

ADDRESS BY WAEC CHAIRMAN PROFESSOR PIUS AUGUSTINE IKE OBANYA
AT THE FORMAL OPENING OF THE 61ST ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING
IN BANJUL THE GAMBIA ON TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2013

Your Excellency, President and Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of The Gambia

Members of the National Assembly

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Honourable Minister of Education

The Lord Mayor of Banjul

Vice Chairman of Council

Leaders of Delegation and Chief Government Nominees on Council

Members of Council

The Registrar to Council

Former Chairmen of Council

Former Registrars to Council

Distinguished Friends of Council

Staff of the Council

Students

Members of the Fourth Estate

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am highly delighted for the rare privilege I have today to welcome you all to the formal opening of the 61stAnnual Council Meeting of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). I welcome specially His Excellency, the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of The Gambia, Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh (GMRG), who has left some very pressing state commitments to grace this event and to personally declare open the 61stAnnual Council Meeting. Your Excellency, we appreciate you most sincerely for this great honour done our organisation by your presence. With this gesture you have once again demonstrated your firm commitment to regional cooperation and the development of education in the West African Sub-region.

The Annual Council Meeting is attended by delegates from the five member countries of WAEC, which are The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Delegates from each of these countries include the Government nominees and the representatives of Universities, Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools and other interests. "Council" is the Governing Board, the highest decision-making organ, of the West African Examinations Council. It meets once each year to review the activities and operations which were undertaken by the five national offices in the member countries during the past year. It receives and considers reports from its various committees on diverse issues concerning examinations, administration, finance, staff management and educational developments in the member countries, and ratifies the decisions taken on its behalf by these committees in the course of the preceding year. Council also considers action plans and operational strategies proposed by its committees and national offices, and it stipulates guidelines for the successful execution of the Council's mandate in the succeeding year.

Your Excellency, WAEC was established in 1952 and given the mandate to determine the examinations required in the public interest in the English-speaking West African countries, to conduct the examinations and award certificates of comparable standard to those of similar examining boards internationally. This occasion has once again provided me with the opportunity to express profound appreciation to the Governments and people of the five member nations of WAEC, including your great country, the Republic of The Gambia, for the consistent cooperation and support which WAEC has enjoyed from them over the years, for the trust they repose in WAEC in the conduct of the various national and international examinations and for their unflinching commitment to the continued existence of the Council. We cannot but appreciate you the more, and give thanks to the Almighty God, each time we remember that our organization is the only one that has remained in existence out of the several regional bodies that were established in the pre-independence West Africa.

WAEC has executed its mandate creditably for sixty one years, both as an icon in educational assessment and a shining example of success in sub-regional cooperation. The Council's impressive scorecard in The Gambia in particular, can be attributed to the personal commitment of Mr. President and the huge investment of resources by the Government in the operations and activities of the Council. The enduring peace and stability in this country over the years have also made it possible for the Banjul Office to plan its strategies, execute its mandate and consolidate its achievements without distractions. I want to thank the Government of The Gambia through your good self, Mr. President, for all these and several other benefits that WAEC has continued to derive from its collaboration with this great nation. I also want to express appreciation for the typical African hospitality which delegates to this meeting have been accorded since their arrival in Banjul. The warmth and calmness as well as the orderliness and tranquility that we have experienced in this Smiling Coast of West Africa, in my humble opinion, are signs of excellent governance and public satisfaction with the performance of the government of the day.

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. It has even gone far beyond its mandate by providing reliable statistical data that have been found very useful for policy formulation and implementation by governments and relevant agencies in the member countries. The Council also provides on request consultancy services in various aspects of educational assessment, and produces various publications that serve as feedback mechanisms to governments, parents, teachers and educational administrators for the improvement of the teaching-learning process.

Your Excellency, as various government interventions improve access to education in the Sub-region, the candidature for the Council's examinations increases on yearly basis. In recent years, the total candidature for the international and national examinations and aptitude tests has risen from 2,775,506 in 2008 to 2,811,757 in

2009 to 3,011,925 in 2011 and 3, 294,740 in 2012,a development that is both heart-warming to all stakeholders in education and in tandem with the Council's responsibility of assisting member countries in the development of sound education.This development however, puts immense pressure on the Council's ageing facilities and dwindling revenue.

Mr. President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,WAEC is a non-profit-making organization which depends on two main sources of revenue for the funding of its operations. The two sources are government subvention/contribution and examination fees. Revenue from both sources have dwindled precariously in recent years as the Council is not permitted to charge economic rates for its examinations, despite inflationary trends and some member governments owe the Council huge backlogs of unpaid contribution and subvention. While I express special appreciation to the member governments who have continued to remit promptly and fully their subvention to the respective National Offices and contribution to the Headquarters, I wish to appeal most passionately to the others, including The Gambia, who are owing the Council, to intensify their efforts and endeavour to meet their financial obligations in 2013. Adequate funding of the activities and operations of WAEC will enable the Council to sustain its high level of performance and render world-class service to stakeholders in the years ahead.

Another worrisome issue to the Council is the festering malaise of examination malpractice, which has become prevalent in the conduct of public examinations in the member countries. Examination malpractice is indicative of a high level of depravity among the youths involved, and it has grave implications for the quality of educational attainments and manpower production in our Sub-region. WAEC, on its own part, has continued to employ both pre-emptive and punitive measures in dealing with the issue. I want to use this opportunity to further reiterate the Council's constant appeal to governments of our member nations to redirect priority attention to the funding of all levels of education by providing facilities, qualified teachers, conducive teaching-learning environment in schools, and invoke all the existing relevant laws to discourage examination fraud.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, our organisation will at this ceremony reward hard work and celebrate excellence by presenting the WAEC Excellence Awards to three outstanding candidates in the May/ June 2012 WASSCE conducted in the Sub-region. Similarly, the prestigious Distinguished Friend of Council Award will be conferred on an illustrious Gambian, Mr. Matthew P. Ndure, for his contribution to the success of the Council.

On behalf of Council, I felicitate most heartily with these award recipients and members of their families.

I also appreciate my Colleague, Prof. Mohammadou M. O. Kah, for the 18th WAEC Endowment Fund Lecture titled Rethinking Teaching, Learning and Examining for Quality Enhancement in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Roles, Challenges and Prospects of Digital Technologies, which he delivered most authoritatively yesterday. The lecturer and all stakeholders in education are assured that the observations and recommendations made in the lecture will be given adequate consideration and necessary action by the appropriate Committee of Council.

Your Excellency, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of Council I once again thank the Government and people of The Gambia for this impressive hosting of the 61st Annual Council Meeting. I also appreciate all individuals, institutions and corporate organizations that have contributed to the grand hosting of the meeting in Banjul.

I thank you all for your attention.