

# ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES (ASUU)



## NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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*TEXT OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE ACADEMIC STAFF  
UNION OF UNIVERSITIES HELD AT THE END OF THE NATIONAL  
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (NEC) MEETING IN UNIVERSITY OF  
CALABAR, CALABAR, 4<sup>TH</sup>-5<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST, 2018*

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### **PROTOCOLS**

Compatriots and members of the Press,

The National Executive Council (NEC) of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) met at the University of Calabar, Calabar, on 4th-5th of August 2018. NEC reviewed the state of affairs in our country - with special focus on the crisis in the education sector, the increasing despondency among the generality of the citizenry owing to the hazy political environment foisted on the people of Nigeria by the politicians of the ruling class, the inclement economic atmosphere that has continued to produce joblessness, hampered productive activities and the development of productive capacities, the total disconnect between the government and the Nigerian people at every tier of our political structure.

ASUU as a Union of patriotic intellectuals is compelled, once again, as in our established tradition, to call the attention of Nigerians to the multiple malaises that have constantly conspired and are still conspiring against our developmental aspiration as citizens in the Nigerian state. As a union in the education sector, we have the duty to the Nigerian people to assess and report on the state of our universities which is gravely disturbing.

Education, which is the kernel of transformation in any society, is being treated with levity in Nigeria. The ruling class in Nigeria has constantly refused to pay due attention to the significant place of education in the improvement of the living standards of the people. Promising pronouncements by politicians about education notwithstanding, no state in Nigeria has an all-round internationally competitive system of education. Yet, Nigerians are widely acknowledged to be among the most intellectually endowed in the world, judged by their performance in all parts of the

world. The Nigerian society is left to drift because of the neglect of the educational sector, especially the Nigerian University system (NUS).

## **COLLAPSE OF THE 2017-2018 RENEGOTIATION**

Gentlemen of the Press, you will recall that in January, 2017, the NEC meeting of ASUU held at Bayero University, Kano, welcomed the reconstitution of Government renegotiation team to enter into renegotiation of the 2009 ASUU/FGN Agreement which was long overdue. The renegotiation commenced in March, 2017. *At the inauguration of the Committee, the Minister of Education declared that he expected the renegotiation exercise to be completed **within six weeks**. Since then, for over fourteen months, our Union has had series of negotiation meetings but it has been a fruitless exercise.*

The Chairman of the Government Renegotiating Team, in the person of Dr. Wale Babalakin (SAN), has constituted a stumbling block in the process of the renegotiation. He has arrogantly exhibited "I-know-it-all" attitude and also conducted himself as a judge, instead of a negotiator. With unwarranted arrogance, he has disregarded the cardinal principles of collective bargaining, deliberately slowed the process and made mockery of the core tenets of industrial democracy. He has arrogated to himself the power to decide matters that should be collectively debated, analysed, and agreed upon by the two parties. He has also consistently attempted to substitute core constitutional provisions of Nigeria on education, including university education, by market principles of trading in and purchasing higher education, putting Nigerian children in debt peonage in order to acquire higher education. This situation is not acceptable to the Union.

ASUU has tried through several entreaties to make him see reason and return to the path of collective bargaining and respect for the Constitutional provisions on Education *to no avail*. The Chairman of the Government team has amply demonstrated that his major interest is to force ASUU to accept the dependence of the education of our youth on debts whereas the Constitution promises **free education**. Since March 2017, a period of over fourteen (14) months, discussion has hovered only on funding and Babalakin's insistence that a tuition regime must be introduced into the public universities in Nigeria. It is significant to point out that education is a right, according to the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Education is also a public good, and it is the constitutional responsibility of the Nigerian state to provide qualitative and sound education to its citizenry (Chapter II - Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy). Since the return to civil rule in 1999, the highest budgetary allocation to the education sector was in 2015, when government allocated 11.75 per cent to education. However, in the 2018 budget, the allocation to the education sector fell to a scandalously low point of 7%. This is also unacceptable.

The FGN/ASUU 2017-2018 renegotiations are intended to reverse the crisis afflicting the universities in particular and the education sector in general. Our Union has, since the 1980s, struggled along with the students, the trade unions and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) to reject attempts by Nigerian governments to impose on Nigerians the Bretton Wood institutions' policy of privatising education and taking it out of the reach of the majority of Nigerians who cannot afford privatized education.

