DECOLONISING THE AFRICAN MIND FOR ETHICAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH AFROCENTRIC ETHICS

<u>CONFERENCE COMMUNIQUÉ</u>

1. Preamble

The International Conference on Decolonising the African Mind for Ethical Leadership Through Afrocentric Ethics was jointly organised by the Department of Philosophy, University of Lagos, and the Afrocentric Ethics for Leadership and Social Responsibility Foundation. The conference was held on Thursday, 27th November 2025, at the Faculty of Arts Conference Hall, University of Lagos, with both physical attendance and virtual participation via Zoom and YouTube platforms.

The conference convened scholars, policymakers, professionals, traditional intellectuals, civil society actors, and students to engage in critical discourse on the ethical challenges confronting leadership in Africa. The central focus of the conference was to examine how indigenous African ethical systems can contribute to ethical leadership, institutional integrity, and sustainable societal development.

2. Objectives of the Conference

The objectives of the conference were to:

- Examine the enduring effects of colonial legacies on African leadership practices and institutions.

- Reaffirm Afrocentric ethical principles as viable foundations for ethical leadership and governance.

- Explore cultural, political, economic, and educational structures necessary for responsible leadership.

- Assess the role of education, media, and social institutions in shaping ethical consciousness.

- Highlight the strategic importance of youth and women in ethical leadership development.

- Formulate actionable recommendations for government, academia, civil society, and the private sector.

3. Opening Session

The conference commenced with an opening prayer led by Distinguished Professor Jim Ijenwa Unah, followed by the rendition of the Nigerian national anthem. The welcome address was delivered by Mr. Victor Olewunne, President of the Afrocentric Ethics for Leadership and Social Responsibility Foundation.

In his address, Mr. Olewunne underscored the persistent ethical deficits evident in governance, business, and social institutions across Africa. Drawing from professional and corporate experience, he identified fraud, erosion of values, and the normalisation of unethical conduct as key indicators of moral decline. He emphasised that Africa possesses well-established indigenous ethical frameworks, exemplified by concepts such as omoluabi in Yoruba thought and comparable values within Igbo, Akan, and Hausa traditions. According to him, these frameworks sustained pre-colonial African societies and remain relevant for contemporary leadership challenges.

He concluded by noting that the conference provided a platform for re-examining, refining, and applying Afrocentric ethical principles to address current leadership and governance challenges.

4. Keynote Address

Keynote Speaker: Distinguished Professor Jim Ijenwa Unah
Title: The Concept of Goodness in Rebuilding African Ethics for Enterprise Leadership and Societal Flourishing: A Phenomenological Agenda for Development

Prof. Unah delivered a comprehensive lecture arguing that the abstract concept of "goodness" must be phenomenologically retrieved from the African "life-world" to solve modern crises. His presentation covered the following key areas:

- **The Pragmatism of Indigenous Ethics:** He began with a compelling anecdote from a DSS webinar where the Director-General identified "Ubuntu" (community working together) as the core of African security. He highlighted that the African response to insecurity historically involved reciprocal solidarity, citing how the Kazaure and Balewa communities successfully defended their ancestral lands through collective action.

- **The Ontology of "Doing Things Together":** Prof. Unah established that African culture is fundamentally about doing things together; mourning, celebrating, and surviving collectively. He linked this to specific ethnic philosophies:

  - **Hausa:** Zaman Lafiya (peaceful living) and Mutumin Kirki (the good person).

  - **Igbo:** The Ummuna entrepreneurship system (igba boy) and Ezigbo Mmadu (the good person).

  - **Yoruba:** The concept of Omoluabi and the belief that hard work is the antidote to poverty.

  - **Ika & Ibibio:** Philosophies emphasizing that one does not let their kin fall, and the distinction between positive virtues (eti nkpö) and negative vices (idiok nkpö).

- **Defining Goodness:** He clarified that "goodness" does not imply perfection or immunity to mistakes. Instead, a "good person" is one who displays moral excellence, integrity, compassion, empathy, and inclusivity, and who strives to make amends when they falter. This stands in contrast to "kakistocratic" leadership (government by the worst citizens).

- **Critique of Western Ethical Models:** Prof. Unah critiqued the standard ethical leadership models taught in business schools (teleological and deontological), arguing they are designed for adults and rely on rules or outcomes. He argued that these models often fail because they are not "internalised habituated character

traits" developed from youth. He contrasted this with African Virtue Ethics, which focuses on the moral agent's character rather than just their actions.

