
ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES (ASUU)



NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

**TEXT OF A PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF
UNIVERSITIES (ASUU), WEDNESDAY, 22ND MAY, 2019, AT FESTUS IYAYI ASUU
NATIONAL SECRETARIAT, UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA, ABUJA**

MATTERS ARISING ON THE 2019 FGN/ASUU MEMORANDUM OF ACTION

Protocol

Comrades and Compatriots.

Yesterday, the Honourable Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu addressed the Press on the achievements of his Ministry during which he was reported, among other things, to have said: *“Let me inform you that the Federal Government has just approved an additional N25 billion to be shared to beneficiary institutions directly. Last year, the Federal Government released N20 billion directly to universities. As I speak, all universities have got their share of the N20 billion”.*

Since information on the amounts mentioned in the media went round, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has been inundated with enquiries on the Union’s perspective to the story. Without undermining the worthwhile achievements of the Federal Ministry of Education under Mallam Adamu Adamu’s watch, it has become expedient for ASUU leadership to clarify issues relating to the said N25 billion

supposedly approved as part-payment for the outstanding arrears of the Earned Academic Allowances (EAA) within the context of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoA) signed between the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and ASUU on 7th February, 2019.

BACKGROUND ISSUES

In a letter dated 8th February, 2019, ASUU conveyed the suspension of its 13-week old strike action which commenced after the National Executive Council (NEC) meeting in Akure on 3rd-4th November, 2018. This followed a series of engagements with the Federal Government. The major outcome of our engagements with the Government team was a new MoA, that included but not restricted to Government addressing the following issues within the set timelines:

1. Part-payment of the outstanding arrears of Earned Academic Allowances (EAA), defraying the balance up to 2018 in 4 tranches within 36 months, and the mainstreaming of further payments of EAA into annual budget(s) beginning from this year's (2019) budget.
2. The release of 25 billion naira in addition to the earlier 20 billion naira released by government for the revitalization of Nigerian public universities.
3. Release of the names of members of the of visitation panels to all public universities tentatively by 11th March, 2019.
4. Provide guidelines on the terms of engagement between the Federal Government team and the Academic Staff Union of Universities at the truncated renegotiation of the 2009 Agreement.

All the above issues were agreed on, and our union sincerely hoped that this Government will, unlike what happened in 2017, keep to the spirit and letters of the 2019 MoA. Regrettably, the leadership of our Union, watched with utter dismay the failure of the Federal Government to live up to its words.

EARNED ACADEMIC ALLOWANCES (EAA)

Following the signing of the MoA, the Union expected, as agreed, that the N25 billion EAA part-payment would be paid between 15th February, 2019 and 28th February, 2019. Thirteen (13) weeks today, nothing in respect of the EAA has been paid to any of our members across the country. As we speak, there is no evidence that mainstreaming of EAA into the annual budget, beginning from this year, has been done. Indeed, what has been going on is the tossing around of the MoA document between the offices of the Hon. Minister of Education and Finance. All our efforts to track the said N25 billion at the Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation (OAGF) have proved abortive.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Press, this is not only unacceptable to us but disheartening and frustrating to our members across the country. It is frustrating because we have visited the Federal Ministry of Education at least three times and written three letters to the same Ministry since we signed the MoA in February, 2019; all to no avail. This is a complete BREACH OF TRUST on the part of Government. It appears the Government is goading the Union to action. For the avoidance of doubt, we expect nothing less than the immediate release of the N25 billion to our members who are entitled to such claims and the mainstreaming of EAA into the annual budget as agreed in the MoA.

Our union is therefore alarmed by the statement credited to the Hon. Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu that the said N25 billion fund for EAA has been approved. Our information is that ONLY N20 billion has been approved and Government has not acceded to our demand that the approved sum be released to the deserving academic staff members. ASUU, therefore, restates its demand that the confirmed N20 billion be paid to those deserving the part-payment for EAA among our members without further delay.

