BEING ADDRESS BY MR. FRED OHWAHWA, PRESIDENT OF JUST FRIENDS CLUB OF NIGERIA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 4TH ANNUAL PUBLIC LECTURE OF THE CLUB ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2022 IN ABUJA

The Chairman of the occasion,

Our respected Guest Speaker,

Our distinguished Panelists

Members of Just Friends Club of Nigeria,

Members of the Press,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to the 2022 Annual Lecture of our esteemed club, Just Friends Club of Nigeria.

This is the fourth annual lecture by our club. We began holding our lectures in 2014, a year after the formation of the club. Mr. Benjamin Dikki, the then Director General of the Bureau of Public Enterprises was our guest speaker. He spoke on the “Federal Government Privatization and Economic Reform Programme”. Since then, we have had the President of the Abuja Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Tony Ejinkeonye, speak on business opportunities and challenges in the Federal Capital Territory and the former Director General of the Debt Management Office, Dr. Abraham Nwankwo who delivered paper on Nigeria’s debt burden and the challenge of infrastructural deficit in the country.

Our lecture series were abbreviated by the coming of Covid-19. Thankfully, the world has survived that global health challenge and we have again started facing the realities of our time.

For us in Just Friends Club in Nigeria, apart from the Public lecture series, we place a lot of emphasis on reaching out to the less privileged in the society. We have made it a duty that every year, sometimes multiple times in a year, we reach out to them. We have visited Old Peoples home in Kado, Orphanages in Gwarinpa, Karu, Kuje, children with disabilities in Kubwa. Last year, we paid the exam fees for indigent students in Government Secondary, Jabi. In March this year, we had a Career Talk Day with senior students of Government Secondary School, Life Camp. Last Saturday November 26th, we were at ANAWIM HOME in Gwagwalada for a charity visitation.

The topic, “Beyond the 2023 Elections: That Nigeria May Be Saved” is very appropriate in this season of electioneering campaigns. It is important for us to recognize that there will be life after the elections and that the elections will not be the cure-all for Nigeria’s multitude of problems. It is also important to manage our expectations. Searching for a messiah with a magical touch to eradicate most of our problems without fundamental changes to the way we do things in Nigeria is pure wishful thinking.

There was a time when this country was truly the giant of Africa. Nigeria was far from South Africa but was designated one of the “frontline states”. In 1975, Nigeria called the bluff of the United States and fully back Agostinho Neto-led MPLA in Angola. Nigeria in 1978 nationalized the British Petroleum and Barclays Bank because of Britain’s flirtations with apartheid South Africa. Today, hardly anybody hears our voice in the comity of nations.

Our internal security challenges are daunting. Our infrastructure deficit makes us look like a nation on the brink of collapse. Add these to the economic hardships Nigerians are facing, and it is difficult not to be despondent. But we must not lose hope. For as the poet Alexander Pope wrote, “Hope springs eternal”.

We have assembled here patriotic and knowledgeable citizens, from the Guest Speaker to the Chairman to the panelists, who will give diverse perspectives on how to make Nigeria better again and reference point for Africa and Africans.

I am sure you will all leave here enriched with new knowledge and a better understanding of the dynamics of Nigeria.

Once again, you are welcome to this event.

Thank you very much.

FRED OHWAHWA

DECEMBER 2ND 2022.