

CITATION ON  
Professor Akinwumi Isola

NIGERIAN NATIONAL ORDER OF MERIT, YEAR 2000

The President Sir,

I present Professor Akinwumi Isola, dramatist, novelist, poet, essayist, literary critic, actor, scrip-writer and translator. Born on the 24th December, 1939, in Ibadan, Oyo State of Nigeria, Professor Isola attended the University of Ibadan graduating B.A. (Hons.) degree in French, Master of Arts in Yoruba Oral Literature in University of Lagos, and Doctor of Philosophy in Yoruba written Literature in 1978.

A prolific and versatile writer, Professor Isola has Shown great distinction as a creative writer. Most of his plays involve extensive historical and cultural research. No other Yoruba writer, past or present, has exhibited so Much interest in the history of Yoruba women. He is not only unique as a male writer on the theme of Yoruba women's history, but he is unequalled in the creative presentation of history through the combined genres of verse and drama. His literary works are inspired and are widely regarded in the world of learning as models of literary genius in Yoruba literature.

In addition to his plays and other works, he has capped his literary achievements with the imaginative plot and authentic language of three video films. These films, which can be fairly described as modern classics, have set a pattern of excellence and are already serving as a corrective in a market glutted with poor or, at best, mediocre video films. Indeed, one of them has won the Fame Merit Awards for best story and best picture. Professor Isola is today the most distinguished Nigerian playwright writing mainly in the Yoruba medium. An active observer of the Nigerian Sociocultural and political

Scene, his plays deal with such contemporary issues as corruption, tyranny, religious exploitation, female empowerment, military dictatorship and misuse of power. Although set in a Yoruba context, the themes explored have a national and universal appeal. His works include the production and direction of both contemporary and historical plays like "O Ie ku", "Ko seegbe", Madam Tinubu and "Efunsetan Aniwura".

In addition to his distinction as a writer, Professor Isola is also a notable literary critic specializing in a critical analysis of several genres of oral and written literature, in particular Yoruba poetry and novels. His most important critical study, *The Modern Yoruba Novel: A critical analysis of the writer's art* shows the fecundity of ideas and critical insights that could be applied to the study of the Yoruba novel. He brings to this and other literary studies a freshness and originality that have made them compulsory reading for scholars not only in his field but also in African and comparative literature. Not for him mere generalizations not grounded in text. He bases his conclusions on text and distils from them vignettes of history, culture and tradition.

Between 1988 and 1993, Professor Isola was appointed Group Leader for Yoruba Language, Culture and Civilization for the venerable, Foundation Education Research Program, "Mothers as First Teachers", which serves as model for Nigerian Languages.

Professor Isola's fame has however, spread beyond Nigeria, for he has regularly been invited to conferences, for example, in Senegal, Kenya, Eritrea, Britain and the U.S.A. In 1998, He went on invitation to the Department of Theatre and Drama, University of Georgia, U.S.A. His most popular play, *Efunsetan Aniwura*, on the character of that name in Ibadan history is also currently being translated into English in the U.S.A. and into French in France.

Professor Isola has brought delight and edification to many through his clever use of plot and language, infectious humour, authentic turns of phrase and profound themes, which transcend the concerns of his immediate audience. In spite of all his achievements, Professor Isola remains a humble, unobtrusive and pleasant person. Among his friends and admirers, he is popularly known as honest Manu. He is currently a visiting Professor to the Department of Theatre and Drama, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, U.S.A. and a Research Professor, Institute of Cultural studies, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife.

**Mr. President, Sir,**

It is this versatile scholar-artist and teacher, this gifted playwright, this outstanding exponent of Yoruba language and culture, this social and literary critic of exceptional sensitivity and skill that I respectfully request you to invest with the Nigerian National Order of Merit for the year 2000 in the category of Arts and Culture.