

**OF MONKS AND MONKEYS:
THE WAGES OF INTEGRITY IN
NIGERIA'S POLITY**

Delivered by

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. This event is unique in many respects.

Government College, Ibadan, GCI has come of age and the inconsequential lad of 1946 is being commandeered to make his sing-song. My dubious distinction is that I almost never entered the College. To make this clear in today's polluted atmosphere of extravagant and contested claims, I must let you into the authentic story of how I came to be number 485 in my class. College numbers in GCI, at least in its early decades, were issued every year in alphabetic order. Our class of 46 commenced with 462 through to 485.

At the shortlist interview in 1945, I must have ranked twenty- fifth on the merit list and the intake was only twenty-four. So, unknown to me, I was on the wait-list in case someone did not show up. Indeed, someone failed to show up; so a frantic telegram arrived to offer me a place. I jumped at it (or more accurately my old man jumped at it for he could readily afford the £16 per annum). I shall never know who it was that could not take up his place on account of means, but I remain eternally grateful to the waywardness of fate. This meant I joined my class a few days late, and even in that short space of time a mischievous little boy named Christopher Kolade, masquerading as a senior, succeeded in making me wash his 'planks and trestle' before I discovered to my horror that we were indeed in the same class!

I was to contend with the seeming indignity of being a fee-paying student all through my course, for no matter how well you do as you progress, you remained a fee-payer once you entered as one. And vice versa. I can think of no better disincentive than to be left unrewarded through conversion to scholarship based on ongoing assessment rather than a once-for-all entrance examination.

I was to learn later that to do otherwise would have been impracticable and untidy, having regard to the fact that some of those on scholarship would have had to leave College if, through lackluster performance, their awards had been withdrawn and converted to fee-paying.

The topic we engage today, '*Of Monks and Monkeys*' reflects the cumulus in our present sky - values upturned, integrity shortchanged, discipline outraged and merit marginalised. A new dawn is upon us and each Nigerian must make some contribution to the total national effort.

We are all today proud of being GCI alumni — Scientists, Administrators, Lawyers, Judges, Doctors, Engineers and Men of Letters (one of whom, bravo to the Class of 46, is the only Nobel Laureate the country has ever had). Nevertheless, that pride does not reside only in their academic prowess or professional skills. A major area of strength is their manifest partiality to fairness, relentless vigour in the fearless pursuit of the truth, an enduring *esprit de corps* and a robust sense of honour.

First let us look at ***Truth***. There is no one in this large audience who has not at one time or the other told a little untruth (a euphemism for a lie). Psychologists are often interested in knowing what age we were when we first told our first lie. Casting my own memory back it must have been when I broke a toy and knew I would certainly be scolded - so I denied handling it.

Others are procured to lie in infancy and childhood - the typical story is for mum to tell his little boy to say to the approaching visitor that she is not at home, although she really is. The seeming immaturity of that innocent boy lays bare the truth when he says to the unsuspecting visitor:

Mummy is upstairs but asks me to tell you she is not at home!

Or consider young Morenike, who was knocked down by a vehicle whilst trying to cross a busy road. She sustains a shoulder injury and was in a sling for several weeks, followed by intensive physiotherapy to prevent a frozen shoulder. Yet her parents insisted on suing the owner-driver of the vehicle claiming damages for loss of function in that shoulder. The two lawyers, for the plaintiff and defendant, went on to cross swords in court. Morenike's lawyer had before the day fixed for hearing, advised the little girl to pretend in court that she could not lift that shoulder vertically from the day of the accident up till then. But the more astute defending counsel asked only two questions of her in the witness box:

Now Morenike, I want you to tell the court how much you could lift that shoulder before the accident, and how much thereafter?

Of course, the dictates of veracity took charge, for little did the young girl realise the trap set by the advocate. She proceeded to lift the injured arm shoulder high to demonstrate how freely she could move it before the accident and then showed the court how restricted that movement had become following the mishap. There again truth prevailed and no damages were awarded!

