

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF  
PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS IN NIGERIA (APROCON),  
PROFESSOR EKUNDAYO OCHOLI AT THE 8TH ANNUAL  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION HELD AT  
GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY, GOMBE.**

**Protocol**

I welcome you all to Gombe state and give God Almighty all the glory and honour for bringing us here safely to witness the 8th annual International Conference of the Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON).

Against all economic and insecurity uncertainties, God has made it possible for all our professional counsellors all over Nigeria to gather again this year to discuss what we like doing, the counselling profession. I am so excited to see all of your rosy faces again.

I am overwhelmed with joy to see our invited guests seated here this morning in spite of your tight schedules, the long fuel queues, and the high cost of fuel. This is an indication of your love for the Association and evidence of your belief in its vision. Thank you for finding time to be with us today; we appreciate your presence.

I want to sincerely welcome the Governor of Gombe State, His Excellency Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya, to this occasion. Thank you, sir, for believing in counselling as a profession and for what you are doing for education in Gombe State.

My appreciation also goes to the Commissioner of Education, Prof. Aishatu Umar Maigari for finding time to attend this conference despite her tight schedule. Thank you ma, and thank you for what you are doing for counselling in Gombe and what you will continue to do for education in Gombe State.

Permit me, to specially appreciate our Chief Host, Professor Aliyu Usman El-Nafaty, The Vice-Chancellor of Gombe State University. Thank you sir for accepting to host us and for your generosity.

To our special guest of honour, Professor Kyari Mohammed, The Vice-Chancellor, Nigeria Army University, Biu, thank you, sir, for honouring our invitation, and thank you for adding glamour to this conference with your presence.

Our gathering today is blessed with an array of Vice-Chancellors. Seated here is our amiable Vice-Chancellor, Professor Umar A. Pate, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State. He is our Keynote Presenter, thank you for gracing this occasion, sir. Another Keynote presenter is also a deputy Vice Chancellor from Kigali, Rwanda, he will be joining us online. He is Professor Felix Maringe, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Academics, University of Kigali, Rwanda. Seated here on the high table is our own Lead Paper Presenter, Prof. L. A. Yahaya, Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin. The second Lead Paper Presenter also is our own Professor C. Agbakwuru of the University of Port-Harcourt.

My appreciation is also to our skills trainer, although our own came from Lagos to expand our knowledge, Dr. Bamidele Segun Donald Odeyemi, from the Institute of Continuing Education, University of Lagos.

Present here is our own who is practising counselling in the military, he is the Director of Academic Planning, Nigeria Army University, Biu, Borno State. He is Brigadier General Mogbekeloluwa Olayinka Fakokunde PhD. You are welcome sir, we also thank you for your concern about our safety here.

Furthermore, I want to use this opportunity to thank all the professional counsellors who have made it a point of duty to attend conferences every year. Thank you for coming this year again, and thank you for your support, the Exco appreciate your doggedness and your loyalty to the Association, God bless your endeavours.

To our students, I say a very big welcome. Yes, this is the way to start, to become professionals and learn from your mentors. As you know, we are inaugurating the student body of APROCON this year, so you will start holding your

conferences under the supervision of the National Body. You are most welcome to APROCON.

To the security men, thank you for coming and thank you for keeping the environment safe.

Gentlemen of the press, we appreciate you coming. Please, keep helping us to create awareness about the role of professional counsellors in Nigeria.

The Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON) is made up of people with great minds who gather every year to discuss Nigeria's problems and how counselling can intervene in resolving them.

This Association has 863 registered members, amongst them are 62 professors, academics and many other members spread across human endeavours rendering counselling services to individuals and the global society.

The theme for this year's discourse is **COUNSELLING FOR NATIONAL STABILITY AND INTEGRATION**; the sub-themes are as follows:

1. Counselling for National Unity.
2. Counselling for National Security.
3. Counselling for Economic Growth and Development.
4. Counselling for Functional Education.
5. Counselling for Family Wellbeing and Moral Development
6. Counselling for Conflict Resolution and Mediation; and
7. Counselling against Domestic Violence.

Without mincing words, you all will agree with me that the theme of this year's conference is apt for the present Nigeria.

It is not out of place to say this country is on the verge of disintegration, because people are already calling for cessation. In recent times, some of our Western allies have even predicted an end to the Nigerian state calling it a '*failed state*' due to incessant intolerance among its citizens leading to conflicts.

It is said that our colonial masters succeeded in bringing together a region with a mass population of people with different linguistic and cultural inclinations which have been the source of the complex nature of this entity called Nigeria.

In 1981, Awolowo predicted that this arbitral merger is the prevalence of oriental ethnic prejudice and intolerance, colossal religious confrontations, endemic political tensions and strives instigated by the passion for ethnic hegemony, extreme intolerance for democratic norms and practice as well as a complete absence of ideological direction by political players which have all culminated in grave insecurity.

