

**AJISEBIOYO LAARI: RESTORING THE HERITAGE OF EXCELLENCE,  
INNOVATION AND AMBITION**

**BEING THE TEXT OF A KEYNOTEADDRESS**

**DELIVERED BY**

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**TO MARK**

**THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE OYO SCHOLARS' CONGRESS**

**AT CAROLINE ODUNOLA HALL ENTERPRISE REPUBLIC, ALONG  
ATIBA UNIVERSITY ROAD, OYO**

**THIS 30<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF DECEMBER, 2024**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 We are here together today for noble ends. God has brought us together.

We thank Him for this reality. We are here as intellectual pace-setters.

Today's meeting is to remind us of the indices or things that make us pace-setting academic researchers and academics, which said factors will continue to perpetuate us in that noble state.

1.2 I wish to first reiterate that it is God Almighty who has made us, and put us in this pace-setting position. Although our forefathers worked assiduously to earn it, but it was God who bestowed it. He still sustains it.

1.3 I am particularly delighted to note that this gathering has drawn scholars and academics from the four local government areas constituting the Oyo Federal Constituency, a blessed Constituency which boasts of a galaxy of academic talents that have extended their tentacles to many research areas.

## **2.0 WHY THIS SCHOLARS' CONGRESS?**

2.1 I know that Professor 'Seun Kolade and Professor 'Segun Oguntunji can say more on this question. Again, our numerous chats on the whatsapp platform can afford us additional details on why we are here today. Everyone who reads the messages on the platform will not dawdle in recognizing what today's Congress stands for.

2.2 It should not escape our attention that the Nigerian educational system has its own structure. The educational pyramid comprises the basic or primary education as the base, the secondary level and the tertiary level (Rodney, 2009:298-299). While the primary and the secondary levels are one-way traffic each, the tertiary level has layers – teacher training institutions, colleges of education, polytechnics and universities.

2.3 The focus or primary pre-occupation of the Oyo Scholars' Congress is the scholar, the teacher, the researcher and the academic at the tertiary level. Such are committed to teaching or research or both. Theirs is serious scholarship. But is this body less concerned about the lower layers in the pyramid? The answer is, and should be, in the negative. The body is not less concerned. Part of what should engage the scholar's mind is how to raise, nurture, wean and successfully produce academic or scholarly giants from the lower layers. And this we must achieve.

2.4 The core mandate of the Oyo Scholars' Congress as a body is, in my humble view, a formal articulation of the scholarly and altruistic ideals fondly cherished by many of our fathers and senior professors here present. Our erudite professors who are experts in their various fields of study have long started what will now form part of the mandate of the Oyo Scholars' Congress – lending helping hands to budding scholars and

fixing them up in many academic or research institutions. Many examples abound: 1. Professor Ayoade Ogunkunle versus Gabriel Adeyinka Okunade 2.; Professor Adeniyi Gbadegesin versus Ademola Ojekunle; 3. the Congress' (Hurdles') platform as someone's "discovery forum" , which was further complemented by Engineer 'Wole Obanisola of Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo; and 4. Rev'd. Dr. Kolade versus Dr. Mrs. 'Kemi Ololade, among others.

2.5 I am of the firm opinion that this Congress will do well by including in its core mandate the hapless and helpless but promising young scholars. Moreover, it is part of the core mandate of the Oyo scholars Congress to post or broadcast opportunities for post-doc fellowships, trainings and conferences, among others.

### **3.0 THE IDEALS THAT OUR FOREFATHERS STOOD FOR**

3.1 History is sometimes good. I intend to talk briefly about the worthy examples our forefathers have left for us. Our forefathers have charted noble paths for us. They set the pace in a way. They laid their hands on many things and they excelled. Some of the areas where they left indelible marks are discussed hereunder.

#### **A. A Formidable Army**

Our forebears under the Oyo Empire raised a formidable army. This might be on an *ad hoc* or a permanent basis. The army sometimes comprised professional hunters who served as volunteers and mobilized able-bodied men (Atanda, 2007:95). The army later comprised a corps of officers known as the *Eso* (Imperial guards) headed by the Aare Ona Kakanfo, the equivalent of a General (Atanda, p. 95; Oguntomisin, 2017:32).

