

## GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

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[Welcome Address to LASU-ESAN Conference by Professor T. Y. Surakat, President, English Scholars' Association of Nigeria (ESAN) on Tuesday, 12th September, 2023]

Vice Chancellor and Principal Officers of Lagos State University here present  
Dean of the Faculty of Arts  
Head of the Host-department  
Distinguished Trustees and Fellows of ESAN  
Esteemed members and EXCO of ESAN  
My dear students of LASU  
Gentlemen of the Press  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

ASSALAM ALAIKUM ... (Peace to you all...)  
Peace be unto this gathering  
E kaarɔ o; ɕe daada l'ewa (Good morning. How are you)?  
INA KWANA, YAYA MUKE? (similar Hausa greeting)  
NDE WO, KEDU (IGBO KWENU...!!!!)  
E KU BE LADZIN, KIE WO NA (Nupe greeting)?

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the 38th Annual Conference of the English Scholars' Association of Nigeria (ESAN). I firmly and strongly believe that this is God's appointed time for this yearly convention which could not hold in September, 2022, as a result of the industrial action embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). We, therefore, give glory to the Supreme Being for the opportunity granted to us to congregate today at LASU to reflect and cross-fertilize ideas on the central theme "Language, Literature and Communication Studies for Peace, (In)security and Development in Nigeria". The choice of the theme is apt and timely, especially, at a period when violence, injustice and turbulence have enveloped virtually all parts of the world, on all fronts: socio-cultural, political, educational, economic, and even, spiritual. In the Nigerian context, the issues include: Terrorism, Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, militancy, kidnapping, farmer-herder clashes, cattle-rustling, cultism and ritual killings, inter-communal clashes, political assassination, ethnic jingoism or chauvinism, religious intolerance or bigotry, drug addiction and peddling, child molestation/abuse and pedophilia. Others are economic woes such as the struggle for resource control, separatist agitations, hunger and extreme poverty, famine and disease,

high rate of unemployment and underemployment, high level of illiteracy and crisis in the education sector.

I have to specially commend both the national and local conference organising committees for the relevancy and timeliness of the main and sub-themes that will engage the attention of scholars, researchers, educationists and other professionals for the next two days. We also appreciate all individuals, groups and corporate bodies for facilitating the success of the event we are witnessing today. The list is long, but we shall definitely mention, identify them at a more appropriate occasion. As we embark on this academic exercise, we must endeavor to proffer pragmatic and workable solutions to the myriad of problems confronting our country.

I have patiently looked through the over two hundred titles and abstracts of papers for this conference under the various sections of Language/Linguistics, Literature/Literary Studies, as well as Communication & Cultural Studies. I am convinced that we shall do justice to the numerous sub-themes of the conference. Very soon, in a matter of minutes, the keynote as well as plenary speakers would set the ball rolling. They will take us on an academic voyage, sailing through the micro- and macro- aspects of linguistics, literature and development communication. However, I crave your indulgence to briefly venture into areas related to Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Linguistics and Theolinguistics.

Language, literature and communication have roles to play in our quest for durable peace, security and development. But these disciplines alone do not have the elixir or magic wand to solve all the problems. Other behavioural or social sciences (psychology, sociology, political science, economics) and the humanistic studies must also contribute their own quotas. In addition, collective responsibility is required: the individuals, families, the larger society, government at the various levels and the governed must be involved. Educational institutions, religious bodies, civil society and non-governmental organizations, corporate bodies, and all must also be involved. In essence, to cook or prepare a delicious soup of peace, all hands must be on deck.

Language is involved in all spheres of life just as it plays a crucial role in shaping, influencing and directing the activities, ideas and consciousness of Homo-sapiens. However, language can also be a double-edged sword. In other words, it can be used for good or evil. Our advocacy, obviously, is appositive use of language, literature, communication and culture to achieve the desired results. Deliberate actions and policies must be deployed to achieve peace and security which are a *sine-qua-non* for sustainable growth and development. Everyone must work and walk the talk. It goes beyond mere lip service. Government must lead, the governed must cooperate; government must develop the political will and set the agenda while the led should faithfully comply.

Factors, attitudes and actions that endanger peace, security and development in the country include: bad constitution imposed on Nigeria by the Military, bad governance, unpatriotic citizenry, lack of accountability, poor management, bad leadership and poor followership, indiscipline, corruption, chauvinism, bigotry, greed, inordinate ambition, poor reward system, upturned or distorted values, favouritism, nepotism, injustice, oppression, executive recklessness, judicial rascality, legislative over-reach, criminal self-help, unbridled freedom, politics of exclusion, impunity both in high and low quarters, intolerance, lack of empathy and human feelings, hate speech, fake news, misinformation, disinformation, Machiavellian propaganda, among others.