Nigerians are no longer safe, kidnapping and banditry all over the country, we now sleep with only one eye closed, and even the military and the Generals are not spared. The prevalence and the occurrence of these crimes have made Nigeria one of the most unsafe countries in the world.

Insecurity has hindered mobility thereby limiting productivity, therefore, increasing the rate of poverty. Economic growth and development are at their lowest ebb making the Nigerian youths to “*Japa*”. The low economic growth has affected functional education, no good structures, high school fees causing the dropout of indigent students, innovative-driven research and teachers' motivation don't exist. Family well-being is the poorest in recent times, families cannot feed well not to talk about good medical care. Morality has been thrown into the abyss, crimes have increased tremendously among youths, no more moral values anywhere. Conflicts and domestic violence have increased unabatedly.

In light of this disturbing scenario, therefore, the need for national stability and integration has become expedient. In General Yakubu Gowon's Civil War victory message to the Nation on the 15th of January, 1970; he expressed the need to pursue unity in diversity and national integration vigorously.

Ladies and gentlemen, professional counsellors, that's why we are here today to deliberate on counselling for National Stability and Integration. I do not doubt that our Keynote speakers and lead paper presenters will do justice to this theme and sub-themes. I also do not doubt that all the empirical and opinion papers that will be presented at this conference will suggest solutions to our stability problems and make us more integrated as a nation.

Permit me at this juncture to appreciate the various state chapters who despite this economic hardship, were still able to impact their immediate communities positively by organizing different counselling programmes. I say well-done, you will be rewarded at the AGM. I also appreciate all the chapters who encouraged their students to attend the conference.

I am so excited to announce the various promotions our members had this year. Among those promoted are:

1. Dr. (Mrs.) Ayodele Olubunmi Womiloju promoted to Principal-General, Ogun State Public Service.
2. Mr. Bankole Taoreed Ajaniade promoted to Principal-General, Ogun State Public Service.
3. Dr. Salman Abdulwahab Adisa – Ahmadu Bello University promoted to Asso. Professor.
4. Dr. Falilat A. Okesina – University of Ilorin promoted to Asso. Professor.
5. Dr. S.K. Ajiboye – University of Ilorin promoted to Asso. Professor.
6. Dr. Mulikat L.A. Mustapha – University of Ilorin promoted to Asso. Professor.
7. Dr. Foluke N. Bolu-Steve – University of Ilorin promoted to Asso. Professor.
8. Dr. Aminat A. Odebode – University of Ilorin promoted to Asso. Professor.

On behalf of the Association, I say congratulations to all of you. We expect that in no distant future, all of you will attain the full chair.

In this association, we value Fellowship awards. These awards are not just given on a platter of gold, a member must earn it. The award is also done bi-annually, this places credence on the award. This year is an award year and the following candidates are those who successfully scaled through the screening.

1. Prof. Osorochi Patricia Obi
2. Prof. Lasiele Alabi Yahaya
3. Prof. Kassim Lagu Kpanja
4. Prof. Chikwe Agbakwuru
5. Prof. Abdulrasaq Olayinka Oniye
6. Prof. Olujide Adedapo Adekeye
7. Prof. Augustine Itohan Ojugo
8. Prof. Grace Chinenye Awujo
9. Dr. Ayodele Olubunmi Womiloju
10. Dr. Benedette Ndudi Okiei
11. Dr. Florence Omumu.

I also congratulate the awardees on behalf of the Association. I want to remind you that this is a call to greater service.

My apologies to the Association that we didn't have more than three webinars this year, it was because of circumstances beyond our control. I believe that the incoming executives will improve on that.

I know without doubt that we are all aware that this is an election year and this is the last speech I will be making as the President of this noble Association. Three years ago, we were elected as members of the executives to serve for two years and subsequently, our tenure was extended by one year.

During this period, we were able to do ten webinars, and three conferences successfully, we initiated the award of Fellowships and the one for today is the second in the series. We also initiated the award for the best-performing chapters. The second in the series will be given during the AGM. We further initiated workouts during conferences for members to keep fit. That will be done tomorrow by the grace of God.

We redesigned and improved the functionality of the Association's main website. We initiated the online publication of the Journal of Professional Counselling (JPC), the Association's official journal (now indexed), which made our publications more visible and accessible worldwide. JPC Volume 5, Issues 1 and 2, as well as Volume 6, Issues 1 and 2, are currently available on the Association website. Let me further assure you that publishable papers presented at this year's conference will appear in Volume 7 of the JPC.

Furthermore, this Exco has put together the inauguration of the student body of this Association, this will be done during the AGM. The Exco was able to collaborate with the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Commission for Senior Secondary Schools. These collaborations are already yielding fruits. Unfortunately, the Exco could not achieve the bill as envisaged but the bill has already passed the second reading in the National Assembly. The Exco will give the incoming Exco all the needed support to achieve that feat.

Finally, distinguished guests, counsellors, students, ladies and gentlemen of the press, I thank you for your patience and attention, I wish you all a fruitful and successful deliberation.

God Bless APROCON!

God Bless Nigeria!!