

The purpose of this Press Conference is not to re-open these issues that are now common knowledge. The purpose is to explain to you some important details about the Agreement reached, and to give you ASUUs position on the extent to which the Agreement could go to resolve the problems which face the Nigerian University System and the education system as a whole.

### **TEXT OF A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES (ASUU) ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2009 AT THE LABOUR HOUSE, ABUJA**

Compatriots of the Press,

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has called this Press Conference to brief you on the outcome of the latest stage in the industrial dispute between the Government of Nigeria and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). You will recall that on June 22, 2009, the National Executive Council (NEC) of ASUU, rising from a meeting held at the Federal University of Technology, Akure, declared a total and indefinite strike to compel the Federal Government of Nigeria to sign the Agreement reached with ASUU after over two (2) years of the re-negotiation of the June 2001 FGN-ASUU Agreement.

You will recall, as well, that on 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2009, NEC having considered a certain memorandum of understanding resulting from the deliberation with the NUC Board, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, Governor of Edo State and Comrade Abdul Waheed Omar, President of the Nigeria Labour Congress, both of whom, were mandated by Mr. President Umaru Musa YarAdua to intervene, resolved to suspend its strike for two weeks only. On Thursday and Friday, 15 and 16 October 2009 respectively, the FGN-ASUU Teams concluded the negotiation on the outstanding matters concerning the Agreement, awaiting the approval of the Principals. On Wednesday 21 October 2009, ASUU and the Federal Government of Nigeria signed the Agreement reached.

As you already know, the Agreement covered:

(1)Funding;

(2)Conditions of Service;

(3)University Autonomy and Academic Freedom; and

(4) Other Matters

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### 1.000 ON FUNDING

If we are to put Nigeria in a strong position to become a knowledge-based society, there must be a benchmark that applies throughout the system. On the basis of data collected from the Universities themselves, some minimal funding levels were prescribed for both Federal and State Universities in the signed Agreement. The Agreement prescribed the UNESCO minimum of 26% of the annual budget to Education- by both Federal and State Governments.

Specifically it states: **Being mindful of the processes for meeting this goal of 26% annual budgetary allocation to education as enunciated in the UNESCO benchmark, the Federal Government shall endeavour to progressively increase its budgetary allocation to the education sector in accordance with its vision 20:2020 programme.**€

All students, parents, Central Labour Organizations the NLC, TUC, and Society Groups, Professional associations are called upon to ensure that Government fulfills this provision in the Agreement. In particular, since Government announced an allocation of 13% to education in 2009, Nigerians are entitled, on the basis of Governments Agreement with ASUU, to expect higher than 13% in 2010. We urge the public interest groups to demand from Government a budgetary allocation to education sector of at least 18% in 2010. The public must take more active and rigorous interest in this matter. This allocation, if made, will enable the Universities to start the process of restoration and expansion of facilities and equipments “ hostels, classrooms, laboratories and basic services “ to enable us discharge our tripodal mandate of teaching, research and community service within a conducive academic teaching and learning environment.

### 2.UTILIZATION OF FUNDS

It is expected that University administration will use the funds, both funds internally generated and those released to the Universities on the basis of this Agreement, with full accountability and responsibility. There must be an enforcement of discipline and satisfactory budget performance. This is why it was agreed that each Governing Council shall set up a Monitoring Committee, with representation from the Congregation, Senate, the Unions and the Students Union. ASUU commits itself to this task of ensuring accountability and transparency in the system and the optimal utilization of the resources available to the Universities.

### 3. ON SALARY AND NON-SALARY CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has since 1992 put on agenda the necessity to put a halt to the Brain Drain. Our country has lost a very significant portion of its academics to the United States of America, Europe and Africa, especially South Africa. The exodus of our young Ph.D holders and academics of other cadres to Southern Africa has intensified in the last seven years. The need to make the conditions of service – salary and non-salary, attractive enough for Nigerian scholars to stay at home even though they are not doing as well as they would do if they were in Europe and America, was the major reason the negotiating committee agreed and even insisted that Nigerian academics should be paid the African average, i.e. the level of remuneration close to what obtains in the African countries to which Nigerian academics emigrate.

