



**MODIBBO ADAMA UNIVERSITY, YOLA**

**29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> Convocation Lecture**

**BUILDING TRUST AMIDST CONFLICT:  
COMMUNICATION, LEADERSHIP AND THE  
PROMISE OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN NIGERIA**

**By**

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**Friday 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2026**

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# **Building Trust Amidst Conflict: Communication, Leadership and the Promise of Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>**

Umaru A. Pate, FNAL FSPSP, MNIPR<sup>2</sup>

## **Abstract**

Nigeria's persistent challenges of insecurity, social fragmentation, and governance deficits reflect a profound crisis of trust among citizens, institutions, and communities. This Convocation Lecture examines trust as a critical foundation for nation-building and contends that the prospects of a new Nigeria depend fundamentally on the quality of communication and leadership. Drawing on national experiences and insights from conflict-affected regions, particularly the North-East, the lecture analyses how exclusionary narratives, misinformation, weak dialogue, and ethical lapses in leadership have deepened mistrust and undermined peaceful coexistence. It argues that inclusive communication, responsible media engagement, transparent governance, and values-driven leadership are essential to restoring confidence, strengthening social cohesion, and managing diversity constructively. The lecture further highlights the strategic role of universities, especially Modibbo Adama University, Yola, in generating knowledge, shaping civic values, and nurturing ethical leaders. It concludes that rebuilding trust is not optional but central to achieving sustainable peace, national unity, and collective progress in Nigeria.

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<sup>1</sup> Text of a Lecture delivered as the Pre-Convocation Ceremony of the Modibbo Adama University, Yola, on Friday, January 30, 2026 at the Main Hall of the College of Medical Sciences, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa State

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# **BUILDING TRUST AMIDST CONFLICT: COMMUNICATION, LEADERSHIP AND THE PROMISE OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN NIGERIA**

Vice Chancellor and Chairman of the Occasion,  
Professor Ibrahim Umar

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Other Principal Officers of the University

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Staff and Students of the Modibbo Adama University  
Yola

Distinguished Invited Guests

Gentlemen of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great delight with a deep sense of honour for me to deliver this Convocation Lecture of the Modibbo Adama University, Yola. I thank the Chairman and Pro-Chancellor as well as the Council, the Vice Chancellor, Management, Senate and all staff and students of the institution. Specifically, I give my special appreciation to the Senate under the leadership of the Vice Chancellor, Professor Ibrahim Umar for their academic and administrative leadership in the University. Very importantly, I am hugely grateful to them for inviting me to deliver the combined 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Convocation Address of the University. I cherish the honour and prays to be able to measure up to their generous expectations.

A convocation ceremony is a very important landmark in the calendar of universities. It is a defining moment in the life of the institution as well as that of its graduates. In essence, convocation ceremonies celebrate achievement, highlight identity and values, demonstrate accountability, and inspire service and leadership. For any student, matriculation and convocation ceremonies are memorable highpoints of their academic journeys in life. Thus, on this very special day in the history of this great institution, let me, on behalf of the Council, Management, Senate and the entire staff and students of the Federal University, Kashere, Gombe State

congratulate the Modibbo Adama University, Yola, on the occasion of its combined 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Convocation ceremony. This occasion is a significant milestone in the history of the institution and a remarkable indicator of its contribution in the development of the nation's human capital.

Indeed, one must not fail to observe with delight the ongoing significant growth in the academic and physical development of the University. I am confident that with the rapid transformation here, the university should continue to remain in the commanding lead in Nigeria's higher education ecosystem. In the current era, Universities are changing very fast to respond and adapt to new mindsets and new skills sets that can make them real spaces for innovation and sustainable impact at the regional, national and international levels. Without doubt, the world is changing fast courtesy of new technologies, the internet, new energy sources, climate change and Artificial Intelligence, among others. In the emerging order, our universities must transform into real avenues of innovation and change to sustain their relevance in the affairs of the people and the nation. I am confident that the current leadership will propel the University to continue to use its convening advantages to train graduates that are skilfully and morally resilient,

undertake contextually relevant research and operate to achieve a high level of economic independence for self-sustenance.

The Modibbo University, Yola, is situated in the North East region; a region that has experienced, perhaps more than any other in Nigeria, the costs of conflict, but also the greatest resilience of hope. For more than a decade, the North East region has been suffering violent conflicts, criminality of different proportions and other forms of terror with disruptive impact on our knowledge delivery system and institutions well-being. In the midst of all of these, our educational institutions have remained resolute and resilient in their functions. Thus, Modibbo Adama University, the University of Maiduguri and all other centres of learning in the zone deserve special acknowledgement on their resilience to sustain operations in the midst of real and imagined existential safety challenges.

