



Address by the Governor of Akwa-Ibom State

His Excellency Mr Udom Emmanuel

TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO RISE!

It is a great honor for me to deliver, on behalf of the Government and good people of Akwa Ibom State, the keynote address at this very important forum of the celebration of teachers. Eight years ago, the Inoyo Toro Foundation began this patriotic and noble exercise. Every succeeding year, the creme de la creme of our society gather, at their behest, to give our teachers a sense of worth. But there is something different and unique about this year's event. What is unique and what is different? I, the proud son of teachers, stand in your midst today to give the keynote speech and lead this celebration of teachers.

We live in a time when we celebrate the superstructures; and neglect to know that without the substructure, they can be no superstructures. We pay tribute to the political irokos of our time, but forget that their roots are the teachers who moulded and fashioned them for success. Therefore, we commend the Inoyo Toro Foundation for digging under the pile to unveil the truth we rarely face. The truth that we owe a debt of gratitude to our teachers for what we are today.

We pay tribute to Mr and Mrs Udom Inoyo for driving this vision of the Teachers Award for Excellence in Akwa Ibom State Secondary Schools for eight years now under the auspices of the Inoyo Toro Foundation. We equally commend the management and staff of the foundation for this great initiative. In line with their philosophy, let me urge all of us to think of that special teacher who served as the compass that activated the magnets of wisdom, self-esteem, knowledge and curiosity in us. If we can leave this place with a



commitment to let such men and women who lit candles to show us the way, know that we appreciate them for everything they did for us, then this event would not have been a monumental success.

The theme of this year's award is a little flattering to me. It is, "Udom Emmanuel in the Eyes of a 13 year old - History and Importance of Education and Why Teachers Need Be taken Seriously." At 13 I was still under the watchful eyes of my parents, who were both teachers. They steered us in the paths of righteousness and I had a clear sense of identity and strong faith in God.

The difference between having teachers as parents and not having teachers as parents is that non-teachers send their children to school; but teaching parents take their children to school. Your parents watch you with parental concern, and the other pupils watch to see whether you live according to what your parents teach. You learn early to do that which is right because all eyes appear to be on you.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, permit me to point out that you are the testimonies that education is important. Education breeds knowledge, knowledge breeds confidence, confidence breeds hope. Hope of a better future. Hope of a better country. Hope of a better you. Hope is the vehicle, which drives you to heights of great attainments.

No society has ever made progress without prioritizing education. Most of the advanced countries have free and compulsory education. Free education takes cognizance of what President John F. Kennedy said, "All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop those talents." An equal opportunity for everyone is anchored on free and compulsory education, which we inherited from the past administration and which we are implementing in our state because of our faith in it. We will continue to invest in education because that is the only way to keep in step with the world.



There is this ancient Chinese proverb, "If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; but if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people." Because we are planning for a lifetime, we must educate our children. We note that many in our society have allowed ethnic and tribal bigotry to take them down the road of perdition. When someone is on the wrong road, he does not need motivation; he needs education to turn him around. We need to turn everyone in our society around and we intend to use education to do so.

We must appreciate teachers from the standpoint that education is not a preparation for life, but life itself. There is a story, which could buttress this point in ways no thesis can. A teacher Mrs Thompson stood before her Primary Five class day to welcome students. She promised to love all of them. But deep in her heart she knew she could never love the boy slumped in his seat in front of the class known as Teddy Stoddard. Teddy was always in need of a bath, wearing dirty clothes, did not play with the other kids, wore a frown permanently on his face and failed all his tests. She took pride in marking "F" in his papers. She abhorred him.

The school required that from time to time teachers should review how each child did in past classes. Doing this for her students, she found comments about Teddy. Primary One, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh." Primary Two, "Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle." Primary Three, "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best but his father doesn't show much interest and his home life will soon affect him if some steps are not taken." Primary Four, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and sometimes sleeps in class."

Mrs Thompson was ashamed of herself, and decided to make amends. When the kids brought her Christmas presents, Teddy brought her a bracelet with missing rhinestones and a perfume. The other students tried to laugh at Teddy's gifts, but she quietened them.



She put on the bracelet and said it was beautiful. Then she sprayed the perfume on her body. Teddy stayed back after school and told her, "You smell like my mother today." She wept for one hour after he left.

She paid particular attention to Teddy from that day, and his mind came alive. He became one of the smartest children in the class. A year later she found a note in her door from Teddy telling her she was the best teacher he ever had. Teddy went on to finish secondary school with the best result in his set and sent her a note again that she was the best teacher he has ever had. He went ahead to acquire a Bachelor's degree, and again sent her a note as his best and favourite teacher. Teddy studied medicine and when he graduated he again reminded Mrs Thompson that she was his favourite teacher.

Dr. Teddy Stoddard contacted Mrs Thompson again and informed her that his father had died and he was about to get married. He wanted her to attend the ceremony as the mother of the groom. Mrs Thompson attended the ceremony and she wore that bracelet with several rhinestones missing. She also wore the perfume that Teddy remembered her mother wearing before she died and which he gave to her.

They hugged, and Dr. Stoddard said to Mrs. Thompson, "Thank you Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference." Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, answered, "Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."

The moral of this story is that, like Teddy, we must remember those teachers who stood by us and pointed us in the right way. We must celebrate those who lit candles to show us the way. We must let them know that we appreciate their investments in our lives.

On the other hand, let the teachers in turn know that teaching is more than imparting knowledge, it is inspiring change. Mrs Thompson pulled Teddy from the brink because she inspired him. A good teacher inspires hope, ignites the imagination, broadens the



horizon, expands the perspective and instils love of learning. Teachers like this do not leave you with education only; they leave you with fond memories and they become parental figures.

We need teachers like this as co-drivers of our Dakkada Campaign. Teachers who would teach our children the way Mrs Thompson taught Teddy and he rose up (Addakkada). We need teachers who would think like the Good Samaritan and lift our children up. Such teachers will always be celebrated. Their students will celebrate them. The society will celebrate them. History will celebrate them. Heaven will celebrate. Today we celebrate them.

I join in this celebration with fond memories of my parents who were quintessential teachers. I salute all teachers and pledge that this administration will never cease to celebrate them.

God bless you and thank you for your attention.