Nigerian society is today replete with those who have such great respect for the truth that they use it so sparingly. Being economical with the truth is now a favourite pastime both in private and in public, and we seem now to revel in it with careless abandon. Society calls a man a thief yet he dances in the public square with the head of a stolen goat. The democratic process post-29th May, seems to be bringing in its wake a series of remarkable but unforeseen, of unintended developments, events which a year or two ago might have been dismissed with a wave of the hand or at least thought so trivial as not to conjure public intention, let alone opprobrium.

Yet today we are being taken through crises of alleged breaches in veracity and a new sense of public morality appears outraged.

Morbid fear sometimes produces the mass hysteria that leads to the pursuit of untruth if only as an exercise in self-protection. Consider this classic personal example. Two years ago, I was invited to give a talk at an exclusive club here in Lagos, and I requested my hosts to choose from a menu of two topics, *The Cost of Talent or In Praise of Docility*.

Not sure of what the second topic would contain or if security merchants might be in the audience, *The Cost of Talent* was swiftly preferred. But before I lunched into the subject on the appointed day I had sought leave of an apprehensive audience to say a few words on the rejected topic.

Suppose, I went on, there was a military decree tomorrow, that all males between the ages of 30 and 35 years were to be executed before 31 December of that year, how would Nigerians react? I gave four possible options. There would be a stampede towards the border by many of the affected group before the due date. Another group would rush to the law courts to swear to an affidavit that they were either below or above that age bracket and their parents would testify vigorously as to the veracity of their statement. The third group having ensured that none in their family was so affected would then proceed to endorse the intention of the decree arguing that we had too many armed robbers and drug-pushers in our midst anyway and there was justification in decimating that particular age cohort to serve as lesson to others. The final group would develop a strategy to bribe the decree-enforcing agencies so their sons could be overlooked.

All these options show the worst in the Nigerian somatotype - The first, a plain act of cowardice to escape from the problem; the second, an attempt to formalise falsehood through illegality; the third, the sadistic selfishness of rejoicing at others misfortune and the last another of the many faces of corruption that have soaked through the entire system.

An enlightened society not cowed into submission by the implications of confronting such abject tyranny would resist it without counting the cost.

In such a process lives would almost certainly be lost but very few Nigerians would take a risk. They will remind their compatriots that discretion is the better part of valour, or that if your head is used to crack the coconut you will not be there to partake of the fruit.

No particular sector of society has a monopoly of ‘untruths.’ Truth is as much casualty with the duke as with the dustman. The only difference is that the high and mighty often conceal their nefarious practices in an intricate web of cover-ups. Eventually the bubble bursts and naked truth is exposed to the light of day.

Our next consideration is *Honesty*. I once was at a dinner party in Europe in honour of a distinguished Nigerian. The toast was awash with tributes to his high integrity and transparent honesty. A non-Nigerian walked up to me afterwards to ask if honesty was not normally expected of the average citizen in my country and questioned why we seemed to make so much song and dance of this particular virtue. Had I forgotten the story told of Socrates walking the Streets of Athens in the 5th Century B.C. holding a lighted lamp aloft though it was mid-afternoon. When challenged he confessed that he was seeking an honest man and had still to find one.

Every race and every culture appears to have its apologists and Nigeria cannot be an exception. The borderline between honesty and corruption is always a hazy one, and when sanctions are feeble both seem to thrive best. A Minister of State in the early part of this decade once exclaimed: *“When you are honest in Nigeria you feel cheated because the crooked often flaunt their loot and appear to get away with it.*

I arrived in Ikeja some years back and a uniformed officer sought to delay my exit through customs, for as soon as he sighted a package containing an Apple computer his eyes twinkled. Maximum extortion was written all over him and he could not wait to ask that I pay several thousands of naira to allow passage. This I refused as it was indeed a donation from the World Health Organization to my research programmes. The more he insisted the more I resisted and eventually I had to leave the Airport without that consignment.

I returned the following week only to meet a new officer who promptly released my incarcerated luggage without the pressure of considerations. A few days later that same gentleman turned up at the University College Hospital, UCH. His son had done the Joint Examinations Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination scored marks considerably less than the cut-off points in Medicine. He was convinced I could get the boy in (at least so he was assured as he kept repeating that I had considerable weight over admissions into Ibadan). He went on to remind me of the good turn he had done me the preceding week and inferred that one turn deserved another! I told him it was impossible but he was convinced it was possible. I had to show him the door as he could never be persuaded to the contrary. That student ended up in another Nigerian university.

