



## Keynote Address by Malam Nasir El-Rufai

All protocols observed,

Firstly, let me commend the Inoyo Toro Foundation on their involvement with teachers and students in Akwa Ibom State. In my view, the most important profession in the world is that of a teacher because teachers shape the young minds and determine the future of the next generation. In Nigeria, our past generation of leaders were all teachers first, before they went into politics. But we have lost all that now. We tell teachers that their reward is in heaven when heaven is now in our lives. Teachers have to be encouraged and rewarded and as a result of what I have seen here today, I am now challenged to go back to my state Kaduna and the Federal Capital Territory where I made my name and try to replicate what the Foundation is doing. I would like to use this opportunity to once again to congratulate the Chairperson and the members of the Foundation for an excellent job.

To the teachers here present, I say congratulations. What you are doing is worthwhile venture and as we pray for you and for more rewards for you right here on earth, I appeal to all of you that after you have become Principals and are through with your teaching careers, go into politics. It is through politics that we will shape the future of the society and influence the lives of millions. The reason why our country is not working as it should is because of the quality of the people who are in politics. We need better people and there is no better place to start than those in the noble profession of teaching.

My remarks will be mostly to the young ones present here because I believe that if we do a good job of preparing our children for the future, this country will be a better place. I believe that my children and some of the children here, with the kind of teaching and mentoring that they are getting and if we can replicate this around the Country, we will have a changed Nigeria. Nigeria could be the China of Africa but we may lose it in my time, because of where we are and the mistakes we have made. I think if we can accept



this as our reality, we can begin to do something about it now. We should not continue living in denial. This is why I am focusing on the young people here today and my message is mostly to them.

I commend the donors and the partners of the Foundation for the support they have given to the Foundation these years, but I have noticed that the focus of the Foundation is on Science subjects. I think the prizes should be expanded to include Economics. Economics is very important and the challenges this country faces will not be resolved without the appreciation of Economics. We also need History. History is important to enable us learn from the past and prepare for the future because unfortunately in Nigeria, history always repeats itself. So, for the next awards, I will sponsor the prizes for History and I will commit a friend of mine who is not here to sponsor the prizes in Economics. My remarks to the young ones here will come mostly in form of stories about my life. My father died when I was 8 years old and after his death, my uncle took me and put me through school. So, everything you have heard about me today, positive or negative stems from the fact that I got an education and my parents and uncle brought me up to believe in the difference between right and wrong. That is all you need to prepare for life.

My first message to you young people here is take your education seriously. You cannot succeed without it. Your chances of succeeding in life are higher with an education. The phase you are going through now is the most important phase in your life and if you do not get educated at the right time, the right age, and of the right quantity and quality, you are going to end up being the house boy or the cook of somebody else. It is your choice to make. Whether you succeed in this life or not largely depend on your education and your upbringing. Your parents and teachers are trying to give you hope to the best of their abilities but they can only do so much, the rest is up to you. You make choices of whether you want to steal or be honest. I know that if you look around you, you don't see many examples of honesty being the best policy or hard work leading to success but let



me tell you something; the phase we are going through in which the bad people seem to succeed is a passing phase, it is a developmental phase. History has shown that no matter how fast or how well falsehood runs, it will be overtaken by truth. So, work hard, educate yourself, and be good because it is good to be good not because somebody will commend you but because ultimately whatever you do, will come back to you.

People usually say that we all have our destinies and our fate and there is nothing you can do to change your destiny. Perhaps!!! But let me say that there is a difference between fate and destiny. An example, my faith is to be male. I did not choose my gender, I did not choose my parents, I did not choose the day I was born, I did not chose why I was born, I did not choose my height. That is my fate and there is nothing I can do about it. But to say that because I am 5ft.5, I will throw up my hands and say that I will not succeed, I am only deceiving myself and denying myself the opportunity to succeed. That is not my destiny. Fate is what God gives you and destiny is what you do with it. I can never be good at basketball, but I played table tennis in college, I got straight A's in school because I applied myself and worked hard for it. That is destiny. So, don't sit and do nothing and say my destiny will happen anyway. Seneca a Roman philosopher wrote hundreds of years ago that, ***"Luck happens when opportunity meets preparedness"***. You must prepare, you must do your bit. The best story I heard as a young man was from one of my professors who told us the story about a man who kept going to Church everyday saying "God, I must win a lottery. People are winning 30million dollars every day why not me God?" And he was going to Church every day for months. One day, God spoke to him and said "friend, meet me half way, buy the lottery ticket" all the while the man was praying to win the lottery; he did not buy the ticket. This is the best example of what Seneca said.

