

Welcome Address by Maureen Chigbo, Publisher/Editor, Realnews Magazine and Publications Limited, at the 10th Anniversary Lecture of the Magazine, held on Thursday, 17th November, 2021, Sheraton Hotel, Lagos

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, and members of my constituency, the Media, permit me to stand on existing protocol to express my delight in welcoming you all to the 10th Anniversary Lecture of *Realnews Magazine Online*. We appreciate your sacrifice and support, especially at this precarious time when the world is in frenzy to round up activities for the year.

We are thrilled that our Guest Speaker, His Excellency, Brig.-Gen. Buba Marwa, CON, chairman and chief executive officer of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency is here with us. He does not need much introduction, for his exemplary reputation, oratory and good works precede him. We are grateful that Your Excellency made time out of his very busy schedule to honour our invitation. We are doubly grateful for the effort of Mr. Olusegun Adegunle and His Royal Highness, Otunba Lanre Ipinmisho, MFR, former NDLEA director general and member of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Eradication of Drug Abuse, put in to ensure that you are here today. I also pray that your coronation next month will be hugely successful and for God to grant you the wisdom to pilot the affairs of your Kingdom. You are warmly welcome sir.

We are also elated that Mrs Elizabeth Ngozi, Group Managing Director of Futureview Financial Services Limited and the Chairperson of today's occasion, and other distinguished guests are here. We are most grateful, our Chairperson. Also our basket of thanks goes to my big brother Mr. Ugochukwu Okoroafor for supporting our efforts to ensure that you made it to this event.

Our special warm welcome goes to Dokun Adedeji, director General, Christ Against Drug Abuse Ministry (CADAM) and Dr. Nkemakolam Ndionuka, Consultant Psychiatrist and Medical Director, Tranquil & Quest behavioural Health. We are very happy to have you here with us today.

Our special welcome goes to Her Excellency, Ms. Samata Gifty Bukari, Consul General, Ghanaian Consulate General, Lagos.

The anniversary lecture series is one way *Realnews* contributes to nation building and development by providing a forum for policy change-oriented discussions by professionals, scholars, technocrats and decision-makers on the way forward for our great nation and Africa in general. In 2014, we focused on elections; in 2015, the theme was on the economy, in 2016 the discussion was

on security; 2017 was on the challenges of Leadership in Africa; in 2018, we dwelt on Africa's political transitions and the economy; in 2019, the focus was on economic narrative for West Africa beyond politics with the sub-theme: *The end of oil: whither the Nigeria economy*. In 2020, we focussed on "Managing the COVID-19 Global Pandemic in Africa: The Nigeria Experience". Last year, our choice of the 2021 topic was: "Nigeria in the Unfolding Integration of the African Market: The Oil and Gas Perspective".

This year, we zeroed in on "Drug Abuse among Youths in Africa: Implication for Nigerian Economy and 2023 Elections" because of our deep concern about the nefarious effect of drug on our youths. We watched viral videos of how Mkpulumiri is wrecking the lives of not just young people but old people too. We heard stories of how students indulge in anti-social behaviours and some even go to the extent of damaging school buildings to pilfer the roofs to sell to meet their drug needs. Drug abuse has been linked to incidents of violence and insecurity in the country. There have also been talks that the psychological well-being of all the governorship and presidential candidates and it has been suggested that those seeking public offices should be evaluated and a public report made of all of them to ensure they are drug-free. All these are genuine concerns given that the World Drug Report 2021 showed that in Nigeria, with 14.4%, the drug use prevalence is significantly higher than the global average. Globally, over 11 million people are estimated to inject drugs, half of whom are living with Hepatitis C. Opioids continue to account for the largest burden of disease attributed to drug use.

Around 275 million people used drugs worldwide in the last year, while over 36 million people suffered from drug use disorders, according to the 2021 World Drug Report, released recently by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). As the 2018 National Drug Use Survey revealed, in Nigeria at that time, there were around 14.3 million drug users of which close to 3 million suffered from a drug use disorder.

The World Drug Report further noted that in the last 24 years cannabis potency had increased by as much as four times in parts of the world, even as the percentage of adolescents who perceived the drug as harmful fell by as much as 40 per cent, despite evidence that cannabis use is associated with a variety of health and other harms, especially among regular long-term users. A worrisome trend, considering that there are 11 million cannabis users in Nigeria, a third of whom seemed to be regular users with a need for drug counselling.