## **Nigeria's Crisis of Trust**

Today, irrespective of the developmental challenges Nigeria is going through, one fact is certain; it is not lacking in talent, resources, or ideas. Rather, I think what we are grappling with is a crisis of trust—trust between

citizens and the state, at intra and inter community levels, between leaders and the led, between families and their heads and a lot more. This crisis is intensified by conflicts that are violent, protracted, and multidimensional: insurgency in the North-East, banditry in the North-West, farmer-herder and ethno-religious based clashes in the Middle Belt, separatist agitations in the South-East, and urban and rural insecurity nationwide. As it is today, only few parts of the country can be said to relatively free from one form of violence, subversive challenge or simmering tension.

These conditions have redefined trust, understanding, and coexistence among citizens. Increasingly, Nigerians distrust and, in extreme cases, attack one another across ethnic, religious, and regional lines. Reading or listening to media reports, especially the social or online media are so frightening that one may think that the country is at war with itself or on the brink of collapse. Contents are often deeply polarizing, negatively conditioning and dangerously manipulative for impulsive and non-critical actions.

History tells us that nations are not destroyed by conflicts alone; they falter when they fail to communicate honestly, lead responsibly, and build trust

deliberately. When a nation's people no longer trust their leaders, when citizens no longer trust each other, when our documents like certificates are widely distrusted and when even information itself becomes a suspect commodity, then we face not just a political or economic crisis, but a real existential crisis of the soul and the community. Trust, like oxygen, is invisible but indispensable in community life. Unfortunately, today, in several African countries including Nigeria, one can easily notice deep-seated mistrust between citizens and governments, at intra and inter-ethnic, regional, and religious lines, thereby affecting faith in public institutions and subverting trust for peaceful coexistence.

From governance and security to education and the media, the crisis of trust has become one of the most critical challenges undermining consensus building, achievement of circumstantial unity and advancing of development. For example, it is common to observe nowadays in Nigeria how simple personal disagreements between individuals are easily framed in ethnic, religious, or political terms rather than assessed on factual merit. Corruption and criminality are often shielded by ethnic or religious solidarity, while legal processes are obstructed in the name of defending 'sons

and daughters.' In this environment, suspicion thrives, stereotypes deepen, and hate and dangerous speech circulate widely—undermining the already existing fragile process of peace and good neighbourliness. In such an environment, misinformation and polarizing narratives dominate public discourse, while poor communication strategies, lack of transparency, and widening inequality alienate citizens to suspicion, cynicism, and hopelessness. In the end, trust is assaulted, peace takes flight and society is enveloped in vicious cycle of conflicts that bear bitter fruits of tension, hopelessness and aggression.

## **Understanding Conflict in the Nigerian Context**

These are critical times for Nigeria. The country's unity, integration, and collective survival are increasingly assaulted by multiple forces. To put it mildly, Nigeria is a nation in tension. In recent times, global fragility assessments have ranked Nigeria among the least stable countries in the world, reflecting deep segmentation along political, religious, ethnic, and socio-economic lines. The nation faces multiple theatres of extremism, conflict, terrorism, and violent crime. In simple summary, Nigeria confronts threats ranging from insurgency in the North East to banditry, kidnapping,

militancy, piracy, farmer-herder clashes, and separatist agitations across the federation. The country is encased by many security challenges that have subverted peace, threatened livelihood and retarded development. Conflict has consistently proven to be a major driver of insecurity globally, and Nigeria exemplifies this devastating relationship.

According to the *Nextier's* Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database, the country recorded 1,303 conflict incidents resulting in 4,865 casualties and 2,936 kidnapped victims as of 2025. The impact of conflict on the nation is multifaceted and severe as captured in a UNHCR report published on January 13, 2026. It revealed that Nigeria's forcibly displaced population stood at 3,544,519 people, displaced primarily by conflict, insurgency, communal violence, and climate disasters.

Such crises have external and internal dimensions. Scholars have variously explained the basis for the Nigerian crises with three interconnected theoretical perspectives relating to ethnicity, religion and elite behaviour. The ethnicity theory explains how ethno-regional patronage and favouritism distort public institutions and weaken policy coherence. Religious division theory illustrates how sectarian polarisation

undermines national unity and provides ideological justification for violent extremism. Elite consensus theory highlights how divisions among political elites hinder coordinated responses to insecurity, corruption and poor governance as rivals prioritise political dominance over cooperation and good governance (The Nextier, 2025). They further argue that conflict in Nigeria cannot only be explained in security terms alone, but its deeper roots should be thoroughly interrogated:

- Historical grievances and identity politics
- Social and economic exclusion
- Youth unemployment and frustration
- Weak institutions and governance deficits
- Misinformation, hate speech, and divisive narratives

## **The Communication Dimension**

For the purpose of this lecture, I will focus principally on the aspect of misinformation, hate speech and divisive narratives and how they undermine trust and corrode the basis for peaceful coexistence and destroy the bond of national unity and integration in the country. Of course, this is not to suggest that I am oblivious of the

other factors. No. I believe they reinforce one another as they are inextricably linked in the context of a diverse nation like Nigeria.