The FGN/ASUU renegotiation, which started in March 2017, never got on to substantive negotiation both in content and procedure. The Chairman substituted his views for those of the Renegotiating Committee, dismissed opposing proposals without input from members of his team, and ignored substantive input by **a joint committee of both sides**. ASUU as a Union of intellectuals totally rejects the castration of the truncated renegotiation single-handedly by Dr. Wale Babalakin (SAN). This action has led to palpable fear, anxiety and apprehension on our campuses.

ASUU calls on all patriotic Nigerians to prevail on the Government to return to the path of honour by immediate reconstitution of its team in order to conclude the renegotiation of the 2009 Agreement.

### **OUTSTANDING ISSUES IN THE MEMORADUM OF ACTION (MoA) OF 2017**

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press, you may recall that our Union went on strike on 12th August, 2017 to press for the implementation of the 2009 FGN/ASUU Agreement and the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between ASUU and the Federal Government. The strike culminated in the signing of a MoA and subsequent suspension of a six-week nationwide action on 19th September, 2017. Since the strike was suspended almost a year ago, the issues have remained largely unaddressed. The continuous failure of government to honour agreements reached with the Union clearly demonstrates to our members that the government is not interested in addressing the rot and decay in the Nigerian University System.

Major issues in the 2017 MoA include:

1. **Release of 20 billion revitalisation fund for public universities in Nigeria:** Government promised that "a total sum of N20 billion shall be released by the Honourable Minister of Finance, made up of N10 billion in September 2017 and another N10 billion in October 2017. This agreement has been breached.
2. **Release of the Forensic Report on Earned Academic Allowance (EAA) payments** to offset the balance of the EAA arrears for 2009-2012 and the *mainstreaming of EAA into annual budget starting with a supplementary budget in 2018*. In September 2017, government informed the Union that it had started

the forensic audit of the N30 billion released for EAA in 2013 and that the exercise would be conducted within a timeframe **not exceeding six months**, and further disbursement would be made after the completion of the forensic audit. Till date, government has made no statement whatsoever about the forensic audit, and, consequently, has avoided further payment due our members as promised.

3. **Payment of all arrears of short-fall in salary, in all universities that have met the requirements on Presidential Initiative on Continuous Audit (PICA) Verification:** Though government promised to address this concern within one week of suspension of the strike action by ASUU in September, 2017, the issue of outstanding arrears of salary and third party deductions for many universities that have fulfilled the PICA requirements has not been fully addressed.
4. **Release of NUPEMCO's operational licence.** Almost one year after the agreement was signed, the operational licence for NUPEMCO has not been released. This is a cause for serious concern to the generality of ASUU members, especially those who are close to their retirement or have retired but are yet to register with a Pension Fund Administrator (PFA).
5. **Poor funding and proliferation of State Universities.** Recognising the concurrence of education in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the government promised to present a memo to National Economic Council (NEC) and National Council of States (NCS) in order to draw the attention of the State Governors to the problems in the education sector regarding the proliferation of new tertiary institutions, especially universities, **without adequately funding the existing ones.** Glaring examples of this disturbing phenomenon are states like Ogun, Ondo, Edo, Gombe and, currently, Bayelsa which, on account of inability to meet financial obligations of NDU, has resorted to the embarrassing subterfuge of down-sizing the University work-force via transfer to the state ministries.

#### **LADOKE AKINTOLA UNIVERSITY (LAUTECH), OGBOMOSHO**

LAUTECH has been having problems of poor funding since 2013 due to failure by the Oyo and Osun State governments to release subvention to the University. The University presently depends largely on the funds which come majorly from tuition fees. The University is owing members of staff 10 months' salary, promotion arrears (2013/2014, 2014/2015, 2015/2016 and 2016/2017). There is no evidence of any infrastructural development on the LAUTECH campus since the inception of the present governments in Oyo and Osun States. In an attempt to increase the Internally Generated Funds (IGF) of the institution, a new tuition fee regime has just been announced by the Governing Council of the University. This has expectedly

heightened tensions on the campus. In order to avert the escalation of crisis in the LAUTECH, ASUU hereby calls on parents, workers, and civil society organizations (CSOs) to call on the Governors of Osun and Oyo states to wake up to their responsibilities to the University.

### **KOGI STATE UNIVERSITY (KSU), ANYIGBA**

There is continual and recalcitrant proscription of ASUU in KSU and persecution of our members whose appointments were unjustly terminated over their protest against selective payments as well as non-payment of emoluments. In a desperate move to cover its tracks, the University administration has recruited Assistant Lecturers and Graduate Assistants to handle academic and administrative functions of Professors, Senior Lecturers and PhD holders. Consequently, the academic health of the University has gone down beyond imaginable levels.

