THE NEED FOR ESTABLISHING A NIGERIAN SOCIETY OF CRIMINOLOGY

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Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir,
Deans and Heads of Departments,
My Respected Colleagues and Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to be here this morning and feel deeply honoured to be given this opportunity to address you.

The purpose for this meeting of eminent scholars in criminology in Nigeria is to provide a forum for dialogue on the issue of the way forward for the discipline of criminology in our country. Added to this, is the issue of creating a Nigerian Society of Criminology which will be the organ to contribute most significantly and determine the life course of criminology in Nigeria. Before we go
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into the need for creating a Nigerian Society of criminology, let us look at the state of criminology in Nigeria today.

Criminology has not adequately been formally defined in Nigeria. As criminologists and those interested in this field of study, we have not debated the conceptual issues of what the term ‘Criminology’ would refer to in the Nigerian Context. I believe that this paucity of information in criminology in Nigeria can be eliminated once the Nigerian Society of Criminology has been formally established, to provide the forum for such formalized debate. We must note that this cannot be properly and formally actualized in and by any other gathering or organization. We, as criminologists and interested persons in the field of criminology have to come together in a forum and decide what the term criminology means in Nigeria and what theories will support our research endeavours based on our peculiar environment and circumstances, which are often different in many instances from those of other countries, particularly those in the western world.

As I have always contended, ‘criminology is the scientific study of the totality of the phenomenon of crime and its related facets such as the effects of the application of criminal law, treatment and management of criminal offenders’. Our field of study is interdisciplinary, because it uses scientific methodologies to:

(a) Understand or comprehend the historical, philosophic, legal, behavioural, psychological, economical, political and social aspects of crime, delinquency, victimization and justice.

(b) Explore the cause or etiology, prevention, control and treatment of crime and delinquency.
(c) Measure and detect crime and delinquency in society.
(d) Examine criminal law and legal processes and procedures and their impact on the criminal, delinquent and victim; and

(e) Explore, understand and improve the law enforcement, prosecutorial, judicial and correctional instrumentalities.

Criminology has not been formally accepted as an independent discipline in Nigeria. It is, rather, regarded as a sub-discipline of sociology or law. Most countries with democratic inclinations have established societies of criminology. These countries have gone beyond accepting criminology as a discipline to accepting it, formally as an interdisciplinary science. Nigeria is now a democratic society, and therefore, there is no better time than now, to establish the Nigerian Society of Criminology to officially react to matters of criminality or crime, that relate to the concern of social order, and justice in our country; and also to encourage teachers, practitioners and researchers in the field of criminology to support scientific, scholarly and practical exchange to aid spread criminological knowledge and as well as perform their duties in accordance with professional standards and the governing laws of the country. I believe that creating the Nigerian Society of Criminology will help the country to quickly build a ‘strong democracy’ – a country with a government elected by majority vote and with encouraged citizen participation, public deliberation and civic education.

Suffice it to say that, criminology is an exciting field of study but much opportunity does not exist for people to study criminology in
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Nigeria’s higher institutions of learning. At present, no university in Nigeria offers an independent degree in criminology. However, a few Nigerian universities offer a degree in sociology with a blend in criminology. Examples of such universities include: Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and the University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt. The absence of a department of criminology in the Nigerian universities is a limitation and it constrains those persons who want to have a full knowledge of the discipline. I believe that establishment of the Nigerian Society of Criminology will help us to formally establish policies and rules, to guide the future of criminology and criminologists in Nigeria. Again, there is the non-existence of a mouthpiece, in the form of a journal, primarily dedicated to disseminate information on issues bordering on criminology, owned by an institute of criminology or a department of the social sciences or behavioural sciences of any university in Nigeria. We require journals on criminological issues, primarily owned by departments of law, sociology, and of the Nigerian Society of Criminology, if established to enable Nigerian scholars in the field of criminology and related fields to publish their research findings, and to make new postulations on theories and methods.

It is not unfounded that the discipline of criminology in Nigeria lacks a sense of its own history. This is because there seems to be no founding fathers to chart the course of criminology in this country. I want us to bring the Nigerian criminology out from the state of shock or amnesia and poverty by reflecting critically upon our own criminological practice, and to make it a healthy intellectual and
vibrant enterprise, guided by rules and standards established by a body called the Nigerian Society of Criminology.