Nigeria is a multicultural and heterogeneous society where patterns of communication reflect the diversities of the cultures. Expectedly, contents of communication (verbal, non-verbal) interpersonal, group and mass will reflect the diversities and tensions, contradictions, sufferings, aspirations and expectations therein. Therefore, assessment of communication and insecurity should not be restricted to mass media contents only; we need to capture perceptions in interpersonal and group communication in the context of intercultural settings especially as facilitated by digital devices.

The nature and structure of the Nigerian polity, its politics and system of social relations have for a long time generated subtle irritations, hatred, and open hostilities to the extent of a civil war in 1967 as well as occasional violent social exchanges. Often, such negative feelings are expressed in hate speeches and stereotypes about each other. However, such exchanges have become more intensive, additionally sophisticated and sharply vehement in the last two decades or so due to the sharp rise in ethnic politics and nationalism,

intensification of poverty, manipulation of local identities and rise of populist regimes in many parts of the world.

Furthermore, the growing influence of fringe ethnic and fundamentalist religious groups on national and international platforms coupled with pervasive influence of the social media have occasioned the lowering of influence and de-legitimisation of trust in our established institutions and conventional media by some of the people in the country.

The combination of those and many more factors have resulted in open, abusive, harsh and violent exchanges across ethnic, religious, regional and political lines generated from multiple sources (cultural, religious, political, education, etc) and transmitted in the press, broadcast media and, worse, the social media. While acknowledging the profound advantages of the new media in our lives, the social media has, in particular, been severely implicated as it has democratised and simplified limitless opportunities for everyone to communicate massively, horizontally and vertically, at minimal cost and some level of anonymity through the internet.

## The Internet Connection

The internet has, in the last two decades, recorded significant growth and development in Nigeria. Its penetration, acceptance and utilisation have been phenomenal. Over 74% of the traffic who use mobile devices are young Nigerians. The internet has obvious attractive features like the elimination of gatekeeping, affordability, democratisation of access and simplification of application and provision of anonymity and ubiquity across boundaries of space, time and cost. A study by UNESCO (2017) found that an average user checks his smartphone for 150 times or more in a day.

In Nigeria, the National Communication Commission has reported that over 140 million Nigerians are connected to the internet (likely including all mobile data subscriptions) (NCC, Aug. 2025). By November 2025, roughly 109 million broadband subscriptions were recorded ((Statista, 2025). Internet access in Nigeria is heavily mobile-driven, with the majority of users accessing the internet through smartphones and mobile networks. Of the figure, 87.37% are engaged in social media activities on the Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter).

Thus, the digital media (online and social) is not only part of us but now central to our lives. We literally live in the digital media in which the conventional media, social media influencers, traditional institutions, and public officials all shape narratives. In fact, our young people are hugely burdened by pressures of globalisation and multiple sources of digitally inclined information with little space for manoeuvrability. In this context, when communication is reckless, society fractures. When it is ethical, inclusive, and empathetic, trust is built.

## **Trust as the Missing Link in Nation-Building**

Trust is the invisible hand that holds a nation together. This is far more critical in multicultural and heterogeneously constituted nations that are diverse and pluralistic like our own. In Nigeria, where ethnic diversity, religious plurality, political variety, historical grievances, and governance challenges intersect, trust is not just desirable—it is foundational to sustainable nation-building and peaceful coexistence. Trust facilitates confidence and cooperation between and among citizens on one hand and citizens and organs of the State on the other. With trust, citizens willingly obey the law and feel obligated to civic duties. More

importantly, citizens respect each other, negotiate and resolve differences peacefully and be willing to accommodate each other's point of view as a matter of right.

However, where trust is absent or very low, rumours replace facts, violence becomes a language, the government is seen as distant or hostile and citizens easily resort to self-help. Citizens harbour hatred against each other with devastating consequences on social attitudes and peaceful coexistence. The elites and public institutions are distrusted by the general population or at best treated with cynicism and contempt. This is dangerously challenging in the process of coexistence, development and integration understood as living together and fusing together within a diverse national setting. Integration implies the gradual reduction of ethnic, cultural, and regional antagonisms in order to create a shared political community and a broad cultural and ideological consensus. Such consensus fosters territorial nationality that transcends parochial loyalties, ethnic exclusivism, religious bigotry, and sectional interests.

National integration has been described as the fusion of norms and cultures, the promotion of economic

interdependence, and the narrowing of gaps between social classes and segments of society. It involves both the structure of the state and the formation of citizens' consciousness based on shared ideals, values, norms, and institutions. However, the foundation of all of that is trust, respect and tolerance. At this point, we need to reflect on our condition as a country and as members of various communities that make up the country. Are we all satisfied that we are happily co-existing in a socially conducive entity?