- **The Call for "Creative Statesmen":** He proposed that Africa needs "creative statesmen" who can groom "authentic revolutionaries", a critical mass of citizens bred on principles of goodness. Without this critical mass, even well-intentioned leaders will labour in vain within corrupt systems.

- **Curriculum Reform:** He concluded with a strong recommendation for ethically conscious philosophers and educators to design curricula on "leadership ethics and critical thinking" for primary and secondary schools, ensuring the "burden of character" is addressed in formative years.

5. Thematic Presentations

5.1 Prof. Obi Iwuagwu – Colonial Legacy and Leadership

Prof. Iwuagwu challenged the conference participants to move beyond historical grievances and accept responsibility for Africa's current state.

- **Re-evaluating the "Blame Game":** While acknowledging that colonialism disrupted indigenous political systems and created artificial borders, Prof. Iwuagwu argued that continuing to blame colonial legacies for all current failures has become an "alibi" for internal unaccountability. He stated, "The time for excuses has been exhausted".

- **The Asian Comparison:** He provided a comparative analysis of post-colonial trajectories, noting that countries like Singapore, India, and other Asian nations faced similar colonial challenges but transformed their fortunes through pragmatic leadership. He asked why Africa remains in a "vortex of poverty" while these peers have advanced.

- **Failures of Post-Colonial Elites:** He argued that post-colonial African leaders often replaced colonial exploiters with local tyrants. He cited Mobutu Sese Seko as a prime example of leadership that treated the state as a personal fiefdom, enriching cronies while impoverishing the masses. He also highlighted the prevalence of "sit-tightism," coups, and the manipulation of ethnic divisions for political gain.

- **The Trap of Foreign Aid:** Utilizing Dependency Theory, he explained how continued reliance on foreign aid fosters corruption and weak institutions, creating a cycle of dependency that makes long-term growth impossible.

- **The Concept of "Virile Citizenry":** A key takeaway was his assertion that leadership failure is also a failure of followership. He called for a "virile citizenry" that actively questions government policies, rejects bribery, and refuses to be manipulated by ethnic or religious rivalry. He concluded that a nation's success depends as much on its citizens as its leaders.

5.2 Prof. Kayode Eesuola – Reclaiming African Ethical Principles for Leadership

Prof. Eesuola's paper focused on the practical "reclaiming" of autochthonous knowledge systems to solve the crisis of legitimacy and trust in African governance.

- **The Crisis of Legitimacy:** He described the current global and African landscape as facing a "multidimensional crisis" of identity, trust, and legitimacy. He attributed this to the "disconnection between Western governance structures and African ethical worldviews".

- **Indigenous Social Contracts (The Case of Alakolemesin):** To illustrate the African concept of the social contract, he recited the Odu Ifa Irosun Meji, specifically the story of Alakolemesin. This leader was dethroned because he violated three ethical "don'ts" he had sworn to uphold. This demonstrated that in indigenous thought, power is conditional and revocable based on ethical conduct.

- **Pan-African Ethical Models:** He argued against the idea that African thought is too diverse to be unified, citing shared philosophical anchors across the continent:

  - **Asante (Ghana):** The Nkwantananso tradition, where the leader is "first among equals".

  - **Somali:** The Xeer system, which emphasizes consensus, negotiation, and collective responsibility.

  - **Mosi:** The Rakire system.

- **Igbo:** A republican system where leadership is distributed across age grades.

- **Reclaiming vs. Returning:** He clarified that "reclaiming" does not mean a romantic return to the past, but adapting these core values to modern governance.

- **Actionable Strategies:** Prof. Eesuola proposed concrete steps for "re-indigenisation":

  - **Citizen Scorecards:** Just as elders evaluated traditional rulers, citizens should periodically assess leaders on integrity and service impact.

  - **Youth Re-indigenisation:** Educating youth not just in Western democracy but in indigenous moral reasoning to bridge the future.

  - **Ethical Codes:** Developing national codes of conduct inspired by Ubuntu, Maat, and Sankofa.

5.3 Mr. Lolu Akinwunmi – Ethical Business Leadership and Economic Decolonization

Mr. Akinwunmi brought a corporate perspective, linking ethical leadership directly to the economic liberation of the continent.

- **Defining Economic Decolonisation:** He defined this as the process of reclaiming autonomy over resources and value chains, re-orienting them to serve African societies rather than just external interests.

