

**ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES
(ASUU)**



**TEXT OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF
UNIVERSITIES (ASUU) HELD AT THE END OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE
COUNCIL (NEC) MEETING HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA, ABUJA
13TH-14TH NOVEMBER 2021**

I. PROTOCOL

II. INTRODUCTION

Comrades and compatriots of the Press,

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) held its National Executive Council (NEC) meeting at the University of Abuja, Abuja, between Saturday 13th and 14th November, 2021, during which the union interrogated the parlous state of the nation's economy; the hydra-headed security problem in the country in general and our universities in particular; government's unfaithfulness in implementation of the Memorandum of Action (MoA) it signed with our union upon which the last strike action was suspended; the worsening conditions of living and working in the Nigerian University System (NUS) and the nation at large; the controversial professorship appointment of Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami) at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO); among others. These issues deserve serious and urgent attention given that they have life-threatening implications for our members in particular, and the ordinary Nigerians and the nation in general.

III. MOU, MOA and 2009 AGREEMENTS WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

In another few weeks, it would be one year since our union patriotically suspended the nine-month strike action occasioned by the failure of the Federal Government to implement the 2009 Agreement and several Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) and MoA that it entered into with ASUU. At the meeting of our Union with the Honourable Minister of Labour and Employment, Dr. Chris Ngige, on Thursday, 14th October, 2021, major outstanding issues between ASUU and the Federal Government were raised, discussed and decisions reached as follows:

- i. **Funding for Revitalization of Public Universities:** The N30bn revitalisation fund for public universities purported to be kept in a dedicated account at the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) was yet to be disbursed even when the majority of Vice-Chancellors had successfully defended their proposals as condition precedent to accessing the fund. The proposal defense exercise which took place from 4th to 8th October, 2021, was followed by the transmission of the report to the Minister of Finance for the release of allocated funds to the successful universities. On the strength of this, representatives of the Federal Government gave assurance that the qualified universities would get the funds on or before the end of October, 2021. Surprisingly, as of today, 15th November, 2021, government is yet to fulfil its promise; with no cogent reason made available to our union.
- ii. **Earned Academic Allowances:** At the meeting, the Executive Secretary (ES) of the National Universities Commission (NUC) informed ASUU that N22.127bn had been appropriated in the 2021 budget as Earned Academic Allowance (EEA) based on weighted average of annual salary appropriated for each university. It was then agreed that the Ministry of Education would take one week while the Ministry of Finance would take up to the end of October, 2021 within which payment would be effected. As at today, nothing has been done to implement this agreement.

- iii. **University Transparency Accountability Solution (UTAS):** NITDA informed the meeting of the huge success of the workshop where UTAS was demonstrated to the satisfaction of all end users. NITDA also acknowledged the positive feedbacks from the end users that were present at the workshop. The meeting was further informed that NITDA was writing its comprehensive report which would be concluded and submitted by the end of October, 2021. This was to be followed by consideration and subsequent approval of UTAS for deployment by the government. Unfortunately, all those reports and promises have amounted to nothing; with no information on UTAS coming from the government and subjecting our members to the evil of IPPIS.
- iv. **Promotion Arrears:** The Budget Office informed the meeting that about 17 universities were being processed for payment of their outstanding promotion arrears. Prompted to expedite action on the issue, we were promised that there would be a meeting on Tuesday, 19th October, 2021 where all concerned would be brought together to put an end to this ugly trend. We are still awaiting the update as we speak.
- v. **Renegotiation of 2009 ASUU-FGN Agreement:** The meeting agreed that the Ministry of Education would set up a committee to study the draft Agreement document produced in May 2021 and revert to the renegotiation team for further action. The Labour Minister promised to fast-track the process; including consideration of recommendations from the Ministry of Education by the Presidential Committee on Salaries and Wages and subsequent approval by Mr. President. Nothing has been heard since then. This is very worrisome, given that our members have been subjected to the same personnel emolument since 2009.
- vi. **Inconsistencies in IPPIS payment:** The inconsistencies in payment of our members' salaries through the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) were acknowledged after initial denial. The Director of IPPIS

then promised to develop a template to be used in the resolution of the matter. The ES, NUC, also promised to convene a meeting with IPPIS, VCs, Bursars, and Registrars with a view to providing a list of all the affected staff on 19th October, 2021. This was to assist in resolving the problem once and for all. However, for one reason or the other, this did not happen. The permanent solution, as we see it, is that UTAS should be fast-tracked to end the unwarranted imposition of IPPIS on our members.