Another case was that of a policeman who came up to my clinic at the UCH in the mid-90s. After he had seen me on account of his illness, I engaged him on some conversation which ran as follows:

OOA: Constable, how much do you earn a month?

PC: A little over one thousand naira, sir.

OOA: And how much do you make at road blocks.

PC: (Startled) how do you know I have been serving on the expressway for the past eighteen months? My take varies.

OOA: But averagely how much?

PC: If you must know, over two thousand naira monthly.

OOA: And how much of that do you give your boss to ensure you are posted to a road block? Graft- wise, road blocks are more lucrative than other beats.

PC: (Chuckles) how do these professors know? This is not regular. Some bosses are more demanding than others, but in my case I do not remember giving over five hundred naira in any one.

OOA: And how many children have you?

PC: Six but two of my brother's children also live with us.

OOA: This means you feed at least ten mouths regularly in your home.

PC: More than that; so how do you think a take-home pay of one thousand naira a month can look after basic family needs. Professor, I am not ashamed to admit that I am corrupt in that sense but at least I am not an armed robber!

The moral of the foregoing is that minimum wage needs a rethink to lure citizenry away from the temptation of being corrupt to make ends meet. I know for a fact that in most western world countries, poverty has a different connotation from the abject lack of means in our own environment. An unemployed may be penniless today in London, but in most cases it is often partly because he is irresponsible or lazy and has frittered away his social security allowances on triviality. He may be housed virtually free-of-charge in a council flat, the National Health Service covers his basic health needs, his children are not denied basic education and he may even have a television set!

The poor Dugbe elderly lady trundling from day to day from home to a roadside stall has all her worldly possession displayed on a wide tray - trebor, kola nuts, matches, cashew nuts in cellophane sachets and batteries forever exposed to sunlight and too feeble to illuminate. All these amount to less than five hundred naira and she will be lucky to make a ten percent profit on these items at the close of day. With such marginal gains a taxi ride back home becomes a luxury and stopping in the market to pick up a few items for supper becomes a nightmare.

That is the face of poverty as we know it in today's Nigeria. Yet this needs not be so for ours is a country so full of potential and resources, both human and material. We have, in the words of Reverend Ploughman, been throwing away with the shovel what our forefathers gathered by the rake.

Corruption is hydra-headed; there are many facts to it in public and private life. It takes the forms of cheating, looting sleeze, 419, graft, over invoicing, kola, consideration brown envelopes, etc — all these being characterised by receiving in response to services rendered or in expectation thereof or downright fraud. Then there is corruption that stems from the exercise of undue or unfair influence - through, for instance, forcing square pegs into round holes, making extravagant claims of one's achievements, or procuring undeserved advantage. Yet ours was a society that once knew little or no guile.

The village farmer displayed his yams, plantain, pawpaw, pineapple and oranges at the crossroads leaving word with a tender juvenile as to how much each item costs. Passers-by would pick the right amount for the right price and leave the money practically unattended. The farmer returns to the spot at the end of the day to collect his sales. Nowadays both fruit and money will disappear and the juvenile may even be kidnapped.

Nearer home, the Cambridge School Certificate Examination papers used to be sent by registered post from Britain to Nigeria for many decades before 1960. The Principal's Office Messenger would then by himself go to the Post Office to collect this, with other letters, and bring them back to College intact. The invigilator then in full glare of the candidates breaks the red sealing wax, opens the package and the question papers were then distributed. This act would be followed religiously subject by subject until the entire examination is concluded.

Again today there is no question of sending such papers through the post and even if it ever arrives through the postbox it is in a tampered state and the messenger who collects it and makes it a regular ritual would have built a house on his perennial takes.

Such has been the magnitude of decadence in our values system that it has virtually become an aspect of our national life.

It is fashionable today to put all the blame for all our woes on an inept and readily corruptible military governance. What we conveniently overlook is how civilians have aided and abetted them, and in many instances how they were the thinkers and frontiers for those whose capacity to “acquire” was limitless. The appetite simply grew with feeding.

I make bold to assert that the pilfering or looting indices (depending on the size) of military and civilian populace are comparable and that if there was a means of detecting what wrong *doing each and everyone* has perpetrated on Nigeria’s traumatised corpus these past four decades there would be little to choose between them.

