FORWARD EVER



Convocation Address of the Vice-Chancellor
Professor Wahab Olasupo EGBEWOLE, SAN
On the occasion of 41st Convocation Ceremonies on
Friday, October 23, 2026

Courtesies,

It is with profound gratitude to Almighty Allah that I welcome Your Excellencies and all our distinguished guests to this third and final day of our 41st Convocation Ceremony. We have come to the conclusion of another remarkable chapter in the history of the University of Ilorin, a chapter characterised by academic accomplishments, institutional progress, research advancement, and the celebration of human potential.

To Almighty Allah, the Giver of knowledge, the Source of wisdom, and the ultimate Planner of all things, we return all the praises. His mercy has sustained us, His grace has guided us, and His protection has brought us to this glorious moment.

I warmly welcome our distinguished Visitor, His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, ably represented here by the Honourable Minister of State for Education, Prof. Suwaiba Said Ahmad. I also welcome our eminent guests, especially the Governor of Kwara State and Chairman of the Nigeria Governors Forum, Mallam Abdulrahman Abdulrasaq CON.

Today is particularly significant because we are celebrating our students with five or six years programme and postgraduate graduands, especially those who have successfully completed the rigorous journey towards the award of the Doctor of Philosophy degree. To all our graduands, I offer my heartfelt congratulations. For our newly minted Ph.D. graduands, your achievement represents years of intellectual discipline, sustained inquiry, personal sacrifice, and an unwavering commitment to the advancement of knowledge.

You have not merely completed a programme of study; you have demonstrated the capacity to investigate problems, interrogate established assumptions, generate new knowledge, and contribute to the intellectual and developmental needs of society.

Today, we celebrate you. We celebrate your supervisors, your families, our researchers, and every member of the University community whose contribution has made this achievement possible.

As we celebrate, I invite us to reflect on a question that goes beyond the ceremony before us. **How do we preserve what we have achieved, strengthen what we have built, and ensure that the gains of the past years are not lost?**

My answer is simple, direct, and deliberate: **we must never turn,** it is **FORWARD EVER.**

From the end is better to no longer where we were, Distinguished guests, our convocation addresses over the years have told a continuing story of institutional growth, responsibility, and aspiration. At our 37th and 38th Convocations, we reflected on the theme, ***The End Is Better***, we were reminded that the value of any journey must ultimately be measured by its outcomes and the difference it makes.

At our 39th Convocation, the message was, *No Longer Where We Were,* a theme that captured the importance of recognising progress, acknowledging transformation, and appreciating how far we had travelled as an institution.

At our 40th Convocation, we reflected on the importance of making our institutional investments count. And yesterday, I challenged our graduands to consider the question, *What Next?*

Today, as we bring this convocation to a close, I wish to take that conversation one step further.

If the end must be better, we must protect the conditions that make it so. If we are no longer where we were, we must not allow complacency to take us back. If our investments must count, we must preserve their value. And if we ask what next, we must be prepared to sustain the gains of today while building the possibilities of tomorrow.

This is the spirit and essence of my message today that we must never turn back but **forward ever**. We must never turn back from excellence to mediocrity. We must never turn back from research and innovation to intellectual stagnation. We must never turn back from discipline to disorder. We must never turn back from accountability to indifference. We must never turn back from the pursuit of knowledge to the mere accumulation of certificates. And we must never turn back from the institutional values and frameworks that have enabled the University of Ilorin to move forward.

This is a call to embrace progressive change without abandoning the foundations of our success. We must retain what works, improve what needs improvement, and courageously replace what no longer serves our mission. Progress must become our habit, not an occasional achievement. Excellence must become our culture, not merely our slogan.

My dear graduands, today marks an extraordinary milestone in your academic and professional lives. You have earned the prestigious academic qualification awarded by our University, and you deserve to celebrate this accomplishment. For Ph.D. graduands, I must remind you that a doctorate is not simply a title to be displayed

before your name. It is a responsibility you must demonstrate through your work. A Ph.D. is not the end of learning. It is the beginning of a deeper obligation to knowledge, society, and humanity.

You have been trained to ask difficult questions, examine evidence critically, challenge unsupported assumptions, and offer defensible answers. You have learned that genuine scholarship requires patience, intellectual honesty, methodological rigour, and the humility to accept that even our most cherished conclusions may need to be reconsidered.

These are not merely academic virtues. They are qualities that our nation urgently needs. Nigeria needs researchers who can help improve food security, strengthen healthcare, develop affordable technologies, improve educational outcomes, advance manufacturing, address environmental challenges, and inform sound public policy.

Our communities need scholars who can translate research findings into practical solutions. Our industries need researchers who can help improve productivity, develop new products, and solve technical problems. Our public institutions need evidence-based analysis that can support better decisions and more effective governance.