Unless you get an education, be at the right place at the right time, have the right friends, be good to people, you will not have prepared to take advantage of your luck. You must



work hard, you must prepare, you must be good and you must be nice to people though not everyone will like you. As you move on in life, you will meet 3 categories of people.

- People that just love you and in their sight, you can do no wrong.
- People that like or may not like you based on second hand information or second hand interaction. People who are open to make up their minds about you depending on how you interact with them. 70% of the people you will come across in your life fall, within this second category. They have no opinion about you. Even when they have an opinion about you based on what someone has said, they are open to changing their views when they meet and interact with you.
- People that just hate you. Perhaps they just hate short people and when once you are short, they just hate you and there is nothing you can do about it.

Do not focus on this 3rd category of people. Focus on the people that love you and the people that are open minded about you. Behave well because it is the friends you make as you grow up that determine to a large extent your success or failure in life. I met my business partner in college and those who have helped me in my career were people that I met many years ago. Have good interactions with people and leave a good impression of yourself and when an opportunity comes, they will remember you.

As you grow up in life and even for the adults here present, you need to constantly ask yourselves 4 questions.

- Under what situations am I most effective? What am I good at? What are my strengths? You can ask yourself that question; you can ask people who know you to honestly tell you. When you know your strengths and effective situations, pursue those strengths.
- Under what situations am I least effective or stressed? Many people will not tell you what your weakness are, so you have to search for people who do not need

anything from you to tell you your weakness. When you discover your weaknesses or situations that do not bring out the best in you, avoid such situations.

- What contributions have I made to this world? Each one of us is here for a reason; God did not create us by accident. We are all here to make contributions. You need to ask yourself constantly, why am I here? What contributions can I make to this world?
- After your contributions, what else can I contribute to the world? Write a book, do something different.

You must constantly ask yourself these 4 questions to have a more balanced life, to make yourself happy because as Socrates said, ***“we are all here to be happy”***

Back to the students, I have told you to be focused on two things; your education and your upbringing these help you to make the right choices and avoid making mistakes. But what bothers young people today? You like Television, you like music and you are on Facebook all the time. But you all have work to do and you have books to read. The young generation these days do not read anymore. Reading really helped me when I was young to avert a disaster.

When I was 14 years I was mistakenly diagnosed with Leukaemia, a blood cancer. I was told that I was going to die before the age of 20. I was sad but I went to read about Leukaemia to know what was wrong with me and why I was going to die by the age of 20. I read lots of books and encyclopaedias on the disease and I was able to list out 11 symptoms of people who have Leukaemia but I did not have any of the symptoms. While my school was making preparations to send me to the Teaching Hospital in Ibadan, I went back to the Hospital and told the Doctor that I do not think I have Leukaemia. The Doctor insisted that I have it and that my blood shows that I have the disease. I listed out the symptoms exhibited by people who have Leukaemia and I told the Doctor that I am not experiencing any of them. I made the Doctor take my blood again for another test. I was

initially in the Hospital for a bad case of malaria when my blood was taken. After the second test, it was then discovered that my blood was mistakenly swapped with the blood of someone that had Leukaemia. If I had not gone to the Library to read about Leukaemia, I would have been given the wrong medication which would have had side effects, I would have been transported to Ibadan only for them to discover that I do not have Leukaemia because the Hospital at Ibadan would have conducted another test before they commence treatment. This is the beauty of reading. In my own time, I had to spend 10 days going to the Library to read about Leukaemia but today, all you need to do is type Leukaemia in Google and everything on Leukaemia will be there in 2 minutes. There is so much knowledge on the internet; there is nothing on the planet you cannot find on the internet. Yet children these days do not read. They spend more time watching movies. **DSTV is the biggest danger to our future generation.** To our parents, please cut down on the TV hours of your children, have TV hours only during the weekends and compel your children to read. To the children, read at least one novel a week.

