

**SPEECH BY CHIMA IBENECHÉ, MANAGING DIRECTOR,
NIGERIA LNG LIMITED AT THE 2009 GRAND AWARD
NIGHT CEREMONY AT THE TRANSCORP HILTON HOTEL,
ABUJA.**

10TH OCTOBER 2009

PROTOCOLS

Good evening everyone, and welcome.

A couple of hours from now, we shall crown Nigeria's 2009 laureates for science and literature. The Nigerian Academy of Science and the Nigeria Academy of Letters will present to this August assembly, the new kings and queens of Nigerian Literature and Science.

Here's the good news. No one in this hall expects Soyinka, Achebe, or J.P. Clark to be announced the winner tonight. The works of these giants, who defined African literature in the last century, are not under consideration.

For the same reasons, Professors Chike Obi, Ayodele Awojobi, Barth Nnaji, Dr. Philip Emeagwali or indeed Emeritus Professor Umaru Shehu will not be named winner of the 2009 prize for science.

We have, it appears, passed the stage of having just a handful of men and women define this country in whatever sphere of life.

Take football. There were Emmanuel Okala, Christian Chukwu, Segun Odegbami, Haruna Ilerika – men who served Nigeria and the

Super Eagles commendably on the world stage. They have all gone on well-deserved retirements but the national team is still contending for the World Cup with another generation of vibrant football professionals.

So shall we continue to evolve; one generation must succeed the other. You might argue that some generations are greater/better than others, but that would be besides the point, because however great or small a generation is, our responsibility is to ensure a continuity; in an atmosphere free of rancour.

Far more importantly, the greatness of any generation is only assured if the succeeding generation is greater than the former. It is

the future that preserves the value of the past and the present.

But then, I am getting ahead of myself. My urgent task tonight is to welcome you to this August occasion. It's an honour for me to be your host, this evening. And I am most delighted that you found the time to answer our call.

The Grand Award Night has become momentous and memorable. It is an evening of making history. All who have been in attendance, at any edition, can attest to this and will always remember these very special evenings. Tonight shall not be an exception.

The Grand Award Night gala has become Nigeria's magical event where writers and scholars previously unsung, unrecognised, and unrewarded, achieve recognition and success despite our collective preference to recognise only power and money. If this description reminds you of **Cinderella**, it may be because there will always be a day for a true princess no matter how fate appears to hide her behind rags and a hateful stepmother. Our search tonight may not be any different from the prince's search for the owner of the glass slipper.

Now you understand why we must wind down before midnight. We need to ensure that no one turns into a pumpkin!

Every year, we celebrate works, scholars and writers we consider exceptional. And we are always enthusiastic to share them with others. At the last count [and still going], beginning from the inception of the Prizes in 2004, for literature are Dr. **Gabriel Okara**, Prof. **Ezenwa Ohaeto [of blessed memory]**, Prof. **Ahmed Yerima**, **Mabel Segun**, Prof. **Akachi Ezeigbo** and **Kaine Agary**.

And for **science**, Prof. **Akpoveta Susu**, Dr. **Kingsley Abhulimen**, Prof. **Michael Adikwu**, Dr. **Ebenezer Meshida** and now Prof. **Andrew Jonathan Nok**.

They have amongst them very remarkable works that have also won international acclaim. Some of these works were

presented to the Nigerian public for the first time at The NLNG Grand Award Night.

The thinking that led to this prestigious gala for the award of The Nigeria Prize for Literature and The Nigeria Prize for Science has many roots. The first and most obvious is that Nigeria LNG Limited is eager to support the efforts of the government and people of Nigeria in providing a conducive atmosphere for science and literature to thrive.

The second is that we are committed to preserving and nurturing Nigerian life, culture and tradition as well as contributing to the growth of her economy.

The third is that there are some eminent persons in this hall who toiled tirelessly to make the NLNG Dream a reality. Because of what they did, and because of what they are doing, Nigeria LNG Limited has become a very successful company.

We promote science and literature to give others the same opportunity you gave us; to give writers and scientists a shot at success; to give writers and scientists who have more or less operated at the margins of our society, the pleasure to sit with full merit amongst the business and political elite and be able to spread their fragrance of joy and wisdom in this struggling nation of ours.

Yes, all the foregoing reasons are true. But when we celebrate here in Abuja, I have yet another reason for this big party. To have an event where politicians are spectators and the ordinary person, the star!

The objective of these Prizes, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, is to produce stars – in the genres of literature and the various fields of science. And we are convinced that several years down the road, our sons and daughters who accept this challenge will be world-class writers and scientists and will change this country's narrative of political instability and economic under-development to one of success and rapid progress.

My task, this evening, is not to tell you about the merits and demerits of these prizes; that is the work of journalists, critics and historians. I touched on the qualities just to remind us all about the purpose of these prizes, which is to honour the best Nigerian book and the best Nigerian research work in any given year.

When in November 2003 we proposed these prizes to writers, critics, and scholars in Nigeria, we were quite clear on our intentions; to bring about a re-awakening for literature and science, stimulating creativity and writing; giving writers, scholars, researchers and scientists a pride of place. We think we have achieved just that.

We commend our judges for their exemplary standards and steadfastness. They have demonstrated that this country is capable of delivering to high standards. I also urge them to hold the door ajar for the unknowns of literature and science. The fun will go out of the contest if the unknowns – rookie writer with his first novel – have no chance of making it through to at least temporary fame.

All other things being equal, we think we have given Nigeria something to be proud of. And we are determined to sustain and improve on our modest achievements.

In conclusion, we wish to thank the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, who tonight is represented by the Honourable Minister of Science and Technology, **Dr**

Alhassan Zaku, the Chairman of this occasion, **Gen. Yakubu Gowon, GCFR**, President **Shehu Shagari GCFR**, President **Ibrahim Babangida, GCFR**, The Chief of Army Staff, **Abdulrahaman Danbazau**, the Executive Governor of Kebbi State, **His Excellency, Alhaji Usman Saidu Dakingari**, Honourable Ministers, of Niger Delta Affairs, **Chief Ufot Ekaette**, of Information and Communications, **Prof. Dora Akunyili**, of Commerce & Industry, **Chief Achike Udenwa**, of State for Petroleum, **Mr. Odein Ajumogobia [SAN]**, of State for Commerce & Industry, **Chief Humphrey Abah** of State for Health, **Dr. Aliyu Idi Hong** and **Senator Jibril Aminu**, Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee.

I sincerely wish to express our deep appreciation for the presence of the Special Adviser to the President on Energy, **Dr. Emmanuel Egbogah** and the Special Adviser to the President on Economic Affairs, Dr. Tanimu Yakubu.

I cherish our relationship with these eminent Nigerians and publicly acknowledge the many acts of kindness they have shown to Nigeria LNG Limited.

Finally, the man who needs no introduction: Dim Odumegwu-Ojukwu, Ikemba Nnewi. The first Oxford-trained Nigerian soldier, the thinker, the philosopher, the warrior, and the orator, per excellence. Nigeria LNG Limited is grateful to the Ikemba for accepting to give the keynote speech this year.

On behalf of the management of Nigeria LNG Limited, I welcome you all.

Thank you all and God bless you.

Chima Ibeneche

Managing Director

Nigeria LNG Limited