

Keynote Lecture

Achebe's Leadership by Example: The Confronting of Corruption and Fiscal Indiscipline in Governance

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The chairman of this occasion and my dear brother, distinguish Senator Utazi; the Vice Chancellor of the University, and all the Vice Chancellors that are here, our Dear Justice Eneh, the Dean and members of the family of the Faculty of Arts; all the great men from this great institution that are here gathered; my dear brothers and sisters. Let me thank all of you, and the organizers of this event. Mr Vice Chancellor, you won't know how I felt this morning when you said that this university is now number one in Nigeria. It was like I had a good morning. As I was about to board my plane in Lagos, I opened the email I received yesterday. It was the Dean of Oxford University, Professor Laritz saying to me, "Peter we are number one in the UK; so you can be proud of your university". And I came here this one is number one. So when I go back, what do I tell them? I only attend number one universities.

So I thank you for doing that great work and everything. I thank all the various contributors. I listened to Senator Utazi. He, like everyone else had talked about Chinua Achebe. I met Chinua Achebe live. As a student here, I took English 101 under Chinua Achebe. You won't believe it, we all came from secondary school after a lot of effort and worked hard to pass English 101. At the end of that exam there was only one

B, the rest had Cs and so forth. So we confronted him. I don't forget that. He told us that we all wrote Igbo! You can see what that could mean for someone who had just come out of secondary school with so much effort. So that was my first meeting of him. Of course I read his books in secondary school like *Things Fall Apart*. While he was in Brown University he invited me as a keynote speaker. I flew to America and there heard the news of his death first-hand. I came back to President Jonathan and told him the news. I planned with his family and when I finished I went back to invite President Jonathan; and guess what everybody said to him. "Mr. President, this man refused a national award; so you can't go for his burial". I said to him: "Mr. President, this man is a great man, that is why he refused the national award and that is the more reason you should attend his burial". And of course he believed me. He invited the President of Ghana and the five governors of the south-east states.

You have listened to what the other speakers had to say about the man being honoured with this memorial lecture, Chinua Achebe. He was indeed a great man; and we are here to talk about this great man. Outside this University, the next time I met him was in South Africa, before I became a governor. President Mandela had invited him to South Africa. Actually, it was a meeting I can say was more important to me than all the others because I had this business partner, being already a big man as a director in a bank. The partners who invited me told me, "you are going to listen to one great talker. A great man coming to talk". So you know, everything was closed. The curtain was closed. So we were expecting; and they opened it: it was Chinua Achebe.

You know, we now live in a society where we don't celebrate people like Chinua Achebe and that is unfortunate. Everybody has talked about this wonderful man. I will talk only about his leadership, on which our dear Professor Nkechi Ugwu has already eloquently spoken. Everybody would agree, reading his book, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, and even his last work, *There was a Country*, that the problem of this country is leadership. That is, you can't get away from that. Somebody has in fact expressed a fear whether we can ever get away from it. That is where I disagree with Senator Utazi. When you talk about corruption, we are a corrupt country and everybody is included. I will tell you why everyone is included. I have served as a governor and I will give example of why I say we are not following Chinua Achebe.

Chinua Achebe refused a national honor. He talked about leadership. He talked about leadership in politics and the reason why Nigeria is where it is today is because we don't have good leaders. It is not that Nigeria has a bad environment. It is not because there is bad climate. It is not anything at all, except bad leadership; and we have chosen to do it that way. I have served, so I know that we are all corrupt. This is the only country I know in the world where somebody is voted into office; that person did not have a car; he didn't have a house. You vote him in and after six months he invites you for house warming celebration and to celebrate his car. That day the bishop will leave everything he is doing to celebrate that mass and the preaching will be that "wherever he got the money may God continue to multiply it". All of us will be there to celebrate with him to sing and

dance. Instead of calling the police to arrest him for stealing our money, we are celebrating with the man and that is why I said, we are all in it together.

