

ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES (ASUU)



*TEXT OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AT THE END OF THE
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (NEC) MEETING OF THE ACADEMIC
STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES (ASUU) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
AGRICULTURE, ABEOKUTA, ON MONDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER, 2019*

PROTOCOL

Comrades and compatriots of the Press,

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), rising from her National Executive Council (NEC) meeting at the University of Agriculture Abeokuta, this morning is, once again, compelled to address you as co-sojourners in the struggle for a better education system and a transformed Nigerian nation. In particular, the crisis of repositioning Nigerian universities for the transformation of the country is evident in maladministration, ineptitude and high-handedness which have arrested the growth of the system. ASUU believes that the origin of the crisis of the Nigerian University System resides in the underdevelopment of the Nigerian state by an alignment of local and foreign elements who have captured the body and soul of the country. Nigerians' aspirations for a stable, virile and enviable nation-state, where individuals' pursuit of decent life and living is guaranteed, has become a receding mirage. Nigerian citizens,

seeing little or no future ahead of them, have been forced to join the increasing army of global migrants and wanderers in search of elusive greener pastures in South Africa, Libya, Turkey, Sudan, Italy and other hostile environments. From increasing insecurity, to mindless betrayal of the people's trust by the elected politicians, mass unemployment of the teeming youth, ethno-religious conflicts and rising cases of violent crimes and criminalities, there are ominous signs of a failing Nigerian nation.

ISSUES IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITIES

The National Executive Council (NEC) reviewed developments in the education sector since her last meeting and expressed strong worries over several issues that have arrested meaningful transformation of the sector. The failure of the Federal Government to declare a "State of Emergency in the Education Sector" as canvased by the Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu, at the Inter-Ministerial Retreat at the Presidency in November 2017 gives serious cause for concern. Among other things, the period of "emergency" should have been devoted to squarely addressing the place of education in Nigeria's developmental aspirations; the problem of underfunding of education, from pre-primary to the university level which, in the last four years, hovered between 6% and 8%; the rot and decay in existing facilities; expansion plans as against the current haphazard establishment leading to mushrooming of educational institutions; and incentives and welfare for workers in the education sector. ASUU calls on government to deliver on the promised "change" in education through an immediate declaration of state of emergency in the sector. In the same vein, ASUU-NEC frowns at government's

propensity for breaching agreements and memoranda signed with the Union. In particular, the Union notes with dissatisfaction that the renegotiation of the FGN-ASUU Agreement of 2009, which commenced way back in March 2017, has not been concluded for more than two years owing to hiccups created largely by government representatives on the Renegotiation Committee. In addition, the Union expresses strong disappointment with the failure of the Federal Government to keep to the timelines attached to the setting up of Visitation Panels to all Federal Universities and mainstreaming the Earned Academic Allowances (EAA) as agreed in the 7th February, 2019 Memorandum of Action (MoA). We hereby call on the Federal Government to urgently address these and other related issues in the best interest of Nigerian public universities.

Another major issue of concern to ASUU at the last meeting was the circular from the Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation (OAGP) dated 29th August, 2019 stating, among other things, that "Government will no longer send money to any MDAs (sic) not on IPPIS platform as Office of the Accountant-General will henceforth pay (sic) salary of all Government employees directly through IPPIS Platform". NEC reviewed the ongoing attempt to forcefully migrate academics in all Federal Universities to the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) and reaffirmed her earlier position in the NSU Keffi NEC Resolution where IPPIS was rejected as a system of salary payment in Nigeria's Federal universities. The Union's principal problem with IPPIS is that it will erode University Autonomy which is backed by Law (the University Miscellaneous Act of 2003, 2012; individual university laws, etc.).

Consequently, NEC resolved to stiffly resist any attempt to force it down the throat of our members because of its potential for eroding the Union's hard-won gains in respect of the autonomy of public universities in Nigeria.

NEC also considered the resuscitation of the "Oath of Secrecy" policy in some university campuses. As we argued in the past, NEC restated her position that the work of academics is about seeking and using information. This universal principle which undergirds scholarly pursuits is lent an additional weight by Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act (2011) which "affords everyone regardless of tribe, age, creed, a right of access to information or records held by public institutions and relevant private entities, irrespective of the form in which such information or records are kept". The Union therefore finds it objectionable and directs our members, nationwide, to ignore any attempt to gag or muscle them in exercising their rights as free intellectuals in any Nigerian university.

The meeting of NEC equally discussed the reported promise of the leadership of the House of Representatives to fast-track the re-establishment of the National Education Bank (NEB) in the country. NEC viewed this development with strong suspicion; wondering why the Nigerian ruling class should contemplate bringing back a project which collapsed after about eight (8) years (1993-2000) of its experimentation on account of corruption, maladministration and government's irresponsiveness. We are aware that this idea was borrowed from the Euro-American setting which the Nigerian ruling class has adopted as their perfect model. But, in all honesty, can they compare the Nigerian situation with that of the Western world in terms of guaranteed opportunities for paid

employment? Even in the climes where the idea of students' loan through Education Bank was borrowed, it has been seriously reviewed because of the attendant consequences of mass default in repayment; with serious consequences for the borrowers including psychiatric problem and suicide. ASUU-NEC restated her rejection of the re-introduction of the National Education Bank and we shall use all legitimate means to resist it in the long interest of Nigerian youth and the Nation.