I believe strongly that establishing a Nigerian Society of Criminology will help to promote fundamental principles regarding crime and delinquency, justice and the rule of law in the body polity and to contribute towards the development of a long-term viable and stable, economic utilitarian culture. I believe also that establishing the Nigerian Society of Criminology will enhance and promote the development of academic departments of criminology or justice education in our universities which will influence an increasing number of students who will learn about criminology and play professional roles in our justice system. I also think that establishing the Nigerian Society of Criminology will motivate law enforcement personnel to be more accountable to their duties because students and faculty engaged in locally relevant research activities will assist justice system personnel with research findings on new methods, techniques, and strategies for dealing with crime and delinquency, criminals and delinquents including the victims of these vices.

We should encourage professional educational standards for the field of criminology in Nigeria. The time is long gone when we depend on the ‘oyibo’ or ‘foreigners’ to write our own history. Nigerian criminologists and persons interested in criminological matters should be motivated to do research on Nigerian criminology. We should also encourage our brothers and sisters, including members of other criminological bodies outside the shores of this country to share their experiences and exchange information with us to forge professional linkages in the field.

In the past, I have held meetings of this sort with scholars and students in other disciplines; they saw the need for the establishment of such a ‘Society’ but there was always a disagreement on why the
focus should be on criminology. Most of the scholars were historians, economists, sociologists, legal practitioners and law students. Unfortunately, we never went far enough to establish the ‘society’ formally. One basic reason why this has been so, was because there were no criminologists present in the meetings, except myself, to collaborate the idea of establishing and naming the organization, the Nigerian Society of Criminology.

I can remember writing to Professor Femi Odekunle to assist in the establishment of the Nigerian Society of Criminology in 1986, and he wrote back to advice that we should wait for a while, apparently because there were not many scholars in the discipline at the time. I discussed the same issue with Dr. E. M. Igbo in 2002 who was happy about my thoughts and said, he would be glad if invited on a subsequent meeting that we may hold or host. In 2004, Professor Allswell O. Muzan of Kogi State University and I, formed an association named Nigerian Association of Criminal Justice. I was the secretary of that association. We held several meetings which were documented and at the last of that meeting, we decided to call for a conference on different issues bordering on administration of justice in Nigeria. We hoped that the conference would give us opportunity to also give participants information regarding the formation and registration requirements of the association. We failed to call for the conference because of lack of funds. Since, we have discontinued the meeting (apparently because of distance), I have, liaised with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, gathering information and requirements for preparation of documents for the registration of Nigerian Society of Criminology. I am conversant with their requirements for registration.
To register the Nigerian Society of Criminology requires that:

(a) Elections for offices be conducted and proceedings of this meeting be adequately documented;

(b) the drafted constitution should be read and adopted, if possible, with or without amendments, to hasten the registration of the ‘Society’ by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

It is also, my desire that we elect a competent and international renowned and recognized person amongst us to become the president-elect and vice president-elect to direct the affairs of the Society. Also, there is a need to have membership registration now because the Corporate Affairs Commission may like to know who are the members or how many we are. Therefore, interested persons can register now. We have registration forms to facilitate the registration process. Registration fees can be decided later.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a great need, and I must add, an urgent need for establishing and completing the formalities for registering the ‘Society’. This need is now clear with this address stating the present state of the field of criminology in Nigeria.

I believe the poor development status of criminology in our country as I have observed and documented in an earlier publication will give us the focus, to see beyond the superficial needs for establishing the Nigerian Society of Criminology, and to enable us as a body to pioneer the life course of criminology in Nigeria. Let me say this though, that the establishing of the Nigerian Society of
Criminology today will navigate policies, theories, and practice of criminology in Nigeria of the future. Nigeria is a democratic society and as it is the tenet, all democratic societies must have democratic institutions. We are all aware that all institutions in Nigeria have not all become democratic in the real sense. The Nigerian Criminal Justice System is yet to be fully democratized. We realize that effort is being made by the police, the judiciary, and the penal institution. Current research endeavours are been made to encourage the Nigerian Government to quicken the process of democratizing the law enforcement apparatuses. But a body like the Nigerian Society of Criminology, if established, will become a leader in advocating the ideas required to make our Criminal Justice System democratic.

Once again, I thank you all for coming to this meeting.