



## **UNIVERSITY OF AFRICA, TORU-ORUA, BAYELSA STATE**

### **SPEECH DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup> MATRICULATION CEREMONY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF AFRICA, TORU-ORUA, BAYELSA STATE, BY THE VICE CHANCELLOR, PROF. KINGSTON NYAMAPFENE**

- Our Visitor and Special Guest of Honour, His Excellency, Hon. Henry Seriake Dickson, Executive Governor of Bayelsa State
- Your Excellency, Dr. (Mrs) Rachael Seriake Dickson
- The Deputy Governor, Rear Admiral Gboribiogha, J. Jonah (Rtd)
- The Speaker of the Bayelsa House of Assembly, Rt Hon. Monday Obolo
- The Deputy Speaker of the Bayelsa House of Assembly
- Members of the Bayelsa House of Assembly present here today
- My Lords, Spiritual and Temporal
- Members of the Bayelsa State Executive Council
- Our Royal Fathers
- Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, Amb. Prof. Lawrence Baraebibai Ekpebu
- Principal Officers of the University
- Members of Senate
- Deans and Directors
- All our dedicated members of Staff
- Our Matriculating Students
- Parents and Guardians
- Distinguished Guests from surrounding communities and beyond
- Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press
- All our guests from various walks of life

It is my singular pleasure this morning to welcome you all to our young and growing university and to this 3<sup>rd</sup> Matriculation ceremony. This ceremony represents a major milestone in the lives of the young men and women who will be inducted here today and bears a large measure of significance for their families, because it marks the beginning of a life-changing experience. It is the beginning of a journey that should open new vistas and lead to new opportunities in the lives of those who have successfully competed against thousands of other young people for a chance to get access to higher education. It is also an important milestone in the calendar of the university, because the hundreds of young people who are being inducted here today made a conscious choice to select the University of Africa at Toru-Orua as the institution from which they would like to receive their higher education, an important vote of confidence in our institution. Let me therefore assure you that we take seriously that vote of confidence and know that we have a very high responsibility towards you, to make sure that we live up to your expectations, nay, to exceed your expectations and honour the confidence you have shown in our ability to deliver not only in terms of the academic experience and culture to which you will be exposed here, but also for the general socialization we hope life on campus will expose you to. In that regard, I want to appeal to

you to make a conscious effort to be part of the process of building a community of people who love each other, support each other, work together and, above all, stay away from, and to protect each other against patterns of behavior and social practices that are not consistent with the values we espouse and promote and, **specifically**, to have no tolerance for such practices as cultism.

At this point, let me pose a question and also provide an answer for it. The question which may be going through the minds of some of you and I know, for sure, comes up when people start comparing fees, is: "What makes UAT so special and different from any other institution in the country today, young as it is?" In answering the question, let me ask you to ask yourselves another question, namely "What is wrong with the Nigerian University system today?" We have read and heard many negative comments about the university system today. Of course, that does not mean nothing good is happening in the system; we have some excellent institutions and some pockets of excellence across the system. However, what has most noticeably changed is the disappearance of the notion of "**universitas**", the Latin word from which the university derives its name (implying a place that is open to scholars from anywhere and everywhere, a universal meeting place of minds). I remember very well, twenty, twenty-five years ago, some of my friends and former colleagues from all across Africa and even from Europe and Asia and elsewhere, worked in some of the older universities in this country and some of them produced works that still serve as key benchmarks and reference points in their various disciplines today. However, today, that is no longer the case. So many of our universities have become localized and even tribalized. Don't get me wrong, it is important to create opportunities for local people and grow local talent, but the notion of a university is that a mixing of the types, sources and backgrounds of your talent, makes for a richer experience all round. And that is one of the major ways in which I believe UAT will distinguish itself, with its focus on **internationalization**. We want you, our students and, indeed, our staff to be exposed to a true universal educational experience. Already, you will have noticed that we have, among our academic staff, people who are clearly from other parts of the world. The next step will be to also bring in students from other parts of Africa and elsewhere, to recreate the kind of milieu that made the older African universities so successful in the past. Before you start thinking, ah, but those foreign students will be taking places away from our children, you have to also remember that, international students, **everywhere in the world**, pay much higher fees than local students and so bring in much needed funds to support the development of the universities. So, for us, this is actually getting other people to pay for what we need to provide a high-quality environment for our own children. To you our matriculants, I want to assure you that we are working on so many fronts to enhance the total experience with which you will walk away from here.

I also want to acknowledge and appreciate the presence of your friends and members of your families who have come to support you today and to witness this event. It is further evidence of the importance of this occasion in your young lives and the positive impact we expect it to have on your families and your communities. We know that, in many cases, your being here today is because of the sacrifices these same people and others have made, to make sure that you successfully completed high school and, as you start your new life here, they will continue to meet some of your needs. We applaud them and appreciate them for that. We also see them as partners in encouraging you to only associate yourselves with practices and actions that will lead to your positive social and mental development and shunning practices that can be detrimental to your health and general well-being.