Read, think, reflect and debate with your classmates, get different perspectives on issues. More importantly, build true friendships, travel. Travelling is part of education. Mixing with other cultures and people open your eyes to the world that is out there for you to conquer. Be slow to judge, do not judge people or conclude that a set of people are bad based on their tribe. There are good people and bad people in every ethnic group, in every family and in every religion. What is important is the personal interaction you have with each individual. In my 20 years in private practice before I went into government, I had been helped more by people from the part of the Country that I do not come from. Even in government, I was appointed by President Olusegun Obasanjo who is not from my part of the Country. **You cannot make an enemy of a group because you will lose a lot of potential friends and you cannot also make friends of a group because you will acquire a lot of enemies.**

Finally, there are a few success factors that you need to bear in your mind as you move on in life:

- The first and most important is to be healthy. Without health nothing else works. Life is God's greatest gift and is also a trust. God has given us this body to use or abuse, the choice is yours. It is up to you to smoke and invite cancer to yourself or drink and invite liver problem. It is what we eat and drink that kills us. Eat modestly, drink a lot of water and try to stay healthy. A large percentage of being healthy depends on you.
- You need to develop a very strong sense of right and wrong. This you can get from your parents, your Church or Mosque and looking around History and learning from what has happened in the past. If you read history, you will find out what happens to bad people, and you will see that they always end up badly. Read a lot of autobiographies, travel, learn about and understand others.
- Be polite to everyone and most importantly be real to yourself. When you wake up in the morning, look at mirror and be real to yourself. You are free to dream and dream big. In fact, latest research studies in brain science shows that when you dream of success you are more likely to succeed than the person who does not dream. Recognise that it is only a dream; you are not there yet. Don't dream and lie down and wait for good luck. You need to dream, work and prepare to achieve your dream.

Recognise the difference between fate and destiny. Do your best to prepare for life that is destiny and leave the rest to God that is fate.

## **What does the future hold for us?**

Nigeria is going through a crisis that we have never been through before. We have military units deployed in 34 of the 36 states of the Federation something that was done even



during the civil war. We have Boko Haram in the North, Militancy in the South, MOSSAB in the East, Area boys and armed robbery in the West. 50% of Nigeria's population is below the age of 15 and when they look around, they are not getting a good education and they do not see a bright future. They see people cutting corners to succeed not people working hard or being productive. We are now a Country of share what we have not worked for and everyone is focused grabbing a piece of that pie and nobody thinks of being productive. This is what these 15 year olds and below see and unless we do something about it, we have no future. It requires leaders of strength and strong morality to be able to take us out of this situation. Our prayer is that we should have those leaders. But don't just pray; those of you that are financially comfortable should go into politics and public service. It is the only way we can change the direction of the Country. The problem in Nigeria is not money but people with vision and the conviction to work for those who cannot help themselves. Most of our leaders think that they are in government to look after themselves and those around them and everything else will take care of itself. We need people that will remember the smallest guy that cannot help himself unless the government does a few minimum things: quality public education, quality health care system. We must not forget that the majority of the citizens of Nigeria are more than those of us who can take care of ourselves and one day, they will unleash their anger against all of us. We as elites need to think about this.

To conclude, the question is, where are we going from here? My prayer and hope is that Nigeria will become better and that we will preserve our democracy. But prayer and hope is not enough. We must all stand for something, we must all fight for what matters. What matters? A Nigeria that is fair to all, a Country that gives everybody equal opportunities and this is possible because we have enough people, we have the brains, we have the resources; natural, human and material to make Nigeria a great place and give these children a future and a hope that things will get better.

Thank you for inviting me and I look forward to coming back here.