We all have skeletons in the cupboard and in keeping with the eleventh commandment - Thou shalt not be found out - we adopt a ‘holier-than-thou’ posture. Contemporary events are already proving the African adage that every day may appear to favour the thief but one day will be adequate to favour the owner.

The bottom-line to the issue of combating corruption is prompt and appropriate sanction. Wrongdoing left unchecked festers like a sore. Nigerian society still has to learn to reward virtue and punish vice. Many countries have different ways of dealing with vice. In mid-East societies, arm amputation is a well-known method; in other lands it can be summary execution. Prescribed sanctions, in our own case, must range beyond mere confiscation of property and freezing of funds in banks.

In any event, we shall never know how much a crooked individual has stashed away.

Occasionally he himself may not keep adequate records of his loot and a smart foreign Bank Manager may take advantage of such lapses in memory or delinquency in accounting. If all the punishment a man gets for stealing ten million dollars is that barely half of this vast amount is recovered and that he will live happily thereafter with the hidden residuum, there will be no lessons learnt. Once you know you can always get away with significant portions of your loot, you will always be tempted to be corrupt.

Peer sanction must also be applied to perpetrators of evil acts for it is a sure way of reminding the villain that crime does not pay.

Nigerian society must cultivate a genuine disdain for instant, unexplained wealth and hold in contempt those who are manifest frontiers and swindlers.

By the law of cursedness these are the very people society extols, the so-called 'movers and shakers'. Exposure of fraud in any shape or form must be pursued in order to purify the process, not by the conventional shroud of secrecy of "names withheld".

A sense of honour is another aspect of the enterprise of self-discovery and realisation. A Japanese boy of eleven returned home after school and his mother found in his pocket a pencil that belonged elsewhere. She admonished the little boy and bade him to return the pencil first thing the following morning. The boy got to school the next day only to find his mates had been looking everywhere for the pencil and when he produced the pencil, he was immediately labelled thief. No amount of entreaty to explain that the act was inadvertent would satisfy his mates. His honour had been impugned and there was no way he could live down the stigma. He committed suicide.

It can be argued that it was an extreme reaction to a trivial accusation, but even at that tender age the boy already knew what honour entailed and felt he had brought an indelible stain on his family name.

Many mothers in our own part of the world will not scold their children for being unknowingly light-fingered. And even when this lapse is discovered they will say taking a pencil home is not a big deal as they can buy half a-dozen in one swoop and have them distributed to the class. Such mothers thus miss the entire point - it is not the cost but the possible disgrace of being found guilty of pilfering. The fracture of discipline at home leads to laxity in supervision and a steady decline in values. These inadequacies are soon reflected in the school's attitude to what is proper and what is not acceptable.

At seventy years, we must now reflect on our beloved school. My lecture was originally to be titled "The Rise and Fall of GCI," but I thought that too traumatic. In any event, it would have been fairer to caption it 'The Rise and Fall of Secondary Education in Nigeria' for the reverses of fortune of GCI are part and parcel of a general decay within the educational industry. Let us take a cursory look at the problems of secondary education in Nigeria today. They can be summarised as follows:

- (i) Low transition rate.
- (ii) Population explosion.
- (iii) Class sizes.
- (iv) Low morale of teachers.
- (v) Poor infrastructure and Learning Resource

(vi) Flagging Discipline

(vii) An overloaded and overheated curriculum.

For the third National Development Plan a transition rate (Primary to Secondary) had a figure of 40 percent but States have varied considerably. Sokoto state has one of the lowest (Less than 15percent) and Imo the highest (51 percent). Ten years ago the national average transition rate was a little over 40 percent. But enrolment into the Primary School System correlates with transition into Junior Secondary School (JSS). It was therefore not by chance that Sokoto was chosen recently as the venue for a relaunch of Universal Primary Education (UPE) (which is now renamed Universal Basic Education (UBE) to accommodate JSS 1-3 and Adult Literacy and Numeracy.

