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Engr. Kashim A. Ali
When humanity meets engineering

From the Desk of Editorial/Lifestyle Director



From how gracious he responded to my calls for an interview appointment and the manner he received me for the incisive interview including taking 'orders' for the photo session, one could easily tell that Engineer Kashim A. Ali, is not only a man with a quiet mien, he is a rare breed of a gentleman. A Fellow and Past President of the Nigerian Society of Engineers, Engr. Ali spends his time discharging his duties as the President of the Council of Registered

Engineers of Nigeria and as a partner at Impact Engineering LTD, a consultancy based engineering firm into civil, water resources and project management. A committed social worker, he holds the traditional titles of Olimene Ata Igala and Galadiman Ankpa presently. The former civil servant tells the Editorial/Lifestyle director, Nkarenyi Ukonu, about his work in COREN, while also unveiling his political side among other issues he is most passionate about.

Engr. Kashim A. Ali

When humanity meets Engineering

Your second tenure as COREN president will come to an end next year. Most people don't enjoy the luxury of re-election. Why do you think you will be given the chance for a second term?

It is an expression of confidence in me by my colleagues and also because my colleagues felt that it would be best I complete a project that was started shortly after I came in the first time. The project is still on and will be likely rounded up by next year. The third reason may probably be providence.

Is there room for continuation after your second tenure ends?

No and even if there was, I won't want to continue because it is a very tasking job; intellectually, physically. Exhaustion comes from doing this work. But because it is in service of the nation and the engineering profession, one has to also put in one's best. One can't continue to work with that level of diligence for too long. Again, after my second tenure ends, whatever ideas that I came on board with, one would have been able to completely deal with them otherwise, someone else can continue with it.



What made you vie for the position in the first place?

I did because I had been on the council for a while and knew a few of the issues that we had that were impeding the growth of the profession and I had my concerns. I talked continuously about them and felt that if given the opportunity, perhaps, it would be easier to get my colleagues to help me achieve those things. One area I focused on was how to market the engineering personnel in Nigeria. I didn't think we were as bad as some people painted us. I wanted to disprove that notion and prove that we are good.

What was responsible for such negative assumptions?

It was an assumption that people were made to believe, that we are not as good as the so called experts from abroad. And so we needed to show that we were not what they described us to be and that we are indeed as competent as the so called expatriates. We needed to belong to a certain club to show that we have arrived in terms of the capacity to practice engineering. We are working on that because any country that is a member of that club is assumed to have attained the excellence in engineering practice. Also there have been visits to

our engineering faculties, interactions with some engineers and this club that we want to be a part of, are convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that we are indeed qualified. We have made all our submissions and we are proceeding to apply to be members of that organization.

What have you done specifically since you assumed duty to change this perception?

The first thing we did was to have an assemblage of all the deans of the faculty of engineering in Nigerian universities look at the curricula of engineering education in Nigeria. We held a workshop where we looked at the curriculum and compared it with what is obtainable internationally. We saw areas we needed to upgrade and did so and subjected it to international review. We got UNESCO to be part of the review and the result was that it is at par with any standard engineering curricula in the world in

terms of faculty members, facilities in the workshop and laboratories. We also discovered something that wasn't in sync with the engineering practice and that is the fact that a child is taught in school, the child regurgitates what has been taught in exam, the child makes a first class but ends up being confused when faced with the practical aspect of the profession. How to convert knowledge was not well taught in schools. So our best practice now is to have the engineering education output based. That is, a young person coming into the university must understand ahead of time, the reason for opting to study Engineering, deciding the field of engineering to focus on and to essentially understand the reason for choosing that field. The whole essence is to ensure that by the time the person is out of the university, he/she has an idea where he/she is going. So what you





have basically provided in the university is to help him/her shape his/her thoughts on what to really do and the way to get that there. Any university that fails to comply with the new curricula will not have their qualifications recognized and what this means is that such a person cannot practice in Nigeria or anywhere in the world. Even when they attempt to practice outside, they will still need a confirmation from COREN that their university's curricular have been accredited.

Besides being an engineer, what other qualities is required of one to be a member of COREN?