The Government of Nigeria unfortunately did not meet the African average, pleading fiscal

difficulties. On our part, we pointed out to the Government that this was untenable, at a time when each Local Government Councilor earns over 4 times, each member of the House of Representatives over seven times, and each Senator over nine times the salary of a University Professor. To say that academics who want to earn a legislators pay should become legislators is a light headed way of missing the point. The point is that Nigerian Government does not value academic labour even though it claims that it wants to compete with the best in the world in the production of knowledge in the twenty-first century. The Agreement which ASUU has signed with Government does not address the brain drain in a way that will significantly reduce this threat to the development of Nigeria. On our part, insisting that the relative devaluation of academic labour must be resolved before returning to work was liable to misunderstanding. We were not interested in increase in salary for the sake of increase. We wanted to resolve one crucial cause of brain drain. That remains unsolved. The problem remains before the people of Nigeria and will be pursued continuously until resolved.. It is up to those in politics and power to take responsibility for the degradation of academic labour and promotion of backwardness in Nigeria within the world order. It is up to those who believe strongly in the future of Nigeria to stand up and reject the devaluation of knowledge producers in the reward system in Nigeria, and work assiduously to reverse it.

#### **4. ON PENSION FOR ACADEMIC STAFF**

It is a welcome development that Government has agreed, because of the special need to produce academics with Masters and Doctoral Degrees and in order to meet the challenges of Nigerias fast-growing University System, to increase the retirement age of academics in the Professorial cadre to Seventy years. But we must note that this right move will not be maximally effective unless serious attention is paid to funding research in the Universities.

## **5THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: THE BENCHMARK AND THE STATE UNIVERSITIES.**

(a) ASUU has, since 1992, insisted that we should never have a multiplicity of academic standards in Nigeria. We cannot divide Nigerian Universities into low and higher standard institutions in the same structure. There should be just one system with one set of minimum standard that will keep the system internationally competitive. This is ASUUs position. This is why we have insisted that what our Union has negotiated is a minimum benchmark for the system. State Governments that cannot fund their Universities to meet the benchmark set up in the Agreement will find that they cannot survive in the system. The minimum conditions are not just about emoluments.

They are standards which must be met in the funding of facilities for teaching and research , funding of post-graduate studies, the upgrading of programmes, remedy of deficiencies in them, and for collaborating with industries in the areas of research and development of technology and staff development.

(b)Contrary to some official view, the Federal Government is not forbidden from assisting States in the development of higher education. In view of Section 164 (1) of the 1999 Constitution, this falls within the powers of the National Assembly. For the benefit of State Governments that believe that all that the Agreement has for them is the burden of salaries, it must be noted that the Agreement contains, in addition to the constitutionally backed assistance, a provision for a new direction of the Education Tax Fund (ETF) intervention in Higher Education, the access to the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF), the patronage of University Consultancies, the National Research Fund, and duty free importation of educational materials. These shall provide significant sources of funding for State Universities.

## **6. UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

The Agreement does not give financial autonomy to Universities. But it has (i) made certain prescriptions that will enhance administrative autonomy for smooth and effective running of the University from departmental to council levels; (ii)

proposed

some amendments in the

JAMB Act

, Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions Act) and the National Universities Commission (NUC) Act (2004). These proposals are to be presented to the National Assembly, without prejudice to any other proposals that might be brought or have been brought before the National Assembly.

## **7. NECS RESOLUTION: INDEFINITE SUSPENSION OF THE STRIKE**

The National Executive Council (NEC) of ASUU, having, through the Principal Officers, obtained from its Negotiating Team the Agreement it signed with the Federal Government of Nigeria on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2009, resolved to suspend indefinitely, with effect from Friday October 23, 2009, the strike embarked upon by ASUU on June 22, 2009.

