

That the Labour of our Heroes Today may not be in Vain

Text of a Speech Delivered by the Chairman, Board of Trustees, Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding, in Celebration of the 70th Birthday of Tunde Kelani at Ulli Beier Hall, CBCIU, Abere, Osun State

[PROTOCOL]

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding (CBCIU), it is with great pleasure that I welcome you all today to this historic event. Only last week, precisely on Tuesday, March 13, 2018, Nigerians from all walks of life, particularly the cultural sector of our economy, all gathered here at the Ulli Beier Hall of this distinguished Centre to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the passing of Duro Ladipo. Playwright, one of the greatest dramatists and composers of his generation, a cultural impresario and an embodiment of Yoruba culture and tradition, Duro Ladipo reinforced our understanding of the Yoruba worldview through innovative folk dramas which encompassed ritual poetry and traditional rhythms performed on local materials. Though Duro Ladipo sadly departed this world 40 years ago, it gladdens my heart to know that we are celebrating one of our own living heroes, veteran filmmaker, director and cinematographer *par excellence* who is physically with us today, Tunde Kelani.

I recall in my speech here last Tuesday that strict attention should be given to our living legends who are also cultural ambassadors and that effort must be made to debunk the popular Yoruba proverb that *ojó a bá kú ni à ñ di ère, èniyàn kò sunwòn ní àyè* (deification comes with death for humans whose worth is not acknowledged while living). I make bold to say that we have put such words into action today through this National Colloquium in honour of an icon whose dexterity in handling the cameras remains unparalleled.

Alagba Tunde Kelani was born in 1948 in Lagos. At the age of five, he left for Abeokuta to live with his grandparents. It was at Abeokuta and under the tutelage of his grandparents that he became deeply influenced and rooted in Yoruba culture and, therefore, explains why he is always on the trademark *aso oke* cap and adire outfit. As a secondary school student in Abeokuta, TK as he is fondly called, learnt photography and started as a local photographer there. He left for Ibadan to work at the Western Nigeria Television (WNTV), building on his knowledge of photography and later enrolled at the London Film School, obtaining a Diploma in Art and Technique of film making.

He started Mainframe Productions (Opomulero) in 1991 and through this company has produced interesting films such as *Ti Oluwa nile*, *Thunderbolt* (Magun), *Arugba*, *Campus Queen*, *Oleku*, *Saworoide*, *Maami*, and more recently, *Dazzling Mirage*. It is interesting

to note that a significant number of TK's films are adaptations of literary works and as we speak, he has produced over 20 films. We are emboldened by his thirst for excellence and standards which he continues to guard jealously. It is not an easy feat to be a highly skilled and proficient filmmaker, producer, storyteller and photographer all rolled into one. We are aware that he has also produced award-winning short films and documentaries and also directed music videos. There is no doubt that TK is not only well-trained and well-rounded but highly gifted.

Tunde Kelani's story remains a veritable reference point and indeed, great lesson for us as parents and most importantly for our children. While we object to the way westernisation threatens the future of our indigenous culture, language and tradition, we have done very little to raise the bar in entrenching the latter in our everyday interaction. Oral traditions have become sacred and almost forgotten. Yoruba books deep in morals and cultural values are almost non-existent if not totally lost. Incidentally, these were agencies through which TK learnt and benefitted immensely from as a child. Sadly, most of the material culture we consume today have little impact or effect on this generation, particularly in relation to local consciousness, useful messages and native intelligence.

Perhaps, this did not pass the knowledge of TK all along which resulted in a career spanning over four decades that helped to tell our own story and make films that remain evergreen with deep lesson to learn from. TK has not only entertained his local and international audience but also taken the essence and embodiment of Yoruba culture to heights many fear to tread. Interestingly, TK's films have touched almost all aspect of human life, from the sacred to the secular and from the cultural to the socio-political. Themes that generate debate and speak truth to power have often been a strong point in these films.

In spite of the challenges of piracy that almost led him to finally close shop, TK has remained resolute. As he once admitted, he is affected and concerned about what is important to us as a people and that is why he uses his films as an instrument of development. There is no doubt that TK has paid his dues in a film industry that is yet to reach its apogee.

For us at the CBCIU, we are very much elated to be celebrating the life and works of Tunde Kelani. Our mission as a Centre is to elevate Black culture with a strong focus on its recovery, preservation, promotion, and utilization of its enduring ways of being for the purposes of holistic development, appreciation, and international understanding. It is, therefore, the primary reason we have graciously planned today's event in honour of a foremost contemporary filmmaker who has consistently given global expression to Yoruba cultural ideas. I am particularly glad to be part and parcel of this grand occasion

and as we conclude this event today, may I remind the general public that our tradition and culture have become endangered for which much is needed to be done in our personal capacity, Like TK has done consistently, to preserve them for posterity.

TK remains a worthy Nigerian whose works promotes Yoruba cultural heritage and advancement of humanity. Let me, therefore, use this profound opportunity once again, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, to thank everyone for coming out today to honour our father, friend and colleague, Alagba Tunde Kelani. May the labour of our heroes today not be in vain!

Thank you all for listening.

Prince Dr. Olagunsoye Oyinlola

Chairman, Board of Trustees,

Centre for Black Culture and International Understanding,

Abere, Osun State.

Tuesday, March 20, 2018.