

**AN ADDRESS OF THE VISITOR TO THE UNIVERSITY,
PRESIDENT, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA AND
COMMANDER IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES,
GEN. MUHAMMADU BUHARI (RTD), GCFR AT THE
26TH CONVOCATION CEREMONY OF THE FEDERAL
UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE, ABEOKUTA ON
FIRDAY 23RD NOVEMBER, 2018**

Protocols

I am highly delighted to be in your midst as the Visitor to the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) Ogun State. I felicitate with the entire members of the University Community on the historic occasion of its 26th Convocation Ceremony. In a special way, I heartily congratulate Professor Felix Kolawole Salako, FSSN, on his achievements in office as the sixth substantive Vice-Chancellor of this University, since he assumed office on November 1, 2017. I must congratulate him for being able to organize the first Convocation Ceremony since his assumption of office.

I also rejoice with the Chancellor, His Eminence, the Obong of Calabar, Edidem Ekpo Abasi Otu V, the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, Dr. (Barrister) Aboki Zhawa, OON, other Members of the Governing Council, Principal Officers of the University, Members of Senate, Staff, Students, graduating Students, Parents, Guardians, Honorary Awardees well-wishers and dignitaries at this auspicious occasion.

I warmly congratulate the new Graduands, their parents,

guardians, relations and friends, who have gathered on this joyful day, to rejoice with them on the successful completion of their studies in the University. Everyone, and indeed the nation, is proud of you because of your labour and the sacrifices of your parents, sponsors and benefactors. I urge you to put into practice all the knowledge, expertise and skills that you have acquired from the University, to guide you through your life endeavours.

The importance of education as the bedrock of national development cannot be over-emphasized. This is why the Federal Government has been working assiduously to address the challenges facing educational development in the country. The government is aware of the infrastructural deficits in the universities and the deficits in our educational sector generally. This is the more reason why concerted efforts are being made to surmount these challenges. You will all recall that the Federal Government has declared an emergency in the educational sector in the country. On its part, the Federal Government will ensure the full implementation of budgetary allocations to education in the fiscal budget.

It is important to remind Universities and other tertiary institutions of learning of the need to adjust to the demands of modern day reality by repositioning themselves and encouraging good and impactful education, for sustainable development. Universities in Nigeria ought to be at the vanguard of research, teaching and community service. As potentially powerful agents of change, our Professors and other experts should play

major roles in the realisation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), derived from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In achieving this, our citadels of higher learning should take the lead in championing and mainstreaming the SDGs, in order to address education-related issues for societal transformation. This, we can achieve, if universities evolve other means of supplementing what they receive as allocations and grants from government and become more responsive to the needs of their immediate society. Our Ivory Towers should equally be able to produce graduates that would be globally-competitive and relevant. This can only be achieved if the universities run all embracing curricular that are globally compliant and locally relevant to drive the development needs of the country.

The current administration under my leadership will do all in its power to give the fullest support to every planned effort that is geared towards creating more jobs. We realise that this is only possible through the re-orientation of Nigerian youths towards developing an entrepreneurial mindset, as this is vital to the attainment of government's objectives of improved food security, employment, poverty reduction and wealth creation. The government will always ensure that agile youths in the country are gainfully employed, to reduce youth restiveness. We must, therefore, promote and enhance the teaching and learning of entrepreneurial skills in our educational institutions, thereby, exposing our youth to the basics and rudiments of starting and sustaining their own businesses such that our graduates would be re-oriented to a rigorous

pursuit of becoming job-creators rather than job-seekers.

As you may very well know, no country has all the means to provide job for every graduate. While the government is committed to employment generation for the majority of our teeming youths, you too must be prepared and determined to contribute your own quota by striving to engage in one form of productive activity or the other. You should be creative, innovative and strive to be self-reliant. You must be determined to succeed in any task you set your hands upon. I, therefore, hope and pray that as you go into the world to begin another phase in your life, may good fortune come your way and bring out the best in you.

As noted by all, this administration is committed to the diversification of the economy of this country by pushing to rely less on oil and more on agriculture. The Federal Government is also tackling unemployment through opportunities being created to grant start-up loans to interested citizens, particularly youths. Some of the programmes that have been put in place by the Federal Government have been spearheaded by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN Anchor Borrowers' Programme), Bank of Industry, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria, National Directorate of Employment, Industrial Training Fund and Bank of Agriculture, among others.