When Professor Okpoko invited me, I told him what I told the Vice Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor is here he will tell you. I told him and I have spoken to about four Vice Chancellors on that. I said, tell me, I have been to great universities in the world. Out of the ten best I have been to six. I have never seen Oxford University giving a politician a doctorate degree award. Which research did he do? If any of these great universities will do it, they do so when the person has left office. Margaret Thatcher was a very great student of Oxford: Oxford never gave her a doctorate degree. Everybody knew that Margaret Thatcher saved UK from collapsing. They honoured her when she died. Here, as Prime Minister, the road would have been named after her.

I have been in Harvard, I have not seen them do that. I have seen it here and I repeat it today. The students of Harvard have refused honour to a former American president because of one single scandal that occurred while he was in office. The students said "yes, he was a great president, but his character does not befit this honour". In this country, presidents want to be chancellor, they will even hire bands and be singing and celebrating criminality.

What Chinua Achebe is saying is that we are all in it. Chinua Achebe said I won't take this honour because things were wrong. I will not take part in this madness, I will not partake in celebrating criminality, incompetence and everything. How many of us are doing it?

When I arrived in Anambra state, all the commissioners that worked with me were people I had never met before. Professor Stella Okuna, for example, struck me because I read somewhere she was the first woman professor of mass communication in Nigeria. I said this woman must be a wonderful person. I called people like that in and I said to them "come let us rebuild this state". When I arrived, my predecessor had started doing some works like roads and other things but a breakdown had occurred because of the way he had come into power. What I saw was a case of where lunatics took over the asylum. My job was how to get this lunatics back into the asylum and look after them. There was no planning department, there was nothing.

When I arrived, I called people together and said, let's talk. I established a ministry of planning; I brought in competent people and said, "Let's work; and I want you people to do me one favour. If anyone of you agrees with me three times, I will sack the person. I want you to be here to contribute". So we started a family. The permanent secretaries that were there in Anambra state, no permanent secretary had a car or had any means of transport. There was no secretariat in Anambra state, ministries were everywhere. There was no planning.

But the principle is simple: if you have not planned, you have planned to fail. And I said to them, "what do we do"? First, a plan had to be adopted. Luckily MDG (Millennium Development Goals) was there. It was a universally accepted plan that had been adopted by all countries in the year 2000. So we quickly adopted it as our plan and then immediately found our own strategy for the delivery of the goals, which

we called Anambra Integrated Strategy. That was the process that allowed us to plan properly, budget properly and execute all our works along the MDG lines. So we adopted our strategy. How did we fight extreme poverty? We were the first state in this country to do poverty mapping. After our poverty mapping, we were able to know where the poor people were concentrated in the rural areas. Today, people ask me “Peter you didn’t do a lot in the capital but roads were built in the rural areas.” Today in Anambra state we have the best road network in Nigeria. The reason why we did that was that we were able to see that if you open up the place you open up their poverty. The poorest areas were Ayamelum and, Anambra West because there was no bridge across to Anambra West. And we said “no”, can we get a road to open that place. When we opened it, they began to make money on the rice they produced; a yam tuber which previously sold for ₦200 rose to ₦500. This was clearly the way to go.

People talk of education. One of you here became my commissioner for education. I said to her, “we are rated number 22 or 25 in educational performance. I want to be in the first 10.” We tried it. One, two, three years and it didn’t work because of investing in education through the ministries. It meant that the money wasn’t getting to the schools. So I decided we must return schools to their owners. We must leave the business of running schools. I remember when I told World Bank, “if you want to give me money, I don’t want the money to come to me: I want the money to move from World Bank to school.” They said, “what do you mean?” I explained that “the traffic through the ministry or through my government operates a toll gate that will not let the money get

there. The money must go directly to schools.” So we decided that every project must be done by the principal, while government does supervision. What we had was bringing about corruption as it allowed money to come into the system. Government had abandoned its job of transformation in favour of transaction.