The basic thing is to be a personnel of the engineering profession. It is a requirement in law to be registered with COREN if you must practice engineering in Nigeria. Also after registration, you have to also have

COREN practicing license if not you will be in default of the law.

Again if you chose not to practice, being a registered engineer gives you an edge

because it means that you are a qualified engineer.

How do you handle quacks who claim to be qualified engineers?

Currently what we have done is to sign a Memorandum of Operation with the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission under which when we have quacks parading as professionals, infringing on engineering jobs and practices, we hand them over to the ICPC for investigation and prosecution. We are



also working on a revision of our acts so that whoever is involved in substandard works; a quack or registered personnel, as long as you are in the practice of the profession, will come under our own investigation and prosecution radar within the law that governs the body. The truth is that all of the collapsed buildings around the country are as a result of unqualified engineers and those are the issues we are trying to tackle. You can imagine that at a time when people are erecting multiple floor high rises in other parts of the world, Nigeria is still dealing with two suspended floors collapsing. It is a shame. But the

truth is that any qualified structural engineer in Nigeria has the capacity to design a high rise with as many floors as possible. So it is quite painful for someone who can design a 100 floor high rise to be smeared with someone's inability to do a two floor building.

What has been your greatest challenge as the president of COREN?

As the president, I am just one among equals so sometimes, the challenges come from one's colleagues. Unfortunately, they are not one's subordinate that you can talk to anyhow. You have to manage their excesses and it tasks one's patience. The issue of managing people is also



pain that a friend died after an action was taken against him.

What are you most passionate about?

I like social work. I derive so much joy from it especially when I have to serve the less privileged. I don't have money so I use my sweat equity most of the time.

What prompted this passion for social work?

I had a car accident sometime back and unfortunately, it oc-

curred in a village. The car I was in crashed into a vehicle that just came out of the bush about to cross the road and instantly caught fire. I was pulled out of the crash by the villagers whose village the accident happened in and saved our lives. Later when I saw the damage we were pulled out from, I wondered if we could have been saved if the accident had not happened in the village. I later went back to thank them. Their kindness triggered me to resolve to offer such service to humanity until I get the opportunity to go back there and do something for the community. Again, I once followed a friend who was passionate about social works to serve poor people food and the joy in their faces receiving the food was so palpable. I am not sure I can compare the joy on their faces with anything I have ever seen. The memory of that was so strong that it buoyed me to do more for humanity.

You once nursed a political ambition that didn't quite come through, for a seat in the House of Representatives under PDP. Are you still interested in politics?

The reason I decided to contest for an elective position was because I felt that there was so much of wastage of public resources on irrelevances but I soon discovered that I was a lone voice. It didn't deter me as I felt that from my lone voice, some people could also change their heart about the way they view public resources and do better things with it and this has translated into the inordinate acquisition of wealth thereby changing the psyche of Nigerians alongside wickedness. Yes my venture into politics didn't work out but I haven't given up, I will continue to raise my voice until I am heard. It is worthy of note that I am now in APC.

What would you say must have significantly shaped you into

who you are today?

God Almighty and my grandfather. My grandfather took me as his friend to the point that I saw him as my own father. He taught me so many things. At a very young age, my grand dad taught me some of the things that were considered important to my royal lineage, at an early age, earlier than I should have been told. He showed me where the documents relating to my family was. He did a lot to shape me and those things have been quite helpful to me and have been my guiding light in life.

How do you let off steam when you are not busy working?

I love to read, I love travelling, I love watching extreme sports. I used to play golf and horse racing.

Why did you stop?

I find them ostentatious. Horse racing is expensive and I would rather use my little resources to service the less privileged. Unfortunately, I enjoy the company of all kinds of people regardless of their social status and I didn't want to imprison myself. So I stopped playing it. I like my life simple and those are not the kind of things that excite me.

At the end of your tenure in 2019, what legacy would you like to leave behind?

I have tried my best and I will continue to try my best in all that I do as COREN president. Anytime I have had responsibilities, I always ensured that I put in my best and I don't care if it is appreciated or not, as long as I am satisfied that I have done my best.

