

**Opening address delivered by the founder and Board Chair, BOSA, of the Integrated Health for All Foundation on the occasion of Foundation's 3<sup>rd</sup> End-of-Year Recognition forum, January 15, 2011, IHAF HQ Secretariat, Yaounde Cameroon**

**Theme: Reaching Out to the Needy in Local Community**

**Salutations:**

I bring you greetings from the Board of Supervisory Authorities (BOSA) of our Foundation on this very memorable occasion. I bring you special salutations from your peers particularly in other area offices of the Foundation in the country and abroad. I want to first thank you Ms. Anne-Chantal Bissong (Special rep of British Higher Commissioner, Yaounde), Mr Njuh Louis Ndam (Founder and President of Commonwealth Students Union), Mr Njack Linus (Director of Goldstar Entertainment), and Mr Tebang Francis (Director of Traitement des Projets Speciaux) for honouring our invitation to join us in this occasion this year. I do not take this job lightly, as I know that where I am standing right now is fertile ground. In other words, you guys and our Foundation are at a stage in your life where you can undertake and or absorb anything you want to, and pretty rapidly without much effort. And thank you Mr Agejo Patrick, Ekuri Daniel, Abia John, Mekole Judith, Eke Sylvester and Nyakuna Vano for all your work in making sure that the Headquarters Secretariat of the Foundation runs smoothly and that today is a special day for members, volunteers and interns.

**Recognition:**

I want to also recognise my wife Eucharria and my daughter Faith who are here with me. People have asked me how I am able to work with universities of Yaounde I & BUST and pretty much full time at our Foundation; the answer is simple: I have a wonderful partner and friend in my wife. She is sort of a behind the scenes kind of person. She manages the home front while I am on travel abroad and away on business or in communities during our philanthropic trips. Indeed an amazing woman. And my daughter too, I recognize her for her persistence, understanding and moral support to our Foundation in the year 2009. She is the *brain child of our proper project planning and management for development workshop (PPPMD) and project management and leadership internship programme (PMLIP)*.

**A special day for our Foundation and for everyone**

This is also a very special day for you members, volunteers and interns in distinguished positions. I can assure you that goodwill people in communities and elsewhere are extremely proud of your achievements as a Foundation.

I bet, there are so many things rising through your mind now. I bet you want to know what's next for you in the rungs of the ladder of the Foundation to higher heights! What does the future hold? Did I work hard enough? Is my performance in the year 2010 been good enough to be recognized in different respects? I can

assure you, that while these are all good and important questions, you probably needed to have been asking yourself these questions on daily basis for a very long time. Recall, I know that I am still asking those questions of myself even now.

### **Origination address: Local Community outreach**

I chose to talk to you today about *local community outreach* or *Reaching out to the Local community*, mostly because it is the story of my life and how my local community experience has shaped my life, my work and made me who I am today.

### **The dream/vision:**

There is a story that was told few years ago, of a graduate who was smart at school emerging as best student in his school at the Advanced level, completed his undergraduate course in record time which earned him the prestigious one in five places out of over 300 applicants for a master's program that he completed with distinctions. By the time, he had picked up moral lessons of life: for example "*Do on to others what you want others do to you*" (from a preacher in a Church in Koh-Ngwo since when he was in Form two), which Dr. Helen Keller rightly said and I quote "Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained". One more example, "*sharing with others whom nothing is expected in turn and for no secondary motives, is the way to serving God without bias*". Upon completion of his undergraduate studies and with much zeal to share and help others i.e. for local community outreach he took to Heifer International – HQ Office Bamenda. Probably based on his age at the time as well as his performances, he was advised by the then Regional Rep of Heifer International, Late Dr Njwe, to undertake a masters' program, and I quote "You will teach in the University and I will readily hire your services with us on at least 320,000Fcf for a start". Immediately the then BSc holder enrolled for a Masters' course where he had plenty of exposure to people's living conditions in local communities in Littoral, South West and North West Regions of Cameroon. After graduation, as proclaimed he started teaching at Universities in Buea and Bamenda. Being academically ripe for the "big salary" and with ample exposure to situations in local communities, unfortunately Dr Njwe died (May his soul rest in peace), thus the enthusiastic graduate could not work in an NGO.

Coming from an average family where care, love and sharing are intuitive characteristics, and considering the little boy's exposure to people's living conditions as well as his vision, he decided to brave the challenge and initiated a humanitarian organization called *Integrated Health for All Foundation*, which is the reason why we are here today. Thank you folks for the esteem to which you regard this Foundation and the immense efforts you make towards achieving the Foundation's objectives by the slogan "*helping people help themselves via prevention & control (P&C) and project & development (P&D)*". I appreciate every bit of time you dedicate to ensure welfare for our brothers and sisters in local communities in Cameroon.

Indeed the then young graduate, then a little boy, is me. Because I believed in myself and my vision, our Foundation, has helped so many orphans and other minorities, families and communities; as well as many other associations (NGOs or civil society organizations) in Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria; – supplying moral and materials, building capacities, and bringing health care information to them.

### **Morals of the story**

The moral of this short story is for you to dream big. *“Have a vision have conviction and pursue it, success will be yours”*. *“It is how much faith you have in yourself and not your financial limitations that determine your future”*. Recall, the legendary hero Dr Martin Luther King dreamed big. And because of him, so many people are now able to reach their potential.