Unfortunately, for decades in our country and continent, several countervailing forces have continued to weaken trust as the basis of peace and security in our integrative efforts. The trust deficit is palpably manifest at all levels of the society. The causes are historically traceable to numerous frustrating factors, few of which are: intra elite conflicts, deepening poverty, pandemic corruption, poor governance, politicisation of identity, unemployment, and the rise of violent non-state actors fuelled by shadowy external interests. In recent years, these challenges have been frustratingly compounded by the intensification of hate and dangerous speech as well as the spread of fake news, poisoned narratives, and declining trust in the conventional media and established stabilizing societal institutions. With

suspicions, stereotypes and hatred, the process of trust is jeopardized. And, disruptive and de-professionalised digital media platforms compound the challenge as Nigerians continue to grapple with basic issues of identity.

I believe that the cries from some separatists' groups in this country could based on the frustrations in our collective understanding and trusting of our diversities, and effectively and equitably managing the realism of pluralism to build a nation where “the entire population of the state is its citizens and that each one of them is loyal and committed to the state” (Nnoli, 2010). As a consequence, our dear country has today found itself in a difficult situation of deep trust deficit fuelled by:

- **Poor governance and corruption** resulting in weakening of faith in public institutions and doubting their sincerity by the citizens
- **Electoral controversies**, which undermine democratic credibility. Our elections are often characterised by quarrels, court disputations and sometimes violence
- **Insecurity and conflict** (insurgency, banditry, communal clashes), eroding confidence in

capability of state protection and heightening of influence of non-state coercive apparatuses

- **Perceived injustice and marginalisation**, especially among youth and minority groups
- **Misinformation and divisive rhetoric**, amplified by both traditional and social media

These factors create distrust, frustration, alienation and disengagement, particularly among young Nigerians. For instance, the 2024 African young people survey involving 5600 youngsters (including Nigeria) reveal that 60% want to leave their countries or emigrate due to corruption which threatens their future, individually and collectively (PSB Insights, 2024) (collapse of ambitions and milestones in life). They feel that their governments are not doing much to address their challenges; 1 in 3 of the respondents believe that democratic rule has no future for them (PSB 2024 African Youth Survey). The youth are barely connected and remain largely disconnected from institutions and pessimistic about the future and directions of government in their countries. Indeed, one can safely say that a large number of our youths are geographically in Africa, but psychologically in Europe, America or elsewhere courtesy of the internet and poor governance

in our shores. Wherever the youth is restless and frustrated, then, the future of such a place is arrested or endangered. A restless and frustrated youth population should be a warning signal for any society.

## **Intensification in hate speech**

The nature and structure of the Nigerian polity, its politics and system of social relations have for a long time generated subtle irritations, hatred, and open hostilities to the extent of a civil war in 1967 as well as occasional violent social exchanges. Often, such negative feelings are expressed in hate speeches and stereotypes about each other. However, such exchanges have become far more frequent and intensive, additionally sophisticated and sharply vehement in the last two to three decades due to ethnic politics, manipulation of local identities and rise in ethnic nationalism. Other forces include growing influence of fringe ethnic and fundamentalist religious groups on national and international platforms coupled with poor governance and most importantly, pervasive influence of the social media which have subverted legitimacy, influence and trust in established institutions and media.

Some of the consequences of the rise of the internet in Nigeria are: decline of public trust in the conventional media especially with their intractable challenges of funding, capacity and ethics; growth of new forms of confrontations to existing institutions, politics, economics and identity as a people as well as the rise of fringe and alternative actors with undefined subversive motives. All of these sources generate and disseminate alternative and often intemperate information that assault acceptable codes and borderlines across the nation. Little wonder that there is an intensification in the spread of what is now regarded as fake news, hate and dangerous speech in the country. For instance, in 2017, Late President Muhammadu Buhari complained on the upsurge in offensive, hate and dangerous speech in the country. He said the situation had crossed the red line in the country's national space. Likewise, the former Vice President who also once complained and equated hate and dangerous speech to terrorism. He said: "The Federal Government has today drawn the line on hate speech. Hate speech is a species of terrorism".

### **Hate and dangerous speech**

Hate speech is an aspect of hate crime. It is complex to define and fluid to comprehend; hence, tailor made

solutions are often applied to evaluate and respond to specific situations. Hate and dangerous speech can better be understood in the context of international, regional and national normative frameworks (Gaglardone et al, 2016). In the Nigerian context, the Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD, 2016) has defined hate speech as: any speech act aimed at inciting the audience to denigrate other people on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, geography and other socially conceived parameter or discriminate feature with the purpose of marginalizing them or placing them at some disadvantage that is contrary to the provisions of the universal declaration on human rights, international covenants on rights of the people and the Nigerian Constitution. Thus, if we operationalise the definition from CITAD, it could mean that the elements that constitute hate speech in Nigeria are, though not exhaustive, the following:

- Insults people for their religion
- Abuses people for their ethnic or linguistic affiliation
- Expresses contempt against people because of their place of origin