IV. SO-CALLED PROFESSORSHIP OF DR. ISA ALI IBRAHIM

The attention of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has been drawn to the controversy generated by the recent appointment of Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (the current Minister of Communication and Digital Economy) as a Professor of Cyber Security by the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). The controversial appointment reportedly followed the advertisement for employment into the position of Professor and other ranks, placed by the administration of FUTO in *The Guardian* and *Daily Sun* newspapers of Tuesday, 22nd September 2020. Thereafter, Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami) purportedly applied for the position and was subsequently appointed as a Professor of Cyber Security in the University. The controversy this appointment has generated is unprecedented in the recent history of Nigerian universities. Indeed, it has generated passionate comments and responses from individuals and groups within and outside the nation. The controversy centres on the perceived roles played by the University administration in the alleged fraudulent appointment, and the subsequent seeming endorsement by the ASUU branch at FUTO. Consequently, some media commentators – print electronic and social – have impugned that the national body of ASUU was in agreement with the position of ASUU FUTO Branch on the said appointment.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. ASUU, as a Union, has never supported, promoted or endorsed any illegal appointment or promotion of academics in any Nigerian University, including those of its members. As a Union, we have always insisted on strict adherence to due process and the rule of law in all aspects of university administration and governance. In fact, when the news of the controversial appointment of Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami) to the rank of a Professor by the FUTO authorities broke out, ASUU

National directed the Branch, through the Owerri Zone, to fully and urgently investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding the appointment and report back. ASUU FUTO held a congress on Wednesday, 22nd September, 2021 and appointed a five-man panel of Professors to ascertain whether due process was strictly adhered to in the appointment of Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami) as a Professor of Cyber Security by the Governing Council of FUTO and submit a report within seven days. The committee presented a report to the Chairperson of ASUU FUTO. The report was then presented to the Congress of ASUU FUTO, which was reported to have accepted the recommendations of the committee on the legality of the appointment of Dr. Isa Ibrahim as a Professor in the University. However, the secretary of the Committee later turned round to produce a minority report distancing himself from the findings and recommendations of the committee.

ASUU NEC members, like many other concerned Nigerians, did not accept the Report of the ASUU FUTO Congress. There are serious doubts and unanswered questions bordering on the qualification of Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami) for the position. The FUTO Branch Committee's report failed to justify Dr. Isah Ali Ibrahim's (Pantami's) appointment to professor on the bases of requisite experience, professional suitability and antecedents at the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (ATBU). Some critical questions begging for answers include the following:

- Has Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami) met the 12-year post-qualification requirement as contained in the advertisement?
- Does he possess the required relevant academic publications and 70% being in web presence?
- Can a serving Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria take up a tenured appointment in the university?
- Is he capable of carrying out his official duties as required of a professor at the same time as a serving Minister?
- Has Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami) met the conditions of teaching supervision mentorship of younger academics and academic leadership required of a professor?
- What did the external assessors' reports on the documents submitted by Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami) say about his publications?

- As it has always been the culture of academics what did the referee reports from his places of previous employment say about him?
- What is the general assessment of the students previously taught by him?
- Did the Governing Council meet to approve the appointment?

In view of the foregoing and having rejected the ASUU-FUTO Committee's report, NEC set up an independent committee to investigate all issues surrounding the controversial appointment of Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim (Pantami) as a Professor of Cyber Security in the University. Thereafter, the position of ASUU-NEC shall be made known to the public. In addition, another committee shall visit the ASUU-FUTO branch with a view to determining the role of members in the controversial appointment and report back to NEC for further action.

V. THE CONTINUED NEGLECT AND PROLIFERATION OF UNIVERSITIES

Setting-up a university, globally, is not cheap. Hence, the import of adequate funding of universities cannot be over-emphasized. Regrettably, it has become fashionable in Nigeria for both Federal and State governments to set up universities without any intention to fund them. Annual budgetary allocations to the education sector are scandalously low and underscore the nation's lack of seriousness about educating its children and youths. It is no longer news that annual Federal Government allocations to education have been on a continuous slide in the last ten years coming as low as below 6 per cent in year 2021. Given the steady devaluation of the Naira and the spiralling inflation, it is obvious that President Muhammadu Buhari's promise of a 50 percent increase in education budgets for years 2021 and 2022, if implemented at all, would be ineffectual. While universities, particularly those owned by the states, are primed to continuously exploit students through the commercialization of education in the disguise of Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) to fund their personnel cost, capital projects have no place in the owner-governments' priority projects given the abysmally low or total lack of subversion from the proprietors of the state universities.