- **Epistemic Decolonisation:** He argued that current business leadership often suffers from a "colonised mindset" that equates success with Western benchmarks. He called for "epistemic decolonisation", validating local knowledge and values as sufficient for leadership.

- **Virtue Ethics in Business:** Citing studies on Nigerian business practices, he noted that a "communitarian approach to virtue ethics" is more effective than Western individualism for fostering trust and reducing corruption.

- **Five Strategic Actions for Leaders:** Mr. Akinwunmi outlined five practical steps for business leaders:

    1. **Embed Afrocentric Frameworks:** Incorporate values like Omoluabi (integrity, community-mindedness) into corporate culture.

    2. **Re-orient Value Chains:** Move beyond shareholder profit to "stakeholder responsibility," sourcing locally and investing in local capacity.

    3. **Strengthen Governance:** Prioritize transparency to build trust and reduce dependency on external actors.

    4. **Decolonise Training:** Business schools must teach African philosophical ethics alongside standard MBA curricula.

    5. **African Relevant Metrics:** Measure success by contributions to community well-being and employment, not just global profitability benchmarks.

5.4 Prof. Maryam Quadri – Education, Media, and Social Influence on Ethical Leadership

Prof. Quadri examined the "ethical infrastructure" that shapes the minds of future leaders, focusing on the triadic influence of education, media, and society.

- **Commodification of Education:** She critiqued the neoliberal trend where education is treated as a commodity rather than a public good. She noted that when profit dominates, ethical values are relegated, and the system produces "skilled but ethically hollow" graduates.

- **Media Hybridity and Sovereignty:** She highlighted that African audiences now navigate multiple moral worlds, influenced by K-drama, Afrobeats, and digital satire. She argued that while media sovereignty is desirable, "media hybridity" is the reality, and ethical frameworks must adapt to this.

- **The Shift in Social Influence:** A critical insight was that social influence is no longer mediated solely by elders and traditional institutions. Today, algorithms, influencers, and virtual communities are the primary shapers of ethics and behaviour.

- **Ethical Pragmatism:** She concluded that Africa needs "ethical pragmatism," not just moral revivalism. This involves combining moral identity with administrative competence and using media to "glamorize" ethical behaviour rather than unaccountable power.

6. Panel Discussion: Youth and Women in Ethical Leadership

Theme: The Place of Youth and Women in Ethical Leadership: Practical Solutions and Actionable Strategies.

Chair/Moderator: Prof. F. N. Ndubuisi

The panel discussion constituted a central component of the Conference deliberations and provided an interactive platform for examining the structural, cultural, and ethical dimensions of youth and women's participation in leadership across Africa. The session was chaired by Prof. F. N. Ndubuisi and featured contributions from distinguished scholars and practitioners, including Dr. Peter Osimiri, Mr. Timothy Iwuagwu, Prof. C. B. Okoro, alongside reflections from other conference participants.

In his opening remarks, Prof. F. N. Ndubuisi emphasized that ethics is the foundation of all meaningful leadership and remains the critical distinction between leadership and the mere exercise of power. He identified three core attributes of leadership which are: intelligence, creativity, and integrity, arguing that integrity, grounded in ethical consciousness, is indispensable for societal progress. He noted that Africa's youthful population and the central social role of women present both an opportunity and a responsibility, stressing that leadership structures must deliberately create environments that foster character formation, ethical education, and civic responsibility among these groups.

Dr. Peter Osimiri underscored the inseparable relationship between ethics and leadership, asserting that leadership devoid of ethical grounding degenerates into domination. He observed that Africa's demographic reality, characterized by a large youth population and significant female representation, requires intentional leadership development strategies.

He called on non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, and public agencies to invest in mentorship, leadership training, and capacity-building initiatives that channel youthful energy toward constructive social engagement and ethical public service.

Mr. Timothy Iwuagwu reflected on the historical and contemporary roles of women and youth in leadership. Drawing attention to notable African female leaders such as Queen Amina, he challenged narratives that portray women as peripheral to leadership. He argued that systemic marginalisation, unemployment, and misaligned educational curricula have constrained the ethical participation of youth and women. According to him, ethical leadership development must address structural inequalities while creating spaces for women's voices, protection, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Prof. C. B. Okoro situated the challenges facing youth and women within the broader context of colonial disruption. He argued that colonialism fragmented African value systems by imposing foreign languages, institutions, and moral frameworks, thereby dislocating indigenous leadership traditions. For Prof. Okoro, decolonizing the African mind requires the deconstruction of colonial ideologies, the preservation of core cultural values, and the reconstruction of institutions anchored in African ethical identity. He emphasized that a nation is defined fundamentally by its value system rather than its geographical boundaries.

