good fight, to stay the course in the face of all the temptations that will come, to finish the race undistracted, and above all, to keep the faith. This way, we can be hopeful that through this generation, old Africa may truly begin to rediscover itself in order to occupy its rightful place in the comity of nations.

