

**REMARKS BY DR. EDWIN N. FORLEMU
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, A.I.
THE AFRICAN CAPACITY BUILDING FOUNDATION (ACBF),**

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE
12TH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES, ABUJA NIGERIA,
4 MAY 2009**

HIS EXCELLENCY, UMARU MUSA YAR'DUA, PRESIDENT OF THE
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA,

HONORABLE AISHATU JIBRIL DUKKU, MINISTER OF STATE FOR
EDUCATION, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA,

HONOURABLE MINISTERS OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA,

YOUR EXCELLENCIES AMBASSADORS, HIGH COMMISSIONERS AND
REPRESENTATIVES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
ACCREDITED TO THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA,

PROFESSOR NJABULO NDEBELE, PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF
AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES,

PROFESSOR GOOLAM MOHAMEDBHAI, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES,

OUR HOSTS, VICE CHANCELLORS, RECTORS AND PRESIDENTS FROM
UNIVERSITIES ACROSS AFRICA, ESPECIALLY PROFESSOR NUHU

YAQUB, VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA, AND
PROFESSOR IS-HAQ OLOYEDE, VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN,

THE LORD FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE OF NIGERIA,

YOUR EXCELLENCIES, DEAR DELEGATES,

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

On behalf of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), which I have the singular honor of representing here today, I wish to express, once more, my great pleasure at being present in Abuja, Nigeria - this time to honor the invitation accorded me by the Association of African Universities (AAU) to make a few remarks at the Official Opening of its 12th General Conference.

Our presence here reflects the strength of the partnership between ACBF and universities across Africa through the Foundation's support to the AAU, which is under the able leadership of its President, Professor Njabulo S. Ndebele, and its Secretary-General, Professor Goolam Mohamedbhai.

This 12th General Conference will have important business to do over the next five days. The theme of the General Conference, **"Sustainable Development in Africa: The Role of Higher Education"**, is apt given the need to develop policies aimed at generating and maintaining high-quality training and research in higher institutions in Africa. We hope that, in the process, we will revisit their role.

Our universities are the rock on which we must build a better and more solid future for Africa – for they will be the source of new ideas and new leaders for the future. The quality of training and research in higher institutions in Africa needs to be enhanced substantially to enable universities to respond more adequately to the challenges of the 21st Century.

ACBF, which envisions itself as a knowledge-based institution, has followed these developments since 1992 when it began making technical and financial contributions to the upgrading of post-graduate training in tertiary institutions across Africa through support to the Collaborative Master's Degree Program in Economics. Today, ACBF grant and technical support extends to the Collaborative Doctorate Degree Program in Economics; the Programme de Troisieme Cycle Interuniversitaire (PTCI); the regional Economic Policy Management Training Programs in Cameroon, Congo (DRC), Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mozambique, Uganda, and Zambia; the regional Master's Degree Programs in Banking and Finance in Senegal and Kenya; and the joint AAU Capacity Development Project for the Revitalization of Higher Education Institutions (AAU-CADRE), which is geared at revitalizing African higher education institutions by improving their capacity in the core functions of teaching, learning, research and community service. These interventions seek to create a critical mass of skilled professionals to design and implement policy reforms as well as to strengthen the teaching and research capacity of universities. Ultimately, the universities that implement these programs are not only building capacity but also, as we now often say, building capacity to build capacity. ACBF has already invested more than US\$40 million in direct support to higher education on the Continent. For example, ACBF support to the AERC and PTCI programs exceeds US\$35 million to date. In addition, ACBF supports specialized training programs in macroeconomic analysis, debt and reserves management, finance and banking.

In our 18 years of work, we have learnt some crucial lessons. Firstly, we have noted the critical role African ownership and leadership plays in the development process. Secondly, we have witnessed the centrality of capacity in the development process - and the need to focus on enhancing the effectiveness of academic institutions, which provide the requisite environment for nurturing pools of qualified expertise. Thirdly, we have recognized the critical role of a partnership approach in addressing capacity problems. Finally, we have noted the long-term nature of capacity-building interventions in institutions.

Still, today, as Africa struggles to confront the scourges of economic crisis, governance turbulence, poverty and disease, let us take this perilous moment as a time of opportunity to write a new destiny for the Continent. In short, we must construct a new architecture for change by forming a more perfect fusion of vision, leadership, strategy, funding, action, and monitoring.

As regards vision, let us embrace a resurgent belief in ourselves (University Presidents and Provosts, University Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors, University Administrators and Principals) as agents of change and transformation. Let us remake our universities in the image of our highest aspirations so that our universities become not only the envy of the world but also the engine of our renaissance. The best way to advance our purposes on the Continent is to demonstrate that our excellence as institutions is worthy of emulation. After all, our nations can be strong only if our universities are strong, too. This will mean, for example, attracting and retaining top-notch faculty, admitting the best students and transforming their experience as students, rebuilding physical plants, and introducing new technologies that link up with other parts of the global community. As you know, technology now enables us to realize monumental changes within our lifetime, which once would have taken centuries.

With respect to leadership, we must invest in our children's education so that they may be better prepared to compete in the world of today and tomorrow. Let our universities help to guide our leaders to the rightful course for change. Let our universities inspire and empower our children - incandescent with high expectations as they are - so that they may confront head-on today's challenges - disease, hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, war, climate change etc. Let our universities tap the wellsprings of our values so that they may preserve our ideals for posterity.

As concerns strategy, our universities must become the driving forces of Africa's renaissance. Let our universities be the repositories of new ideas and the free exchange thereof so that the quiet force of our ideas may unleash the spring of new approaches to sustainable development, for we shall be judged not by the length of the prefixes to our names, but by the depth of the ideas that underlie our aims. Our universities must re-position themselves and be lodged as reformers at the vital centre of our lives. The passion, the commitment, the resolve, and the wisdom, which we will bring to this endeavor will truly light every corner of our campuses and, therewith, the rest of society.

As regards funding, ACBF is an autonomous African organization vested with the mission to help African countries to build, utilize and retain the requisite capacity for their development. Therefore, the work of the AAU meets in many ways the goals of ACBF. Therefore, ACBF stands ready and eager to continue to co-operate with the AAU and its stakeholders to transform our universities into instruments of change and transformation. This is a shared responsibility, a

common purpose – involving the strong support and collective action of governments, public-sector donors, private-sector institutions, charitable organizations, alumni, and networks such as the AAU, which play a front-line role as tools of advocacy and vectors of best practice. We dare not miss this opportunity.

Lastly, in respect of monitoring, let our universities be the watchdogs of change and transformation in Africa so that our leaders may be more accountable to the people who elected them. Given their orientation, our universities can be honest brokers in this perpetual balancing of interests and aspirations.

During this 12th General Conference, we will prove once again that we are past masters of scholarly papers. Let us now be masters of our moment, for this is our summons to higher achievement by making higher education a driver of sustainable development in Africa. We wait upon you all to deliberate fully over the next five days, and greatly look forward to learning the outcomes that will help transform sustainable development in Africa from possible to probable. We wish you every success.

Thank you everybody.