I can tell you that in every area of the MDG we had the best results. Someone asked me this morning, “Peter with all these things you did, how did you people save money? We can’t pay salaries, we can’t do things.” Hey! Wait a minute, I left Anambra state with over ₦100 billion in banks. Anybody who wants to know, the day I left Anambra I had \$50million in Diamond Bank, \$6million in Fidelity Bank and \$50million in Access Bank. We didn’t steal the money.

The money gobbler is the cost of governance. The rate is unacceptable. People use public money irresponsibly. When I became governor, I found that Anambra State Governor had a governor’s lodge in Abuja. Does the Governor of Anambra State live in Abuja? No! Why have we a house in Abuja? It was costing us ₦10million per month to maintain. Whenever I went to Abuja, the cook would be given ₦30,000 to ₦50,000 to feed me. And I said “cook, why will we give you this money? The buffet in the hotel is ₦5,000 and you are using ₦30,000 to cook here. Why don’t I go to hotel? You won’t need to wash plates anymore. So go to Awka. You will no longer live here.” So I shut that house down. It wasn’t necessary. ₦10million a month for minimum wage at ₦30,000 is 500 persons. That is the money that would have gone to service a house that we did not need. I leased the one in Lagos for 25years. We used to have 30 personnel in Abuja,

I reduced it to 7. When I arrived at Abuja, about 30 persons would come to receive me. They started constituting a nuisance.

I said “no, no, no, no you cannot do this”. And it is all over the place. You can hear in the news that a governor or this person travelled with certain amount of money. I can tell you it is true. My first trip to Abuja, I travelled with over 30 people for a meeting I was invited alone. Nobody invited those 30 persons. Yet I was to pay for everybody that was coming on that plane and it would cost us ₦30,000 per person to go to Abuja. That is ₦1million for the plane. I also had to pay their hotel bills and you know because they were idle, they ate more and when I came back I had to pay for it. Nobody invited them there. If I stayed one week in Abuja, it would cost us 7 to 10 million naira. So I decided after the third trip: “You know what we are going to do, Director of Protocol? Go back to the ministry; Deputy Director of Protocol go back too; everybody go”. And I told the IG “when I come to Abuja, give me 3 policemen and 2 SSS. That’s all I need. I have two drivers, they will take me. I can carry my bag”. So for 8years, nobody went to Abuja with me. And we brought the cost down to under ₦250,000. The average governor goes to Abuja 5 times a month. Some of them charter a plane. If you charter a plane from Enugu or Owerri it is ₦2.5million. The flight back is also ₦2.5million and when you do the other things you do, everything may come to ₦20million. That is the minimum wage for one thousand persons. And they say there is no money. No! There is enough money. It is the irresponsibility in the usage. I didn’t create money.

When I started, people were coming to pay me courtesy call. Traditional rulers, they wrote me a later that they were coming to see me. When they were leaving, my protocol people would say "Oga, we have not given them an envelope." I said, "What?" "He said you should give the traditional ruler ₦200,000 or ₦250,000." I said, I didn't understand. This man said he wanted to see me, what did he come here to do? He came to say "you are doing well. You are doing well" even when things are going wrong. Let the man be. After one week no one came any more.

What am I saying? If anyone could say I have invited them for a party, while I was in office as a governor for eight years a governor; if anyone can say they came to Anambra government house, and they drank any sophisticated drink like champagne, tell the person it's not possible. Today people drink something that they sell for ₦900,000 per carton, 2 cartons, 3 cartons per day. If you multiply it at an average of 2milion per day, it's 60milion a month. How many workers' monthly pay is that? People say there is no money but let us look at the facts.

I had a fuel depot when I was a governor and I want you to verify all these. After about four months I shut it down because it was costing us ₦30million to keep the fuel depot. I said no, because it was wrong. I used four cars for moving around. If you have four cars, you spend about ₦200,000 for fuel if you are moving around daily. Some have a convoy of thirty vehicles: that is, ₦1.2million per day. For thirty days ₦36million and you say there is no money.