ASUU was alarmed about the initial reports on the avoidable death of three students of the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Bauchi, on 5th August, 2019. NEC reviewed the incident leading to the loss of three (3) students as a result of a collapsed bridge linking the students' hostels with the lecture area and regretted that it could happen in a 21st century university campus. ASUU calls for a full-scale investigation into the immediate and remote causes of the incident. Anyone found culpable in the ugly incident should be made to face the full weight of the law. More importantly, the ATBU incident should be seen as a wake-up to university authorities and governments (Federal and State) to rise to the challenge of upgrading facilities in public universities as we have consistently demanded. Until and unless this is done, Nigeria may not be able to prevent a repeat of this regrettable incident in some other campuses.

STATE OF THE NATION

Comrades and compatriots, today, critical sectors of the Nigerian society such as education, health, and power supply have continued to deteriorate on account of wanton corruption and deliberate mismanagement of Nigeria's economy by members of

an insensitive, reckless and decadent ruling class who are tied to the apron-string of the Bretton Woods institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Little wonder therefore that most Nigerians live in excruciating poverty, occasioned by high level of unemployment, widening inequality, decaying infrastructure and failure of government's macro-economic policies resulting in hyperinflation and rising debt profile. The neo-liberal, capitalist economy foisted on Nigeria cannot but produce a society where there is high level of insecurity, kidnapping for ransom and hostage taking.

At no point in the history of our country since the flag independence have Nigerians been as vulnerable as they are today. Daily incidents of kidnapping and hostage-taking for ransom have come to sign-post our highways. Dens of kidnapers where kingpins of criminality are fully in charge are now all over our villages, towns and cities. In the face of this daunting challenge of insecurity, the security agents, from time to time, remind us of their helplessness because of poor equipment and underfunding. No wonder, criminals now live and thrive among us without scruples!

A situation of insecurity and helplessness of the security agents is inevitable where materialism and politics of prebendalism reign supreme. Only millionaires and billionaires can now win party primaries, be it for local government chairmanship, legislative seat, governorship or presidency. As such, politics is approached with mercantile mind-sets where every kobo invested into the contest must be recouped with stupendous profits. A corrupt and corrupting system of this kind can only produce self-serving leaders with the mass of Nigerian electorates receiving the short end of the stick.

It is within the context of such political arrangement that Nigerians have been subjected to increasing infrastructural decay, abandoned educational institutions, accumulation of months of unpaid salaries and, decreasing quality of life and life expectancy.

Violent ethno-sectarian clashes, mostly induced by contest for the control of the people's resources, have also become the order of the day. Various ethnic groups who have long co-existed peacefully have been manipulated by the political class to see one another as enemies. Mutual suspicions have become the game. Hence, the poor Fulani herdsman, tending the cattle of the money-bags in the Cities, now sees the poor farmer as his enemy and vice versa. For many Nigerians with no survival means, life has become so meaningless, such that suicide is now an attractive alternative.

It is the conviction of our Union that, as long as Nigeria remains a dependent, peripheral and rentier state, with a parasitic elite who minister only to their selfish greed to the detriment of the Nigerian people, so long would our compatriots in the diaspora, who are forced to migrate out of Nigerian in search of greener pasture, will be victims of racial and xenophobic attacks as currently the case in South Africa and other parts of the world.

Comrades, it is not only uncharitable but inhuman that a government that is still foot-dragging on finalising the framework for paying the newly-approved minimum wage could encourage some elected officials to set aside several billions of Naira for the

purchase of exquisite, luxury, vehicles for themselves. This is a further attestation to the crises and contradictions of the global capitalist system in which Nigeria is a captive.

CONCLUSION

Against the foregoing background, our Union restates her position that, the country, as a matter of categorical imperative, should discontinue the unproductive, repressive and exploitative neo-liberal ideology and its structures; reconstitute the Nigerian state along a Socialist path that would guarantee life more abundant and popular participation; and revolutionize the educational, health and agricultural sectors to galvanize the productive capacity of our people as a basis for employment generation and poverty eradication.

Finally, ASUU reaffirms her commitment to the struggle for repositioning our universities for the radical transformation of Nigeria. It is the only way to go for the progressive and sustained development of the country. Towards this end, we call on all progress-loving workers, media practitioners, civil society organisations and friends of Nigeria to continue to support ASUU in our struggle for a transformative education for the betterment of Nigeria.

The struggle continues!

Thank you.



Biodun Ogunyemi
President

9th September, 2019