On this issue of poor funding and proliferations of universities, it cannot be over-stressed that the greatest culprits are state governments. Most of our state universities are derisively referred to as "TETFund universities" on account of the poor funding and having to procure basic facilities at the mercy of grants assessed yearly from Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund). It is indeed no exaggeration that over 90 percent of capital projects on the campuses of both State and Federal universities in the last 10 years were funded through TETFund and Needs Assessment Revitalisation grants. Most state governors and Governing Councils now look up to TETFund as the only regular source for funding capital projects. In some instances, state governments had diverted allocations meant for existing institutions from TETFund to establish their politically-motivated new universities. Even the minimum obligation of paying staff salaries has been ignored by these state governors; with our members being owed arrears of salaries for between three and 20 months in some state universities. It is immoral and criminal for elected officials who collect their jumbo pays and stupendous allowances as and when due to continually subject Nigerian academics to psychological torture and human devaluation by withholding their salaries and emoluments. This narrative must change if we are to maintain industrial harmony in our state universities. ASUU will stop at nothing to defend and protect the interest of our members at all times - be they in the Federal or State universities.

By the act of criminal abandonment of their responsibilities to fund universities, governments in Nigeria are encouraging irresponsible extortion of our students in the name of IGR. This act of negligence in itself tacitly promotes corruption in our universities. Our union has historically stood against commercialization of education and other social services in Nigeria. Whether in the guise of IGR or whatever nomenclature, we stand resolutely against the privatization of education. We not unaware that the agenda for commercialization and privatization of education being gradually unveiled by the Nigeria's ruling class had long been packaged for them by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) under the Policy Support

Instrument. Our ruling class and their foreign collaborators are surreptitiously making education the exclusive preserve of the rich and privileged members of the Nigerian society. To this end, the model that promotes an absolute reliance on tuition for the funding of capital projects and personnel emoluments in our universities is regrettable, condemnable, totally unacceptable to our union.

For ASUU, to establish a university is not and must not be reduced to the whims and caprices of the political leadership whose understanding of establishing a university does not go beyond a constituency project for easy and unmerited political gains. The process of establishing universities, in other climes, is seen as a very serious matter. Unfortunately, the contrary is the case in Nigeria. Much of the problems we are grappling with today emanated from over-politicisation and poor conceptualization which robbed our new generation universities of the ingredients of developmental academic institutions. Evidently, proliferation and politicisation of universities will take our country nowhere.

The nation is currently harvesting unprecedented scale of privatization and commercialization of university education in Nigeria. The models vary from dependence on over N1 billion bank loans by the Kwara State University, (KWASU) Malete, for the settlement of its monthly wage bills, to raising tuition fees by over 120% at the Ondo State University of Medical Sciences. For ASUU, proper conceptualization and planning for the funding of every new university by Federal and State governments are the irreducible minimums and must be made categorical imperatives before the universities are established. As a matter of fact, the establishment of new universities without concrete plans for their funding is most uncharitable, unpatriotic and does a grave injustice to the idea and ideal of the university.

It is constitutionally in order for state governments to establish universities as education is under the Concurrent Legislative List. However, the authors of the 1999 Constitution

(as amended) presumed that this power must be exercised most responsibly. As we argued on the matter before, State governments proposing to establish new universities should be barred from accessing TETFund grants to support their projects for at least ten (10) years. In the same vein, owners of proposed universities – whether private, state or federal – should provide verifiable growth plan for providing not less than seventy-five (75%) of their pensionable academic staff complement; in addition to provision of requisite infrastructural facilities.

It is time patriotic Nigerians intervened to pressurize the National Assembly to ensure that the pledge made by Nigeria's President to the international community to increase funding by 50% is upheld. Same should apply to State Governments in fulfilling their financial obligations to their universities. No country can rise above its educational level. Most of the socioeconomic problems confronting Nigeria today can be linked to the cumulative inattention to education. To this end, ASUU calls on proprietors of state universities to as a matter of urgency:

1. Make adequate annual budgetary provisions to cover capital and recurrent expenditure, staff development and payment of staff emoluments effective from the 2022 budgets.
2. Pay all outstanding salaries, check-off dues, pension deductions, cooperative contributions, bank loans and other third party deduction made.

VII. STATE OF THE NATION

State of Insecurity in Nigeria, especially in educational institutions

It is no exaggeration to say insecurity in the country is gradually becoming the norm. There is hardly a day that killings either of security personnel or civilians are not reported. The security architecture in the country has almost collapsed. Just last Friday, 13th November, 2021 it was reported that a senior military officer alongside three other military personnel were killed by men reported to be members of ISWAP. These killings

are going on unabated across every region of the country and citizens no longer feel safe anywhere in the country.