ASUU has written to request an audience with the Visitor. The Minister of Labour and Employment as well as the NLC President has also written to the Visitor on the same issues. Unfortunately, the Visitor has rebuffed all these interventions. ASUU will continue to struggle against the injustices visited on its members in Kogi State University, Anyigba, until justice is done and the University is restored to a normally functioning institution.

### **UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN (UNILORIN), ILORIN**

For close to two decades, UNILORIN has remained an example of a University where impunity, lawlessness and unwholesome labour practices thrive. The university administration continues to persecute members loyal to ASUU while giving illegal backing to an imposter group not known to ASUU's Constitution. Some months back, the appointments of ASUU's branch Chairperson and Secretary, Drs. Kayode N. Afolayan and Solomon Oyelekan, respectively, were terminated for exposing the corruption and monumental breaches committed by authorities in that University.

More worrisome is what now appears to be a case of complicity between anti-graft agencies (the EFCC and ICPC) and the UNILORIN administration. Since December, 2016, ASUU submitted a well-evidenced petition to these agencies. *The Nation* newspaper, in an award-winning feature story that ran between 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2017, gave more gory details of the malfeasance in the University of Ilorin. Unfortunately, these agencies have refused to bring the named principal actors to justice. The disposition of these agencies in this matter casts a slur on the much touted anti-corruption stance of the current Federal Government.

## **LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY (LASU), OJO**

In recent times, our Union has been inundated with reports of misgovernance of the Lagos State University by the Professor Olanrewaju Fagbolun-led Administration. The latest of the Vice-Chancellor's witch-hunt of our members is the issuance of queries to the Branch Secretary and Assistant Secretary for carrying out their legitimate Union assignments. The NEC of our Union reasoned that the recent activities of the Vice-Chancellor and the subsisting sack of our Branch Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson *on very questionable charges* are clearly part of the plan of the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Fagbohun, to repress the activities of our Union, with the aim of covering up the truth on important matters, in alliance with well-known opportunists.

Our Union condemns strongly the assault on the officers of our LASU Branch and the gross abuse of power by the Vice-Chancellor, aimed at undermining our members' resolve to ensure that the University operates within the ambit of regulations and academic/professional propriety. We affirm our earlier resolve to ensure that all the injustices being perpetrated by the LASU Administration against ASUU LASU are redressed, using all legitimate means. We also hasten to impress it on the Vice-Chancellor that our Union, following its tradition, will ensure that any individual, no matter how high, who participates in bringing the image of the University system and the academia into disrepute, is apprehended and appropriately dealt with, no matter how long it takes.

## **ON STATE OF THE NATION**

### ***INSECURITY, INCESSANT KILLINGS AND KIDNAPPINGS***

The issue of insecurity in Nigeria has escalated beyond the boundary of rational explanation, just as it continues to defy solution. Indiscriminate killing of Nigerians, mostly the poor in the rural areas of the country, is no longer news. Banditry and criminality of violent dimensions have become the quickest means of making fast money among the desperate, helpless and unemployed citizens of Nigeria. The rate of kidnapping has become so serious that major highways in Nigeria are now places where people are abducted and traumatized. Where ransom monies are not immediately released, abducted victims often lose their lives. One of the most sensational cases which attracted global condemnation was that of the Chibok school girls where over 200 children were forcefully taken hostage right on their school premises. Many of the girls, as at today, are yet to be found and freed. Another instance was the Dapchi school girls, which riddle is yet to be fully unraveled.

The rate of unemployment among Nigerian youth is a major impetus to kidnapping. Unemployment and poverty have pushed a large number of Nigerians into series of criminal acts, both within the country and abroad. Lack of access to education and jobs is a major problem that leads to crime and criminality. The educational institutions are in a state of decline at all levels. Yet allocations to education by Federal and State governments remain about lowest in the last ten years.