And to our guest, please be mindful that as I pursue my dream and have it come true, it has not been without criticisms, advise, supports, torments here and there, and off course love from friends and dear once. So too are members, volunteers and interns of the Foundation expecting much moral support and otherwise from you.

### **Passion**

I am probably known more for my philanthropy and outreach work to the local community than the research and teaching works I do at Universities. My works at Universities are equally important – helping to develop solutions to basic health problems and training young Cameroonians. But people tend to gravitate more towards initiatives that they perceive to bring immediate relief to the poor and needy. So whether I like it or not, I am now one of the go-to persons for questions that relate to philanthropy, health care/education in Central and West Africa. It is almost like being an expert on education, nutrition and health care in these regions. And truly, that is my passion. As you go through life, no matter what profession you finally choose, ask yourself: *What is my passion?* Discover it and nurture it. Make it part of your life and it will make you both a complete person and a resource for that attribute. And this will separate you from others, making you pretty important, wherever you find yourself.

### **Community Service:**

*Your services to humanity remain the only true bible about you. I do believe that every man created by God is the same, our characters made us different. Your service to humanity differentiates you a lot from other people and is a testament of your character.* Again, I quote from legendary Martin Luther King *“THIS IS THE JUDGMENT, WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR OTHERS?”*(Montgomery Alabama in August of 1957). Martin Luther King suggested that for one to start living fully, one must rise above our individual concerns to the broader concerns of humanity. These are services you are doing without any compensation. It also gives you so much

joy to see that the little that you are doing is changing lives. Oh yes it is true as confirmed by Dr. Helen Keller rightly said and I quote “Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other’s welfare, social justice can never be attained”. In my many trips to local communities, I couldn’t tell you how much my life has been touched and changed by the work our Foundation is doing. It is better imagined than described. It definitely has made me, just like any other IHAFer, a better person. You have to experience it yourself. And that is what makes it seem so easy for those of us that spend countless hours doing voluntary community services. Because the joy and peace that it gives us far outweighs the time, effort and money that we put in

### **Some goodwill quotes and remarks:**

The President of Commonwealth Students Union Cameroon, Njuh Louis Ndong, on Tuesday, August 4, 2009 1:50 PM, wrote and I quote: *“Well i think your effort is quite enormous and i must thank you on behalf of all those who might not have had the time and privilege to go through a piece of work put in place by very fine hands and laurdable brains. Saintliness/sainthood is not inherited but it is on meritocracy. You are a saint IHAF and we need you to stay”*.

The Coordinator of the Project Planning and Management Course in PAID-WA Komme Epie, on Tuesday, July 7, 2009 9:56 PM, wrote and I quote: *“Its’ with profound pleasure to learn about a dream being transformed to reality. As a matter of fact, i want to say a **big thank** to you guys in your endeavour to push this country ahead”*

Etah Shilton of the Bamenda University of Science and Technology, described you on guest book as “Ambassadors and that God Almighty has a time to reward you.

Nworgu Chigozirim said on September 13th, 2010 9:09am, and I quote “ i believe the only route to an enduring world peace is true understanding and tolerance, irrespective of cultural and religious affiliations”.

Denis Jato said and I quote “crowd equals to confusion”.

Thus never mind how few we may be our outcome is what matters, recall in physics apply small force and do much work using machines.

Daniel Ekuri, has the conviction something big is near, and so advise you all to wait and see

### **Networking:**

The last thing I want to definitely touch on is the power of networking. Yes even this moment onwards you should begin to build your own network – know more people and make more partners. The more serious minded folks you know, the more opportunities will come your way and by extension our Foundation. Not just people in Yaounde, but people around the country and the world. I know that the best and long lasting relationships are when you are young, when there is no underlying agenda to relationships and friends you make. Notwithstanding, at your ages best relationships are developed during informal discussions at meetings, workshops or ceremonies like this. I am aware that our Foundation organized picnics, seminars, field trips and workshops in several parts of the country. That is awesome. Not many NGO workers have had that kind of opportunity. Keep in touch with the friends you made in those places. In the ICT world nowadays, there is no excuse not to keep in touch. You can email, text, skype, Facebook, and twitter your friends- with Foundational guidance in some cases off course. And I am sure that there is yet another medium going to come out in the near future considering our numerous projects released for possibilities of funding. All these are good ways in keeping in touch, but I will admit to you that none of these are better than the good old letter writing and using our good old postal service. It says 2 things of you- 1: that you care so much that you took time to write and mail a letter and 2: you care about the Cameroon economy- buying stamps stimulates our economy! So wherever you find yourself, network and reach out to good successful people. This is one of the ways to thrive and be successful in life and in your work.

**Conclusion:**

To wrap off, dream big, have faith in oneself, convert your dream into something you are passionate about achieving, build your character by honouring our creator/savior and then others and build relationships with peoples. Can somebody say “Yes We Can”. Yes you can do all these by partnering with your colleagues and our Foundation. Effective partnership with them will distinguish you from many and position you for a very successful life.

Thank you for your kind attention!

**About Founder:**

*Wilfred A. Abia is the Founder, Chief Executive Officer and Board Chair of IHAF; and also Lecturer at the Bamenda University of Science and Technology (BUST); and also Part-time Teacher and Research Assistant at the University of Yaounde I, Cameroon. Outside Humanitarianism, he is a researcher and winner of the 2009 junior toxicologist award (developing countries) in Sun City South Africa. He is married to Eucharica and happily they have 3 kids Merilyn, Faith and Wilria.*