

**REMARKS BY OLUSOLA AKANMODE,
CHAIRMAN STEERING COMMITTEE,
AT THE DISTRIBUTION OF DRUGS AND MEDICAL EQUIPMENT TO VARIOUS
DISTRICTS UNDER THE PAN-OKUN COVID-19 RELIEF AND RESPONSE AGENDA.**

Members of the Elders' Advisory Council,
Members of the Steering Committee,
Chairman and Members of the Implementation Committee,
Representatives of the Various Districts,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to begin by expressing my profound regret for my inability to be physically present at this historic ceremony.

Secondly, it is appropriate, and even compelling, to use this occasion to pay tribute to one of our own, Professor Mathew Ajibero, who worked assiduously to bring this dream to reality and who would have been here today to savour the remarkable success of our efforts to serve our people.

Professor Ajibero was, by all accounts, an outstanding Okun man who has left indelible marks in the academia, in politics, in community service and in the church. At the risk of sounding hyperbolic I will venture to say that he died in active service to our people, considering the fact that this project was, perhaps his last major preoccupation.

You will recall that he was initially selected as the Chairman of Materials Distribution Committee and later a member of the Implementation Committee.

In view of his demanding commitments at the onset of their programme the Chairman, Alhaji Ganiyu Obatoyinbo and I readily agreed to make Professor Ajibero to function in that capacity. He was performing this role effectively until his health condition forced him to step aside. Incidentally, one of my staff in the village added the "rumour" of his death as an addendum to the briefing he gave me after taking delivery of the first consignment of the materials we are about to distribute. The sad coincidence and cruel irony in the timing of his death became a poignant reminder of his invaluable contributions to this project. May his soul rest in peace.

We have been on a long and bumpy road since we commenced this journey in April last year. But in spite of the twists and turns we can be justifiably proud of where we are today. There is no denying the fact that we are very far from the target we set for ourselves, but neither the substance nor the symbolism of the achievement we have recorded can be ignored in the history of our people. It is significant to note how the initial scepticism and the cynicism in some quarters gradually gave way to the commitment and enthusiasm of most of our people.

One of the favourite sayings of our late sage, Chief S.B. Awoniyi is that :

“There is no limit to what we can achieve if we do not care about who takes the credit”. However, in this tasking endeavour, the following individuals and groups are eminently qualified to be **given** credit:

- a. The initiators of this project, Hon. Leke Abejide and Hon. T.J. Yusuf.
- b. Members of the Elders’ Advisory Council, especially the Chairman, Professor Olu Obafemi, who stepped in to salvage a troubling situation and has since remained unremitting, decisive and pragmatic in the pursuit of our goals.
- c. Otunba Funso Owoyemi and Hon. Leke Abejide who worked with me behind the scene and made it unnecessary to charge **“the cost of raising funds”** into our aggregate collection.
- d. My colleagues in the Steering Committee who provided the direction and guidance for the entire program from the beginning to the present.
- e. Dr. Ronke Bello, the ceaseless Campaigner and the indisputable “Face of the Project”.
- f. All our donors – big and small.

Now to our Implementation Committee. There is no gainsaying that all the efforts we put into this project cannot yield the desired results without effective and efficient implementation. This is why I want to specially appreciate the painstaking and rigorous efforts of the Committee to provide the framework and processes for the implementation of the project. They have produced an implementation document that not only meets the highest standards of transparency but can also be a reference point or framework for similar endeavours in the future. We are exceedingly grateful to the Chairman and members of the Committee.

Looking Ahead

What we are doing today is just the first stage of our implementation programme. I believe the Chairman of the Committee will elucidate on the next steps.

Secondly, while this is not intended to be an open-ended project, we have not yet closed the door to prospective contributors. Incidentally, only a few days ago the fund got a N1 million boost from our daughter, Dr. Folashade Yemi-Esan. More importantly, in line with her initial stance on this project, she has undertaken to assist us to mobilise support for the provision of Solar-Powered Boreholes in some communities.

I have already requested the Chairman of the Implementation Committee to work on the criteria for selecting the potential beneficiaries.

Thirdly, I will like to express our profound gratitude to Mr. Eniola Bello for facilitating our contact with the TY Danjuma Foundation.

Following our application, which was supported by the impressive document produced by the Implementation Committee, the Foundation has agreed in principle to support the project.

We have already identified our priority areas and we are awaiting further actions from their end.

Fourthly, we now expect that the Implementation Committee will move into the second stage while the Monitoring Committee will commence its own activities.

Thank you all for your attention.