ASUU is particularly worried by the incessant attacks on our educational institutions especially the universities. Not too long ago, a young pregnant pharmacist and staff of Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital was abducted and killed. The reign of terror unleashed on schools and colleges in states like Niger, Kaduna, Zamfara, Bornu and Yobe has not only caused distress to the families whose children and wards were abducted for ransom but has discouraged schooling and compounded the problem of out-of-school children. The recent kidnap of three professors, one registry staff and some family members of the University of Abuja (UNIABUJA) epitomised the uncontrollable wave of insecurity that has enveloped our educational institutions from primary to the university. Government's failure to secure the schools, colleges and universities will sound the death knell of our fragile education system. Staff residential quarters on our campuses are least befitting of academic communities of the 21st century. Apart from the dilapidating facilities, many of the quarters are embarrassingly porous; making them prime targets for criminals, hoodlums, kidnappers and other criminal elements. Until recently, the University of Calabar (UNICAL) staff quarters was perennially attacked. Similar experiences were reported in University of Maiduguri, Usman Dan Fodio University and some other campuses. In these and other instances, some of our kidnapped members never came back to tell the stories.

The UNIABUJA episode is a wake-up call on government to address the simmering insecurity situation in Nigerian university campuses. Way back in 2012, issues related to dilapidation of facilities and insecurity on our campuses were comprehensively documented by the Federal Government's Committee on Needs Assessment of Public Universities. Even though the Federal Government agreed with ASUU to release a total of N1.3 trillion over a period of six years only a total of N150 million has been released so far; making it impossible to address the documented rot and decay on our university campuses. The minimum of perimeter fencing of UNIABUJA and other campuses should

be effected without further delay. In addition, there should be thorough investigation of the UNIABUJA's kidnap and other incidences with a view to bringing all those involved to justice and preventing future occurrences.

In addition, there is need for government to consider the following options to end the menace of insecurity in our educational institutions and the nation at large.

- i. Porous borders around the northwest and northeast must be adequately secured to mitigate the spread of terrorists and bandits' activities from neighbouring countries.
- ii. Illicit proliferation of weapons must be genuinely curtailed through sincere implementation of legislations.
- iii. Income inequality, rising poverty and youth unemployment must be addressed to solve this problem because insecurity has a positive and strong correlation with poverty and unemployment.
- iv. Increased political will and determination to end insecurity to disprove the popular cliché that *"if insecurity lasts for more than 24 hours, the government has a hand in it"*. The government must take the *"bull by the horns"* and end insecurity in the country.

Increasing Debt Profile and Worsening Living Conditions

The rate at which the current regime is borrowing, is to say the least, reckless. According to the Debt Management Office, Nigeria's public debt stands at N33.107 trillion/\$87.239 billion. As it stands, the productive capacity of the real sector of the economy is at its lowest. No country can develop when it borrows from domestic and the international community to fund its annual budget.

While public debt is rising, the cost of governance is also skyrocketing. In order to stem the tide of reckless borrowing, there is the need to declare austerity measures on

government apparatuses and drastically reduce the cost of governance. But this should in no way add to the burden of the impoverished citizenry.

Nigerians are today finding it extremely difficult to feed because of the exorbitant prices of food items and cooking gas which are daily on the rise. The adverse effects of this worrisome trend, especially on the growing children, are quite enormous. The evidence abounds in poor growth outcomes, reduced immunity and generally poor health outcomes and disharmony in families. Add to this is the poor take home pays of Nigerian working class which can hardly take them home. Nigerians have never had it so bad!

The recently negotiated new minimum wage has been rendered useless by rising cost of living even as most government workers at both Federal and State levels are yet to be paid the benchmark salary and its consequential adjustment benefits. The living condition in all its ramifications indeed calls for a state of emergency and should thus be treated. Great countries in the world partner with their best brains to solve their challenges including high cost of living. State and federal governments should be sincere enough to seek solutions to myriads of problems in Nigeria by engaging intellectual bodies, especially the academia, to find solutions.

V. CONCLUSION

Comrades and compatriots, ASUU is fully committed to upholding academic integrity in our universities and working to make them more globally competitive. We are equally committed to promoting industrial harmony in the Nigerian University System for as long as all stakeholders are willing and committed to play their parts. We call on all Vice-Chancellors, as the main drivers of the system, to join us in this mission to safeguard the waning image of our universities. They have no business trading honorary degrees and academic positions for personal and immediate gains; thereby smearing the collective integrity of committed scholars and other patriots who are working day and night to uplift the system that produced them. Our union shall not shy away from taking the fight to administrators of Nigerian universities as well as internal and external agents who are

bent on compromising the standard ASUU has consistently laboured to protect and improve.

Finally, we call on all patriotic Nigerians and lovers of Nigeria to prevail on the Federal and State governments to act fast to prevent another round of industrial crisis in Nigeria's public universities. It is painful that our Union may soon have no other way of securing the implementation of FGN-ASUU collectively bargained agreements and redressing the criminal neglect of welfare issues of our members by State Governors. Governments of Nigerian should be held responsible should ASUU be forced to activate the strike it patriotically suspended on 23rd December 2021.

Thank you for listening.

Aluta Continua! Victoria Ascerta!!



Emmanuel Osodeke
President

15th November 2021