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The purpose of this press conference is to draw urgent attention to the state of the negotiations between Academic Staff Union of Universities, (ASUU) and Federal Government of Nigeria.

### Background

ASUU and the Federal Government had returned to the negotiating table on 7th June, 2007 after ASUU was persuaded by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar Adua, to suspend the strike which the Union most painfully embarked upon at the end of March 2007.

It should be recalled that the Union patience had been exhausted by the preceding government tactics of prolonged exchange of communication calculated to keep ASUU waiting without beginning the process of negotiation. This is why, even though ASUU had asked the Federal Government to begin negotiations as far back as August 25, 2004, only in October 2006 did the then government agree to renegotiate FGN-ASUU 2001 agreement. And the inauguration of the negotiating team began two months later in 2006. The negotiations broke down in March 2006 when it became clear that the federal Government Team and ASUU Team could not agree on principles of collective bargaining, without which any agreement reached would lay on a shaky foundation and inevitably lead to crisis, which ASUU was determined to avoid. The federal Government team did not appear to have a clear mandate.

When President Yar Adua appealed to ASUU to call its members back to work with a pledge to resolve all the issues in the strike, the National Executive Council of ASUU and all our members gave the promise an enthusiastic welcome. Specifically, NEC, in suspending the three-month-old strike took serious notice of the agreement with the Presidential Ad-Hoc Committee that, among other things:

1. The UNILORIN 49 lecturers sacked in violation of the non-victimization clause as contained in the June 30, 2001 FGN-ASUU agreement would be re-instated through an out of court settlement (which is a legally legitimate practice).
2. That the government negotiating team shall be empowered to negotiate with ASUU, adhering to the principles of collective bargaining, with the aim of addressing the rot and the brain drain in the university system.
3. The re-negotiation of the FGN-ASUU agreement shall be concluded within the time frame to be set by the re-negotiating teams. September 30th was agreed upon as a reasonable time by ASUU and NUC.

### The Goals of the Negotiations

The report of ASUU negotiating team is that the two teams had begun serious negotiations since July 2007. It was the objective of the teams that the negotiations would lead to an agreement that would set the Nigerian University system on a path of restoration and rehabilitation so that Nigerian Universities would be ranked among the best in the world. If

Nigeria is to attain a position of competing in a knowledge-driven world, there is no alternative to:

1. Putting an end to the advanced stage of decay in the university system.
2. Halting the debilitating process of one-way exit of Nigerian academics to the United States of America, Europe, the Middle East, and South Africa etc.

To attain these ends, there must be an agreement on a funding basis of the restoration of the university system. This would require an adequate and stable funding, rehabilitation of laboratories, studios, engineering workshops, teaching facilities, water and electricity supply, library development, academic staff development, university press, the funding of research and advanced teaching methods, international exchange of scholars.

There must also be a system of remuneration sufficiently attractive to reduce significantly, if not halt a one-way brain drain. It is necessary to begin to attract Nigerian academics back from abroad to work for the development and the revival of the university system.

Such issues as the necessary democratisation of the university system, the autonomy of the universities, the review of the roles of the National Universities Commission, (NUC), Joint Admission and Matriculation Board and Education Tax Fund are to be addressed at the negotiating table.

The issue of pension, which is causing the premature exit of experienced academics from the universities, has to be resolved. The democratisation of the universities, the autonomy of universities, the role of the national universities Commission, Joint Admission and Matriculation Board and the Education Tax Fund are necessary aspects of the negotiations.

### The Budgetary Process

It has been ASUU goal that any agreement reached at the negotiating table, to be implemented, in so far as it has financial implications, must be provided for in the 2008 budget. Without a firm funding commitment anchored on the budget, the agreement, no matter how sound in content, would not yield the desired result.

With this in view ASUU has pressed at all times for a speedy conclusion of the negotiations, especially in view of the initial agreement that the negotiations should end in September 2007. The sense of importance and the urgency attached to the President pronouncement on the need to resolve the problems of the university system appear to have been lost. Federal and States budgetary exercises have not received any input arising from the vital negotiations on the funding of the universities.

The rot in the system continues. The hopes raised by the Presidential intervention in June in the academic community are yet to be realized. So long as the negotiations remain open-ended, the effects are, for the academic community, demoralization, discouragement, alienation, and the attractiveness of Southern Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

For our students, learning under impossible conditions will continue. For other members of the University community, hopes of an improved working environment will be lost. For the

university system and Nigeria, the handicap in the race to survive in a world where research and researchers determine progress will become more severe. The Academic staff Union of Universities, therefore urges the President of Nigeria, Alhaji Musa Yar Adua, to intervene to ensure that the ASUU-FGN negotiations are concluded before end of 2007. This is not only possible but also necessary.

Thank you,

Abdullahi Sule-Kano.