

WELCOME REMARKS AT THE VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE ON NEO-AWOISM: REIMAGINING THE AWOLOWO DEVELOPMENTAL PHILOSOPHY FOR 21ST-CENTURY NIGERIA

Convened by the Obafemi Awolowo Foundation

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Distinguished scholars, eminent participants, ladies and gentlemen

The Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ Foundation was established, among other things, to promote *"a socially-edifying interaction between policy and scholarship."* One of its core objectives is *"to provide a forum for frequent and fruitful interaction between policy makers, reputable academics and the general public, so that each party will be enriched and public policy upgraded."*

Convening this roundtable on **'Neo-Awoism: Reimagining the Awolọwọ Developmental Philosophy For 21st-Century Nigeria'** is, therefore, not incidental to the Foundation's work, but a direct expression of its founding mandate.

So, on behalf of the Foundation, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all and to thank you most sincerely for accepting our invitation. We are particularly appreciative of the calibre of minds assembled here, and of your willingness to devote your time and intellectual resources to this important conversation.

I would like to specially commend the author and originator of the Neo-Awoism concept, **Mr Tilewa Adebajo**, whose intellectual initiative has provided the impetus for today's gathering. We appreciate not only the thought and effort that have gone into developing the proposition, but also his willingness to subject it to independent scrutiny and critical engagement.

That willingness is itself commendable. After all, ideas do not necessarily grow stronger simply because they are admired or applauded. They grow stronger when they are questioned, challenged, refined and tested against the realities they seek to address.

And that, essentially, is why we are here.

Chief Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ was, among many other things, a profound thinker and a man of ideas. His political philosophy was not merely an abstract intellectual exercise. It was rooted in a deep concern for the welfare of the people and a conviction that government must be purposeful, disciplined and accountable.

His commitment to education, healthcare, economic development, social justice and genuine federalism was informed by a coherent vision of society and the responsibilities of leadership.

But Papa was also a man of his time, responding to the circumstances and challenges of his time.

Our responsibility today is not to recreate that era. Rather, the challenge is to identify the enduring principles underlying his philosophy and consider how they might be reinterpreted and applied in a world profoundly transformed by technology, globalisation, demographic pressures and changing economic realities.

Neo-Awoism, as a concept, offers one possible approach to that challenge.

I should emphasise that the concept did not originate with the Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ Foundation. We have, however, recognised its potential as a contribution to contemporary national discourse and, with the consent and active collaboration of its

author, have undertaken to bring it before a wider circle of informed and critical minds.

Our role is that of convener and facilitator. We are not here to endorse a predetermined doctrine or seek validation for a particular position. We are here to encourage an open, rigorous and constructive examination of the proposition.

And this brings me to what I consider particularly important about today's meeting: the need for focus and a clear sense of purpose.

In the synopsis circulated ahead of this meeting, we identified five broad questions intended to guide our deliberations.

First, which elements of Chief Awolọwọ's developmental philosophy remain relevant to contemporary Nigeria, and how might they be appropriately reinterpreted?

Second, does Neo-Awoism, as presently conceived, offer the framework required to address Nigeria's current political, economic and social challenges?

Third, how might its principles be translated into practical policies in such critical areas as education, healthcare, fiscal federalism, economic productivity, technological advancement and institutional reform?

Fourth, what gaps, contradictions or limitations in the proposed framework require further investigation or refinement?

And finally, how might the concept be brought to the attention of relevant public institutions, policymakers and development agencies for consideration and possible action?

These questions are not intended to constrain independent thought or discourage robust debate. On the contrary, we welcome differing perspectives and constructive criticism.

But I would respectfully urge every participant to keep them firmly in mind.

Given the breadth of the subject and the wealth of experience represented here, it would be all too easy for our discussions to expand into a general examination of Nigeria's many problems, which, though a worthwhile undertaking, is not the specific purpose of today's meeting.

Our task today is to interrogate a particular proposition and determine whether, and how, it might be developed into something of practical value.

We should, therefore, be guided equally by the desired outcomes set out in the synopsis.

We hope to emerge with a rigorous assessment of Neo-Awoism's intellectual foundations, strengths and limitations; a clearer understanding of areas requiring further research and refinement; and some indication of its potential relevance to contemporary public policy.

Above all, we hope to arrive at some clarity about the way forward.

Does the concept merit further development? If so, in what direction, through what process, and with what possible implications for public policy? How might the resulting ideas eventually reach those institutions and agencies capable of translating them into action?

These are important considerations, because Nigeria is certainly not suffering from a shortage of discussions about its problems. What we need are coherent ideas, credible frameworks and practical pathways towards meaningful change.

If today's deliberations can help move this proposition from intellectual exploration towards greater clarity, refinement and possible practical application, we will have made worthwhile progress.

Let me conclude by reiterating our sincere appreciation to the author for initiating this conversation, and to all our distinguished participants for agreeing to engage with it.

The Foundation remains committed to providing an independent, non-partisan platform where ideas can be freely examined, enriched and advanced for the public good.

As we undertake this exercise in reimagining, interrogating and refining the concept of Neo-Awoism, I believe there is one important consideration we must keep firmly in view.

Whatever form the emerging framework may eventually take, **we must be careful not to lose sight of the core ethos that defined Chief Awolọwọ's philosophy and gave it both its moral force and practical, enduring relevance.**

At its heart is a profound concern for the welfare of the people, a conviction that government must be purposeful, disciplined and accountable, and an abiding commitment to education, healthcare, economic development, social justice and genuine federalism.

These were not merely individual policy preferences. They were interconnected elements of a coherent vision of society, founded on the belief that the ultimate purpose of governance is to improve the human condition.

The institutions, policies and instruments through which that vision is pursued may change with the times. **But in adapting the means, we must not lose the ends.**

For ultimately, whatever we choose to call it, the true measure of any contemporary reinterpretation of Awolọwọ's philosophy must surely be its capacity to advance the welfare, dignity and opportunities of the people.

That, I believe, is the enduring essence of Awoism. And it is my hope that this enduring ethos will continue to inform and guide our exploration of Neo-Awoism.

I thank you all most sincerely, and look forward to a stimulating, purposeful and productive discussion. You are all most warmly welcome.

Ambassador Dr Ọlatokunbọ Awolọwọ Dosumu