

**END OF TENURE ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR SUNDAY ENESSI ODODO (FSONTA) PRESIDENT SOCIETY OF NIGERIA THEATRE ARTISTS (SONTA) – 4TH AUGUST 2015, YA’ADUA CENTRE, ABUJA**

I stand here today on the mandate you gave to me two years ago which empowers me to speak with approval from the stars and with the support from SONTA members, to keep the history of SONTA alive today. This day marks the end of my tenure, the tenure of the executive council which I lead as president of SONTA and ushers in a new election year which coincided with the Nigerian year of elections that brought in Mohamadu Buhari as president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Thus I consider it a great honour to welcome you all distinguished scholars of SONTA to our Annual General Meeting here in Abuja, the Nigerian Federal capital. Words cannot begin to describe the passion I feel - and my gratitude to you all - for entrusting me with this role of stewardship of this noble society. My job is to build on the successes of past leadership of SONTA and help move the organisation to the next level. As members of the executive council of this umbrella body of theatre academicians and professionals we applaud you for your contributions, in many capacities, to move SONTA forward and for standing with us to provide solutions to decisive and central issues affecting theatre scholarship, practice and training in Nigerian institutions of higher and formal learning. SONTA is acutely and expressively committed to creating a pulsating platform for scholarship, inventiveness and professionalism. We are a great society of noble and imaginative minds, determined every day to become even better. I admit we are not perfect but we are an effective change agent I must say. The commitment you have all shown to our profession and to our scholarship and creativity inspire me every day. I am grateful to you all for your service.

I could not have wished for a more pleasurable or convivial place at which to end my term of office and organize elections to usher in a new democratically elected executive council, it is to the credit of Dr Barclays Ayakoroma, our hosts in NICO the patron body of arts, culture, creativity and scholarship, who, with the invaluable assistance and guidance of some committed SONTA members, have succeeded in organizing this International Conference, in such an efficient and specialized style. It has been to my immense personal benefit to closely cooperate and to get direction and backing from exceptional SONTA members, all of whom

have given, and continued to give, their energy and priceless time to the development and progress of SONTA. My colleagues in the Executive Committee have proven to be wonderful exemplar of these traits. Each one of them, both independently and within the group, has contributed in his or her own way to the implementation of decisions taken by the Executive Committee.

Journeys embarked upon by humanity have a beginning and an end. The journeymen also have stories to tell. Such stories are sometimes unpleasant, and sometimes pleasant. They even count achievements where necessary. It is against this backdrop that I wish to on behalf of the executive council give account of our stewardship in the last two years. I must say that SONTA has had an amazing history of successful leadership that has guided the society through tremendous growth and change. This heritage reveals a well-built academic and professional association with a comprehensible logic of distinctiveness and reason to uphold and build upon that influential sacrament.

I am not excited when I experience tragedy because when tragedy occurs it brings sorrow and grief to humanity. The heavens themselves burst into flames in the occurrence of human tragedy particularly when the tragic victims are first rate humans of academic heroism. No sooner than our executive council was set in motion SONTA experienced an unprecedented tragic blow in the history of its existence. Our professional colleagues, university dons, some of the finest African scholars of Nigeria and powerfully committed SONTA members all from Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, lost their lives in a ghastly auto crash. The three lecturers are Profs. Jenkeri Okwori, Samuel Kafewo and Dr. Martins Ayegba. All were Development Communication experts and also teachers at the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts Ahmadu Bello University. Just few months later, precisely on September 10<sup>th</sup>, we lost Professor Jacob Manase Agaku from the University of Jos. Within the period, SONTA also mourned the exit of a patriarch, one of the greatest theatre scholars of Africa, Professor Dapo Adelugba, a professor of Professors, a mentor of mentors, a critic of critics who occupied a formidable and iconic space in the arts universe of Africa that cannot be replaced for a longtime, a man who gave unconditional love and immeasurable support to the younger generation of African scholars of

Art. He was an amazing scholar-critic and artist who touched the nation's live with his knowledge. He was roundly and resoundingly one of Africa's best theatre scholar who led to the foundation of various theatre foundations like SONTA, NANTAP, Nollywood, etc. We also lost Mr Dennis Akpede of Benue State University this year. As members of the executive council we have done what we could to honour our departed heroes but it is only right and proper that at this gathering we rise to give last respect to our late brothers and mentors. May their souls rest in perfect peace; Amen.

