

AN invitation to deliver a convocation lecture at Nigeria's premier University of Ilorin (Unilorin) posed a dilemma with the Ebola epidemic raging in West Africa.

Unilorin held its 30th convocation last week. Unlike most Malaysian universities which commemorate their convocation by organising Pesta Konvo — a carnival-like expo — universities in Nigeria also hold a special intellectual discourse involving members of the university community and the public. This tradition is to tap into the “crème of intelligentsia” from both the local and global arena to enrich knowledge and showcase the fact that a true university is universal.

Unilorin invites luminaries from all corners of the world, and I am privileged to be the first speaker from Malaysia — indeed Asia — in my capacity as president of the International Association of Universities. Unilorin vice chancellor Professor A.G. Ambali said in recent years the university “has committed to invit-

Bridging Malaysia-Nigeria higher education

ing the best as its convocation lecturers”.

The lectures, however, are not an isolated strategy as evident from the tertiary institution's climb to be the top university this year, following through from former vice chancellor Professor I. Oloyede's efforts.

Unilorin also premiered a special theatre programme presented by the Department of Performing Arts for both the campus community and the public to commemorate the convocation ceremony.

Directed by Dr Abdul Rasheed Adeoye, the vibrant high quality show, themed anti-violence and titled *The Killers*, unmasked the

multifarious criminal tendencies that have veered us off the road to much sought after peace in society. Featuring talented students, the entertaining and educational *The Killers* focuses on concerns of the greater community.

Indeed, the convocation lecture and special theatre are a clear indication of the intent of the university to position itself as an important seat of learning which has the pulse of the community at its fingertips, intellectually and culturally.

Ambali elaborated on the achievements of the university at a Press briefing attended by some 30 people covering the entire media spectrum. One of the ongoing projects was a “massive 10,000-hectare oil palm plantation”.

This was inspired in part by the success of the oil palm sector driven by Malaysia which reportedly

“took the seedling from Nigeria a few decades ago”. In 2012, Malaysia exported some 24 trillion metric tonnes of oil palm, largely to the US, Europe, China and India.

And it has earned the country about £20 billion (RM105 billion), equivalent to more than 5.3 trillion Naira, the Nigeria currency. On the contrary, Nigeria has to import 500,000 metric tonnes of oil palm.

The oil palm project was officially launched by the Finance Minister and Coordinating Minister of Economy Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala on campus. He said: “I salute you for your serious-mindedness and I say that you are an example for other universities to emulate.” It is worthy to note that Unilorin has also successfully embarked on a teak plantation project on campus as an investment.

This bold move forward is sup-

plemented with a slew of infrastructure development, including state-of-the-art transdisciplinary centralised laboratory facilities, on campus. This is to allow the sharing of the most up-to-date equipment while encouraging teamwork in the university. This is indeed timely as the university is said to be fast “emerging as a mega-institution where several programmes are offered in response to the higher education needs in the 21st century”. It aims to be *the* institution for quality higher education. There is, no doubt, that it has the capacity to chart a great new course for the future.

In light of the recent Malaysia-Africa Education Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Unilorin is laying the ground for future collaborations. Incidentally, the World Health Organisation declared Nigeria Ebola-free on Oct 20.



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