### ***HERDERS/FARMERS CONFLICT***

The recent communal crisis that manifests as farmer/pastoralist conflicts has made Nigerians and citizens of other countries wonder what is really happening in the country. Different interpretations have been given to the crisis. The deeper explanation of the crisis, as we have pointed out in our previous publication, is to be found in the politic-economic game among wings of the Nigeria's rulers. Situated in all major ethnic groups, these groups, coalitions, group of individuals, fuel and benefit from these crises that they cause. Poor peasant farmers and pastoralists are victims and instruments used in the interest of the rich. The small land owners who gradually lose their access to land are forced by the need for survival to toil for the rich land owners. The herdsmen are employed as cattle attendants working for large cattle owners who are mostly politicians and businessmen. When violent conflict ensues, the victims of such violence are not the rich, owners of land and cattle, but the poor and cattle rearers and innocent Nigerians living in villages in the rural areas. The originators and owners of the conflict and bloodletting are safe in their acquired mansions in the large cities all over Nigeria.

As we have explained in our Press Conference of 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2018, the conflict, as a result of the struggle for grazing land and access to drinking water for cattle and humans, takes different appearances - ethnic, religious, and political or a combination of all these. These conflicts can be regarded as eclectic: in some cases, it is political, ethnic, religious, about resource control or a combination of these factors.

One major factor that stands out, is the ecological disaster in the lake Chad Basin that poses a serious problem of insecurity among pastoralists and farmers in the region and in the Middle Belt. Over 40 million people across Nigeria, Chad, Cameroun, Niger and African Central Republic depend on water from the Chad basin for survival. The lake has significantly shrunk and desertification has intensified over the years. Large numbers of people, once dependent on the lake for livelihood - fishing, irrigation and dry season farming, drinking water for cattle, have been left with leaner harvest, and pastoralists have been compelled to venture to other locations. In search of food and water for their cattle, the pastoralists are forced by nature to move deeper southwards. This has resulted in deadly clashes between herdsmen/farmers in different states in Nigeria.

The solution must come from a Pan-Nigerian perspective. Manipulation of ethnic antagonism arising from this crisis will hurt the oppressed more than the sponsors of ethnic violence. The solution must come from people's organizations – labour and civil society organizations – leading the drive for resolving the crises.

### ***THE ECONOMY***

Since Nigeria's flag independence in 1960, the nation's economy has remained in the predatory grip of the Bretton Wood institutions which include the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), all of which operate in concert with the Nigeria's economic and political leaders. Both are allies in the robbery against the people of Nigeria. Successive political leaders have ignored the sound economic path of developing domestic production. Instead, they have embraced policies from foreign countries. As a result, they have relied mainly on imports from countries in Europe, the United States of America, and Asia. There have been little or no incentives for domestic production of the goods needed for local consumption and an unacceptably high capital flight from the country exists.

Ultimately, and coupled with political and social instability in our country, viable industries that would have generated needed employment for the citizens of Nigeria have had to relocate to alternative places abroad. Furthermore, Nigeria's rulers have continued to rely on a largely mono-sector economy which depends essentially on proceeds from crude oil. The effects of visionless economic failures of the rulers of Nigeria are - crime, deepened inter-group and inter-regional distrusts, more life-threatening poverty, and continued decay of infrastructure. Yet the ruling class continues to fortify its members, families and friends mainly through crumbs from the tables of foreign industrialists. This state of affairs is completely unacceptable to ASUU. ASUU further calls on all Nigerians to be alert to, and resist policies of government **dictated** by the Bretton Wood institutions. This has been, and remains, the source of the economic misery in Nigeria.

### ***RESTRUCTURING***

The issue of restructuring has of recent become very loud in the nation's political and economic discourse. The arguments canvassed, in many instances, reflect the discontent in the sharing of the nation's common wealth under the control of the ruling class. The agitation for restructuring does not mirror a genuine concern for the exploited ethnic minorities in all parts of the country, and of the majority of Nigerians who survive on less than 20% of the nation's resources while the 5% of the ruling class pockets 80% or more of the nation's resources.

ASUU condemns in the strongest terms the exploitation of the millions of Nigerian people by numerically tiny few. As we have argued in the recent past, elite



agreement on redistribution of 'power' with no mention of socio-economic injustice, will take our country nowhere. Hence, to make more resources available to kleptocratic ethnic jingoists who are currently at the forefront of the devolution movement, is perhaps, to worsen the level of anguish and despair among helpless and hapless Nigerians. Indeed, the unbridled arrogance and inexplicable clairvoyance of elected officials, particularly the State Governors, are all too familiar to expect that the lot of the poor and toiling masses, wherever they are located in the Federation, would be enhanced under the watch of the leading advocates of power devolution.

