

CITATION OF PROFESSOR WOLE AKINWANDE SOYINKA

Professor Wole Akinwande Soyinka was born in 1934 at Isara, Ijebu-Remo, Ogun State. Following his initial education at the University College, Ibadan and the University of Leeds, England, the young Wole Soyinka earned an Honours Degree in English Literature and settled down to a most active, eventful and productive career. He has since lived an extraordinarily varied and exemplary life as novelist, poet, essayist, play-write, nationalist, adamant advocate of democracy, and insuppressible social critic.

As a writer in English, Professor Soyinka has effectively used Yoruba culture and mythology as the philosophical basis of his writings and thus transformed the patterns of Nigerian and African theatre in English. With unusual dexterity, he moves from one literary genre to the other and, through his prolific literary output, Professor Soyinka has elevated the status of African Literature to become an essential part of the world cultural heritage.

Using his great intellectual prowess and extensive knowledge of world affairs, Professor Soyinka has stridently defended human rights and human dignity, social justice and democracy in Nigeria, his home country, in Africa and the world at large. Though this irrepressible aspect of his life has earned him occasional detention and exile, his revolutionary fevour has not been dampened. His prison experience during the Civil War years are recounted vividly in one of his master pieces, *The Man Died* (1972).

Uniquely, Soyinka's writings, be they biographies, plays, poems, and essays continue to be an expression of the voice of the oppressed in Africa and an exposition of the corruption of dictatorships in Nigeria and Africa as exemplified by his book, *The Open Sore of a Continent*. Many of his other critical works, such as *Ake: The Years of Childhood*; and a companion piece, *Isara: A Voyage around Essay*; *Ibadan: The Perkeleemes Years and You Must Set Forth at Dawn* besides being biographical in spirit, turn out to be graphic and illuminating records of national socio-political events. Of his plays, poems, novels and social critiques, *The Lion and the Jewel*; *A Dance of the Forest*; *Myths, Literature, and the African World* stand out as works of exquisite and penetrating erudition, with universal messages.

Professor Wole Soyinka's long and meritorious academic career as teacher, writer, African Nationalist, defender of human rights and social critic have endeared him to the global community of academic and professional bodies. His outstanding literary works and involvement as activist have also earned him admiration and honours from many universities, public and private institutions and governments, not only in Nigeria but all over the world. He holds Honorary Doctorate Degrees, Fellowships and memberships of: The University of Ibadan, his *alma mater*; Yale, Harvard, Nevada, Morehouse and Emory Universities in the United States of America; Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield and Edinburg in the U.K; Toronto and Alberta in Canada; Paul Valery, Montpellier

and Sorbonne in France; Bayreuth in Germany, Cape Town in South Africa; Havana in Cuba; Turin and Bologna in Italy and the European University in Hungary. To crown them all, Professor Wole Soyinka uniquely won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, the first Nigerian and writer of African descent to do so.

He is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of the U.K and Academie Universelle des Cultures, France. He has received several other literary honours, medals and artistic awards in virtually all the continents of the world.

Mr. President sir, I present to you this accomplished scholar, and intellectual giant, a writers' writer, a man who embodies the scarce qualities of transparency, integrity and justice; a shining star of Nigeria to the world and an inspirer of young and old alike, Professor Wole Akinwande Soyinka as a recipient of the Nigerian National Order of Merit Award in Humanities for the year 2008.