When I started as a governor the permanent secretaries had no cars, no permanent secretary had a car. I was going

home one day and I saw a permanent secretary and I said "Hey, let me take you home". He said "No, no, no, if I enter your car, what will they say about me?" I said "even if you don't enter they will say something so it is better you enter and let's live with what they will say".

My predecessor because of the circumstances in which he came to office had ordered two bulletproof cars from Coscharis. Each was ₦75million. So when I came I went to him and said "Oga, I don't need this type of vehicle please. I want you to help me. I need the money back". Luckily somebody wanted to buy them. I went to Onyemuche Nnamani., Then they used to sell Peugeot 406 for ₦3.6million. I told Onyemuche I will not pay ₦3.6million but ₦3million. I want to buy fifty units because I have ₦150million. Go and talk to the people in Kaduna". Onyemuche went to Kaduna. After he talked to them, they agreed and I signed a paper not to disclose that I paid ₦3million apiece. Now I can disclose it because it is a long time now. So I bought fifty vehicles. I had 19 permanent secretaries and 19 commissioners; so they took 38 of the cars and there were 12 left. But there were judges also to think about, twelve of them, I think 12. So I gave the judges the remaining 12. In my first four years all I used was 406 and nobody killed me.

All I am trying to say is that Chinua Achebe preached something we all need to adopt. People say today how did we do the things we did in Iyi--Enu? What did we do to crime? How did we support this and how did we save money? Like I said, we didn't print money. Like I said we passed a law. What we had was a small and diminishing asset called oil. It

made sense to save for the future. I took the view that we must save 10% of what we have. Yes it was difficult and painful but all of us needed to support it. I pleaded with everybody. I can tell you it was not easy. If you see anybody from Anambra who tells you he is happy with me, then that person is not telling the truth. Nobody was happy. We reduced the cost of feeding in the house to less than 20%. They used to slaughter a cow everyday in government house. I had to stop that. I instructed my cook: "cook for one person, this place is not a hotel". We need to get things right and not be part of the problem. The little money available is the same one we are supposed to use to build hospitals and schools.

We built a teaching hospital from scratch. How did we do it? The Nigerian medical council said to me that they were going to shut down our medical school because we don't have a teaching hospital. But I said "we had students that had been in our university for over six years. What were we to do with them?" They said they didn't care. I said "no, can you give me two years to build a teaching hospital?" They said "no, it is not possible. How can you do it? Where are you going to get all the money?" but eventually they said that they were only going to give me three years. I called Professor Akpuaka, and I invited all the professors of medicine in Anambra state and said this is the condition they gave me. I am not going to pay you people one Kobo, your job is to tell me how I am going to build a teaching hospital. I worked with them and in 18 months we delivered a teaching hospital.

Similarly the agency accrediting law schools told us that they were going to close our faculty of law because we didn't have a building, we didn't have anything. I said "give me one

year". I built Igbariam from starch, there was nothing there before. Go there and you will see a clean university. I cut the bushes. People say where did you get money to do this?

Before, if you go to Upper Iweka, Onitsha, you would be wondering, but it is a different story now. We didn't steal to do it and yet there was enough money when I left office. We were owing pensioners ₦35billion. I said "We cannot owe these people. The worst thing you can do to anybody is to owe a pensioner. It is a crime". The older someone gets, the fewer his/her opportunities, the weaker he/she gets, the more the need for support. Why would you owe them? It was ₦35billion. We cleared everything. What did we do to clear it? There is a lot of waste in our system today.

Look at the federal government, the Prime Minister of Britain doesn't own a plane. The Chancellor of Germany doesn't own a plane. No head of government in Europe owns a plane. We have over ten government planes flying everywhere. Everybody is complaining and on top of it universities are celebrating the waste. That is where it is more painful. Because the people who create this confusion, are the ones to come and deliver the speeches, telling you what needs to be done. That is why your school is not working. Nothing is working, because we choose to do the wrong thing and all of us are celebrating it.

