

## Welcome Address by NITI President, Professor Tundonu AMOSU

The leadership of NITI, in particular, Professor Ekundayo Simpson and our indefatigable Secretary/Registrar, o Senor Joachim Okeke, distinguished ladies and gentlemen who kindly honoured our invitation, members of Abuja NITI who have continued to keep the flag flying, our dear colleagues, including myself, who covered considerable distances and have taken out time and resources to be here today;

I cannot pour enough encomiums on those who spared no effort to ensure the holding of this conference once again. I am particularly delighted to note the presence of the colleagues who would have wished to host us in Bayero University, Kano. In spite of what may come as a disappointment, they continue to brave the harsh realities of what has become a full blown insurrection with the unpleasant problems of governance and economic development. Since we are a country of over 450 ethnic groups (verified by recent survey), we cannot speak a single tongue but we may indeed agree on the language of good, democratic governance and economic development which are premised primarily on good and sound education, both nominal and civic, as well as palpable infrastructure for individual and corporate development. This fits in very well with our theme: **Translation and Interpretation in Democratic Governance**. Our sub-themes: **Translation and Justice, Parliamentary Translation, Translation in Mass Media** and **Teaching and Research in Translation** bear witness to the fact that ours is an activity which is definitely relevant to human society as a whole.

Let it be said that, as long as members of communities and nations recognize the need to understand use the information from various lands, such as the breakthrough agreement between the European Union and the Iranians on their nuclear talks, even if Israel considers it a disaster for the future; the rising civil disobedience against the head of government who wants to bring back her brother Taksin Shinawatra through the back door; the Russian strong arm tactics against the proposed pact between the European Union and Ukraine; the recurring tragedy of African migrants and their Lampedusa drama and, only recently, the drowning of some of our cousins from Haiti trying to reach the United States, as long as no nation can ever desire to live in total isolation, translation and interpretation will never go out of fashion. In transmitting all the aforementioned stories, it is certain that translators are at work, putting across the realities of other lands. Whereas in Nigeria, our media people in the local languages have found a way of rendering vanishing billions (SURE-P, Oceanic Bank, etc), people from other African countries actually wonder how such monstrous sums can be declared missing (or not?). For them, such disappearances cannot be possible because they would bring down the whole nation. Here, that reality hardly bothers anyone because the civilian population is not in any way directly affected and since ignorance is bliss...

We are all aware of the charade called elections in several parts of Africa where the principle of universal adult suffrage is undermined by the despairing and warped interpretation of the '**will of the people**'. One may ask: what people and which will? Can we talk of the *will of the people* where indeed those who are voting only refer to symbols when making their supposed choices, conveniently ignoring the academic, moral and spiritual antecedents of candidates? The tragedy of good governance in most parts of Africa reposes on the fact that the voters are invariably incapacitated in virtually every sense of the word and this is a boon to political candidates. They can limit electioneering campaign issues to ethnic considerations (**this is our son, he will listen to us!**). As a politician explained: ***why bother to campaign to the big people at Asokoro who are hardly up to six per household whereas they cannot match the teeming masses at Mpape or Zuba?*** In short, the danger to democratic governance is rooted in the voters themselves who cannot task the candidates since they have no manifesto as such to consider and hardly know anything concerning the candidate. In the process, a lot of things suffer, chief of which is sincerity of purpose amidst the scandalous remuneration of our legislators and decision makers. The idea of justice is often weighed against the ability to leverage money in the right direction while the mass media may never reach the masses on account of the latter's illiteracy. It is common knowledge that, apart from the three main languages in Nigeria, several others have already entered the narrow tunnel to leading to oblivion and irrelevance because they have no written literature. Maybe this is the occasion to praise the efforts of the Bible Society which, in the process of carrying out its evangelical project, is already a key factor in ensuring that all languages in the country are actually reduced to writing.

Distinguished guests, members of NITI, ladies and gentlemen of the Press,

It is trite to say that the practice of translation and interpretation in Nigeria remains largely an all-comers affair. It has not been easy to establish solid criteria for admission into the body and the consumers of our services cannot be said to have 'benchmark minimum standards'. No one doubts the fact that the ability to understand both the source and the target languages can be a serious advantage in translation and interpretation but we cannot preclude the importance of basic and continued training as sine qua non for the proper existence of the profession. We do have faculties which run programmes in translation but there is the need to go beyond mere award of certificates.

The reality of translation is that a good number of those who engage in it are neither qualified nor committed enough to seek knowledge instead of doing enough harm to the conscious efforts of a few. The call which this speaker made six years ago for the training of more Nigerians who can confidently translate into English is still valid today. In fact, some texts supposedly translated into English especially from French have evacuated one's pride at a

number of international conferences. Only recently, one was more than convinced that the conscientious translator should, in all seriousness, only remain within the confines of foreign to native language translation because it is not particularly welcome to translate into a language which is not the person's language of basic education. Just as we have howlers when the Anglophone translates into French, there are equally amusing translations in some hotel lobbies in Cotonou!

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Translation is and remains the bonding factor in international relations. It has made its way into the world of industry, particularly in the banking sector where, unfortunately, many otherwise talented translators and interpreters have found a cosy niche. Its inherent nature of being indispensable to human relations outside one's immediate environment means that, if some people can afford to travel regularly, a large majority remain in the category of armchair travelers, who are very much part of the new global village, even if they seldom have cause to step beyond the frontiers of their country.

I thank you for your attention.

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