- Disparages or intimidates women or girls because of their gender
- Condones discriminatory assertions against group (s) of people
- Abuses or desecrates symbols of cultural or religious practices
- Denigrates or ridicules traditional or cultural institutions of other people
- Deliberate spread of falsehood or rumour that demeans, demonizes, maligns or ostracizes other people on the basis of some subjective discriminate feature

The Dangerous Speech project (2017) regards hate speech as an offensive or abusive expression that can be distinguished from dangerous speech in the following words:

Hate speech is offensive, painful, and even threatening, but it does not, very often, inspire violence by those who are exposed to it. Conversely, Dangerous Speech isn't always hateful. It often instils fear, which can be at least as powerful as hatred, in inspiring violence. So, the two categories overlap only

partly. Another distinction is this: the most familiar way in which hate speech harms is directly, by hurting the feelings, self-respect, or dignity of people it purports to describe, when they are exposed to it. By contrast Dangerous Speech does much of its damage indirectly, by persuading one group of people to fear, hate - and eventually to condone violence against - another group. Hate speech can also harm indirectly, by persuading one group of people to hate another group - the categories overlap.

The implications of the spread of hate and dangerous speech particularly on the conventional media in the country are numerous and in some situations grave. Apart from the media legitimizing the content of hate in such messages, it misinforms and misdirects the public thereby undermining the trust in the media. This is compounded by the fact that many factors that appear normal in influencing perception and believability of media messages elsewhere hardly apply in the Nigerian context. Rather, subjective elements like: corruption, ethnic, cultural, religious and social and political affinities hugely influence perceptions and understanding of media messages among citizens with

occasional fall out on safety of the nation. Individuals, irrespective of educational attainment or social standing, commonly interpret media messages based on ethnic or perceived religious inclination instead of the authenticity, quality or even veracity of the reports. That remains a challenge for the media in the task of packaging and disseminating messages.

Without citing the cases of Rwanda and those of other nations, hate and dangerous speech in the mass media can be hazardous in a polarised society because of reach, perception and potentiality of provoking reactions almost instantaneously from segments in the society (as they heighten tension, build fear, mistrust and subvert peace). In the words of Late President Rawlings of Ghana: “When people within the same country frame and define one another in the manner intended to set them up for violent attack, then they are setting themselves up for a major disaster.”

## **Nature of hate speech in Nigeria**

Hate speech occurs commonly across and between individuals and groups in Nigeria. Often, hate speeches that threaten the country's collective unity are expressed in one or more ways as identified below:

**Online bullying/digital hate:** this is a very common occurrence where individuals, in most cases use anonymous identities to spread invectives and hateful messages against individuals and groups with little chance of being directly identified. The internet has offered limitless opportunities for individuals to spread dangerous messages. In fact, the internet has provided cheap and wide online spaces for waging of different ethnic, religious, regional, class and political wars that vent the tensions generated by the contradictions and stresses in the Nigerian system. Naturally, these wars impinge on the cohesion of the nation. Severally, we have seen how online violence resulted into physical violence in this country.

**Derogatory inferences** by non-native speakers on the dignity of other linguistic groups because of their ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious affiliations: there are numerous stereotypes, ethnocentric feelings and many other negative sentiments against the 'other' in the country. Naturally, a country consisting of more than four hundred ethnic groups of different sizes, philosophies, orientations, goals and relational frameworks would generate tensions, negative feelings and in some cases, confrontational relations manifested

in numerous contestations. The Nigerian public space is replete with examples.

Pluralists argue that Nigeria's unity has generated avenues of conflict over resources, wealth, income and opportunities for success among individuals and groups. The struggle, according to Lyman (1988) is, "not only that individuals are striving after generally accepted goals, but also, and more significantly, of whole groups seeking to locate themselves in advantageous or strategic positions in the competitive social order". As a consequence, groups demonize each other, spread incorrect information about one another and exchange tirades against each other. Thus, the abundance of exchange of hateful comments against ethnic groups, religions, opposition and the country.

**Incidents of ethnic intolerance:** In a mix where "diverse people" meet as a result of social and geographical contacts, a culture shock is produced. Usually, that is not the problem; rather, the challenge arises when there is the politicization or poor mediation of the mix which lead to violent shocks that explode into social conflicts with devastating consequences. Little wonder that the country is increasingly witnessing

explosion of violent conflicts of different colorations at very frequent intervals. Indeed, no part of the country is exempted from such ethnic, tribal and religious threats worsened by deep poverty, frustrating living conditions, violent crimes and extreme terror. Added to hate speech in the dangerous trend is what is commonly called fake news.