Existing facilities in JSS are stretched to the limit (classrooms, laboratories, libraries, workshops, etc are bursting at the seam). Class sizes have become too unwieldy. In my days the entire school was 144 (with 24 in each class). Today each year has several times the entire School population in the 40s. Yet the National Education Policy had prescribed not more than 70 pupils per class to ensure optimal teacher/pupil ratio.

Low morale of teachers is a major impediment to good function. We are all witnesses to the current spate of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) unrest consequent on late payments of teachers' salaries. It was heartening to learn in the news only a few days ago that the backlog is now being speedily cleared but the concomitant lack of basic teaching resource material and overcrowded classes will still vitiate optimal teacher performance and make them unfulfilled even though their salaries are paid.

Today many schools are so understaffed that they depend on the generosity of Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) to hire teachers especially in the science subjects.

The curriculum must be de-congested as it is no longer defensible to expect a JSS 1 pupil to take up to 14 subjects, including Introduction to Technology and two pre-vocational subjects.

The impoverished condition of most State Schools (including GCI) has led to increasing demand for admission to other schools owned and better funded by the Federal Government (Fed. Secondary Schools, Army, Navy, Air Force and Police Children Schools, Gifted Children). It is strange, for instance, that FSS students drawn from all 50 odd secondary schools represent less than 5percent of the entire Secondary School population in the country. Then there are the spate of private secondary schools, some of them ruinously expensive but providing facilities more comprehensive and congenial than even the best of public schools. I suspect the majority of us in this audience today will have our children and grand-children in such schools and I must not embarrass old GCI alumni by asking how many of their own descendants have been to or are presently in GCI. The response would be dismal.

Way back in 1967, following the outcry of NUT regarding the disparity between the salaries and conditions of service of teachers in the civil service and in voluntary agency schools, the Federal Government set up the Asabia Commission which sought to abolish the disparities and advocated take-over of secondary schools by the State Governments.

The practical logistics of the exercise and the inadequacies of funding have worked hardship of the smooth implementation of the handover, and many years later there is a groundswell of agitation to hand the voluntary agency schools back to their proprietors. The State Government Colleges are all in pathetic disrepair.

The GCIOBA has in the past two decades been living through the nightmare of pouring sentiment, goodwill and material resource down what appears to be a bottomless pit. The more you give, the less you see, to the extent that at some point it became obvious that an alternative College was the only way to redeem the old pomp, glory, discipline and academic muscle of our alma mater. We as Old Boys are not short of enthusiasm or even the wherewithal to make the school great, but the forces in the negative appear formidable. The physical status of old Grier and Swanston Houses and the historic orchard in-between, have robbed many of us of the nostalgia we had nurtured in the 50s and 60s, and these Houses are now only a shade different from the Roman ruins of the first millennium!

The New National Policy on Education says the education of the heart should be done through moral and religious instruction studies and practices of the religions, biographies of great people, the discipline of games and team work, role playing, training in citizenship; qualities of fair play, honesty, respect for opposing opinions and views, public spiritedness, self-denial sacrifice, youth work, etc.

These were the attributes that made GCI what it was in the 30s through to the 60s. Some of the greatest exponents of Human Rights, Judicial Activism, and Public Transparency in Nigeria today are products of our noble heritage. A new political dispensation, the present dawn of democracy invites us to address the foregoing - concerns with a new freshness of approach and determination.

We have finally discovered that the hood does not make the monk and that it might indeed make a monkey of us unless we take the trouble now to stop, ponder and change course whilst we are still willing and able.

At 70, Omar Khayyam wrote in the 12th century:

Tomorrow I will haul down the flag of hypocrisy. I will devote my grey hair to wine, my life's span has reached seventy, If I do not enjoy myself now, when shall I?

Several millennia afterwards (1870), Emerson writing on Old Age, Society and Solitude revealed:

We had a judge in Massachusetts who at 60 proposed to resign, alleging that he perceived a certain decay in his faculties. He was dissuaded by his friends on account of the public convenience at that time. At 70 it was hinted to him that it was time to retire, but he now replied that he thought his judgment as robust and all his facilities as good as ever they were.

It is in order, in spite of this spectacle of premature ageing, to congratulate GCI for a remarkable catalogue of achievements these years. Institutions are worth no more than those who work them, brick and mortar are only part of the enduring scenario of excellence. But colleges such as the famous one in Apatanga were founded in perpetuity even at the time of the great global depression.

