

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE CHAIRMAN, GOVERNING BOARD
OF THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL MERIT AWARD AT THE 2008 INVESTITURE
CEREMONY HELD AT THE PRESIDENTIAL
VILLA, ABUJA ON TUESDAY, 16TH DECEMBER, 2008**

PROTOCOL

It is a great honour and privilege for me, once again, on behalf of the Governing Board of the Nigerian National Merit Award, to salute Your Excellency, The President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, GCFR, the Vice President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, our Chief Host, the gentle and amiable Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Alhaji Mahmoud Yayale Ahmed, Honourable Minister of Special Duties, other Ministers and Permanent Secretaries here present.

We are gathered today to present three distinguished Nigerians, Professor Wole Akinwande Soyinka, Chief Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike and Professor Oyewusi Gureje to Mr. President as worthy recipients of the 2008 Nigerian National Order of Merit Award.

This year's Investiture Ceremony is unique in many ways. It affords the Governing Board of the NNMA another opportunity to interact with Mr. President and his team of dedicated operatives and advisers, and use the opportunity to appraise and thank him for the modest milestones that we have achieved since, with his administration's assistance in 2007, we initiated the effort to mobilize the nation's intellectuals for national development.

Your Excellency may recall that with an ad-hoc grant approved by your good self, the Board convened the 1st Forum of the Laureates of the NNOM in December 2007. That was the first large-scale formal gathering of the laureates in the 28-year life of the Award. The focus of the discussions during the 2-day event was "*Promoting Intellectual Excellence and Innovation for National Development in Nigeria.*" The Communiqué

arising from the forum was presented to your Excellency at the 2007 Investiture Ceremony which followed immediately after the Forum. It contained four key recommendations, viz:

- i). The need to institutionalize the Forum of the Laureates of the NNOM as an annual event at which Nigeria's innovators and intellectuals, both at home and in Diaspora, meet to brainstorm, dialogue and interact with government and industrialists on policy and institutional options for the accelerated development of the scientific and technological needs of Nigeria,**
- ii). Re-establish, as a matter of urgency, the culture of research and development in the nation through the establishment of the Nigerian National Research and Development Fund or Foundation. It further recommended that this body be jointly managed, on behalf of the Federal Government by the NNMA and the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology and other relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies,**
- iii) Establish and fund appropriately, the NNMA's Endowment Fund,**
- iv) Utilize the intellectual capacity of the Laureates and the national Academies as "Think Tank" for intellectual, R & D matters in much the same way as the Nigerian Economic Summit Group plays key advisory role to the government in its areas of focus.**

I am glad to report that though the government was still in the process of settling down in office at the time when we made these requests; some measure of success was recorded during the year as summarized below:

- The NNMA budget and Endowment Fund were increased substantially during the 2008 budget year,**
- The Forum of Laureates was accepted as an annual event that is now a line item in the NNMA's annual budget,**

- A multi-disciplinary Committee on the *“Actualization of the Science and Technology Research and Development Fund,”* was set up by the SGF with strong representation from the NNMA, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology and the Office of the SGF. The Committee completed its assignment and its Report with recommendations has been submitted to the SGF.
- A few other recommendations contained in our 2007 Communiqué have been placed before appropriate arms of the Federal Government for necessary action. We are optimistic that our listening government will act positively on the requests.

It is pertinent to state that the funds allocated to small operational units like the NNMA needs to be provided in bulk and protected from ad-hoc administrative decisions that can prevent the organization from achieving the purposes for which the funds were allocated.

The records of the discourse and the achievements of the 1st Forum are preserved for posterity in the published Proceedings of the Forum, a copy of which is here presented to Your Excellency.

In pursuit of our objective to give quality support to government’s developmental policies and ideas, the 2nd Forum of Laureates was held on schedule from 2nd to 3rd December, 2008. Like the 1st Forum, it was a huge success and was attended by most of the 46 living laureates (both local and in Diaspora) as well as the representatives of the national Academies and the Post-graduate Medical College of Nigeria. The theme, *“Developing a Road Map for the Rapid Technological and Industrial Development of Nigeria”* was specially selected in order to focus needed attention on the human resource, scientific, technological and infrastructural requirements for attaining government’s Vision 20-2020. Commissioned lead papers were presented by experts from within Nigeria and Diaspora as well as by invited government officials and key private

sector participants. These, along with two challenging topics (Ajaokuta iron and steel, Agro-allied industries) posed by the SGF, in his Opening Remarks as Chief Host to the Forum, were discussed vivaciously by the participants.

The Communiqué for the 2nd Forum has since been presented to the SGF for onward transmission to the Federal Government for its consideration and action. Besides, the NNMA has set up a Steering Committee, composed largely of former Board Chairmen and some selected researchers. Their immediate duty is to establish the modalities for the prompt response by the “Think Tank” to whatever assignments are given to it from time to time by the government.

It is our fervent hope that government will embrace our warm offer of fellowship, and give the needed momentum to the initiative for a positive change in the national attitude to Science, Technology and Innovation, the three key ingredients that are need for industrial growth. This way, Nigerian scientists and engineers, both at home and in Diaspora, will be mobilized and encouraged to take the lead in getting Nigeria back on the path to sustainable development.

Mr. President, sir, after the usual rigorous screening of the large number of nominations received from local and international sources, for the 2008 NNOM Award, the Governing Board unanimously upheld the recommendations of our usually dependable Committees of Assessors and their Chairmen. As a result of the exercise, three eminent Nigerians are being presented to Your Excellency this morning for the Award. They are:

- (i) Professor Oyewusi Gureje, a Professor of Psychiatry with international acclaim as an authority on schizophrenia, Alzheimer’s disease and substance abuse;**

- (ii) Professor Vincent Chuckwuemeka Ike, a highly reputed University Administrator who, in later years, and by dint of self motivation and hard work, also rose to national acclaim as a novelist, poet, author and intellectual; and**
- (iii) Professor Wole Soyinka, a true son of Nigeria, who is undoubtedly one of the world's foremost dramatist, essayist, poet and author. He also qualifies, without fear of contradiction, as Africa's most decorated intellectual. He brought great honour to Nigeria, his fatherland in 1986, when he was named the winner of the highly coveted Nobel Prize for Literature. I am glad that today, the nation has the opportunity to honour him.**

Your Excellency, with the crop of talented and highly gifted Nigerians presented to you today, I have no doubt that the Presidential initiative and impetus which you are about to give to the restoration of the national research and development effort in science, technology/engineering, medicine and humanities, will soon begin to yield good fruit.

On behalf of the Governing Board of the Nigerian National Merit Award, I wish, once again, to commend and thank Your Excellency and your team for listening to our call to mobilize the nation's human resource endowment for home-grown development. We pray fervently that, under your leadership, the nation will attain the lofty goals of Vision 20-2020. We also use this opportunity to wish Nigeria and the government a Happy New Year.

**Prof. Oluwafeyisola Sylvester Adegoke, NNOM
Chairman, Governing Board of the NNMA**