FUNDING FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Funding for the revitalization of public universities has for years been of very high priority to ASUU. We have, over the years, argued that the place of education in formulating our national policies should be unrivalled by current reliance on foreign concepts of development as advanced by the Bretton Woods economic packages to our universities as “Centers of Excellence”. Towards this end, it was agreed in 2017, following an action by ASUU, that N20 billion would be released by the Hon. Minister of Finance (HMoF), which was made up of N10 billion in September and another tranche of N10 billion in October 2017. This earlier commitment by government was jettisoned by the same government until we threatened another action in 2018. And, like we said before the commencement of the last strike, it came too little too late.

In the 2019 FGN/ ASUU MoA, we called on government to make further releases without prejudice to what the FG/ASUU Renegotiating team would come up with. Therefore, the recent declaration by Government that it inherited an “unimplementable” agreement of N1.3 trillion when they assumed government in 2015,

four years after, to us, is buck-passing. The task of funding education is squarely that of the Nigerian government and the problem should be addressed squarely. That statement clearly ignores the history of Needs Assessment carried out by government to reposition the Nigerian University System (NUS). The remark by the Minister that “private sector” contribution to education far outweighs public sector contribution, contradicts the position of Government in 2017 that they should work towards meeting 20% budgetary allocation to the sector. We shall therefore insist that the Federal Government should stick to the terms and letters of the 2013 FGN/ASUU Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the implementation of Needs Assessment Report on Public Universities in Nigeria because it is the surest pathway to the revitalization of Nigerian public universities

VISTATION PANELS

At the point of suspending the 2018-2019 strike action by our Union, the impression created by agents of government was that what was left was mere administrative procedure and that it would not take a week to release the membership of the visitation panels. Thirteen (13) weeks after, government is yet to release the list of members or inaugurate the panels. It needs no belabouring that the visitation panels are key to bringing up and decisively addressing a number of reported administrative and financial infractions in many of our public universities today. ASUU will not relent in its resolve to get the visitation panels in place, if only in the spirit of accountability and transparency which the current administration advertises as its mantra.

FG/ ASUU RENEGOTIATION

Reaching agreement with the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has often been a tortuous and frustrating journey for our Union. It is often marked with protests, strikes and requires a conscious and focused engagement on the part of ASUU. The 2001 Agreement, which gave birth to the 2009 Agreement, was not an exception. The exception in the ongoing engagement is the personality leading the government renegotiation team. For a task that is meant to reverse the decay in the Nigerian University System (NUS) and reposition it for greater developmental responsibilities, enhance remuneration of academic staff by disengaging them from encumbrances of a unified civil service structure, restore them through massive and sustained funding with genuine academic freedom, the current leadership of the government team clearly lacks the academic disposition and humility. In him we have seen a character with penchant for fixation and haughtiness. Indeed, we have written to the Hon. Minister recently that, with Dr. Wale Babalakin (SAN), we may go nowhere. And with the current approach of Dr. Babalakin to the ongoing negotiation, the future of Nigerian universities is in jeopardy. We call on all well-meaning Nigerians to prevail on Dr. Wale Babalakin to embrace a change of attitude in the interest of helpless and hapless Nigerian children whose parents cannot afford the cost of a highly priced and privatized university system.

CONCLUSION

Comrades and compatriots, our members enjoy their work and hate to see any disruption in the smooth running of our universities. Our lives are intertwined with

those of our students and the communities that host our institutions. However, the level of frustration occasioned by the lackadaisical attitude of government towards meeting the terms of the 2019 Memorandum of Action that was freely signed with our Union is increasingly becoming unbearable. We, therefore, call on all Nigerian patriots and lovers of Nigeria, parents and students including the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), to prevail on the government to respect the terms of our agreements, otherwise our union should not be held responsible for any disruption in the system.

Thank you for listening.


Biodun Ogunyemi
President

22nd May, 2019