The power of words and the double-edged sword can be discerned from the Yoruba saying *ọrọ ni 'yọ obi l'apo ...* (words can bring kola-nut from the pocket, just as it can equally bring sword or dagger from the sheath). Words can be manipulated to convince a man to 'go to hell' and he will long for the journey. The magical, miraculous powers of words can also be illustrated by making reference to aspects of critical theolinguistics. Although Karl Marx was translated to have said that "religion is the opium of the people, masses", there is the popular saying amongst adherents cutting across faiths that "prayers or supplications are the panacea for all ailments, problems and conditions". These two seemingly contradictory (paradoxical?) assertions cannot, however, be interpreted literally. For the faithful, if they find themselves in certain conditions, they resort to chanting or reciting lines or passages from the Scripture. For instance, Muslims often recite AYATUL KURSIYU, SURATUL IKHLAS, FALAQ, NAS, FATIHA, YASIN, and so on, for special effects – depending on circumstances. Similarly, Christians also recite relevant aspects of the Holy Bible such as Psalm 23 – The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...; Psalm 27 – The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; of whom shall I fear? The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; of whom shall I be afraid?; and many more. Adherents of African Traditional Religion also chant incantations which they believe perform wonders.

From the economic perspective, let us consider the ripple, turbulent effects of an expression which was even not originally in the text of the inaugural address of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (on 29th May, 2023) ... SUBSIDY IS GONE! As soon as the pithy statement dropped, the spontaneous catastrophic transformations in the economic fortunes of Nigerians still produce a sour taste in the mouth of virtually all the citizens. A simple clause announcing the removal of subsidy on petrol has exacerbated the problems of hyper-inflation, hunger, unemployment, insecurity, and so on. Nigerians may have to grapple with the adverse effects of the policy statement for some time to come except if appropriate remedial measures are introduced.

In a situation like this, the relevance of “Liberating, Functional and Sound Education” cannot be overemphasized. As academics and professionals, this conference is part of our own contributions to addressing the challenges facing the country. All other stakeholders should not hesitate to play their own roles as patriotic citizens and groups. Good governance, War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), Ethical reorientation are among the essential ingredients for peace, security, economic growth and national development.

My sincere and passionate appeal to our leaders, politicians and all is: “Let us give peace a chance (but not peace of the graveyard); Do not be divided by religion, ethnicity, gender or age. All hands must be on deck to achieve the desired results”. It is an open secret that both local and international forces are responsible for retarding the progress of Nigeria. Consequently, deliberate strategic moves must be deployed to neutralize the saboteurs. Those who do not appreciate peace should try conflict. However, we plead with the rich and powerful politicians to “Let the poor breathe and allow the masses to survive; Let the teachers teach and not cheat the learners; Kill corruption, fraud and impunity but kill NOT Nigerians”.

### **Conclusion**

As an incurable optimist, I strongly believe that Nigeria will be great again by the grace of God. But we must play our roles conscientiously as patriotic citizens. It is on this optimistic note that I refer to the lyrics of four tracks by three legendary artistes: 1. WAR – Bob Marley; 2. EQUAL RIGHTS – Bob Marley; 3. MY VISION (for Nigeria) – Ebenezer Obey; and 4. LIFT UP NIGERIA – Sunny Ade.

#### **1. WAR**

Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is War Me say War

That until there are no longer first class and second-class citizens of any nation

Until the colour of a man’s skin is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes, Me say War

That until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all, without regard to race, Me say War

That until that day, the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship, rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained – Now everywhere is War

And until the ignoble and unhappy regimes that hold our people in Angola, in Mozambique, South Africa, sub-human bondage have been toppled, utterly destroyed – Well, everywhere is War; Me say War;

War in the East, War in the West, War up North, War down South – War, war and rumours of War

And until that day, the African continent will not know peace and we Africans will fight we find it necessary and we know we shall win, -----As we are confident, in the victory of good over evil, good over evil

## 2. EQUAL RIGHTS

Everyone is crying out for peace, yes, none is crying out for justice (2x)

I don't want no peace; I need equal rights and justice ....

Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die (power of Jesus)

... I don't want no peace; I need equal rights and justice ....

What is due to Caesar, you better give it unto Caesar;

And what belong to I, ... you better give it unto I

'Cause I don't want no peace, I need equal rights and justice;

I got to get it, equal rights and justice; I'm fighting for it ....

Everyone is headed for the top, tell me how far is it from the bottom?

Nobody knows but everyone is fighting to reach the top, how far is it from the bottom?

I don't want no peace; I want equal rights and justice ....

Everyone is talking about crime, tell me who are the criminals? I really don't see ... I don't want no peace; I need equal rights and justice ....

