



SENIOR STAFF ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES (SSANU)

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ADDRESS BY THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF SSANU AT THE SPECIAL NEC MEETING HELD AT THE NATIONAL SECRETARIAT, ABUJA, ON SATURDAY 9TH MAY, 2026

Protocol

Distinguished members of NEC, respected comrades, leaders of our great Union, ladies and gentlemen.

I welcome you all to this Special NEC Meeting at a time that is both sensitive and defining in the life of our Union. We are gathered not merely to discuss a circular, not merely to debate the suspension of a strike, and certainly not to trade emotions. We are gathered to reflect as leaders, to reason as custodians of a great Union, and to take decisions in the best interest of our members, our struggle, and the future of non-teaching staff in the Nigerian university system.

Let me begin by appreciating the courage, sacrifice, patience, and total compliance of our members across the branches. The level of compliance recorded during the industrial action has once again confirmed that SSANU members are united, conscious, and prepared to defend their dignity when called upon to do so. For this, the leadership remains deeply grateful.

However, comrades, recent developments have also exposed a disturbing concern. The two letters in circulation, one from the FGN Expanded Tertiary Institutions Negotiation Committee and the other from the Joint Action Committee of NASU and SSANU, have generated unnecessary comments, blind criticism, and careless interpretations from some quarters, including from persons who, by virtue of their membership of NEC, are expected to lead with vision, maturity, discipline, and understanding.

This meeting therefore gives us an opportunity not only to clarify issues, but also to remind ourselves what leadership, unionism, administration, negotiation, and government engagement truly mean.

The Suspension of Strike Was Not a Surrender

Comrades, let it be clearly understood; the suspension of an industrial action is not the abandonment of a struggle. A suspension is a tactical pause. It is a strategic instrument in labour engagement. It allows room for negotiation, creates moral advantage, tests the sincerity of government, and keeps the Union in control of the next step. There is a difference between calling off a struggle and suspending an action. When a strike is suspended, the issues remain alive. The demands remain valid. The mandate remains intact. The pressure remains available. The Union only creates a defined window for the other party to act. ***That is exactly what JAC has done.***

The FGN Expanded Tertiary Institutions Negotiation Committee appealed for the suspension of the ongoing strike, with a commitment that the renegotiation process, including a reviewed offer on CONTTTA, would be concluded within two weeks from the date of suspension. JAC considered this appeal, engaged the Committee, extracted a commitment, and communicated same to the branches. ***This is not weakness. This is leadership.***

President John F. Kennedy once said, ***"Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate."*** That statement is relevant to our present situation. The courage to negotiate is not cowardice.

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Vice President (North-West):- Sabo Balarabe Wudil

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The wisdom to pause is not betrayal. The ability to create room for resolution without losing focus is one of the highest tests of responsible leadership.

What Leadership Requires in Moments Like This

Leadership is not noise. Leadership is not the ability to issue the harshest statement in the room. Leadership is not measured by who can condemn faster, shout louder, or attack leadership publicly without understanding the full picture.

Leadership is the ability to see beyond the immediate anger of the moment. It is the ability to understand timing, process, pressure, opportunity, and consequence. Leadership requires emotional discipline. It requires strategic patience. It requires knowing when to advance, when to hold ground, when to engage, and when to allow the other party to expose its sincerity or lack of it.

Nelson Mandela, a man whose life remains one of the greatest examples of disciplined struggle and negotiation, said that *“real leaders must be ready to sacrifice all for the freedom of their people.”* That sacrifice is not always physical. Sometimes it is the sacrifice of personal popularity. Sometimes it is the courage to take a difficult decision that may be misunderstood today but vindicated tomorrow.

As NEC members, we must understand that we are not ordinary commentators. We are leaders. Our words carry weight. Our reactions shape the mood of branches. Our conduct either strengthens or weakens the Union. When leaders speak carelessly, members become confused. When leaders criticise without facts, they damage the same institution they claim to defend.

What Unionism Is Really About

Unionism is not permanent confrontation for its own sake. Unionism is organised pressure for justice. It is the disciplined use of collective strength to achieve legitimate demands. A Union that cannot fight is weak. But a Union that only knows how to fight without knowing how to negotiate is also incomplete.

The purpose of a strike is not to enjoy the strike. The purpose of a strike is to compel attention, force engagement, and secure results. Once the other party is brought back to the table with a commitment, a responsible Union must assess the situation and decide whether a temporary suspension can produce more value than continued confrontation.

Comrades, strike is a weapon. But every weapon must be used with wisdom. No serious leadership uses its strongest weapon endlessly without calculation. The power of a strike lies not only in declaring it, but in knowing how to use it to extract concessions.

Chester L. Karrass, a respected authority in negotiation, captured it well in the title of his well known work; *“You don’t get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate.”* This is a painful but true reality. Our members deserve dignity. They deserve fair remuneration. They deserve recognition. But these will not come by emotion alone. They will come through pressure, negotiation, documentation, persistence, and strategy.

