

WELCOME ADDRESS

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you all to today's lecture: Re-evaluating Local Governance in Nigeria: Responsibilities for the Media. Today's lecture is designed to double as celebration of the 77th birthday anniversary of Professor Wole Soyinka. It has been the tradition of WSCIJ since the first in the Centre's annual lecture series in 2008 to make the lecture coincide with the birthday of Wole Soyinka, as a way of paying tribute to Professor Soyinka's life-long commitment to human rights and good governance in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

I welcome in particular, today's guest lecturer, Professor Bayo Olukoshi, and the discussants: Ms. Kadaria Ahmed, Dr. Abubakar Momoh, Mallam Modibo Kawu, the representative of INEC, and the representative of ALGON, Association of Local Governments of Nigeria. We know how busy you are and appreciate your coming to boost the discourse on how to make our local governments function responsibly and responsively to the communities they serve.

Today's lecture and discussions are co-sponsored by the WSCIJ and The Orderly Society Trust (OST). The collaboration between WSCIJ and OST is not new. OST intended to sponsor WSCIJ's first award for excellence in local government reporting last year. But this award could not be given because of paucity of good materials on local government reporting. Today's event in particular is an illustration of the joint commitment of WSCIJ and OST to stimulate and strengthen the media in giving adequate attention to the country's third-tier of government and the one that affects the people most directly. WSCIJ and OST have kindred missions: to strengthen good governance, rule of law, transparency and accountability in the country's public and private sectors.

It is remarkable that since the last lecture in 2010, the Freedom of Information bill had been passed into law, after almost ten years of incubation period. Whatever may be the limitations of the FOI Act, there is no doubt that it is capable of facilitating, more than ever before, the media's capacity to perform its constitutional role in strengthening the culture of democracy and good governance in our country; a goal shared in common by WSCIJ and OST.

While the relationship between local governments and the states that foster them continues to be an issue within the camps of advocates for true federalism and regional autonomy, there is no doubt that the local government remains under any system the closest tier of government to the people. Because most local governments are in rural Nigeria and are thus removed from the attention of the country's largely urban-based media, local government reporting has been largely pushed to the back burner for too long. It is the goal of WSCIJ and OST to bring local government reporting to the front burner. To do this requires generating knowledge about governance at the local government level. Today's lecture is one of many activities designed to provide ideas on how to make the local governments in our country serve the purpose for which they are created. WSCIJ also recognizes the need to stimulate community radio and newspaper projects to enrich local government reporting in an interactive manner that leaves space for the voice of citizens at the grassroots level.

Once more, I welcome you all to the intellectual feast that today's event is designed to provide. Thank you for listening.