You go around as governor, everybody is telling you "Your Excellency, Your Excellency". What is the meaning of "excellency"? Excellency means "*an excellent life we can emulate*". I went to university here. The grades were good, pass and then excellent. That is the meaning of His Excellency. Here we call the worst person His Excellency. I

was moving around as a governor. Everywhere I went, even when you are seeing that things are bad, people are telling you, you are wonderful.

I will tell you about a place called Oba-Ofemili. This is a town in a remote part of Anambra state. I was there, the parents, mothers and fathers were busy celebrating me, jumping up and down saying I am the best thing that had happened to them, the best thing they wanted to see, but I saw some kids under the age of twelve and I asked them "Do you know me?" They said "Yes". "Who am I?" They said "Governor". I went on to ask, "Do you have any problem?" They said "Our school has no roof". That school could be seen from where I was. The parents were there celebrating. It was the small boy that had a problem. That is the crisis here. Another child said there was no toilet, another said no teacher. But their parents were busy calling me "Your Excellency"... When you are busy celebrating mediocrity, criminality and everything: those celebrating are certainly part of the problem. No! We need to say "No" to all these things. That is what Chinua Achebe is saying.

He is saying that we have to select the best. If we select the best, we celebrate it. Peter Obi passed through Nsukka and so what? Two years ago, I left government; if after two years EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) hasn't arrested me, then you can call me to deliver lectures. You shouldn't call a man who, after he has left, like Prof. said, you begin seeing money under his matress. No! No! No! Why can't we just wait? That is what Chinua Achebe is saying, that he would not be part of it.

I am using myself as a case in point. Today it is still being done where people celebrate impunity. How many of us have been in a community where we recognise a man because he was good? When I was in government I said "Anybody that has a First Class degree, I will give that person one million naira." Some of you heard about it. It was tough because I started it with my supposed security vote. I thought there would be only fifty. But there were four hundred plus. Every morning one would come with his original result and I would ask myself, why did I make such a promise?

What am I saying? Was the incentive too much? Why did we encourage our students to aspire towards First Class? After all we had medical doctors and everything, and it wasn't as if we were starting from scratch. I was telling somebody that I had never been sick before but this year, I had a minor surgery in the UK and I came in. It was a well-established good hospital with white people all around. When I entered the theatre, two young men came in, they were blacks. Immediately, one jumped "My governor, you are a wonderful man". I said "Wait, wait, wait". He said "I'm from Ogidi". The people there, they told me "these boys were good"; "these boys were wonderful". "This boy was the best". But look at it well, he is doing it there. If he comes back here, they won't recognise him.

How many young men are working to be professors? Why do they have to kill themselves and do research when they can become a councillor and their wives become first lady of the council area? All I am trying to say is that we are all guilty of this mess. We are all celebrating it.

There is no end of examples of the wastage and celebration of wastage in Nigeria. When President Obasanjo visited Anambra state, he insisted he must sleep in Anambra state. I went to him. Every state in Nigeria has a presidential lodge. They were building one in Anambra when I came and they had just done the foundation. It was going to cost us about five hundred or six hundred million naira. So I said "No. The president does not live in Anambra state so he cannot have a house here". So when he wanted to come, I went to him and said "You are the president of the country, you can come in the morning and go in the evening. You don't need to sleep because I have no place for you to sleep". He said No. No. No. He wanted to come on Thursday and leave on Saturday. I said "Can you then sleep in Enugu or Asaba because there are presidential lodges in those places?" He refused and simply insisted he must sleep in Anambra state. I said "Ok. Fine, come." I said come and see where I live. "This is my house as governor. If you inspect here and it is good, I will give you the key for one month. I will go somewhere else and stay. When you go, I will come back."