During the interactive session, participants contributed further perspectives. One intervention suggested that Africa's challenge should be approached not only as decolonization but also as *deglobalization*, emphasizing the need for functional systems that enable Africa to compete responsibly within the global order. Another participant linked contemporary leadership failures to the inability of societies to connect institutional practices with indigenous values, stressing competence and ethical orientation as key leadership deficits.

The panel concluded that sustainable ethical leadership in Africa is contingent upon the deliberate empowerment of youth and women through inclusive policies, value-based education, mentorship structures, and institutional reforms grounded in Afrocentric ethics. The session reinforced the consensus that youth and women are not peripheral stakeholders but central agents in Africa's ethical transformation.

7. Key Themes Emerging from the Conference

- The decolonisation of African consciousness is fundamental to ethical leadership.

- Indigenous African ethical systems provide viable frameworks for governance and leadership.

- Education and media play critical roles in ethical formation.

- Ethical business leadership is central to economic decolonisation.

- Youth and women are essential to ethical leadership transformation.

- Multi-sector collaboration is necessary for sustainable ethical development.

8. Resolutions and Recommendations

The conference resolved to:

- Reaffirm Afrocentric ethical principles such as omoluabi and ubuntu as foundations for leadership.

- Promote cultural renewal and the decolonisation of the African mind.

- Integrate Afrocentric ethics into educational curricula at all levels.

- Encourage responsible media practices that promote ethical values.

- Strengthen governance institutions through accountability and transparency rooted in African ethics.

- Promote ethical business leadership as a driver of economic decolonisation.

- Develop leadership pipelines that intentionally include youth and women.

- Support community-based leadership development initiatives.

- Strengthen collaboration among academic institutions, government agencies, civil society, and traditional authorities.

- Establish mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of ethical leadership initiatives.

9. Conclusion

The Conference reaffirmed that Africa possesses the ethical, cultural, and philosophical resources necessary for leadership renewal and sustainable development. Participants reached a consensus that ethical leadership must be grounded in indigenous African values, communal responsibility, institutional accountability, and moral integrity. The Conference further affirmed that decolonising the African mind is a necessary and ongoing process that must be advanced through education, governance, economic practice, and cultural renewal.

The Conference concluded with a collective commitment by all stakeholders to promote, implement, and sustain Afrocentric ethical principles as a foundation for ethical leadership and societal transformation across Africa.

FINAL CONFERENCE COMMUNIQUÉ

Issued at the Conclusion of the International Conference on

Decolonising the African Mind for Ethical Leadership Through Afrocentric Ethics

Having deliberated extensively on the thematic focus of the Conference, and having examined the historical, philosophical, educational, economic, and institutional dimensions of ethical leadership in Africa, participants hereby adopt this Communiqué as a formal statement of consensus and commitment.

The Conference:

1. **Affirms** that the ethical crises confronting leadership in Africa are deeply connected to the erosion of indigenous moral systems occasioned by colonial and postcolonial disruptions.

2. **Recognises** Afrocentric ethics as viable, relevant, and necessary frameworks for rebuilding ethical leadership, institutional trust, and social responsibility.

3. **Calls upon** governments, educational institutions, media organisations, and the private sector to integrate Afrocentric ethical principles into policy formulation, curriculum development, leadership training, and institutional practice.

4. **Emphasises** the strategic role of education and media in shaping moral consciousness and promoting ethical leadership norms.

5. **Urges** the intentional inclusion and empowerment of youth and women as central agents in ethical leadership development and societal transformation.

6. **Endorses** ethical business leadership as a critical pathway to economic decolonisation, institutional credibility, and inclusive development.

7. **Commits** to sustained collaboration among academia, government, civil society, traditional institutions, and the private sector to advance ethical leadership initiatives.

8. **Resolves** to establish mechanisms for follow-up, evaluation, and continuous engagement to ensure the effective implementation of the resolutions of this Conference.

This Communiqué is hereby adopted as the official outcome document of the Conference.

For the Department of Philosophy, University of Lagos

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Name:
Designation:
Date:

For the Afrocentric Ethics for Leadership and Social Responsibility Foundation

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Name:
Designation:
Date:

Conference Chair

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Name:
Date:

Conference Secretary

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Name:
Date:

Venue: Faculty of Arts Conference Hall, University of Lagos
Date: Thursday, 27th November 2025