"Lower perception of drug use risks has been linked to higher rates of drug use, and the findings of UNODC's 2021 World Drug Report highlight the need to close the gap between perception and reality to educate young people and safeguard public health," said UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly.

Based on these facts, we began a search for the best brain to deal with the theme.

We narrowed down on our Guest Speaker today because of his pedigree. I have no doubt that he will do justice to the topic of this lecture.

We have also a carefully selected panel of discussants with relevant expertise, knowledge and experience to shed more lights on the topic.

I would like to appeal to my journalist colleagues to ensure that the message from here today is heard in Africa and beyond. Of course, at *Realnews* we will ensure that we do our part by giving the widest publicity to this important lecture and the discussions. *Realnews* boasts a crop of seasoned journalists who believe strongly in the tenets and ethics of the profession. We are convinced that journalism as the *Fourth Estate of the Realm* can contribute to building a free, fair and just society where fundamental human rights are respected and where citizens enjoy the freedom to pursue their interests without let or hindrance. Our motto at *Realnews* is: ***“For God and Humanity.”***

In the past nine years we have kept faith with our Vision and Mission statements. We have investigated and published exclusive stories that cover all sectors of our focus, including politics, oil and gas, business and economy, women, youth and environment etc. We can proudly say that we have done and continue to do our job with a highest sense of responsibility.

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ever, the modest success we have recorded at *Realnews* has come with its share of challenges, especially in fashioning creative ways to sustain our publication in a difficult economic environment with dwindling prospects for advertisement.

Consequently, we would like to invite everyone here, especially those who are not already on our mail list to visit our website and subscribe to our e-Newsletter to enjoy investigative reports on topical development issues rendered in professional style.

Realnews Magazine is free but without your support, from the public or private sector alike, and civil society, it will not survive! The support can be in form of advertisement, special supplement and special features on your company/organization for publication on our website. We also welcome capacity building programmes for our staff to serve our clients better.

Realnews is also into media consultancy; writing of books and biographies, and image survey for companies. Over the years, the books we have published

include *Federal Road Safety Commission in the Eyes of the Media Volume 1 – 4; Pathways to Political and Economic Development of Africa, and Paragon of Journalism Volume 1 and 2*. We are working on several manuscripts and require sponsors for their publication. These are some of the ways we raise money for our free-source on-line publication, with investigative journalism, as our first-love.

In addition, we also welcome whistle-blowers in the world of ***Realnews magazine***. Rest assured that all information provided would be handled with the highest sense of responsibility and confidentiality.

Realnews Magazine is all about investigative, robust and excellent journalism. We are your partners in development, and together we will build a strong and virile society where all will be free and happy to live and invest in.

Before I conclude, permit me to appreciate and welcome members of the ***Realnews Hall of Fame***, here present Mrs. Comfort Coleman, CEO, NEGECO Resources Limited and Sir Elvis Emecheta, CEO, Selsa/Elvis Group, and Mr. Paul Ejime, International Communications Consultant. The ***Realnews Hall of Fame*** is our modest way of honouring Lecturers and Speakers at our Anniversary Lectures for their contributions to knowledge and national development. We also honour ***Realnews Ambassadors***.

May I also crave your indulgence to thank members of the ***Realnews*** team chaperoned by Mr. Goddy Ikeh for their commitment, hard work and sacrifice; Mr. Paul Ejime for his editorial guidance, and Mrs Comfort Coleman, CEO, Nekego Resources and Sir Eze Emecheta, CEO, Elvis Group, for their encouragement and advice.

I cannot end this address without thanking government institutions and corporate organisations that made this year's ***Realnews*** Anniversary Lecture possible with their support and advertisements. These are the Nigerian Content Development Monitoring Board, Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited, Nigerian Ports Authority, FirstBank of Nigeria, Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, OSGF, the Federal Road Safety Commission, FRSC, Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC, Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, SPDC, Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, Johnwood Hotel, Glo, Abuja. We are most grateful to you all.

I also welcome those who are participating in this lecture via zoom and others following proceedings on the live streaming of the event on Facebook and YouTube from different countries. We appreciate you all.

Thank you for your attention and welcome one and all!

God bless Realnews! God bless Nigeria, God bless Africa.