## 3. MY VISION (for Nigeria)

*Nigeria yi si ma dun, o da mi l'oju*

*L'ola Oluwa, a dun, á dun, a dun*

*B'ẹkun pẹ d'alẹ gan, ayọ nbẹ lowuro*

*O to ojo meta ti a ti gba ominira*

*ẹ wo ẹnu ilẹ, ẹ wo ẹnu oko*

*Ka sunmọ Oluwa, ka tẹ 'pa mọ 'şẹ*

*Ka tẹ 'pa mọ 'şẹ, ka f'ẹşẹ s'ilẹ*

*Nigeria si ma dun, o da mi l'oju*

*L'ola Oluwa, a dum, a dun, a dun*

*Baba-loke ba wa şe k'odara, ba wa şe ko da*

*Edumare ba wa şe k'odara, ba wa şe ko daa*

*ogbagba ti ngba ara adugbo, ba wa şe k'oda,*

*oba ti ngba alailara, ba wa şe k'oda*

*ş'i'ju aanu rẹ wo wa, ko ba wa şe ko dara*

This Nigeria will be sweet, great again, I'm sure, convinced  
By the grace of God, she'll be sweet, great and sweet

If tears last till late night, joy will follow in the morning  
It's been several decades that we attained Independence  
Imagine the glorious and wonderful experience we enjoyed  
Nigerians must move closer to God, and work harder  
We must work diligently, and avoid sins or transgressions  
(to redeem or regain the lost glory)

Heavenly-Father guide us aright, guide us aright  
Almighty God make it good for us, make it good for us  
The Saviour of the masses, guide us aright  
The Helper of the helpless, make it good for us  
(The King Who grants hope to the hopeless, make it good for us)

**Have mercy on us and bail us out of the difficult, precarious situation**

#### **4. LIFT UP NIGERIA**

*Nigeria yi ti gbogbo wa ni, ko ma gbodo baje  
'tori ko si'bomiran ti a le lo, ajo o le da bi ile  
e je ka so'wope k'afi'mo s'okan  
gbe k'emi gbe*

*oya k'ajo gbe, gbe k'emi gbe (2x)  
(Repeat of first verse stanza)*

*Oya k'ajo se asaro t'odara  
K'afi inu we'nu, k'afi ikun lu'kun  
Ki Nigeria o le te siwaju  
Ogun ote yi tito  
Ki a gbagbe ija eleyameya  
Hausa, Ibo pelu Yoruba, seni a sa jo jija ominira  
Ominira de a tun nba'raja, eedi re o, ogun esu ni  
Gbe k'ajo gbe*

*Oya k'ajo gbe o, gbe k'emi gbe  
(Repeat of the first stanza or verse)*

*omo iya kannasa laje, ija l'ode ti orin d'owe*

*nipa ɔrɔ oşelu wa, oun lokoba gbogbo wa o  
lo koba ɔrɔ aje wa*

*'tori komaleşe ki'ja ma wa, ti ija bade k'a pari ẹ loyẹ  
'tori awɔn ɔmọ wa ti nbọ leyin,  
kinni a fẹ sọ pe a gbe'le aiye şe?*

(Other artistes are featured who sang in Hausa, Nigerian Pidgin, etc).  
This Nigeria is for us all, she must not be destroyed  
Because there's nowhere else to go (or call ours)  
There's no place like home, home sweet home  
(East, North or West, home is the best)  
Let's all join hands together and forge a unity of purpose  
(Let's cooperate, unite and forge ahead)  
Lift her up and I'll also uplift her

Let's together lift her up, you lift and I'll also her up (2x)  
(Repeat of the first verse or stanza)

Let's engage in meaningful dialogue  
Let's rob minds and compare notes, share ideas  
All for the progress, uplift and development of Nigeria  
Enough of the bickering and unnecessary wars  
Let's put an end to inter-ethnic rivalry and crisis  
Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and all jointly struggled for Independence  
With Independence, we now fight, quarrel with one another  
It's like a curse – the treacherous orchestration of the devil / demon  
You lift, and I'll also lift her up

Now, let's jointly, together uplift her, you lift and I lift  
(Repeat of the first verse or stanza)

We are all from the same parent / mother  
A little misunderstanding degenerates to a serious conflict  
(because a mere song is misinterpreted as a proverbial satire)  
It is our reckless, unbridled politicking that created the fragmentation  
It also created the economic crisis (from which Nigerians still suffer)  
Quarrels are inevitable in a human society (but)  
When quarrels erupt, they should be amicably resolved, settled  
**Because of the coming generation**  
**What legacy shall we bequeath to them?**



## DEDICATION

This piece is dedicated to the memory of Prof. D. R. Jowitt whose funeral service in the United Kingdom was conducted about the time this address was delivered at the Lagos State University, Ojo, today, 12th September, 2023. Less than a week after (18th September, 2023 – to be precise), I also had the privilege of receiving, on behalf of ESAN, the remains of our Late Fellow at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja. I had known the Late Professor David Jowitt for three decades, during the time he served at the Bayero University, Kano. His publications, particularly *Nigerian English Usage* (1991/2000) are cited in some of my local and international publications. ESAN (formerly, Nigeria English Studies Association, NESAs) further enhanced our relationship over the decades. I was also at his investiture as a Fellow of the Nigeria Academy of Letters at the University of Lagos while I was the Vice President of ESAN (and a Member of NAL). Though physically away, his fond memories would remain with ESAN for a very long time.

May his gentle soul rest in perfect peace – Ameen. ADIEU, DRJ!