On September 23, 2009, ASUU suspended its strike for two weeks. NEC through the President of ASUU called upon the Federal Government to ensure, in the interest of the University system, to negotiate and sign an agreement with SSANU, NASU and NAAT, so as to enhance industrial harmony on the campuses. NEC reaffirms that position.

### 8. ON THE ISSUE OF STRIKES

The issue of strikes needs to be addressed. To be clear: ASUU is not responsible for the persistence of strikes in the Universities. The burden of defending the education system for over twenty years has fallen on our Union. ASUU has always asked those who oppose strikes to propose methods other than dialogue and persuasion, which ASUU exhausts before embarking upon any strike. To those who dissociate themselves from ASUUs strikes while accepting all benefits from the suffering of the Unions members, the only response is to appeal to their sense of what is dignifying to do.

ASUU appeals to all interest groups €“ parents, students, parent associations, and civil society groups, to show interest in the Universities at all times, not just when a crisis ensues. University teachers would prefer to be in the classrooms and teach, be in the laboratories to do research if parents and other interest groups come out and act to prevent crises. Strikes are avoidable. But for strikes to be avoided, government must be sincere, implement agreements, dialogue with unions when it is incapable of implementing agreements. Parents, professional groups and civil society groups, must show interest in the Universities and the educational system as a whole.

### 9.OUR COMMITMENT TO OUR STUDENTS

Our students are very dear to us. We thank them for their overwhelming support in the struggle for the survival of the University System. We are impressed that our students no longer want to receive less than the best. The struggle however, is continuous, until we achieve the best. We want our students to re-build a formidable students organization to make University education better oriented, more just and more productive of good citizens. We are also aware that our students have complaints and dissatisfaction about some indefensible practices by a minority of their lectures. NEC will ensure that these practices are combatted and ended on our



campuses.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

On behalf of NEC, we express patriotic feelings of gratitude to the Nigerian public, for their support for the struggle; our students, who persevered, because of their understanding of the importance of the struggle for the future of our country; special students organizations like the Education Rights Campaign, the Association of Nigerian Female Students; NANS Zones; the Nigeria Labour Congress, the Trade Union Congress, Industrial Trade Unions, particularly PENGASSAN and NUPENG, the Labour-Civil Society Coalition; the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), the Nigerian Bar Association; Arewa Consultative Forum; the National Universities Commission Board (which contributed immensely to the breakthrough); Comrade Eze Nwagwu of COSEN, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors, and Committee of Pro-Chancellors and Forum of Chancellors.

We wish to appreciate in a special way the intervention by Mr. President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, Mallam Umaru Musa Yar Adua; the Speaker of the House of Representatives Rt. Hon. Dimeji Bankole and the Education Committee and members of House of Representatives; the Edo State Governor, Comrade Adams Oshiomohle, the President of Nigerian Labour Congress, Comrade Abdul Waheed Omar and Governor of Lagos State, Alhaji Babatunde Fashola and the West African Students Union.

We wish to thank the Minister of Education for his cooperation and commitment to this Agreement and in a special way we wish to appreciate the Permanent Secretary Federal Ministry of Education Prof. Dapo Afolabi for his initiative, creativity, pragmatism and sense of patriotism which contributed in no small measure to the speedy resolution of the impasse.

Finally, we call upon all Nigerians to realize that unless and until all Nigerians have the right to education at all levels, unless the people of Nigeria struggle relentlessly to ensure that education does not become a privilege enjoyed by only the rich and powerful; unless we struggle for a country where our national resources and wealth are used for the welfare of the people, for a free and just society, our survival as a people with one destiny will be in jeopardy. Education is the base of development. The challenge to build a durable, liberating educational system is an imperative.

We express special thanks to the Nigerian media, print, radio and television, especially AIT Channels and SilverBird, for solid objectivity and support throughout the struggle. If we did not always meet your thirst for information, it was meant to preserve our common concern for a resolution of the crisis. We apologize for any sensitivities thereby offended.

Thank you and God bless.

**Prof. Ukachukwu Awuzie, fnia**

***President, ASUU***

***For and on behalf of ASUU-NEC***

***Friday, October 23, 2009.***