### **B. A Viable Economy**

The Oyo Empire had the economic life which it used to its advantage both in its expansion and in sustaining its authority over conquered areas (Atanda, p. 96). Our forefathers, through hard-work, native intelligence and calculative initiatives, had ways of making money. They derived their economic strength from agriculture, local industries in form of crafts, cloth weaving and trade, among others (Atanda, p. 96). Tributes in cash and in kind from the population as well as tolls on goods by the trading segment of the population ensured or guaranteed a sure source of revenue for the *Alaafin*'s use. From such revenues, the *Alaafin* was able to reward the administrative personnel that in turn reciprocated such royal rewards with loyal service (Atanda, p.96). Again, the impact of Oyo's imperial glory increased the revenue portfolio of the Oyo empire (Aborisade: 2015, p. 196).

### **C. Administration**

Another source of strength of the Oyo empire was its effective administrative system (Atanda, p. 97). No doubt, Oyo had a strong central government in which power was vested in the *Alaafin* and his council of state, the *Oyo Mesi* (Atanda, p. 97; Johnson: 2022 [Reprinted], pp. 84 & 171). In theory, the *Alaafin* of Oyo absolutely ruled his domain and his word was law. In practice, however, he ruled with the advice and co-operation of the *Oyo Mesi*, who had constitutional functions to regulate and check the powers of the *Alaafin* in the interest of good government. The *Oyo Mesi* are the Osorun or Iba Osorun (now Basorun), Agbaakin, Samu, Alapinni, Lagunna, Akinniku, Onamodeke and Asipa (Jonathan: 2018, p. 22). It should be noted that Margret Jonathan's (Iya Agunpopo's) account of the composition of the *Oyo Mesi* in her book *The Unique Heritage – Palace of Palaces* is different from that of The Reverend Samuel Johnson in his book *The History of the Yorubas* (See page 84 of his book).

### **D. Environment**

The Oyo Empire was blessed with a very good geographical feature which adds to its source of strength. Its plain area facilitated the mobility of the Oyo Empire's army. This mobility also facilitated contact within the different parts of the empire.

#### **E. Leadership**

Oyo had the fortune of, and was enormously blessed with, rulers who knew what to do at crucial periods in its history. Such rulers include the *Alaafins* like Ofinran, Onigbogi, Orompoto, Ajiboyede and Abipa, among others. Some of these led the Oyo empire in victorious wars/battles (Atanda, p. 98).

#### **F. Our Fathers' Receptive Stance to Formal Education**

In the aspect of formal education, which is what informed today's meeting, our fathers' efforts are to be applauded because they were, and are still, accommodating. They welcomed, and are still welcoming, the establishment of schools. Ladies and gentle men, we currently have two private universities under our Federal Constituency. Again, a foremost Teacher Training College started in Oyo. The Federal School of Survey is another example of our fathers' receptive attitude towards educational development. It is recognized beyond its location. Let us also look at the Federal College of Education, Oyo, which combines special education with other aspects of its curriculum.

## 4.0 SUSTAINING AND BEQUEATHING THESE NOBLE IDEALS TO POSTERITY

4.1 I stand before you today to remind you that our forefathers did well. They did their own part. They left us an enduring but fading legacy. Immanent in the above-itemised areas in which our forefathers out-shone others are clear examples of **excellence, innovation and ambition**. They were excellent, innovative and positively ambitious.

4.2 As intellectuals, we have our academic fathers here today. Some are unavoidably absent. Some are outside the country. But all of them are living legends. I cannot exhaust their list because they are many. Kindly permit me to mention few of them like Professor Wande Abimbola, Professor Ayo Ogunkunle, Professor Matthew Odedokun, Professor Tanimowo, Professor Oyedele Adeyi, Professor Adesola Ogunniyi, Professor Lameed Gbolagade and Professor Adeniyi Gbadegesin ( my humble self), among others. These are senior professors who have also begotten or produced professors. We have a lot to learn from them – virtues or attributes of excellence, innovation and ambition.