## **The Fake News Dimension**

Fake news in Nigeria is not merely a communication problem; it is a governance, security, development, and ethical challenge. Fake news refers to false, fabricated, misleading, or deliberately distorted information presented in the style of legitimate news and circulated through traditional media, social media, or interpersonal communication, with the intention to deceive, manipulate opinion, attract attention, or cause harm. Fake news often comes in the form of disinformation, misinformation, mal-information, rumours and lies. Fake news is not limited to outright lies; it also includes half-truths, manipulated visuals, false context, and exaggerated claims.

Note that “fake news” does not assume the same meaning as “false news”. Meneses (2018) argues both

may have similar but never equal meanings. The difference is in the intention with that which the lie is produced and disseminated. False news is associated with journalistic error, lack of competence and irresponsibility, while fake news relates to “false information” that was deliberately intended and intentionally misleading (Meneses 2018). Meneses (2018) states that the term false news has always existed, unlike fake news, which has only been around for the past 20 years. Fake news is the result of technological advancement, the internet and social media. Fake news deepens: ethnic divisions, religious intolerance and regional suspicion. It reinforces “us versus them” narratives, weakening peaceful coexistence. In the Nigerian context, fake news often thrives due to:

- Deep seated distrust of the elites
- High social media penetration
- Low levels of media and digital literacy
- Political, ethnic, and religious battles
- Weak gatekeeping in online communication spaces
- Slow, weak and sometimes contemptuous official responses to emerging issues

There are thousands of examples of stories of fake news that have caused security upsets, political upheavals, ethno-religious skirmishes, medical complications, family breakdowns, etc. in this country.

## **Universities, Trust Building and Sustenance**

Universities provide the required education that refines and equips its recipient with values for human advancement and knowledge and skills to build trust and promote tolerance in a multicultural setting. On a slow, evolving basis, education has remained one of the highest-ranking sources for peaceful coexistence in the country. In the past, education reduced the gap between the rich and the poor, the privileged and the unprivileged, the urban and the rural, the educated and the uneducated. It promoted the general feeling of national solidarity in the context of local, state, linguistic, religious and other sectional or parochial loyalties.

The old institutions from Yaba, through the University College, Ibadan; to the King's and Queen's Colleges; and, later, the Unity Schools and the large number of federal universities, polytechnics and colleges of education and others, as well as the unified educational system and services, were all designed and operated to build and

strengthen trust among the citizens. Unfortunately, many of those values are vanishing in our school system with devastating consequences on trust building and peaceful coexistence

Globally Universities are noted for critical thinking, intellectual honesty and independence of thought and action. Those are the defining elements of scholars and scholarship found in universities. Often, we emphasise trust in teaching, credibility in research, standardization in publications, honesty in accreditation, acceptability of rankings, etc. But the deeper question we must ask today is: What does it mean for a university in Nigeria — and in this region of the North-East — to hold the trust of its society? The answer lies in the following:

- Knowledge: The generation of new ideas, insights, and understanding.
- Service: The translation of that knowledge into actions, community engagement, and social benefit.
- Trust: The belief that the university exists not just for its own prestige, but for the public good.
- Diversity: the inclusion of all people and reflection of variety opinions

In the digital era, universities can only build trust and confidence if parents and society demonstrably see the impact of training in the conduct and performance of graduates which should make them critical thinkers and benevolent contributors to peace and stability in their families, communities and nation. Indeed, today's young people are severely burdened and pressurised from torrents of information that flood their brains and occupy their attention. The challenge is indeed enormous and real. Thus, universities in Nigeria must consciously operate as Trust-Building Sites

This is why the MAU like any sensitive institution must rise up to the current challenge to save us the embarrassment of training students for jobs that will automatically disappear so soon. After all, recent reports suggest that in the next five to ten years, over 92 million jobs will disappear while 120 million new ones will emerge courtesy of the internet of things, robotics, big data and evolution of Artificial Intelligence. Therefore, we need new mindsets, new skills and adjusted cognitive capabilities to be relevant or risk being thrown into abyss of obscurity. Our universities must respond and lead the change by equipping our young people to navigate the world of AI for peace and consensus building through teaching and active research especially

at community levels. This entails that the country must accelerate the transformation of our universities into moral and civic laboratories as well as engines of innovation in the Knowledge Based revolution

## **Building Trust through Leadership**

Building, rebuilding and sustaining trust require more than policies; it requires credibility, consistency, and communication. It requires responsive leadership that appreciates the essence of diversity, equity and peaceful co-existence based on respect and prosperity. Nigerian history offers lessons—both positive and negative—about leadership responses for peaceful coexistence. Where leaders denied problems, manifested incompetence or used divisive rhetoric, conflicts deepened and peaceful coexistence threatened. Where leaders engaged communities, communicated transparently, and pursued inclusive solutions, tensions eased. Often, leadership is tested not in moments of comfort, but in moments of crisis or conflict situations like what we are passing through in Nigeria. Leaders are expected to be morally upright and demonstrate emotional intelligence with willingness to listen as well as have the courage to say uncomfortable truth and be

honestly equitable in human and material resource management.