Understanding Government Engagement

We must also understand the nature of government. Government does not move like an individual. Government moves through bureaucracy, approvals, committees, memos, political clearance, financial implications, and presidential authorisation. This does not excuse delay. It does not justify insincerity. But it helps serious union leaders understand how to apply pressure intelligently.

In the meeting with the FGN Expanded Negotiation Committee, it was indicated that any further review of the Government's earlier offer required presidential approval. Whether we like that process or not, it is part of the machinery of government. The role of Union leadership is to keep pressure on that machinery until it produces an acceptable outcome.

Therefore, when JAC secured a commitment that all renegotiations, including a reviewed CONTTA offer, would be concluded within two weeks from the date of suspension, it created a measurable timeline. That timeline is important. It gives the Union a basis to hold government accountable. It gives us a clear point of reference. It also places the moral burden on government. If government fails, it will not be because JAC refused dialogue. It will be because government failed to honour its own commitment.

A Word to Those Who Criticised Without Understanding

At this point, I must speak plainly. It is unfortunate that some NEC members, who should know better, have chosen to reduce a serious strategic decision into a matter of suspicion, bitterness, and emotional commentary. Such conduct is disappointing. It is beneath the standard expected of leaders of a serious Union.

A NEC member who cannot distinguish between suspension and surrender needs to reflect deeply on the responsibility of leadership. A NEC member who rushes to condemn every tactical decision without understanding the negotiation environment weakens the confidence of members and strengthens the hand of the employer. A NEC member who uses public criticism to heat up the system instead of educating members is not helping the struggle.

Let us be clear; constructive criticism is welcome. Honest disagreement is part of democracy. But reckless criticism, blind condemnation, and careless statements from leaders are dangerous. They create confusion. They demoralise members. They undermine negotiators. They make the Union appear divided before government. No responsible army goes to battle while its commanders are attacking one another in the open field. No serious Union can win if its leaders speak like spectators rather than custodians of collective responsibility.

Those who see no wisdom in this tactical suspension must ask themselves: what exactly is the alternative? To continue indefinitely without testing the written commitment? To reject every appeal even when a timeline has been given? To appear unreasonable before the public and allow government to shift blame to the Union? Leadership is not about proving anger. Leadership is about securing results.

The Strategic Value of the Suspension

Comrades, the suspension has several strategic values.

1. First, it shows that JAC is reasonable, mature, and committed to peaceful resolution.
2. Second, it gives government a clear two-week window to act.
3. Third, it protects the Union from being portrayed as unwilling to negotiate.
4. Fourth, it keeps members mobilised while preserving the right to resume action if government fails.
5. Fifth, it gives branches time to brief members properly and maintain internal unity.

This is how responsible labour leadership works. **We apply pressure. We engage. We secure commitment. We give a defined window. We monitor.** Then we respond based on outcome.

Sun Tzu's strategic wisdom remains relevant here; ***"The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."*** The lesson is not cowardice. The lesson is strategy. Victory is not only achieved by direct confrontation. Sometimes victory comes by forcing the other side into a position where it must act, commit, or expose itself.

Our Message to Members

Our message to members must be clear and united. We have not abandoned the struggle. We have not forgotten the years of neglect. We have not accepted injustice. We have not surrendered our demands. We have only created a defined opportunity for government to conclude what it has committed itself to conclude.

If the government honours the commitment, our members benefit. If the government fails, the Union retains the moral, legal, and organisational right to take the next necessary step. That is the message NEC must carry to the branches. Not suspicion. Not division. Not careless interpretation. Not emotional outbursts. Our members are looking up to us for direction, not confusion.

The Way Forward

Going forward, I propose that NEC should adopt the following position:

1. The suspension of the strike should be understood strictly as a tactical and conditional suspension, not a call-off of the struggle.
2. The two-week period must be strictly monitored from the effective date of suspension.
3. The FGN Expanded Tertiary Institutions Negotiation Committee must be held accountable for the commitment it made.
4. JAC should continue engagement with relevant stakeholders within the two-week window and provide timely updates to branches.
5. Branches should educate members properly, maintain mobilisation, and avoid statements that create division or weaken confidence in the Union.
6. If government fails to conclude the renegotiation process and present an acceptable offer within the agreed period, NEC should be prepared to take a firm and decisive position.

Conclusion

Comrades, history will not judge us only by how loudly we shouted. History will judge us by whether we secured results for our members. It will judge us by whether we acted with courage and wisdom. It will judge us by whether we understood the difference between emotion and strategy.

This is a time for unity. This is a time for discipline. This is a time for mature leadership. We must not allow anger to destroy strategy. We must not allow suspicion to weaken solidarity. We must not allow careless criticism to hand government an advantage.

Let us negotiate without fear. Let us fight without recklessness. Let us lead without bitterness. Let us correct without destroying. Let us speak to our members with one voice.

The struggle continues, but it must continue with wisdom, discipline, unity, and purpose.

Solidarity forever.

Comrade M. H. Ibrahim *fnipr, fnils, fciml, manupa*
National President, SSANU
National Internal Auditor, NLC
Chairman of JAC (SSANU/NASU)