

UNITED WE STAND

Being the Text of the Address of the Vice-Chancellor, University of Ilorin, Professor Is-haq O. Oloyede, to the University Congregation on Wednesday, April 23, 2008 at the Auditorium at 3:00 p.m.

Distinguished colleagues and fellow staff of this great citadel of learning, it is my utmost pleasure and honour to welcome you to this Congregation, the very first since I assumed office as Vice-Chancellor some months ago. I want to begin by acknowledging your support to this administration and appreciate your cooperation with us in our commitment to consolidate the gains of the past, build a firm foundation for the present and secure a brighter future for our University. A tree does not make a forest and you cannot clap with one hand. Thus, whatever achievements that might have been recorded in the last seven months are based on your support and cooperation. It is my fervent hope and solemn appeal that we shall still continue to work together with a sense of dedication, service and single-minded purposefulness. I want to say a big THANK YOU to you all.

A critical reflection on this administration in the last few months will reveal a two-sided pattern. It would be crystal clear to every keen observer by now that the University believes in excellence. Thus, students who have excelled in their various disciplines have been duly recognized, with the re-activation of the University Scholars Scheme and the concomitant sponsorship of outstanding students by the University. Many staff have also benefited from Staff Development Awards to pursue higher degrees at home and abroad while several others have been encouraged to work harder on research through the Learned Conference Fund, from which scores of academic staff have benefited. If motivation is that which induces action or determines choice, we have tried to stimulate the 'inner urge' in both staff and students to excel. The door, not just the window, is still open for all to stand out by being outstanding in what they do. I urge you all to direct your thoughts, control your emotions and ordain your destiny. The sky is just the beginning.

On the other side of the coin, there is a noticeable pattern of zero tolerance for indiscipline. It is said that “effective leadership is putting first things first and effective management is maintaining discipline” and we consider this an unassailable operational philosophy. This is expedient because without a sense of discipline, there is no dedication and without dedication, nothing really works. Even in heaven, the first law is order. Against the backdrop of the foregoing, we have expelled students for reasons ranging from academic incompetence and membership of unregistered or questionable clubs to gross misconduct bordering on the violation of their matriculation oath. We have also dealt with indiscipline on the part of two or so staff members without fear or favour, in line with the thrust of this administration as espoused in my “Regeneration for a New Age” addressed to the Senate last October, especially as regards justice and equity.

As a Professor of Islamics, I want to draw your attention to what I would ordinarily construe congregation to mean. A congregation, technically referred to as *jamaa’ah*, is a group of people with a common goal, which is the pursuit of God’s pleasure. A congregation operates as a single body with several parts. A congregation operates on the principle of unity and loyalty to the leadership. So crucial is the congregation that shunning it can invalidate worship and render faith meaningless. I believe that Congregation in our own context is equally essential as it is the largest and most inclusive organ of the University, an organ in which virtually all professional unions on campus are represented.

Talking of the unions, their contributions to the development of the University system cannot be over-emphasized. Our firm belief in progressive unionism can be attested to by the restoration of student unionism and functional interactions with the University staff unions. Yet, it is revealing that the University statute has made a provision for the essence of unions in the Congregation. If

the main concern of University unions is the welfare of their members, the singular term of reference of the Congregation, as enshrined in the statute, borders on “all matters affecting the interest and welfare” of staff and the University at large.

In other words, Congregation provides a veritable channel through which welfare issues are addressed and critical matters are redressed. Just as our administration believes in strengthening the unions for informed and intellectually-driven engagements, including the Students Union, it is also our determination to activate the statutory relevance of the Congregation. The era of pugnacious unionism and destructive mentality, which characterized the antics of some pseudo-unionists who held the University to ransom in the past, should be confined to the trash-can of history. According to David Friedman in a quotation of his, the veracity of which often amuses me, “The direct use of force is such a poor solution to any problem; it is generally employed only by small children and large nations.” In a way, I think strike actions and antagonism, lawlessness and threats are elements of the use of force which are always ineffective, as evidenced by our contemporary global dynamics.

In the light of the foregoing, I appeal that we should continue to hold the banner of unity aloft. A house that is divided against itself cannot stand. We do not need to be an Achebe to know that when *things fall apart*, the natural corollary is being *no longer at ease*. Development only occurs in a situation where there is law and order. The peace and tranquility, the harmony and amity that have characterized the University for the last few years are a worthy legacy that we must determinedly maintain and protect. The remarkable performances of our staff and students at fairs and competitions are an eloquent testimony to the fact that we are on track. We cannot afford to fail; we cannot afford to falter.

Distinguished members of the Congregation, it is essential to use this forum to comment on our attitudes to work. On many occasions, we clamour for our rights while discountenancing our responsibilities, whereas the two are not mutually exclusive. It is my humble opinion that, to paraphrase a prominent former American President, we should be thinking more of what we can do for the University, not what the University can do for us. A situation in which some staff have formed the habit of resuming work at nine or ten in the morning is ethically disturbing. Punctuality is the soul of business and what is worth doing at all is worth doing on time, not just doing well. I, along with other principal officers, go round the campus at times, and I am often amazed by the lackadaisical attitude that some of us unabashedly display to our work. It is crucial that we pick the petal and drop the metal in that regard. This is because people all over the world are talking about social responsibility. Thus, as individuals and an institution, we must be conscious of the roles we are playing and we should play our roles well. We owe the University a duty; we owe our students a duty; we owe our community a duty; we owe the country a duty. Above all, we owe ourselves a duty of doing our best and we owe ourselves a duty of that inner conviction that we are socially responsible.

Also, I want to reiterate our collective need to be ICT-compliant. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is so fundamental in our contemporary world that not being *computerate* is now construed as illiteracy. There are still some of us who believe that a mouse is nothing other than a small rat! The world has become digital and everyone now is clicking. Our University cannot be left behind and it is duty-bound on us all to acquire the necessary skills so as to be able compete favourably with the rest of the world. As Nicholas Negroponte in his *Being Digital* would tell us, we are in the world of *bits*, not again in the world of *atoms* and the “information superhighway is about the movement of weightless bits at the speed of light.” The University is on this superhighway but I am concerned that many of our staff are still not

onboard. Towards facilitating this movement for all, the University has a computer acquisition scheme aimed at providing personal computers/laptops for staff members. It is a welcome development that some faculties and unions are also working in that respect. There is no excuse for any member of this Congregation not to IT-certified, or, at least, be *computerate*.

In conclusion, our University is on the fast track in a fast-moving world; we cannot afford to dawdle. Our University is growing in leaps and bounds; we cannot afford to be complacent. Our University is surely on course; we cannot afford to derail. We are the University of Ilorin and together let us stand together to lift it to higher heights. *United we stand; divided we fall*. We can achieve more greatness by contributing our quotas in our diverse ways towards its greater development. Our administration is open and hoping to receive innovative ideas from you all to propel us to grander achievements. We are a leading University already. We need to work harder to keep on top.

Thank you very much for your attention.