And our universities need scholars who will continue to expand the frontiers of knowledge while mentoring the next generation of researchers. Take your research beyond the thesis. Take your knowledge beyond the laboratory. Take your discoveries beyond the University gates**.**

It is imperative to stress that research is one of the strongest foundations upon which a modern university must stand. Teaching transmits knowledge. Research

expands it. Community engagement applies it to human needs. Together, these responsibilities define the enduring purpose of a university. Our commitment to these ideals earned University of Ilorin the No. 1 position in research quality in Nigeria.

Over the past four years, we have continued to pursue a stronger research culture, greater institutional visibility, enhanced collaboration, and the development of an environment in which ideas can grow into meaningful contributions. We must not lose these gains, thus, we must never turn back, but **forward ever**.

Research culture cannot depend solely on the enthusiasm of a few individuals or the initiatives of a particular administration. It must become embedded in our institutional practices, supported by appropriate policies, sustained investment, effective administration, and a shared commitment to scholarly excellence. We must also remain committed to research integrity.

A university's reputation cannot be sustained by the volume of its publications alone. The credibility of our scholarship depends on originality, transparency, responsible authorship, accurate reporting, and respect for ethical standards. We must never let the pressure to publish undermine our responsibility to produce reliable knowledge. To this end, our enviable research quality position must be maintained, therefore **forward ever**.

Our aspiration must be to produce research that is respected because it is rigorous, valued because it is relevant, and remembered because it makes a difference. To our academic staff, let us preserve the conditions that enable our researchers to thrive.

To our institutional leaders and partners, let us continue to support the systems, collaborations, and resources that make sustainable research possible. We must never turn back, it is **forward ever**.

Your Excellencies and distinguished guests, trophies and awards are visible expressions of excellence. They tell the world that an institution, a team, or an individual has demonstrated outstanding performance in a particular field. Over the years, the University of Ilorin has continued to celebrate achievements in academic competitions, research, innovation, professional practice, and other areas of institutional life. Every award we win is a source of pride. Every competition in which our students excel strengthens our confidence. Every recognition earned by our staff and alumni enhances the reputation of our University.

But we must understand something important, winning a trophy is an achievement; sustaining the standard that produced it is a greater responsibility**.** We cannot depend indefinitely on yesterday's victories. We must continually prepare for tomorrow's challenges, thus we must never turn back but move forward permanently.

If our students have excelled in debating, we must nurture the next generation of critical thinkers and effective communicators. If our researchers have distinguished themselves, we must build an environment that enables other researchers to achieve comparable or greater success. If our graduates have excelled in professional examinations, we must sustain the teaching, mentoring, and academic standards that made those achievements possible. We must institutionalise excellence rather than personalise it. We must create systems that allow success to survive changes in student leadership, academic supervision, departmental management, and university administration.

Let every trophy become an inspiration for future achievement. Let every award encourage higher standards. Let every recognition remind us that our reputation must be earned repeatedly through performance.

Our motto, *Better by Far*, must continue to be reflected in our daily conduct, our academic standards, our research output, our administrative efficiency, and the quality of our service to society. We must never turn back from the standards that have earned us recognition, let us remain focused on our goals by moving forward.

Your Excellencies and distinguished ladies and gentlemen, one of the greatest responsibilities of institutional leadership is to ensure that progress does not disappear when the individuals who initiated it leave office. Universities are enduring institutions. Administrations change. Appointments end. Personnel retire. New leaders emerge. But the University must continue to grow. This is why the frameworks we establish are as important as the projects we complete and the awards we receive.

A building is valuable, but the system that maintains it is far more important. A research grant is important, but the policies and structures that enable researchers to attract future grants are even more enduring. A successful programme is commendable, but the institutional framework that allows it to continue, improve, and expand is what makes its impact sustainable. A trophy brings honour, but a culture of excellence ensures that the next trophy remains within reach.

Over the past four years, our collective efforts have contributed to institutional progress across different areas of the University's responsibilities. We must ensure that the policies, procedures, processes, partnerships, administrative systems, and

developmental initiatives that have supported this progress are properly documented, strengthened, and sustained as we move to the next levels.

We must preserve institutional knowledge. We must maintain reliable records. We must ensure that policies are clearly articulated and accessible to those responsible for implementing them. We must evaluate our programmes and improve them in the light of experience and evidence.

Let me emphasise that the gains of the past four years by this great University are not the property of one person, one office, or one administration. They are the product of collective effort. Our Governing Council has provided oversight and strategic direction. The University Senate has contributed through its responsibility for academic standards and governance. Our Principal Officers, Deans, Directors, Heads of Departments, academic and non-academic staff, students, alumni, partners, and other stakeholders have all played important roles. To each of you, I express my sincere appreciation and appeal to you all to continue to move our University forward.

No Vice-Chancellor builds a university alone. Leadership provides direction, but progress depends on the dedication of people who translate that direction into action. I am grateful for the cooperation, support, and sacrifices of the University community throughout the past four years.