Edward Young reminds us that... *Our birth is nothing but our death begun.*

Let us continue to uphold the best traditions and loftiest ideals of GCI in spite of the present buffeting storms. Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to specially say to us all. Happy Annual Reunion.

ABOUT THE LECTURER

Professor Oladipo Akinkugbe, *MD, D.Phil, FRCP, FWACP, FAS, NNOM;CON, Officier de l'Ordre National de La Republique de Cote d'Ivoire*, is one of the world's most distinguished and respected physicians and intellectuals.

Professor Akinkugbe is the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin; former Vice-Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University; former visiting Professor of Medicine at Harvard University; former Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council of the University of Port Harcourt as well as Emeritus Professor of Medicine, University of Ibadan.

He was born in Ondo, capital of Ondo State in South Western Nigeria on 17th July, 1933. His father who was a chemist and druggist, belonged to an impressive family tree in Ondo traceable and connected in some distant past to the marble rich clan of Igbeti in Oyo State.

He grew up in a Christian home, his father being a People's Warden at St. Stephen's Church and a Synod Delegate for several years. The regular routine of school, choir practice, Sunday's Devotional Worship, Sunday School, evening service and other such engagements, left him with little time for frivolities after school. However, whenever the opportunity presented itself, young Oladipo ever failed to enjoy his juvenile frisk and frolic, sometimes with disastrous consequences.

He entered Ondo Boys High School in 1944. However, science subjects were not counted among the strong point of OBHS, and inspired by the notes he saw in physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics, belonging to a boy who was attending another school outside of Ondo, young Oladipo decided to take entrance examination into Government College, Ibadan.

He made it to the interview stage, where he missed admission by one place. His dreams seemed shattered, but providence came promptly to his aid as one of the admitted fee-paying students could not take up his own offer. He was then called up from the waiting list.

Young Oladipo had a smooth sail through GCI, where he established himself as an undisputed leader in the science subjects, conceding English and literature to Wole Soyinka and Christopher Kolade. After a brilliant secondary school career, he took entrance examination and gained admission into the University College Ibadan in 1951, to begin his study of Medicine.

Here he proved himself, once again as a serious student, balancing academics with social and extra-curricular activities. After passing his second MB examination in 1955, he was posted to University of London [the Royal London Hospital] for his clinical studies, where in 1958, he obtained his MBBS of London without any skirmishes.

After completing a six months internship at the London Hospital, Being a Western Region government scholar, Dr. Oladipo Akinkugbe came back to Nigeria in 1961 and took appointment with Government Specialist Hospital, Adeoyo, Ibadan. But later that year he went back to England to do his D.phil. programme in Oxford. On successful completion, he returned to Nigeria to take up lectureship at the Department of Medicine University of Ibadan in January 1965.

Thus began Professor Akinkugbe's brilliant academic career during which he became Professor of Medicine in 1968, Dean Medicine 1970 — 74 and Head of Medicine 1972. Taking special interest in Hypertension and Kidney diseases, he has made tremendous contributions in these areas.

He has attended over one hundred national and international professional, scientific, educational and health conferences, in the past forty years, in all the continents of the globe. He has made presentations in many of these conferences; published many authoritative works, and received numerous awards. He is a member and fellow of over twenty international organisations, societies and institutions.

Professor Akinkugbe studied and taught at some of the world's most prestigious universities including the University of London, Balliol College University of Oxford, England and Harvard Medical School Boston, USA.

Prior to joining Vesta Healthcare Partners, Professor Akinkugbe was Chairman of the Presidential Projects Implementation Committee (PPIC) on refurbishing of Teaching Hospitals in Nigeria. He was also a former Chairman of the Board of Management of University College Hospital Ibadan, Nigeria and one-time Chairman of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board.

He has also served as Pro Chancellor, University of Port Harcourt. He was a Former Vice Chancellor, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, a Former Vice Chancellor, University of Ilorin; and a Former Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ibadan.

Professor Akinkugbe has received several awards including the Boehringer Ingelheim Award of the International Society of Hypertension. He is a member of World Health Organisation (WHO) Technical Advisory Committee on Health Research and Secretary of WHO Technical Discussions on University and Health for All.

He is married with two sons.