**WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS IN NIGERIA (APROCON), PROFESSOR EKUNDAYO OCHOLI AT THE 7TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION HELD AT NASARAWA STATE UNIVERSITY, KEFFI.**

**Protocol**

I give God all the glory for making it possible for us to assemble here this day of the year 2023 for the International Conference of the Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON). I welcome you all to Nasarawa State, and particularly to Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

I am very excited to see our invited guests and professional counsellors, all over Nigeria, gathered here this morning inspite of the harsh economic situation of the country. It is heartwarming and very gratifying, thank you all for coming.

To our guests, thank you for the sacrifice, love, interest and believing in the vision of the Association and in what we are doing today. We appreciate your presence which has added value to this occasion.

Our Chief host, Prof. Suleiman Bala Muhammad, the Vice-Chancellor, the comrade himself. I have always known you to be a very magnanimous person especially to the academics. Thank you sir, for opening your doors so wide and for making us comfortable.

To our Keynote speakers: Prof. Ruth Falzon from the University of Malta, Malta, Velleta and Prof. Mike Trevisan from Washington State University, Pullman, USA, who will be joining us virtually. Thank you very much for accepting to allow us share from your experience, skills and wealth of knowledge.

Lead Paper presenters and skill trainers: Professors A.I. Ojugo and M.G. Fajoyonmi, Drs. O. Adebanwi, A.Y. Jibrin, A. Garba and Sa’adatu Makarfi; we appreciate your coming and willingness to broaden our horizon through your papers and skills.

The Fellows, Elders, Professors and very dear colleagues, I salute your tenacity. You defied all odds to be here ’*gracias’!!!*

The Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON) is an Association of great repute with people of great minds, of about six hundred registered (600) members among them are 54 (fifty-four) Professors. These are a group of people who permeate through every stratum of human existence to offer counselling services to individuals and the society at large.

Apart from the individual counseling services rendered by these professionals, we gather once in a year to deliberate on a theme and sub-themes of great concern to the society that affects humanity.

The theme for interrogation this year is “Counselling for Value Re-orientation”, with the following sub-themes:

1. Counselling for Value Re-Orientation at Home.
2. Counselling for Value Re-Orientation in the Basic and Secondary Education.
3. Counselling for Value Re-Orientation in the Tertiary Education.
4. Counselling for Value Re-Orientation in Religious Leadership.
5. Counselling for Value Re-Orientation in Political Leadership.

Taking an in-depth look into the theme and sub-themes of the conference this year, and looking intensely at the political, economic, social, educational, psychological and emotional situation of Nigerians, no doubt, all indicators point to the aptness of the theme.

Going down the history lane, Nigerians have never had it this bad economically, just as a result of the multiplier effect of the withdrawal of the fuel subsidy. This hardship has transcended the limit of bearing, and therefore, many Nigerians have become more criminally minded – leading others to commit suicide. The moral decadence is appalling and corruption is overwhelming. Some have dropped out of school. Gender and domestic violence have increased and are surging at an alarming rate. Political violence, forgery and insensitivities are done with impunity. Furthermore, Nigerians no longer have value for life. Many are displaced and languishing in the IDP camps, many are being killed by *yahoo boys* and *one chance* operators, kidnapping and banditry are the new norm but the police is doing nothing about it.

The home has lost its values because parents no longer inculcate cultural and moral values in their children. A lot of unreported domestic and gender based violence occur at home with impunity. The reported ones at most times lack justice.

The school is not different, the value for hardwork has been trivialized and compromised at the primary, secondary and tertiary level. All kinds of examination malpractices abound, sexual harassments are a daily occurrence, cultism and substance abuse are the norms.

The moral decadence has not abated, but increased and the religious leaders are indifferent about it. The moral values of the 60’s and 70’s are no longer in existence. We see immorality and corruption as the new culture even in the churches and mosques. The media will show us nudity on television and just tell us *‘Viewers discretion is advised’.*

During the first republic, politicians were competing on giving their people good structures to make them comfortable, schools were made free and so many had opportunity to go to school, but now, politicians are so selfish that even the constituency allowances are diverted to personal use and they still make jest about it by saying “*let the poor breath.”*

Taking inference from the above therefore, it implies that this country Nigeria, still needs a lot of value re-orientation and that is why we are gathered here to brainstorm on how counselling can intervene in the value re-orientation of the various institutions.

2023 has been a very difficult year economically for everyone and every organization in Nigeria. Hence, APROCON is not immuned to these difficulties, inspite of these, we are still been able to organize five webinars that were highly insightful and refreshing. We appreciate all our guest speakers.

I am elated to inform you that we have started an Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapist in Africa (ACPC). This Association was initiated by APROCON and it is presently presided over by our own Prof. Oyaziwo Aluede.

Permit me at this juncture to appreciate the various chapters who inspite of the difficulties, impacted their members and communities positively with various counselling programmes. The outstanding chapters are Kwara and Gombe. I want to say well-done, this is the way to go, keep doing this and keep rendering services to humanity for posterity will not forget you. To the remaining chapters, we are in the helping profession, please, let us help humanity.

It gives me great joy to inform you that the Association is growing in number and that an underground work is ongoing to give birth to a new chapter in Kogi State. This will be possible because of our collective efforts. I thank you all. I am equally excited to announce the promotion of the following people to the rank of professor: Prof. Taiwo Williams, Babcock University, Prof. Kashim Kpanja Lagu, Prof. Mayange Levi Terzungwe both of the Nasarawa State University, Keffi and Prof. Obi Osorochi, Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State. The following were also promoted to the rank of Associate Professors: Christiana Ladi Abeshi, Nasarawa State University, Ogunlade Olurotimi Bamidele, Olumilua University of Education Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti and Jonathan Adedayo Odukoya, Covenant University, Ota.

On a very sad note, and with a heavy heart, I announce the demise of two of our members, Prof. Sanni Aminu of Kogi State University Anyigba, a former PRO of this Association whose sad event took place on the 24th October and Dr.(Mrs.) Dorcas Usi Enwan of University of Benin. May their souls rest in peace. Amen.

Finally, members of the high table, distinguished guests, counsellors, ladies and gentlemen, gentlemen of the press, I thank you for your patience and attention. I wish you all a happy deliberation.

God bless you all.