The Federal Universities of Agriculture and FMARD as a supervising Ministry must find a synergy through which

both institutions can restore agriculture to its prime place in driving the Nigerian economy. Nigeria is not bereft of ideas. However, we need to transform ideas to reality for individual and community development. My administration would like the ideas encapsulated in the Nigeria's Agriculture Promotion Policy 2016-2020 brought to fruition. These include (1) Agriculture as a Business, (2) Agriculture as key to long-term Economic Growth and Security, (3) Value Chain Approach, and (4) Climate-Smart Agriculture, among others.. The Federal Universities of Agriculture are expected to serve as catalysts for the implementation of these ideas. Opportunities exist in these policies for fresh graduates to engage in start-up businesses related to agriculture.

We implore the private sector to join hands in assisting government to promote youth entrepreneurship through the development of micro, small and medium scale enterprises in the country. The Federal Government's Agricultural Anchor Borrowers Programme, which was launched in November 2015, has equally been an outstanding success story with the initial release of about N43.92 billion disbursed through the CBN and the 13 participating institutions and 200,000 small holders farmers from 29 states of the federation benefitting as well as the 233,000 hectares of farmland cultivating eight commodities, namely Rice, Wheat, Maize, Cotton, Soya-beans, Poultry, Cassava and Groundnuts in addition to fish farming programmes, among others.

The Federal Universities of Agriculture in the country must become a primal driver in the effort to make agriculture

become a good enterprise for our teeming youths. There is an urgent need to replace the aging population of farmers in this country if we are to promote food security for the rapidly increasing population of Nigerians, our Universities of Agriculture must ensure that its curricula are such that it will make farming attractive to its students so much so that graduates of these universities should naturally embrace agriculture rather than searching for white collar jobs after graduation.

I am happy to note that the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta is living up to expectations through its Community-Based Farming Scheme (COBFAS), which promotes student involvement in farming by making the students live among the rural communities in the various parts of Ogun State. No doubt, Universities of Agriculture will ever remain relevant, especially in view of current realities in the country, where the declining internally-generated revenue and over-dependence on oil revenues have constituted a big threat to our economic stability. In view of the present scenario, the way out is simply to return to agriculture and seek for other ways of diversifying; the economy.

It is no longer news that our country is coming out of a difficult period of economic crises and recession. Economic recession is not peculiar to Nigeria as many countries in the world are facing similar challenges. The nation looks up to our Universities of Agriculture, to put their academic and research efforts into proper perspectives for the needed turn around and re-engineering. The government is ever ready to support the universities in fulfilling the special roles for which they were

established. The imperative of placing Universities of Agriculture in their rightful positions in the scheme of things has led to the decision by the Federal Government to transfer the three Federal Universities of Agriculture from the direct supervision of the Federal Ministry of Education to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in line with the Acts, establishing the institutions.

. Realising the importance of entrepreneurial skills, the Federal Government, through the National Universities Commission (NUC), has made it mandatory for all universities to teach entrepreneurial skills. By that, we will be rescuing the nation from a consumption import-driven economy to a productive and export-oriented economic giant. I am happy to know that FUNAAB's Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies (CENTS), is living up to expectations in this regard. The government is also impressed with the strides of the University in its laudable programmes such as the World Bank Centre of Excellence for Agricultural Development and Sustainable Environment (CEADESE). The government is concerned with the development and retention of new generation of academics and professionals, who will drive the sector on a sustainable basis

We must make concerted efforts, therefore, to re-orientate our people towards cultivating a new habit of growing what we will eat and shun our penchants for eating foods that we do not grow. We must promote value-additions to our crops, tackle post-harvest losses and improve local contents by encouraging the industrial uses of our local crops. I am happy to note the primal role that FUNAAB has played in the promotion of cassava as a value-crop all over Africa.

Let me state at this juncture, that no nation can achieve greatness in an environment, where corruption thrives. The

war on corruption can never be fought and won by the government alone. Universities should, therefore, be at the forefront of the fight against corruption and this can be achieved through the enthronement of the culture of discipline, hard work, honesty and inspirational leadership. University administrators should always endeavour to be the shining light by subscribing to prudence, transparency, accountability and fairness in the management of human and material resources. As a commitment to ending the anomaly, the current administration already has a pact with Nigerians. This is about the promise for change. Surely, one of the most difficult things about human affairs is embracing change. Nevertheless, changing our society from the path of corruption in high and low places is a daunting task that we all must be committed to. It is not a magic wand or arsenal that a single leader alone can use. Rather, we all have to believe in it and we have to work together for it by inculcating the virtues of hard work, honour, integrity, discipline and transparency.

At this juncture, I wish to charge the Chancellor, His Eminence, the Obong of Calabar, Edidem Ekpo Okon Abasi-Otu (V) and the Chairman Governing Council, Dr. (Barr.) Aboki Zhawa, and all members of the University community to sustain their commitment to the development and progress of the University while striving to become a world-class University in a very short time.

Thank you and God Bless.

LONG LIVE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR