

**A KEYNOTE ADDRESS PRESENTED BY DR ISRAEL H. IDRIS ON THE
2022 READERSHIP PROMOTION CAMPAIGN OF THE NATIONAL
LIBRARY OF NIGERIA, TARABA STATE BRANCH, WITH THE THEME
“READING AS A PANACEA FOR SOCIETAL PROBLEMS” HELD AT
THE VIEWING CENTRE NEAR KPANTIPALACE ZING, TARABA
STATE ON THE 19TH OCTOBER 2022**

Protocol

*“Readers are Leaders;
Leaders are Solutions”*

Preamble

I feel so delighted been nominated to give the 2022 readership promotion campaign keynote address in Taraba State, Nigeria. It is important to state clearly that I share the same passion and aspirations with the National Library of Nigeria ably led by Prof.Chinwe Veronica Anunobi.

Considering the theme of this year’s readership promotion campaign, I concluded that the National Librarian and her team understand the timing. It is truly a round peg in a round hole. We are currently witnessing a like insocietal problems occasioned by different actors and events which have left so many, wondering about the way to escape. These societal problems act against the norms, morals and ethics of our society and of course make life very uncomfortable to all, and should not be allowed to degenerate. However, because we breed some of them, we now have issues of banditry, kidnapping, illiteracy, rape, cultism, drug abuse, forgery, examination malpractice, impersonification, communal crisis and other societal unrest. These have left so many Nigerians displaced, with a rising number of persons in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Camps, a high poverty rate (with over 85% persons) and high illiteracy level. The question remains “What must we do to eliminate or reduce these societal problems, which have eaten deep

into the fabric of the Nigerian society and the African continent". The answer could simply be found in this year's theme "Reading as a Panacea".

Dear participants and distinguished audience, reading is the springboard of any literacy program. It is one of the oldest habits of human civilization and has remained the passion of the greatest personalities of all times. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of several inter-related sources of information, an art of interpreting printed and written words, and the most effective process of conscious learning, which influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as the attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgement and action of individuals. However, due to the current observance of individuals who rarely pick a book or magazine to read, there is a serious decline in reading culture. The same is applied to the school child for whom reading has become a thing of spare time.

In Nigerian society today, while technology (such as the Internet) is slowly taking steady control over individual lives, societal problems, and the reading culture among our youths is fast vanishing into thin air. Today, students do not read to learn new things, instead, they prefer having fun for hours on the Internet. Surfing the net, playing with funky handsets, chatting and passing non-stop short message services (SMSs) have become the order of the day among students, thereby making reading a book or any other piece of written material in a quiet or peaceful corner of a library or home an archaic idea. The declining interest in reading among our children (especially those in higher schools) compared to the increase in hours spent over the Internet has become a cause for alarm, a resultant to increase in societal problems, and a challenge to all. Something needs to be done to alleviate this yawning problem.

Regrettably, what do we see in our society today? '**Juvenile Crimes**': These crimes represent those immoral behaviours exhibited by children below the age of 18 (our youths). Sometimes, they are overlooked or ignored by their parents,

government and law enforcement agencies and are always rated as minors. They are simply caused by the paucity of the right information due to a lack of reading. On the other hand, the societal problem is the upsurge of new dimensional and hi-tech crimes such as kidnapping, bank and armed robbery activities in many parts of the country (not forgetting the popular 'yahoo, yahoo'). In most cases, innocent lives are sorrowfully terminated in the process. There is also Internet scam, credit card robbery, internet pornography and other related offences prevalent in our society among the youth and adults. There are also cases of the activities of AIEQ'AEDA groups and Boko Haram which always target less-informed citizens for their recruitment and programs. What about the increase in the poverty rate? All these constitute societal problems

While we celebrate the government of the day for their unrelenting efforts in addressing some of these societal problems, we need to know that reading remains the germane solution. This is because, through reading, humans have the tools to transmit knowledge to each succeeding generation, bringing to their understanding, the norms and values. Reading allows one to listen to the wisdom and people of the ages. This is emphasized by many different religious traditions. The Apostle Paul in one of his epistles to Timothy admonished him to **“study to show yourself approved unto God”** (II Timothy 2:15). Similarly, Islamic religion holds the acquisition of knowledge (literacy, reading, etc.) in high esteem. This is shown when the Holy Qur'an reveals that the first communication (injunction) between Allah and Prophet Muhammad was knowledge-based, - *Iqraa*, meaning “read” or “recite” (Qur'an 96: 1-5).

We need to see reading as a very important issue which brings not only enjoyment or pleasure but serves as a basic tool of education. The minds of these individuals are not only kept busy but also edified and protected. Reading makes way for a better understanding of one's own experiences and it can be an exciting voyage to

self-discovery, which also influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as the attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgement and actions of persons. Once we know how to read, we can reach our full potential. As well, becoming a reader enhances the chances of success at school and beyond.

Remember, reading is not just for school, it is for life. To this end, reading in all its variety is vital to being better informed, having a better understanding of all, and making man a thoughtful and constructive contributor to a democratic and cohesive society, thereby eliminating societal problems. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I, therefore, urge you all, to read and become reading advocates as you leave here today.

I wish you all a successful 2022 readership promotion campaign as we anticipate a high reading rate and zero societal problems in Taraba State, and beyond.

Thank you.