## Conclusion

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, building trust amidst conflict cannot be accidental or instantaneous in a diverse setting like Nigeria. It has to be a conscious national policy based on choices shaped daily by how we communicate, how we lead, and how we treat one another. For journalists and communicators, this responsibility demands conflict-sensitive reporting, rigorous fact-checking in an age of disinformation, the rejection of hate speech and sensationalism, and a deliberate commitment to amplifying the voices of peace-builders—not only the purveyors of violence.

For majority of our citizens, especially young people, we should be digitally conscious and have media literacy skills to guide us on how to handle and utilise digital devices. We should not be tools in the hands of our devices, rather we should use them as tools to solve our communicative issues positively. The devices can be disruptive, time and resource demanding, alienating and very addictive. Therefore, let us be guided for the devices to be positively used for peace building and peaceful

coexistence instead of keeping them as tools of destroying our communities and nations.

For Nigeria as a nation, trust building requires a firm commitment to truthful communication that confronts our challenges honestly; ethical leadership that leads by example; inclusive governance that leaves no group behind; responsible media practice grounded in empathy and accuracy; and education for peace that embeds civic responsibility at all levels of learning. Trust, we must remember, is built slowly and deliberately over time. Nations are not sustained by denying conflict, but by managing differences wisely and humanely.

As graduands of this great university step into society, may they carry not only certificates, but a deep commitment to truth, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence.

The Pro Chancellor, Sir, members of Council and Senate, our dear students, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me once again express my profound appreciation for this rare opportunity to share my thoughts with a great audience like today's gathering. I am immensely grateful and hugely thankful to all of you for your kind attention.

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## **Brief on Professor Umaru A. Pate**

**P**rofessor Umaru Pate (the *Kaigamma* of Adamawa) is a Professor of Media and Society and the outgoing Vice Chancellor of the Federal University, Kashere (FUK) in Gombe State as well as the President of the Society of Nigerian Broadcasters. He was appointed the Vice Chancellor of the FUK in February, 2021. Before then, he had served as the founding Dean of the Faculty of Communication, Bayero University, Kano and the immediate past Dean of the School of Postgraduate Studies and the Ag Chair of the Committee of Deans and Directors in the same University (2019-2021). Equally, he is the immediate past Vice Chairman of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) Advisory Group and a Member of the National Research and Development Standing Committee.

Before relocating to BUK as a Professor, he had served as a Professor in the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Maiduguri where he rose through the ranks beginning as a Graduate Assistant in 1988, an Associate Professor in 2002 and full Professor in 2007. He headed the Mass Communication Department in that University for a total of seven years. Pate holds a PhD in Media History (Unimaid, 1997), Master of Philosophy in Communication Studies (University of Ghana, Legon, 1990) and Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication obtained in 1987.

Professor Pate was born on January 4, 1964 in Song, Adamawa State. He attended Nassarawo Jereng Primary School from 1971-1976 and proceeded to Government

Secondary School (Government College) Maiduguri where he completed as the overall best student in the GCE O' Level examinations in the Arts sequence in 1981. Thereafter, he enrolled at the College for Preliminary Studies, Yola and obtained the IJMB A' level results that qualified him for admission as a Direct Entry student into BA Mass Communication at the University of Maiduguri in 1984. He graduated in 1987. At the request of his then Head of Department, he was retained for the NYSC year in the Department. Immediately after the national service, he was employed as a Graduate Assistant by the University of Maiduguri on October 2, 1988. In November of the same year, he enrolled for a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) degree in Communication Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon. He completed in August 1990 and returned to Unimaid where he enrolled for his PhD in 1993 and graduated in February, 1997.

In November, 2017, Professor Pate was appointed as a Director representing Africa on the six persons Board of Directors of the prestigious Paris based Global Network of UNESCO International Professors in Communication (ORBICOM) with headquarters at the University of Quebec at Montreal, Canada. In addition, he is affiliated to several national and international organisations as well as the immediate past National President of the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria. He is an editorial advisor to fifteen communication journals in and out of Nigeria. He had variously served as an external examiner to over fifteen Universities in Nigeria and abroad. Some of the Universities are: Unilag, Ibadan, Nsukka, ABU,

Covenant, Bowen, Jos, Awka, Enugu State, Leicester (UK), Tehran (Iran) and Makeni (Sierra Leone), among others. He had served on several federal and state governments committees and currently chairs the boards of Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) with offices in 13 African countries and the *Pulaaku* FM Radio station in Yola. He has working relationships with Universities of Ohio and Alcorn in the USA, Al-Ain in the United Arab Emirates, University of Punjab in Lahore, Pakistan as well as being a Visiting Professor to Beaconhouse National University in Pakistan and the University of Makeni in Sierra Leone

In his career, he has applied and successfully won funding grants, at various times, from the Ford Foundation, National Agency for the Control of AIDS, the World Bank, OTI/USAID, UNESCO, Panos Institute of Washington, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the MacArthur Foundation, among others. For example, from 2017 to date, his proposals had attracted grants in Millions of Dollars for the Faculty of Communication in Bayero University, Kano, from the MacArthur Foundation. Part of the grants were used to establish the Digital BUK FM Radio and Digital BUK Television as well as review the national communication and media studies curriculum that unbundled Mass Communication in Nigerian Universities.

