

12th Convocation Address by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Eghosa E. Osaghae

I am pleased to welcome everyone, graduating students, parents, honorary graduates, friends, well-wishers and invited guests, to our 12th Convocation. For those who say things with landmark dates and years, 12 must be a winning number. It certainly is for us at Igbinedion University. Only a few days ago, we came to a happy winning end of a protracted battle to restore the accreditation of our medical programme. The restoration has placed us back where we belong – Nigeria’s premier private medical school, and the very first to produce medical doctors in West Africa. It is a reflection of the excellence of our academic programmes, all of which are accredited by the NUC and relevant professional regulatory bodies, including Council of Legal Education, COREN, ICAN, Pharmacists Council and Medical Laboratory Council.

Our graduates have excelled in their post-graduation endeavours all over the world, and continue to show why Igbinedion is Nigeria’s preferred private university. This is the legacy that our graduating students have as foundation. I congratulate you all for being able to reap the fruits of your hard work and showing yourselves worthy of the degrees that you have earned. The other day a journalist raised an important question on the quality of students and products of private universities. He wanted to know if the perceptions, first, that students of private universities have lower qualifications than those in public universities and second, that private universities standards are lower than those of public universities, were not valid.

I told him they were not for the simple reason that over 80 per cent of students who get admitted into IUO come from the very best secondary schools in the country and have some of the highest UTME scores, which can only mean that we are a university of choice and preference,

not second best. Secondly, graduates of private universities have proven to be better than their counterparts from public universities in postgraduate studies, professional astuteness, and overall competence. It is little wonder that they are the graduates of choice by employers. All of which puts a lie to the misleading perceptions, and the truth to the saying that the taste of the pudding lies in the eating. But, more than this, IUO and I guess other private universities in Nigeria and other parts of the world also, have a distinctive edge that cannot be taken away from them: we transform every student given to us, including those that have been written off, to be cant beats, the very best possible. We are able to do this because our philosophy is to redeem the lowly

Yet, notwithstanding these distinctions and invaluable contributions to human capacity building and national development, including serving as a corrector and innovation other to public tertiary institutions, private universities continue to be vilified and disenabled by inexplicable acts of exclusion, discrimination and victimization. We can never be tired of joining issues over the exclusion of private universities from TETFUND intervention, not the least because TETFUND funds come from the private sector. Those who argue that government has no business subsidizing private enterprise need only be reminded that the federal government has provided generous intervention funds to develop Nollywood and aviation industries, which are both private. Whatever happened to the elementary economics principle of protection that has been used to shore up infant industries which private universities are?

We do not believe in free lunches and would not support the use of funds that does not reward hard work, proven abilities and excellence. We believe the best way to manage funds for educational institutions is to make access competitive, to make it an incentive, rather than a privilege for those who may not know what to do with money! But private universities suffer more: they are systematically excluded from

external donor funds whose enabling bilateral and multilateral agreements make them the monopoly of public tertiary institutions. Major foundations also deny access to private universities on the grounds that they are pro-poor agencies, suggesting, that is, that private universities are anti-poor. Haba! We think the time has come to review existing statutes, bilaterals and multilaterals as they relate to funding access and opportunities, with a view to making them more inclusive, equitable, and competitive. We can longer pretend that private universities do not exist, or that they are a strange species; they have come to stay and should be encouraged to make the difference that justified their coming into being in the first place.

At Igbinedion, we take the task of making a difference seriously, which is why since 2013, we have initiated a project of building a new national elite that is discerning, nationalistic, entrepreneurial, and highly intelligent. It is a project on which a number of state governments, notably Kano, Bauchi, Gombe and Katsina, have embraced our invitation to be part of the smart partnerships. The elite we are grooming in the mould of Plato's Philosopher-Kings, will provide the pool for intelligent and committed national leadership that will liberate our country from the extant pathologies of poor governance, corruption and underdevelopment in the coming years. We invite other stakeholders to join the smart partnerships by for example offering scholarships that would enable bright children with affordability issues to be part of the bright future. In order to do this properly, however, corporate bodies, philanthropists and those able to help must move out of the discriminatory mould that holds that indigent students are only to be found in public universities, which is why scholarships are given to students in public institutions, even when it is very well known that the fees charged by these institutions are already heavily subsidized.

Let me close this short address with the customary acknowledgements and appreciations. I thank the Hon Chancellor, Chief Gabriel Igbinedion,

for the Fatherly support we have continued to enjoy; the Deputy Chancellor, HE Chief Lucky Igbinedion, the Pro-Chancellor, Professor David Awanbor and the Governing Council for the invaluable guidance and encouragement; and our principal officers, provost, deans, heads of departments, works, sports and ICT, hostel administrators, security men and women, cleaners, and all our staff and students who work ever so hard to make IUO what it is. I also thank several bodies that have remained steadfast partners in progress over the years: NUC, MDCN, PCN, Council of Legal Education, COREN, ICAN, PCN, Independent Radio and Television, and University of Ibadan. I congratulate our graduating students and honorary degree recipients once again, and look forward to many more years of partnership and friendship.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all for your attention, and welcome you to our 12th Convocation.