Let me take a moment to share with you our incoming students an important phenomenon which you need to be aware of in order to both prepare yourselves adequately and to avoid disillusionment with the role of higher education as a career-developing experience. For very long in our modern history as Africans, we have seen a university degree as a sure fire guarantee to a well paying job and a comfortable life, a view that may have been given credence by what we saw in the early post-colonial periods of all our countries, when the civil service in particular, needed many educated people to provide leadership and professional services for the successful administration of government. However, much has changed since those days, not only here in Africa, but globally. A university degree is no longer that guaranteed ticket to a good and comfortable life. I say this, not to discourage you, but to wisen you up to a new reality and also make you aware of the new possibilities that come with the disappearance of opportunities previously taken for granted. Successful universities today have become the breeding grounds for innovation, for the development of new technologies, the creation of business start-ups and other initiatives that lead to the creation of personal employment opportunities and personal wealth. Of course, not everyone will be able to create a new technology or start a new business but here, at UAT, we hope to create an environment that will enable ALL of you to explore possibilities beyond simply learning and acquiring a paper qualification, but also equipping your minds with the ability to think critically, and to use your knowledge to solve real-life problems. After all, is it not the case that many of the world's wealthiest people achieved their wealth by discovering a need or a problem for which a solution needed to be found and they went ahead to provide that solution and made people pay for it? So, every single one of you right now is a potential entrepreneur, innovator, social engineer and creator of new ideas that will improve, not only your own lives, but also the lives of entire communities and nations. Although the ultimate goal for your being here may seem somewhat distant, almost four years away from now, you will be surprised how quickly that time passes and, before you know, it is graduation day. It is therefore important that every single day you remind yourself of that ultimate goal and remind yourselves why you are here and what you want to achieve during your short sojourn here. It will help you to avoid the terrible surprise of getting to graduation day with no idea as to what happens next in your life.

In your pursuit to realise your dreams, bear in mind that one of the hallmarks of academe worldwide is honesty, integrity and the pursuit of truth by honourable means. The honour code is a very important part of that culture, which says that we trust you to do what you do by honest means. Therefore, cheating in order to achieve your goals goes completely against that culture. I say this at this very early stage, so that you are aware that dishonest behavior such as plagiarism (taking other people's work and trying to pass it off as your own) and cheating in examinations is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. How can you really be proud of your achievements if, deep down, you know that this is not really your own output?

Let me now turn to our Special Guest of Honour, the Visitor to our University, H.E. the Governor of Bayelsa State whose vision it was to make education a very high priority for his Administration. The creation of this university was part of that vision. In many parts of the world towns and cities have grown to become world famous places because someone had the foresight to place a university not in the middle of a thriving urban area or even on the edge of a city, but chose a place where no such facility existed and decided to establish it in a manner that integrates the life of the surrounding communities into that of the university. We see it here right here where, a few years ago, much of what is now the university campus was a desolate swamp of little use to anyone.

Once established, the peculiarities of this thing called a university are such that it attracts all manner of secondary activities. It creates a new demand for labour and services and thus becomes the engine for creating a new economy in the place where it is located. It is already clear that, that is already happening here. Your Excellency sir, I want to express our appreciation to you and your team, for this gift you have brought for our people here and for the empowerment it will bring to these communities in the years ahead.

To those of you from outside the university, let me take this opportunity to briefly share with you where the trajectory of our development is taking us. Today, we have four major programme areas, namely, the Faculty of Agriculture, the Faculty of Arts and Education, the Faculty of Basic and Applied Sciences and the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences. However, later this year, we look forward to adding three new programme areas, by way of a new College of Health Sciences, a Faculty of Engineering and Faculty of Law. With those fields of study, for which demand is very high, I am confident that, by this time next year, our enrolment will be more than double our current numbers. I would be remiss if I did not also share with you our university's best kept secret, our second campus (which was actually our temporary base for a while, before this main campus was ready for occupation), our campus in Bolu-Orua, which continues to house our School of Foundation Studies. I call it a "best kept secret" because it is sometimes forgotten but we really want you to know about it, since it plays a very important role, not only in complementing our enrolment management plan, but even more importantly, it serves the purpose of giving a second chance to those who may not have been able to get in through the standard Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB) process. In addition, it serves as a place where students are provided with the type and quality of instruction that makes them much readier for university level studies than those who come as direct entrants. It is deliberately designed to engage students in such a way that it is not only a very effective bridge between high school and university, but also an environment where the instructional methods gently migrate students into the kind of discipline required to become independent learners and to socialize them into becoming responsible young members of our academic community. So, for those of you who have friends, relatives or others that you know, who could not make it into a higher education institution this time around, please share with them this information, that UAT offers an opportunity for a second chance.

Let me conclude by:

1. Reiterating my words of appreciation to our Visitor and State Governor, His Excellency, for having had the vision to create an institution with a new kind of approach to how higher education should be done in Nigeria and, indeed, to serve as a model for the rest of our continent.
2. Reiterating my words of welcome and congratulations to you, our incoming new students, and reminding you of the opportunities now before you as well as the responsibility it places on you not to squander this great opportunity.
3. Thanking those of you from outside the university, those in Government, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for the material support which makes it possible for us to function at all; and those from our local and surrounding communities who cooperated with government to make this project possible and continue to work with us as genuine partners in a project that will result in the upliftment of all our communities here; and to all of you, ladies and gentlemen, for having taken your precious time to grace this occasion with your presence.

My very sincere thanks to ALL of you.