As we celebrate our achievements, however, we must also acknowledge that progress creates obligations. The more we achieve, the greater our responsibility to protect what we have built and improve upon it. Our successors must inherit more than buildings, documents, awards, and reports. They must inherit a stronger institution, a healthier research culture, more effective systems, a commitment to

excellence, and a community that understands the importance of continuity. We must leave behind a University that is better equipped to meet future challenges than it was when we began. And that responsibility belongs to all of us.

My dear graduands, you leave this ceremony with a significant academic accomplishment. But I encourage you to see today's celebration not as a conclusion, but as an invitation to greater service. You have acquired knowledge. Now use it. You have developed expertise. Now apply it.

You have conducted research. Now ensure that it contributes to the advancement of knowledge and the improvement of society. You have received recognition. Now demonstrate that you deserve the confidence that recognition places in you. Do not allow your academic achievements to become reasons for complacency. Continue reading, questioning, learning, collaborating, and growing. Remain open to new evidence and new perspectives. Be confident in your expertise without becoming arrogant about what you know.

Be the researchers whose work others can trust. Be the teachers who inspire curiosity. Be the mentors who open doors for younger scholars. Be the professionals who demonstrate that advanced education can produce practical benefits for society. And remember your alma mater.

Return to mentor students, collaborate with our researchers, support our laboratories, contribute to our research funds, and create opportunities for the next generation. Help us build networks that connect the University of Ilorin to research institutions, industries, governments, and communities across Nigeria and beyond.

The University has invested in you. Now, in whatever capacity you can, help that investment continue to yield dividends for humanity.

As we gather on this third and final day, the ceremonies will soon end. The academic processions will conclude. The gowns will be returned. Our guests will depart, and the campus will gradually return to its usual rhythm. But the end of the ceremony must not become the end of our commitment.

The end of a convocation must be the beginning of renewed institutional effort. The completion of a project must be the beginning of responsible maintenance and productive use. The winning of a trophy must be the beginning of preparations for the next competition. The establishment of a framework must be the beginning of its effective implementation and continuous improvement. And the conclusion of an administration must be the beginning of a new chapter built upon the lessons, achievements, and sound foundations of the preceding years.

This is what continuity means. This exemplifies **forward ever.** We must not be satisfied merely because we have achieved something. We must ask whether the achievement can be sustained, whether its benefits can be extended, and whether those who come after us can build upon it.

We must never turn back simply because the immediate challenge has passed.

We must never abandon excellence because the applause has faded.

We must never neglect research because a particular grant has ended.

We must never forget institutional discipline because a ceremony has succeeded.

And we must never mistake the completion of a chapter for the completion of our responsibility.

My dear colleagues, graduands, and members of the University community, as we conclude the 41st Convocation Ceremony, let us carry forward a shared commitment to preserve our achievements, strengthen our institutions, and expand the frontiers of knowledge.

To our Ph.D. graduands, congratulations once again. You have earned this distinction through perseverance, intellectual discipline, and hard work. May your research continue to illuminate difficult questions, solve practical problems, and improve human lives. To our academic staff, may your scholarship continue to flourish. To our non-academic staff, may your dedication continue to strengthen the systems that sustain our University.

To our students, may the achievements we celebrate today inspire you to pursue excellence with courage and integrity. To our alumni and partners, thank you for believing in our vision and supporting our mission. And to the entire University community, I urge us to remain united in our determination to move forward.

Let us preserve the gains of the past four years, not because we are unwilling to change, but because we understand that genuine progress must be protected, strengthened, and improved.

Let us retain our trophies as reminders of what is possible, preserve our research culture as the foundation of future discoveries, and strengthen our frameworks so that our achievements can outlive the individuals who contributed to them.

Let us build a University in which excellence is sustained, research is encouraged, integrity is protected, innovation is rewarded, and institutional progress remains a collective responsibility. Our story is not finished. Our mission is not complete.

Our possibilities remain vast. We have travelled far, but there is still much to accomplish.

We have achieved much, but there is still more knowledge to discover, more lives to touch, more problems to solve, and more legacies to establish. Therefore, as we close this convocation, I leave you with three commitments:

We must remember where we came from.

We must protect what we have achieved.

And we must continue moving forward.

We must move forward on excellence.

We must move forward on research.

We must move forward on integrity.

We must move forward on progress.

And we must move forward on our responsibility to the generations that will follow us.

May Almighty Allah guide our decisions, strengthen our resolve, bless our researchers, protect our institution, and grant us the wisdom to sustain the gains we have made. May the University of Ilorin continue to rise in scholarship, innovation, character, and service to humanity.

As we bring our 41st Convocation Ceremony to a close, let the world see that the University of Ilorin does not merely celebrate achievements; it builds upon them.

We do not merely record progress; we sustain it. We do not merely inherit legacies; we strengthen them. And we do not turn back when there is still so much to accomplish.

Forward in knowledge. Forward in research. Forward in excellence. Forward in service. Forward, always.

Thank you, and may Almighty Allah continue to bless us all.