In 2017, he got a grant from the UK funded NRSP to publish a book on Media, Diversity and Conflict Reporting in Nigeria. Equally, he had attracted co-funding in the last four years to

start an FM Radio station (FUK 89.10). Recently, he secured another international grant to establish the Centre for Journalism and New media Studies in Bayero University, Kano. The international centre will be the first of its kind in any Nigerian University with focus on high level research and postgraduate studies.

Prof Pate is widely travelled and extensively published in books and journals across the globe. For example, in the last few years he had not only published but presented papers and participated in high level academic and policy dialogues in Harvard University, Boston (USA), Helsinki (Finland), Gothenburg (Sweden), Oslo (Norway), London and Cambridge (UK), Paris (France), Nairobi (Kenya), Jakarta (Indonesia), Lima (Peru), Mexico City, Montevideo (Uruguay), Glasgow (Scotland), Zaragoza (Spain), Mumbai (India), Dubai (UAE), Florida (USA), Lahore (Pakistan), Taipei (Taiwan), Accra (Ghana), Vilnius (Lithuania), Krakow (Poland), Freetown (Sierra Leone), just to mention some.

Nationally, he has been actively involved in delivering high level keynotes, convocation lectures, policy papers and lead lectures severally in Nigeria. He had worked as a national and international consultant for different United Nations Agencies and organisations in Nigeria and other parts of the world that included Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Cameroon.

Prof Pate is a Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters where he is also the current General Editor; Fellow of the Nigerian Guild of Editors; Fellow, Society for Peace Studies and Practice; Fellow, Chartered Institute of Business

Management, Member, UNESCO Global Network for Communication Professors; Member, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations and president, Society of Nigerian broadcasters, among others. He is closely linked to the media industry in Nigeria and abroad through board membership and content contribution. He is a Member of the Board of Trustees of the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism, Lagos; Member of Board of Trustees of the AAT University, Ilorin and Member, International Advisory Council of the Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan.

As a Vice Chancellor at the Federal University, Kashere, Prof Pate has contributed significantly in academic and physical development of the institution. One of his landmark legacies is that he attracted extensive extra budgetary funding that helped him to establish a first-class Medical College that received NUC approval to take off with 7 new programmes (MBBS; BSc Dental Surgery, BSc Nursing, BSc Occupational Therapy and BSc in Anatomy, Physiology and Pharmacology) all at once. He named the College after Late Prof Jibril Aminu, a distinguished Cardiologist and scholar. Already, the College has admitted its first set of 45 students. He has also secured a classic Three Storey Building with multiple suites as a Commercial Guest House for the University in Asokoro, Abuja, among others.

Professor Pate is a recipient of numerous academic and other prestigious awards and recognitions from different institutions and bodies that includes the BBC World Service in London, University Pancasila in Indonesia, University of

Punjab in Pakistan, Beaconhouse Univ, Pakistan, University of Education, Winneba in Ghana, the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru-Jos, ATBU Bauchi, the Univ of Ibadan, the Nigerian Union of Journalists, HLF-Christopher Kolade Award for Excellence in Leadership and Professionalism in Media and many more.

He holds the traditional title of *Kaigamma*, Adamawa (Senior Councillor and Kingmaker in Adamawa Emirate), a title that he inherited from his forefathers. It may interest you to know that the Kaigamma has remained with their house since 1809 when Modibbo Adama established the Fombina or Adamawa Emirate. Pate is currently concluding his biographical book on Late Prof Jibril Aminu, one time VC of Unimaid, former Education and Petroleum Resources Minister, Nigeria's Ambassador to the USA and two term Senator of Nigeria.

Professor Pate has so far supervised and graduated 25 PhDs and 45 MSc candidates. Many of his students are professors, senior academics and senior officers in media houses in and out of Nigeria.

He is happily married to Hajiya Zainab Abubakar, currently serving as a Deputy Registrar in Bayero University, Kano.

The Pro-Chancellor, Sir, it is with delight that I present to you Prof Umaru Pate, a Professor of Media and Society and an extensively connected scholar who has traversed more than 70 countries as a scholar; a scholar that has established global links in his discipline; a scholar that has offered significant academic contributions and influenced national policy directions for the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Convocation Lecture

of the MAU, Yola. His topic: Building Trust Amidst Conflict: Communication, Leadership and the Promise of Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria is timely, relevant and indeed desired at this point in Nigeria's history. Incidentally, Prof Pate also served as the Convocation Lecturer of ATBU, Bauchi at its last convocation ceremony.