Therefore, ASUU, once again, restates its contention that, for the debate on restructuring to be properly situated, it must be located within the minimalist expectations spelt out under Chapter Two of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). Making this Chapter the fulcrum of the ongoing debate about 'restructuring' would help redefine and refine its essence in order to refocus the social, economic, cultural and educational objectives of the Nigerian State from which 'powers' to the federating units could be devolved. Our Union insists that it is only within the framework of commitment to the welfarist prescriptions of Nigeria's Constitution will the sloganeering about 'change' be properly contextualised and meaningfully defined.

### *CORRUPTION AND CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE*

The Nigerian state is a classical case of an incredible paradox. Our story has remained that of a country abundantly endowed with natural, material and human resources but with the majority of her population wallowing in penury. The pervading abject poverty in Nigeria is a consequence of the mindless looting of the commonwealth by the minority ruling class.

Successive governments, since the return to civil rule in 1999, have laid claim to fighting corruption especially in the operations of government. The current administration has [even] gone further to elevate the anti-graft 'war' to the level of making it one of the cardinal objectives of its government. However, evidence available to our Union does not support the claims by all administrations in the last two decades or so. Rather, we see corruptive practices wearing new garbs at every twist or turn.

Our Union will never be drawn into the sterile debate about which of the dominant political wings of the ruling class is more corrupt. Rather, we reiterate our earlier position that *all* Nigeria's ruling class parties - coming from a common political ancestry - are infested with the culture of corruption, the positive achievements of EFCC, ICPC, and the Presidential Committee on Corruption notwithstanding.

Ruling class thievery continues in the highest and most powerful levels of government throughout the country, and in all ruling parties. The solution to the problem of corruption is, therefore, not to be sought within any existing ruling class party. As we have equally argued, the solution to the ruling class culture of corruption lies in the power of the people of Nigeria to produce a popular democratic government. And the search for a popular democratic government should not be left with coalitions of ethnic wings of Nigeria's rulers. They are the cause and the sustainers of the Nigerian crisis and corruption. No existing wing of the ruling class in Nigeria has shown deep commitment to the welfare of "their people". In the current situation, the ruling class governments, no matter their states, are busy manipulating to tighten their grips on the people (in their states), their resources, and their future. The majority of the children of the workers, peasants, the poor and the jobless, in general the underprivileged, have no access to education. In education, the privatization policy is ensuring that private universities have come to outnumber public universities, which are essentially underfunded. We are facing a gradual realization of the threat made by a former president that the answer to the agitation for funding public universities was to flood Nigeria with private universities. Yet, the Constitution promises every Nigerian child a free education at all levels. Corruption is a chief obstacle to funding education for the poor.

## **NEC RESOLUTIONS**

NEC took reports on the status of the implementation of the September 2017 FGN/ASUU Memorandum of Action (MoA) and the FGN/ASUU renegotiation exercise which commenced in March 2017 and resolved to:

- i. condemn in strong terms the Federal Government's failure to faithfully implement many items on the 2017 MoA with particular reference to: (a) release of N20 billion revitalization fund, (b) release of the report of forensic audit and mainstreaming of EAA into the 2018 budget, (c) payment of arrears of shortfall in salary, (d) platform by the Federal Government for ASUU leaders to engage the Governors on funding and proliferation of universities, (e) underfunding of university education, and undue interference in the affairs of State universities, and (f) payment of EAA claims to the Union's loyal members in UNILORIN;
- ii. approve the decision of the ASUU Team to withdraw from the renegotiation of the 2009 FGN/ASUU Agreement as a result of the Dr. Wale Babalakin's insistence on the commercialization of tertiary education in the country;
- iii. update ASUU members on the failure of Government to keep its promises on the renegotiation of the 2009 FGN/ASUU Agreement and September, 2017 MoA; and
- iv. meet in due course to consider the next line of action.

## CONCLUSION

There is a need to bring to an end the rule of the unproductive and corrupt ruling class in Nigeria and to enthrone a popular, democratic government. The current crises within Nigeria's ruling class parties vindicates Nigerians who have argued that the people of Nigeria need their own party to protect and advance the interests of the people of Nigeria - majority of whom are poor. As the search for this alternative continues, we call on all progressive forces in the country - labour, farmers, artisans, journalists and credible civil society groups - to insist on the implementation of the provisions of Chapter II of the Nigerian Constitution as a minimum for redirect our nation from the current drift.

Thank you for your kind attention.

The struggle continues.



**Biodun Ogunyemi**  
*President*

6<sup>th</sup> August, 2018