4.3 They are **excellent**. Some of them have been vice-chancellors of federal and state universities. They are also **innovative**. In this regard, some of them have won many grants both within and outside Nigeria due to

innovative and award-winning proposals submitted to the funding bodies. In fact, what brought us together today is the innovative idea of some of our younger professors. Again, our senior professors are **ambitious**. They nursed the ambition to be great in life. They pursued the ambition. God then gave it fruition. And it came to reality. The heritage must be sustained and passed on to posterity. This will keep us in our pace-setting position.

4.4 The need to restore and sustain the heritage of excellence, innovation and ambition has been captured by the *Oyo State Anthem*. And without any modicum of equivocation, one may confidently assert the State's Anthem was composed from the sterling qualities and values demonstrated by our fathers in this Federal Constituency. In fact, the expression "Ajisebioyo Laari" is premised on this.

4.5 From the above Oyo state Anthem, it is easy to agree that we need hard-work, honesty, integrity, good conduct and determination of purpose for the actualization of our goal, which is the restoration of the heritage of excellence, innovation and ambition.

## **5.0 PITFALLS IN FORM OF PLAGUES**

5.1 I do not intend to dilate unnecessarily on this aspect of my address. But I must emphasise that a city or family that is divided against itself must

crumble. We are meeting formally for the first time. Our commitment each must be unity. Let us **avoid disunity** like a plague. We must dwell together in unity. Let us shun religious groupings. Our goal is scholarship. We must also shun class claim or the Isale-Oyo/Oke-Oyo dichotomy. Subscribing to or sticking to it will rubbish objectivity in scholarship. Unity underlies laudable achievements anywhere. So, we must be united.

5.2 The second thing we must avoid in this body is willful **relegation of our senior professors and elders**. I agree that the world is a global village. I know we are in the digital world now. In fact, I am aware that Artificial Intelligence is the order of the day now. But all these must never supplant our *omoluabi* values. I urge us to respect our senior professors and academic elders. This will enable us to bequeath to posterity the virtues of excellence, innovation and ambition that are devoid of arrogance and disdain for the elders.

5.3 The last one is **pride**. An excellent but proud person will soon fall. Avoid academic or intellectual pride or any form of pride at all. I think we have live examples here today. Our senior professors have chosen to humble themselves to attend today's Congress. They want the heritage of excellence, innovation and ambition restored and sustained. This is a worthy example.

## **6.0 SOME WORDS OF ADVICE OR SUGGESTIONS IN NEED OF OUR ATTENTION**

**6.1 Sustained Passion through Poverty Eradication:** How can we retain scholars in their respective work positions? How can we help one another? How can our brothers outside Nigeria help the Nigerian scholars? We need to encourage one another.

**6.2 Legal Birth and Name:** We are currently fluid. We are yet to take a definite shape now. It is an amoebic nature now. We need to think about how to get the body registered under the appropriate section of the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020. We should also think about its name.

**6.3 Constitution/Bye-Law:** It flows from the first point. We should have rules of engagement. I think on our platform we have something like that. Such rules need to be clothed with a legal garment.

**6.4 Leadership Structure (including Committees):** We need to think about this one too. We need people like the Executive Committee members of any viable association who are available, responsive, effective and efficient.

**6.5 Membership Scope:** What is the scope of membership? We may need to settle this.

**6.6 Annual Dues:** We may also consider this. Associations need money to blossom.

**6.7 Designated Building as the Operational Base:** We need a place of this ilk.

**6.8 Creation of Website:** We equally need to consider this. I am happy this has been done.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

I want to thank the conveners of this Congress. It is a laudable initiative. I thank you for choosing me as the keynote speaker for this inaugural meeting of the Oyo Scholars' Congress. I equally want to thank our senior, mid-career and early-career scholars for your attendance – physically or virtually. Finally, I return all glory to God for making this event a successful reality. I thank you all. God Bless you.

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