During the period under review SONTA recorded some major achievements. The society experienced expansion of publication titles and also embarked on occasional special publications. SONTA members can now have their books published by SONTA. It is also significant to note that we ventured into a baglog of publications arising from the Calabar Conference. Ten publications have been recorded by SONTA within these two years we came on board. These include:

- It's only bent, not broken
- Theatre and Sociocriticism
- Marketing contemporary Nigerian Theatre and cultural entertainment
- Nigerian Theatre Journal Vol. 13: nos. 1 &2
- Book of proceedings 2014 for SONTA UniLag Conference
- Theatre Unbound
- Facekuerade Theatre
- Scene Dock
- Nigerian Theatre Journal Vol. 14: nos. 1 &2

These publications are the outcome of some of the actions outlined in SONTA's Strategic Plan. We will continue to implement the activities outlined in the strategic plan as funding opportunities permit. Perhaps, I should mention quickly that one of SONTA's new journals titled **Scene Dock**, dedicated to theatre scholarship in the area of theatre technology and technical theatre is a product of this action.

My professional colleagues, the outgoing executive council under my leadership thought it absolutely wise and necessary to initiate and establish for the first time in the history of the society, the SONTA

Literary award in Creative Writing and Music. This is not only to create new and more literary heroes and heroines in Nigeria but also to make SONTA attractive and increase participation in SONTA activities as well as to promote excellent literary creativity. Talking about heroines, Prof. Mabel Evwierhoma's SONTA-Theodora Tobrise Young Female Thesis Assistant Grant 2015 is worth mentioning at this point. She is putting 1million (One Million) Naira to encourage young female scholars of our noble profession. This International Conference produced the first set of award winners in playwriting and music. These awarded are beneficiaries of the prizes from Professor Olu Obafemi and Dr. Chris Iyimoga. While congratulating the winners of the competition, the entire body of SONTA profoundly appreciates this character of encouragement from most senior members of SONTA. For the winners, this is an amazing tribute to their integrity, character, and commitment. SONTA Executive would like to call on other senior members of SONTA to emulate their colleagues. An investment in younger scholars cannot be a waste.

It will interest you to note that there was no university host for SONTA when we took over its affairs but we made it in Lagos. This was by dint of hard work, ability, dynamism, strong determination and ideas to make things work better for SONTA. Our Executive council also entered into collaboration with government agencies like National Institute of Cultural orientation (NICO) to host this year's SONTA under the able leadership of Dr. Barclays Ayakoroma its Executive Secretary. Where we are now and what we are seeing today and during this conference is a robust demonstration and product of that collaboration. It is our wish to strengthen the membership fold of SONTA and encourage more active and committed participation, while promising to provide platforms for the growth of young theatre scholars/professionals and the projection of established ones.

During the period under review we remodeled our SONTA Website for more fruitful interaction. The site has speed optimization and commands a high photo-centric value to give users the best possible experience. Our guiding principle for all these we have put together is to attract more active participation in SONTA activities and ensure confidence building in society through diligent, knowledgeable and thorough approach to the work of the association. We urge us to practically practice professionalism in the professionalization of the theatre profession

through commitment and effective translation of the vision and mission of SONTA to concrete manifestation.

It is also worthy to note that many of our members had landmark achievements becoming professors and winning awards. Prof Sam Ukala winning the NLNG 2014 Nigeria prize for Literature is a thing of pride for all of us. The award which is worth \$100,000 is the highest in Africa. However, I am still waiting for Prof Ukala to tell us what he intends to do for SONTA.

I cannot conclude this speech without acknowledging the quality of progression of our members in their careers. Many have been promoted to the rank of professorial cadre. Some have earned their Phds and some have become HODs and Deans. Permit me to use this moment to congratulate you all. It is a huge achievement for SONTA and pride to the body of the creative industry.

It has been the great honour of my life to be your President saddled with the task of transforming SONTA to attain a worthy image. I am indeed grateful for the opportunity given me to serve you. I have been reflecting on what the past years I have served you meant to me and the image that shows up is the refrain of service for progress. We held together through some stormy seas to get to our destination. Our dream is not only to provide intellectual, artistic and political directions for SONTA but lead SONTA to the lane and land of respect. During the past two years every resolution we made, every executive action we took was meant to make SONTA a good society. This body which, has existed since 1982 champions quality curricula, research and promotion of academic discourse and robust practice in the areas of theatre, media, film and culture. We must sincerely appreciate members for their contribution to SONTA. No society moves without cooperation and coordination. Cooperation without coordination is like playing Shakespeare's Macbeth without Lady Macbeth and the whole drama becomes a farce instead of the intended tragedy. A positive cooperation and coordination is imperative for success in an organisation such as ours and I must say, in all our bad times and good times you displayed and gave great assistance to this Executive Council to achieve our common cause. I would like to express to all of you my gratitude for the support that has been extended to me and the executive council, over the past two years. It has been a

great privilege to head this treasured and valuable international academic/artistic organization. I would like to make use of this opportunity, to express my sincerest and warmest thanks to all of you, for your loyalty and commitment to our association and even call on you for more support. Let us bind ourselves intellectually or emotionally to the course of making SONTA a better society for all of us and future generations. Thank you all.

*Prof Sunday Enessi Ododo, fSonta  
President, SONTA  
4<sup>th</sup> August, 2015.*