

INAUGURATION OF GEIFON AND 1ST PUBLIC LECTURE

April 27, 2006

A Welcome Address By:
Professor Anthony B. Ebeigbe
(Executive Director, GEIFON)

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies & Gentlemen.

I welcome you all to this first public outing of GEIFON. I am indeed overwhelmed by the quality of this audience.

The story of GEIFON started in conceptual form a few years ago, during frequent informal discussions with colleagues at home and abroad, about modalities for uplifting the quality of Nigeria's higher education. My recent one-year sabbatical at the University of Maryland, USA afforded me the opportunity to network with a vast array of Nigerian experts and professionals across the USA, Canada and Europe. This led to the decision for the registration of GEIFON by the Corporate Affairs Commission, as a non-governmental organization. As Dr. Amos Adamu mentioned earlier, GEIFON is also registered in the USA as GEIFON-USA Inc. while the legal process for GEIFON-Canada, is ongoing.

Nigeria's higher educational system has witnessed phenomenal growth in recent years: there are now over 75 Universities: comprising Federal, State and Private universities. This is a strong testimony to the vibrancy of the Nigerian educational sector. It is however, common knowledge that Nigerian universities and other institutions of higher learning continue to be grossly under-funded. Budgetary allocations to institutions can barely meet recurrent expenditures, with very limited funds available for capital expenditure, teaching and research. As a result of these constraints, the ability to support the conduct of high-quality scientific research has been seriously compromised.

There is a current concept called *emerging global knowledge economy* which is based on the tenet that KNOWLEDGE has become the most important factor for economic development in this 21st century. Knowledge has been described as having the capacity to augment productivity; it also increasingly constitutes the foundation of a country's competitive advantage. All well-meaning countries must therefore invest adequately in institutions which generate knowledge. Some key parameters which define the knowledge base of a country include: research and development, higher education, computer software, patents, etc.

A 2002 World Bank report showed that many developing countries (including Nigeria) have "neither articulated a development strategy linking knowledge to economic growth nor built up their capacity to do so" The study provided statistics for different countries, on the number of scientists and engineers engaged in research and development per

million persons. Nigeria (Africa's most populous country) has only 15 scientists and engineers per million persons – in comparison with 168 in Brazil, 459 in China, 158 in India, and 4,103 in the United States.

Another quote about Nigeria, from a World Bank report in 1996 reads thus: *“With a population of 120 million and ample natural resources, Nigeria is Africa's sleeping economic giant. It is also a somewhat deformed giant. While one-third of its population pursues a life style oriented in various degrees towards Europe and North America, the other two-thirds struggles to survive on less than one dollar per day. Wrapped in a culture noted for industry, creativity and initiative, some Nigerians prefer to apply these talents to questionable or illicit pursuits, while many others expect government to provide the cure for their economic and social ills.”*

In the light of the above, one can appreciate that non-governmental organizations have a critical and complementary role in national development.

The primary objective of **GEIFON** is: *“To serve as a major catalyst and forum for facilitating and strengthening global educational partnerships with Nigerian institutions and provide a platform for connectivity between scholars in the various institutions of higher learning in Nigeria”.*

Although still in its infancy, GEIFON is currently involved in a number of global educational projects involving domestic Nigerian scholars and their counterparts in diaspora. Some of these are:

- ◆ **Outsourcing:** In partnership with Advanced Micro Peripherals (a technology company in Cambridge, UK) this project will set-up computer software laboratories in two Nigerian Universities for outsourced American, European and Asian technology jobs.
- ◆ **Study-Abroad Programmes:** In partnership with the University of Wisconsin USA, GEIFON is working out a 3-week study abroad programme which will enable 20 students from the University of Wisconsin to undertake a study visit to 2 Nigerian Universities. These foreign students will interact with their counterparts in these Nigerian universities, in an organized course on globalization.
- ◆ **Research Partnership:** GEIFON, in partnership with Florida Gulf State University, USA, is developing a project proposal on *the environment and the Niger Delta*, for the National Science Foundation (USA) for a collaborative study involving researchers at the Universities of Benin and Port Harcourt.

Details of our future activities will be widely publicized in the media.

GEIFON will require the support of all stakeholders in the education sector, to achieve its objectives. During the course of today's proceedings, we will call on you to support GEIFON generously, in whatever way you consider appropriate. **We also invite you to be our institutional partner** in sustaining the objectives of GEIFON. In this regard, you

will be joining a group of local and international sponsors who will support our secretariat and programmes.

We are privileged to have in our midst, today, Professor Noureini Tidjani-Serpos – A very senior official of UNESCO, Paris. This is, indeed, a home-coming for him, considering that he has spent a good part of his highly productive life in the University of Benin, in the 70's and 80's. I will not attempt to reel out the exemplary qualities of Professor Tidjani-Serpos – that will best be done later.

When I first contacted Professor Tidjani-Serpos by telephone, to invite him for this lecture, his response was an immediate YES. He was even more enthusiastic when I gave him the tentative title of the lecture. No doubt, we stand to benefit immensely, by his interaction with us.

I wish to end this address by expressing my appreciation to the following persons:

- ◆ Vice Chancellor, UNIBEN, Professor EAC Nwanze for the tremendous support towards hosting Professor Tidjani-Serpos,
- ◆ The Chairman of this occasion, Dr. (Brigadier-General) Osaigbovo Ogbemudia, the founder of the University of Benin, for finding time to be with us
- ◆ Dr. Amos Adamu, the Chairman, Board of Trustees of GEIFON, who has been a strong pillar of support. Most people would link Dr. Adamu with sports (FIFA, CAF, National Sports Festivals....). Let me amplify, here, that Dr. Adamu actually holds a PhD. Degree in Education! – No surprise, therefore, why he agreed to chair an Educational project!

Thank you for listening.

Professor Anthony B. Ebeigbe,
Executive Director, GEIFON