

LITERACY... Saving our Humanity

*(Being introductory note to the LABAF 2017 programming concepts, by
JAHMAN ANIKULAPO, Programme Chair of the **Committee for
Relevant Art, CORA, and Festival Director, LABAF)**)*

"We find ourselves living in a time where the fundamental underpinnings of democracy are being challenged and disrespected ad absurdum, as demonstrated by the current president of the United States towards a hitherto functioning judicial system. Even the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees, and individual countries' membership of the European Union are being called into question by certain Western statesmen and women and candidates for political leadership.

"Even the most unequivocal facts, such as climate change, are declared "fake news", and, in turn, actual fake news reports are infiltrating and influencing accepted mainstream news media. Nationalistic currents and right- and left-wing populist parties are gaining ground internationally, their leaders already occupying important positions of power in certain countries. Russia is being shaped by the dismantling of civil society caused by its current president and his administration, the criminalization of dissidents, oppositionists, gays and lesbians, its annexation of Crimea and war against Ukraine, and war crimes in Syria.

"Due to China's economic success, international commercial relations and continuing operation as a police state, its ruling powers can continue to blithely eliminate anyone who opposes them. The state of peace we Europeans have grown accustomed to since the end of the Second World War can no longer be taken for granted".

THE excerpted statement above from the *World Wide Reading of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* on September 6 2017, organised by the International Literature Berlin, summarises the theme for this year. Nigeria also participated in the reading through an event initiated by the Nobel laureate, **Wole Soyinka** through his Wole Soyinka Foundation, but executed by a consortium of Cultural advocate organisations including the Committee for Relevant Art, CORA, Freedom Park, Arterial Network, AJ House of Poetry, and Oxzygen Koncepts.

Held at the *Speaker's Corner* of the Freedom Park, the event featured writers and activists reading the letters of the UNHR, with first section read by Soyinka himself, and the rest by other eminent activist-citizens, including the columnist Tunde Fagbenle and top-bill actor Bimbo Manuel, who also anchored the event. The pidgin version was read by members of Oxzygen Koncepts led by Toritseju Ejoh, while tributes were paid to writers who have been repressed, oppressed or harassed by recklessly 'drunken' men in power, of means or matters as anchored by the fiery poet, AJ Dagga Tolar.

The essence of that worldwide reading event is encapsulated in the spirit of *ERUPTIONS: Global FRACTURES and our common HUMANITY*—the theme of our 19th *feast of IDEAS and LIFE*.

FOR us at CORA, the core of our very VISION and MISSION is the protection, and implicitly, the sustenance and survival of our/the human race. We insist that *no Human is greater than the Other*. All is/are created equal, except where extraneous circumstances dictate that some are better privileged than the others; and such who could exploit such privilege to oppress the non-so-privileged. Essentially, the first instrument of oppression

of the 'lowly' by the so-called High and Mighty is the hoarding of such essential civilising tools as EDUCATION, which ensures that important information circulates to all; EMPOWERMENT (mental and economical) which ensures that everyone is capacitated to be able to fully explore his/her potentials, and exploit same for his self-benefit and mutual benefit of his/her family and the community.

The CORA insists that what the community of Humans needs is the flourishing and flowering of LITERACY to/and among every member of the Human family; so they are well resourced to participate effectively in the conversations that affect their common interest; and the general wellbeing of the society. This is the way to deepen democratic values and guarantee that all will be effective participants in decision making processes that lead to collective good, and better nationhood.

This is why we insist on an open air *fest* of IDEAS and LIFE, where every member of the community is a partaker; and an active actor in the socialisation process.

This is the creed of our engagement at the programming directorate of the LABAF, which is running into its 20th anniversary on a blaze of glory.

This edition is an extension of the ideas that we have pursued in recent editions of the festival that we love to claim as the "*biggest cultural picnic on the continent*", hence a reiteration of the statement we made last year, vis:

EDUCATION. LITERACY. EMPOWERMENT...

THIS combo cocktail is what the *Lagos Book & Art Festival* is all about. These are the virtues that the grand "festival of ideas and life" has pursued since 1999, when its birth was instigated by the

desire to help prepare the Nigeria citizenry for then impending era of political freedom... a relief from decades of wastefulness by the vagabonds in warrior attire.

The LABAF was born out of a desire to help facilitate the rise of the 'intellect' over 'emotion' in the affairs of peoples of our nation. The LABAF signposted its mission with the dream to help deepen human capital development in the continent through a systematic spread of enlightenment through the written, painted, sculpted, crafted or spoken texts... that educate, enlighten, empower and develop the mind... all about erasing ignorance from the mind of men... eroding their powerlessness... wearing off their hopelessness in the capability of goodness to always *trump* the evil.

BOOK...

The TEXT (written or visual)

MIND/MENTAL DEVELOPMENT...

The Book (knowledge and mental empowerment) must, going forward, be installed as the *weapon* of our engagement with the malfeasance that abound in global political arena.

Education must be our shield against the acidic rain that hover above our collective consciousness due to the irresponsibility and irascibility of political and economic actors locally, and globally.

Mental and mind development must be our wall against the reign of leprous beings that often/have appropriate(d) our collective consciousness.

AS you come to the festival ground, just remember that the BOOK is the *megastar* at the LABAF... the writer is as big as the idea contained his/her Book.

Enjoy the feast...

-- **Jahman Anikulapo,**
Festival Curator
Programme Chair, CORA