

# **THE MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION**



**ADDRESS**

**BY**

**DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM  
CHAIRMAN OF THE MWALIMU NYERERE FOUNDATION**

**AT THE**

**CHARITY DINNER ON "CANCER CARE IN AFRICA":  
ORGANIZED BY THE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION OF  
NIGERIAN SPECIALISTS AND GENERAL PRACTITIONERS  
IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

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London  
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# **“CANCER CARE IN AFRICA”**

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**Mr. Chairman**

**President of MANSAG**

**Dr. Olu Oban,**

**Your Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Let me at the outset, state how grateful I am to be invited by **MANSAG** to address such a distinguished gathering of eminent specialists in allied medical fields and practitioners in the field of medicine as well as many distinguished personalities from within and outside the Continent.

Your presence here tonight, is an eloquent testimony of your commitment to our common endeavour of joining together in

mobilizing support and resources and above all building awareness in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the World towards the enhancement of Africa's efforts to tackle the ever persisting problems associated to cancer care. This is a vivid demonstration of your sensitivity and concern with the plight of the continent.

I wish to pay a well-deserved tribute to **MANSAG** for this important and timely initiative. It is my hope that Africans of all walks of life in the Diaspora and especially those equipped with various talents and resources will follow the example set by **MANSAG** this evening.

The African continent is bedevilled with many crises both man made and natural. They range from conflict situations and natural disasters to killer diseases like MALARIA, AIDS, TUBERCULOSIS and associated diseases. Paradoxically, despite the enormous strides made in the field of science and technology, ignorance and poverty still engulf a large proportion of the human race and disease, old and new, continue to ravage large populations of Africa.

In developing countries, today, approximately 3.4 million people, mostly children, die each year of water related diseases and millions from malaria alone. In 1999, there were 5.4 million new cases of AIDS (4 million of whom were living in Sub-Saharan Africa) and 8.4 million new cases of tuberculosis, while in the year 2000 there were 10 million new cases of cancer. The sheer scale of the human misery caused by these diseases, which is predicted to increase dramatically with time is incomprehensible. For example, cancer cases are estimated to reach 20 million within a few years in both developed and developing countries. Tanzania alone has an estimate of 100/100,000 living with cancer with about 21,000 new cancer cases per annum. In the context of other non-communicable diseases in Tanzania, cancer is the second commonest cause of death and one of the top causes of morbidity. With these predicaments, we could ask ourselves as to how can we bring the benefit of science and technology to the huge fraction of the African population that presently has little or no access to them.



Fighting cancer is not a single process. It requires application of a broad range of approaches to its prevention, treatment, and care. This in turn, must be managed by highly trained, committed teams of professionals underpinned with a strong political will to commit the required resources. Indeed, fighting cancer is costly. It attracts little attention as a health problem in the poorest, heavily indebted countries, particularly in Africa, which are forced to focus all the available resources on meeting grassroots problems of water, education, poverty alleviation to say nothing of the major pandemics that continue to afflict the continent and decimate its people.

Given these circumstances what then can be done to address the issue of Cancer Care and treatment in our continent? In my view it is important to improve medical and technical means to increase information and, most of all, eradicate ignorance of cancer through promoting greater public access to information, better psychosocial support for patients, better planning/funding and to promote early detection through better screening as well as health care staff in-service training. This is where organisations such as **MANSAG** are

crucial to the development of an effective strategy for research, prevention, treatment, human health capital development and cancer control in Africa. To achieve this **MANSAG** and similar institutions within and outside the continent need the concerted support of scientists, health care providers, individuals who are working in cancer and or cancer-related fields.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, which has been working with 20 African countries to improve standard of safety and effectiveness in clinical radiotherapy services for the most commonly diagnosed cancers; such as breast, cervix, head/neck and HIV-related carcinomas has observed that each year, an estimated 5 million new patients require radiation therapy per year. These huge numbers of patients keep increasing because of increasing life expectancy rates. Yet in Africa there are relatively very few fully functional radiotherapy machines in operation.

Indeed, we survey the situation in Africa, we inevitably note that cancer control is sub-optimal, lacking research, training and

funding. We miss unique opportunities that exist in developed countries for increasing our knowledge of the cause of cancer and for identifying predisposing factors. This is precisely why the continent needs not only to mobilize its own internal resources and use them wisely, but also needs the support of the international community to get on with the task of combating cancer and all its ramifications. This is one of the reasons why **MANSAG**'s initiative to host the charity Fundraising dinner is most timely because if we rise to the occasion, our gathering here tonight would be a significant step towards strengthening the regional infrastructure and promoting human resources development especially bearing in mind that **MANSAG** comprise very competent and qualified professionals who can make an invaluable contribution to addressing this challenge.

Cancer poses a great challenge to all of us. It is a killer disease that needs to be dealt with urgently. We all have the memories of cancer taking toll on our beloved brothers and sisters in the continent including some of Africa's illustrious sons – foremost Pan Africanists and great statesmen. On a very personal level in the

course of the last nine months I have lost two of my younger sisters in succession to this deadly disease. Evidently, we need to take the challenge of cancer seriously.

Scientific studies show that cardiovascular diseases, degenerative diseases and cancer are on the increase and account for 23 percent of all fatalities. Many oncologists believe that a significant percentage of about 25 to 30 percent of cancers could be prevented or cured if we use the knowledge that we already have to its maximum potential. At the same time, new information from research activities needs to be evaluated, disseminated and incorporated into clinical practices taking into account varying operative environments. It is a truism, that fighting cancer with better facilities, well informed background about all contemporaries of cancer, its early detection, etc, we may save many lives.

I began my address by observing that Africa is faced with formidable crises both natural and manmade. Let me now conclude by stressing the obvious. This is that strenuous efforts are being



made within the continent to confront and overcome those formidable challenges. Many African leaders and civil society are actively engaged in conflict prevention, management and resolution. More determined efforts are being made to combat killer diseases. I can testify to this having spent a greater part of my life dealing with African problems and especially so during the 12 years, that I served as Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity. But, I can also testify that one of the major constraints facing the continent in dealing with these crisis and challenges is, as I said earlier, the paucity of resources. Funds and in some cases, human resources are needed to buttress Africa's determination to get out of the morass of perpetual crisis, some of which are brought about by the inherent consequences of poverty and underdevelopment.

This function tonight by the Medical Association of Nigeria Specialists and General Practitioners is a great boost to the efforts being made in the Continent to fight cancer. This is a truly inspiring initiative. I would like to appeal to the invitees and those not present but no less concern to support **MANSAG's** efforts. Let me add that it

is particularly noteworthy that this event is taking place on the eve of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Africa Day – May 25 – tomorrow – the day the OAU was established. It is in my opinion, one of the most fitting ways to mark this historic occasion.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, I would finally urge you to support **MANSAG** in cash and or in kind to achieve the noble objective of fundraising for cancer care in Africa.

I thank you for your attention.