

VALEDICTORY SPEECH DELIVERED BY MARIAM IBRAHIM ON THE OCCASION OF THE 7th CONVOCATION CEREMONY OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY LOKOJA HOLDING ON SATURDAY; 21st OCTOBER, 2023.

The Visitors,
The Chancellor, Federal University Lokoja,
The Vice Chancellor and other members of the management committee,
Kindly permit me to stand on the already well-established protocol.

Valedictory Address on behalf of the Graduating students of the 7th Convocation.

With deep appreciation and overwhelming pride, I stand, with huge eulogy, to address you today on the occasion of our esteemed university's combined 6th and 7th convocation. My intention is not to merely recount my individual journey but to narrate a story of collective resilience, unity, and personal development. As we embark on this journey of reflection, I am reminded of the rich tapestry of experiences that has collectively woven us into the remarkable individuals we have become.

Becoming the valedictorian of 7th convocation of our dearly beloved university was a dream I never dared to envision when I first set foot within the hallowed gates of this prestigious institution. The bustling campus life left me in awe, marking my first venture far from home. The liberty was exhilarating, yet it was equally balanced with the sage advice I carried from my traditional Nigerian upbringing- ***"Remember your roots and heritage, which literally means tamayi iza mau hure ve in Ebira dialect."*** These words served as my guiding star, a constant reminder of my identity as the first child of Mr Suleiman Ibrahim and Mrs Khadijat Ibrahim, who may not have had formal education but held a fervent belief in the power of knowledge. Their values have become my compass, guiding me on this remarkable journey.

Let me begin this chapter of my speech titled **"Finding My Purpose"** by acknowledging that my path has been paved with failures, serving as poignant reminders that even the tiniest victories are worth celebrating. I embarked on my academic journey with a singular aim - to explore the art of learning with unwavering dedication. It was an enlightening period, marked by the absorption of an abundance of knowledge. I was a stranger to the grading system, and my family lacked experienced scholars to lean on for guidance. It is to the gift of those who unwaveringly stood by my side that I owe my deepest appreciation. You have been my guiding light, offering steadfast support and imparting in me the resilience to persist through adversities. My journey has taught me that purpose is an unceasing cycle of learning from mistakes, refining one's path, and perpetually improving to excel in the game of life.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global socio-interpersonal dynamics, compelling us to adapt to an unprecedented "new normal." However, our resilience as a cohort shone bright. We learned a critical life skill that classrooms cannot teach: the capacity to adapt, endure, and rebound from experiences. In the midst of the pandemic, I had the honor of representing our institution in the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Equity Research Challenge 2023, propelling us to the national level on our maiden attempt. This achievement would not have been possible without the unwavering belief and support of the Dean of Student Affairs, Prof. Musa Yusufu Abdullahi and Mr. Isa Aminu, who wholeheartedly endorsed our aspirations. To bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application and foster a community of finance enthusiasts dedicated to problem-solving, I spearheaded the formation of the first-ever student-led finance society, The Investment Society.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the University Administration for its commendable efforts in infrastructural development, the expansion of facilities, the pursuit of academic excellence, and the relentless pursuit of global competitiveness. According to the National Universities Commission (NUC) ranking, our Federal University Lokoja (FUL) stands as the best among its peer universities established under President Goodluck Jonathan's tenure.

While our journey at Federal University Lokoja has been replete with challenges, including transportation and accommodation issues that have affected the core of our educational experience, it is incumbent upon us, collectively - students, faculties and Administration, to address these challenges and work towards viable solutions. This serves as a call to action for governmental bodies and stakeholders to provide the essential amenities necessary for quality education and human capital development.

To the Heads of Department, esteemed members of academic and non teaching staff of the Department of Economics, I express profound gratitude for your invaluable guidance, wisdom, and unwavering support throughout my academic pursuit. A special mention is due to the Head of the Department, Dr. Mathew Ekundayo Rotimi, whose fatherly advice has been a constant source of inspiration.

Today, Federal University Lokoja remains our alma mater, and we are its ambassadors. We must hold dear the knowledge and experiences gleaned here as we venture into the uncharted waters of the real world. While graduating is an important milestone in life, it merely marks the beginning of a vast journey of accomplishments.

"Sic itur ad astra," meaning *"so we go to the stars,"* as our university motto aptly states. Today, the sky is not our limit; *it is our beginning*. Let us continue to strive beyond the skies.

As we bid goodbye to the institution that has nurtured our intellect and character, let us treasure the memories, friendships, and lessons we've garnered. As young graduates and future leaders, I leave you with the words of wisdom of Eleanor Roosevelt, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." Dream boldly, work diligently; never underestimate your potential and peers. And, above all, be unwavering in your faith.

Congratulations, the **7th Convocation Graduates**. I look forward to seeing you at the summit, where we rightfully belong!

Cheers!

Long live department of Economics!
Long live Faculty of Social Science!
Long live Federal University Lokoja!
Long live Kogi state!
Long live Nigeria.