

**ADDRESS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF COUNCIL, PROFESSOR JONAS A. S.
REDWOOD-SAWYERR, AT THE FORMAL OPENING OF THE 60TH ANNUAL
COUNCIL MEETING IN ABUJA, NIGERIA ON TUESDAY, MARCH 27, 2012**

Your Excellency, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
Honourable Ministers
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps
Vice Chairman of Council
Leaders of Delegation and Chief Government Nominees on Council
The Registrar to Council
Members of Council
Former Chairmen of Council
Former Registrars to Council
Staff of Council
Members of the 4th Estate
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with immense pleasure that I welcome you all on this august occasion of the formal opening of the 60th Annual Council Meeting of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). I welcome, with special appreciation and humility, Your Excellency the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who, despite your State commitments, has accepted to attend today's event and to personally declare open the 60th Annual Council Meeting. Mr. President Sir, I cannot thank you enough for this great honour of your presence, especially as this edition of the Council Meeting which you are about to declare open is as historic as it is celebratory, for it coincides with the landmark celebration of the Council's 60th (*Diamond Jubilee*) anniversary.

The Annual Council Meeting is an event which attracts delegates from all the member countries of WAEC which are The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Each country delegation is made up of government nominees and representatives of Universities, Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools, and other interests. These are distinguished individuals and accomplished professionals who bring their rare attributes and wealth of experience to bear on the decision-making process of the Council.

Council is the governing body of the West African Examinations Council. It meets annually to review the activities and operations which were undertaken the previous year by the five national offices in the member countries. Council receives and considers reports from its international committees on the various operations of the Council, ranging from the conduct of examinations, staff discipline and other administrative and finance matters, and ratifies the decisions that were taken on its behalf by these committees in the preceding year. Council also considers action plans by its committees and offices and takes decisions to guide the execution of the mandate of the Council in the succeeding year.

At its inception six decades ago, the West African Examinations Council was given the responsibility to determine the examinations required in the public interest in the English-speaking West African countries, to conduct such examinations and to award certificates of international standard to deserving candidates in the examinations. With the constant support, cooperation and encouragement received from the member governments and stakeholders in education in the member nations, the Council has continued to execute this mandate with resounding success and exploiting information and communications technology wherever it enhances the efficiency of our operations.

The West African Examinations Council conducts in the member countries its international examination, the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), and various national examinations that are peculiar to each country. In addition, it avails governments and other stakeholders of its long-standing experience and expertise in educational assessment by conducting for them on request aptitude and selection tests. It also administers tests and examinations on behalf of foreign examining boards. To be able to cope with its steadily expanding clientele, the Council has continued to build the capacity of its staff, its teeming candidates and service providers. It has also deployed modern technology extensively in its operations and service delivery in all the member countries. In the last five years, the total candidature for the international and national examinations and aptitude tests has risen from 2,548,071 in 2007 to 2,811,757 in 2009 and 3,011,925 in 2011. Council constantly reviews its examinations portfolio in terms of relevance and candidature, and advises member countries accordingly in the face of the preparedness of our students for higher education.

WAEC makes available to stakeholders in the member countries other services outside its educational assessment portfolio. It renders world-class consultancy services in diverse areas through its rich repertoire of competent staff, who are professionals in various fields of human endeavour. It also provides reliable statistical data and research reports on examinations and related activities to guide governments, institutions, organizations and agencies in planning, policy formulation and implementation. The feedback mechanism which the Council provides in the form of Chief Examiners' Reports on individual subjects of its examinations has been of tremendous assistance to teachers, candidates and education administrators in the teaching and learning process.

We must however, continue to be responsive and pre-emptive in dealing with emerging issues consequent on incidences such as examination malpractice as well as technological challenges in all facets of our operations. The Registrar and her team are congratulated on the development of the Strategic Framework. The appeal to consider in depth the issues raised towards a global ownership of the emerging Strategic Plan by all member states is very relevant and an urgent need if the Plan is to be successful.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria remains an esteemed member of the WAEC family. The country's vast population is a source of strength and her great human and material potentials are available for the Council to continue to tap from in the discharge of its mandate.

