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Welcome Address Presented By

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I welcome you to the 19th **International Conference on African Literature and the English language (ICALEL)**. Let me start by thanking you immensely for your generosity in accepting our invitation and coming actually. Your physical presence fills us with joy. I thank many who have braved many hardships to be here today. We do not need to enumerate some of the known hardships that might dampen the zeal even of the most determined zealot. One thing is certain, Calabar is noted for here hospitality, and here we have made adequate provisions for the comfort our esteemed guests. Take some burden off your minds during these few days and be with us here in Calabar. I have the honor of being Co-Host at this occasion with the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Bassey O. Asuquo, who is the Chief Host. He is ably represented by his deputy, Prof. Friday Mbon, who acts in his place as the Chairman of this occasion. I welcome, in a special way, Prof. Dennis Brutus, who came from faraway South Africa. Prof. Brutus, you have honored our invitation to make the *Keynote Presentation*. Thank you for your kindness. I recognize the pioneering contributions of our revered Prof. Ernest Emenyonu, who initiated this conference as its founder. I thank the convener of the this year's conference, Dr. Tonia Umoren, his assistants and others in the team of organizers; those we see and many who remain invisible behind the scene, we recognize your invaluable inputs. I think here most especially of our sponsors whose generous contributions have immensely helped to

lessen our burden. Malabites and Malabresses, it is a pleasure beholding your delightful presence even during this holiday period. Ladies and gentlemen of rank and other dignitaries in our midst, we take note of your august presence and thank you immensely for coming. You are all welcome to University of Calabar (UNICAL) and to our conference. The themes outlined in the papers for the various panels are quite impressive. You would definitely find something that suits your interests and expectations. Endeavour to attend as many sessions as possible. We have already come and should avail ourselves the opportunity to be informed and to inform others on this topic of great importance.

Finally, I welcome all of us formally to the main theme of the conference, which reads: “African Literature, Language and the Global Knowledge Economy”. I wish to make a brief remark and an appeal, in this welcome address, as these relate to the concept “global knowledge economy”. Global knowledge economy is something that touches all of us, either as producers or consumers of knowledge. One of our major stocks in trade as academics, so it seems, is the production of ideas. Here, we represent a certain global segment that lays claim to the generation of ideas for its own sake; a cartel of ideas, sort of. This seems to follow a noticeable trend in the world today where there is a shift in emphasis, such that intellectual resources, in the form of information technology and general technological know-how, stand above other things like natural resources, labor, and capital, physical, liquid and other assets. Thus, the concept “global knowledge economy” has become a catch phrase to demarcate what some identify as purely knowledge driven economy from non-knowledge or less-knowledge driven ones. Proponents of this view make us believe that almost all other resources are dependent on a peculiar type of know-how they have in mind. This is done as if there is any economy that is devoid of rational input. This naturally brings with it some sort of asymmetry and tension in an arrangement that favors what has come to be identified as knowledge-driven economy, as opposed to..., I do not know what. The human person, we recognize, is basically a rational being. This makes all co-heirs to any form of economy that is knowledge in articulation. Each individual participates in this global economy, and each in the comprehensiveness of his constitution and not in the fragmentation of his otherness. In this way, we address our world in the wholeness of our persons and not in the fragmentation of our faculties. Knowledge is important and worthy of acquisition but let our cravings for rapid technological changes not mislead us to a developmental paradigm that is flawed and divisive. Some of the major attractions of this

shift in emphasis are understandable, if one remembers that knowledge is power. But this power must go round and not remain in a few hands/heads. In a world of fierce competition for scarce resources, the ideological underpinnings overshadowing what has come to be known as global knowledge economy become obvious. These can easily result to a situation where those who manipulate their ways to claims of higher forms of rationality lord it over others. This sort of distinction naturally creates undue tension and suspicion, prepares the grounds for discrimination, exploitation and a new class war. Is the tension accruing from this form of distinction at all necessary or desirable? Certainly not! This is why we need other alternative more comprehensive paradigms that seek to address this matter creditably and adequately.

We are happy to note that language and literature, in their approach, far more than technology, have what it takes to address the human person, not only in the relativity of his existence, but more so in the comprehensive-ness of human interrelatedness. In this way, they fall within a wider existential spectrum of mediation capable of addressing the stringency imposed by undue deification of knowledge. They share this important characteristic with *complementary reflection*, which avers that the human condition is such that all units of which the whole is constituted are missing links of reality that stay to each other in a relationship of mutual complementary relationship. These missing links serve each other interminably, such that any attempt to make a distinction between knowledge-based and non-knowledge based, as this relates to world economy, remains arbitrary and capable of evoking contradictory opposites where there should be none. Within a complementary framework, units, in their insufficiency, stand to benefit from each other mutually, since they operate under the realization that to be is to be in mutual complementarity relationship, and that anything that exists serves a missing link of reality. This is one of the major thrusts of the new ontology of **Ibuanyidanda** (Complementarity), as we call it in Igbo language.

African literature, language and Arts in general, in a global knowledge economy, are playing very important roles going by the fact of this mutual dependence and interdependence in complementarity with all missing links of reality. This mode of complementary interrelatedness can be intensified today. I can say that Achebe realized this fact early by exploring the riches of his Igbo language and culture, which he brought to bear on an otherwise despised colonial heritage to produce his epic, whose 50th an-

niversary we are privileged to celebrate this year. He did this contrary to the opinion of some purists who are bent on upholding the purity of African language, literature and culture. Achebe is only one among many who cherish this high ideal of Ibuanyidanda. We can make this important ideal thrive in a world marked by division and exclusivist tendencies. However, as the saying goes, it is easier to have a good idea than convincing others that one has a good idea. Here, we have much home work to do by marketing vigorously our ideas, our culture and values in a world of fierce competition. In the same way, we endeavor to acquire and conserve, in the true spirit of Ibuanyidanda, all that can help us become real global individuals. This is my appeal. What sense does it make scorning at one's culture and one's values as many still do? We can hardly win, talk less of enriching others, if we despise our values and are not capable of promoting and patronizing them. We are aware of many who do not cherish their native languages and even instigate others to do the same. These are those cases, were some parents proudly announce that their wards do not speak Annang, Bette, Boki, Efik, Ejagam, Ibibio, Igbo, Ijaw, but prefer to speak only English. To such "progressive minds" my advice is to think twice, because it is never too late to be wiser. If you do not value your thing, hardly would anyone recognize it. This is very valid today. The world of mutual complementary relationship is one of give and take devoid of excessive selfishness. Here, we should be proud to receive, if we are generous in giving. It is amazing that some hardly avail themselves of the opportunity to participate in the cultural life of their host communities. Literature is the life we live and our commitment to literature can become evident in our general attitude to life. We are thinking today of a global knowledge economy. What rights do we have to go global if we are not local enough? The new complementary ontology, envisages a mode of being where all stakeholders are ready to share **all** they have towards mutual enrichment of the whole. It is in this way that we prepare ourselves for a non-exclusivist type of global knowledge economy. Conferences of this nature can help probe more thoroughly the ibuanyidandaness of our overall commitment. It can deepen our commitment to complementarity, as we take language and the Arts to newer inclusive liberal heights. I thank the convener for giving us the opportunity to reflect on this important topic. I wish all of us very fruitful and successful deliberations during this conference.