LEAD DEBATE ON A BILL FOR AN ACT TO AMEND THE JOINT ADMISSIONS AND MATRICULATIONS BOARD (JAMB) ACT AND FOR OTHER MATTERS CONNECTED THEREWITH

Sponsor: Senator Joshua Lidani ***(Gombe South)***

Distinguished President of the Senate, very distinguished senators, may I first express my profound appreciation for the opportunity to lead the debate for the Second Reading of this Bill which seeks to amend the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board Act, otherwise known as the JAMB Act.

This distinguished Senate is invited to kindly take a retrospect at the genesis of this Bill. The Bill is a by-product of a motion moved on the floor of this senate on Tuesday 17th November, 2015 by my humble self. Subsequent upon that motion, the senate adopted a resolution mandating its **Committee on Tertiary Institutions and Tertfund "...to inquire into circumstances surrounding the new JAMB policy...and review the power of JAMB vis-à-vis admissions."** (Page 1, paragraph 1 of the report). After debating on the report of the committee which was presented on Wednesday 2nd March 2016, the senate resolved inter-alia, **"...that the JAMB entrance examination validity should be three (3) academic years."** To this end, the senate also resolved to **"...mandate the committee on Tertiary Institutions and Tertfund to present an amendment to the JAMB Act to increase the validity period from One (1) academic year to three (3) academic years." (S/Res/106/01/16).** In a nutshell Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, the foregoing summary encapsulates the genesis of this bill.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, let me aver that the time to take a holistic look at the operations of JAMB with a view to bringing it in tandem with existing realities is long overdue. An Act like JAMB,

which was enacted in 1978 to regulate an area whose operations are dynamic, cannot itself remain static. The last amendments to this law, in 1989 and 1993, did not envisage today's realities and therefore did not reflect what this bill contemplates and which it intends to address.

Therefore Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, this bill, which was read for the first time on Thursday 14th April 2016, has as its primary purpose, the need to plug a major loophole in our education system and enhance our children's quest for education while also strengthening the body that serves as a vehicle for attaining that goal.

While it may have been expedient in 1978 when the Principal Act was enacted, to have a restricted admission system that coped with very little or no pressure under a population of a little over Sixty-Nine Million people, the same cannot be said of present-day Nigeria with a population on the fringes of One Hundred and Eighty million. In like vein, the economic and social circumstances of today's Nigeria differ substantially from that of Thirty Eight years past. It is therefore expedient and incumbent upon us, to rise up to the challenge of the moment and be seen to have answered when duty called.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board has in recent times, been a subject of intense controversies and has come under intense negative criticism arising from factors such as arbitrary increase in cost of examination forms, poor conduct of examinations and an overwhelming "left-over" of candidates. These are candidates, who though may have secured the requisite scores for placement in their preferred institutions and courses of study, are not enrolled due to "lack of space" and other factors. The result is that these candidates are left in the cold and required to re-sit for these exams the in the next session. In effect, the resources plunged into this effort, the time spent, the energy exerted, the drain (in various forms) on the parents and guardians - who are

usually the very poor hoping to break their circle of poverty with some education for their wards - and all other incidental efforts, goes to naught. Effectively, a fresh circle of the endeavour to secure placement for such affected candidates begins all over again, the fact that these candidates may have met every prerequisite notwithstanding.

Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues, the major amendment to this bill, as already resolved by this senate, is to ensure that results validly obtained by any candidate seeking admission into any tertiary institution through an examination conducted by JAMB and meeting all the requirements set by the body, shall remain valid for three consecutive academic years. At a time when resources are lean and families are strained as a consequence thereof, every effort must be made, especially by a body such as this Senate, holding forth for the people, to bring succor. As we had shown in the past when such demands arose, this senate must, in this instance too, wake up to this responsibility.

Let me also emphasize that this amendment will also tremendously enhance the operations of the Board in several respects. First, it will reduce the scramble for the often-touted limited spaces. Second, it will minimize the pressure on operational logistics required by JAMB for the conduct of its activities and ensure effective utilization of available resources. Third, it will improve the administrative capacity of the Board to meet its mandate under the law.

Mr. President, my fellow Colleagues, let me, at risk of sounding repetitive, conclude by once more drawing your attention to the three broad and salient objectives that this bill seeks to achieve as already enunciated in the foregoing paragraphs.

1. To provide a 3-year validity period for results and scores obtained from examinations conducted by JAMB;

2. To ensure that candidates who meet the requirements for admission at any given examination conducted by JAMB but are not given placement, are given preference in the succeeding years over fresh applicants. It would be the duty of the Board to also ensure that such results remain relevant and meet the set-out criteria for admission in subsequent sessions.
3. To maintain standards in administration of the Board.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, to state that our educational system is in dire straits is only just belaboring the fact. That it is also our responsibility to reposition it to meet modern challenges and emerging circumstances is just stating the obvious. I therefore call on you all to rise up in support of this bill for it to be read a second time and sent to the appropriate committee for further legislative action.

Finally, let me state that being an amendment to an existing legislation, this bill raises no additional financial implications, which therefore eliminates the need for a financial compendium as required by order 77(3) of the Senate Rules.

Thank you.