They were very nice to me. They said the house was okay. I said to my dear wife – because in my life the only person who has property is my wife – I said to my dear wife "please gather your things. These people are coming to use here for one week so you have two days to pack". So we moved out. There is a hotel beside my lodge, ₦30,000 for the suites. The hotel man said he would take ₦15,000 from me. So I paid for one week. It cost one hundred and five thousand naira as against ₦500million for a presidential lodge.

He came. He stayed in my bedroom. It was even good because they came with beddings and everything was new so when they left we had a lot of new things. They left the things because they couldn't carry them all back to Abuja. So what we got from them was more than what we paid in the hotel. But they were happy. They came, they left. Before he arrived, his protocol told me we must have a bulletproof car for the president. I told them I didn't have any, but on second thoughts, I said, "Don't worry. Come". We went to Asaba and borrowed from the governor of Delta state.

What am I trying to say? You don't need those things. This country needs people who must sacrifice. I don't have to come here and say "You voted me in, I'm building a hostel". I wanted to come to this university and do something and this is the time I will do it. Not when I was a governor. Because if I did it then, I would be paying with the people's money – I would be stealing their money. No, I won't build with their money. I will do it with my own hard earned money.

So what we are saying is that all of us collectively should fight corruption. All of us, for it to work. How can people say in a place where I left ₦75billion that they cannot pay salaries? Wait a minute. Let that deputy governor come I will tell him what to do to pay salaries. Let me tell him about the food he eats every day, that it is very expensive. He doesn't need all that food. You go there, you see all the money. I am happy some of them are doing the opposite.

I was with Governor Ugwuanyi on Saturday. Somebody from Anambra said "It seems like Peter has started teaching you to serve people Fanta. How can you be serving Fanta in government house?" I told him "You are lucky to find Fanta.

The man gave you food, because I wouldn't have given you food." President Jonathan came three times, slept in Asaba once. I told him I didn't have entertainment to host him. If you must come our way, you can just pass by.

There are so many things we can do. We can create jobs by empowering people who are working hard. I laid foundation for Innoson motors. I watched him build that factory and I brought President Jonathan to commission it. I wanted to give schools vehicles. We are the only state in this country that bought vans for our secondary schools – 700 of them. Every town in Anambra state has a security vehicle. They were all built by Innoson. People said "Peter Obi, suppose the vehicle has break failure?" I said to them, Innoson will do it; the same for vehicles for traditional rulers, I said, Innoson will do it. We paid him and that is why that factory is working today.

Innoson you know would have gone bankrupt if I wasn't there. To tell you how wicked this country is, Innoson borrowed money from a bank, imported goods worth ₦800million. Instead of 5% duty, they went back and charged him 35%. While he was angry, four months passed and they said it had entered overtime cargo. What he bought with ₦800million – and he was now owing the bank ₦1billion – they sold it to a senator for ₦25million. That is your country.

It was me, when somebody told me, I drove to him. I went to his house and asked him what happened. He was so bruised. I told him somebody told me his story; tell me yourself. When he finished, I collected all his papers. I went to President Jonathan. I said, "Mr. President. I have a problem. We are looking for foreign investors, look at what

your country did to a local investor.” When I finished telling the story, he called the Head of Customs, called the Minister of Finance and told them that they had one week to give Innoson ₦1 billion. That was how that place was saved. I can go on and on and on.

Just to come to a conclusion, I would say yes, that we have poor leadership but as the senator said, the followership is even worse. But the university has a part to play. If I didn't do well as governor, withdraw my degree. Nobody should be allowed to hold a degree of University of Nigeria despite putting everybody's worth into question. No. If you start doing all these things people will know. But today go to our churches, who are the knights? Criminals. Who are they giving awards? Criminals. How many churches have celebrated people who made First Class in the university?

Please for God's sake Chinua Achebe is challenging us, when we talk about leadership, let us be challenged that all of us owe it. We have no other country except this one. We will all collectively build it for our children. My dear people, the society we are destroying today will take its revenge on our children as it is already taking revenge on us today.

Thank you, thank you, and God bless you.