Candidates from Nigeria account for over 80% of the total candidature for the Council's international examination each year, and the country is apportioned a significant proportion of the total budget of the WAEC Headquarters, based on various parameters which include the number of candidates presented by each country for the Council's international examination. I am pleased to disclose to this august gathering that Nigeria has been playing its role creditably in the sustenance of the Council. For many years and up till now the Federal Government of Nigeria has fulfilled its financial commitments to the Headquarters and the Nigeria National Office of the Council. While we applaud Nigeria for this encouraging gesture, we remain confident that this commitment to its obligation to WAEC will continue. In this vein let me use this celebratory opportunity to appeal to all member governments to remain committed to their obligations to WAEC so as to ensure its enviable role as a world renowned examinations body.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Guests, at this ceremony, various awards will be presented to deserving candidates and personalities in the member countries under the auspices of the WAEC Endowment Fund. The Council will celebrate academic excellence among the youths of the West African sub-region by presenting the **WAEC Excellence Award** to three candidates - Miss Sakyi Ann Abena Antwiwaa, Master Hameed Irbaz and Miss Adeloje Christiana Ope - for their excellent performance in the May/June 2011 WASSCE conducted in The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The **Augustus Bandele Oyediran Award** for the best performing candidate in West Africa will also be presented to Miss Sakyi Ann Abena Antwiwaa.

At the national level, the **National Distinction Award** will be presented to three candidates - Miss Adeloje Christianah Ope, Miss Omigbodun Iyeyinka and Miss Nwigbo Kanayo Uduani - for their distinguished performance in the May/June 2011 WASSCE conducted in Nigeria. The **Augustus Bandele Oyediran Trophy** for the best performing school and the **Omo N'Oba Erediauwa Coronation Trophies** for the schools that produced the best male and female candidates in Nigeria will be presented to the winning schools.

Also, at today's event, two distinguished citizens of the West African sub-region, both from the Federal Republic of Nigeria, will be conferred with the prestigious **Distinguished Friend of Council** Award. One of the recipients is Chief (Mrs.) Margaret Oyebola Shonekan, former Head of Nigeria National Office of WAEC and one time First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The other recipient is Professor Ifedioramma Eugene Nwana, a university lecturer and administrator, former government nominee on WAEC and the scholar who delivered the 12th WAEC Endowment Fund Lecture at the 55th Annual Council Meeting here in Abuja in March 2007. I heartily congratulate all the award winners and their families and supporters.

As part of the activities lined up for the Annual Council Meeting, the 17th WAEC Endowment Fund Lecture was delivered yesterday, March 22, 2012, by a renowned scholar, Professor Pius Augustine Ike Obanya of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The lecture was entitled *Nipping Educational Failure in the Bud*.

I commend Professor Pius Obanya for that thought-provoking lecture on a topic which has been engaging the minds of all educators recently, as governments raise concerns about the performance of students in examinations and its knock-on impact on our nations' human capital development and succession plans. I wish to assure him and all stakeholders in education that the recommendations made by our distinguished academic will be given the deserved attention.

Your Excellency Sir, in conclusion, permit me on a personal note as the outgoing Chairman of Council and also a Sierra Leonean, to thank the Government and people of your great nation for the support it gave to Sierra Leone during our period of internal hostilities. Sierra Leoneans will be eternally grateful for the pivotal role and ultimate sacrifice made by our Nigerian brothers in restoring peace and democracy to our nation, thereby confirming the historical and filial bond between our two nations. We are confident that these family and national ties will continue to be strengthened with every passing year as our history and traditions are inextricably inter-twined.

We wish you, Your Excellency Sir, God's richest grace, wisdom, discernment and good health to lead this great nation to even higher heights in prosperity, peace and stability.

Distinguished Guests, I thank you all for your attention and wish you all God's continued blessings at all times.

Floreat the Government and people of Nigeria! Floreat the West African Examinations Council!