

LEAD DEBATE ON A BILL FOR AN ACT TO REPEAL THE MARITIME ACADEMY OF NIGERIA, ORON ACT AND TO ESTABLISH THE UNIVERSITY OF MARITIME STUDIES, ORON AND RELATED MATTERS.

Sponsor: Senator Akon Eyakenyi, PhD

Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues, I appreciate the opportunity given to me to lead the debate on this very important Bill which seeks to upgrade the Maritime Academy of Nigeria, Oron to a University of Maritime Studies, Oron.

Please recall that the Bill was read for the First Time in this Hallowed Chamber on Thursday, 12th day of December, 2019.

The Bill essentially seeks to upgrade the pioneer maritime school in Nigeria to a University by repealing the law establishing the Maritime Academy of Nigeria, Oron Cap M3 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2010 and establish in its stead the University of Maritime Studies, Oron, a school with broader scope of studies which is the need of our country at this point of our national development.

BACKGROUND:

Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues, Nautical College, Oron was established In 1977 by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria by Executive Act No. 172 with the mandate to educate and train shipboard officers and ratings as well as organize short based management courses for personnel for the maritime industry.

The primary objectives of the college were:

- i. for building/developing the much needed capacity and manpower for Nigeria's maritime industry;
- ii. and to address the acute shortage of indigenous manpower in the maritime industry.

The college commenced operation in 1979 with two departments to wit: Nautical Science Department and Department of Marine engineering. The first batch of cadets passed out in 1983. The Nautical College of Nigeria was upgraded to Maritime Academy of Nigeria, Oron by the promulgation of Decree No. 16 of 1988 which is now enshrined as cap M3 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2010.

The functions of the Academy as stated in section 3 of the Act are as follows:

- i. To admit and train the various levels of personnel required for running and operating ships of the merchant navy,

- ii. To train technical manpower for marine engineering, workshops, piloting and navigation, marine insurance, hydrography and other related services,
- iii. To provide such other forms of instructions as the academy may from time to time decide to undertake.

The Academy was designed as an integrated institution primarily for the education and training of shipboard officers, ratings and short-based management personnel in line with the requirements of International Maritime Organization and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE).

The Academy in addition to training the nation's Merchant Navy Officers, also has the mandate to certify Nigerian Seafarers in line with the provisions of Merchant Shipping Act, 1962 and the IMO Convention on Standards, Certification and Watch-keeping (STWC) 1995 for seafarers.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, the Academy is the foremost Maritime Institution in Nigeria and has graduated to date about 5000 Merchant Navy Officers, Ratings and others for both shipboard and shore based operations. It is the only institution in Nigeria with the mandate and requisite capacity/facilities to conduct test and examination of certificate of competency for seafarers. The Academy is recognized both nationally and internationally by regulating authorities.

The drawback of the Academy is that the Academy was mainly designed to produce technicians or low level personnel which were our need in 1977 but as a developing country we need more than technicians to manage our maritime sector.

UPGRADE:

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, the desire to upgrade the Academy into a degree awarding institution has been long in process; it is quite unfortunate that Nigeria first mooted the idea of upgrading its maritime institution into degree awarding but others that started later have long executed it by upgrading their Maritime colleges/Polytechnics into Universities/Degree Awarding Institutions, whereas we are still in the contemplation stage. In 1995 the then Head of State General Sani Abacha on a visit to the school, emphasised the need to upgrade the Academy into a degree awarding institution.

In 2008, the then Minister of State for Transport like his predecessor in office harped on the need to upgrade the Academy into a degree awarding institution. His successor in office, Alhaji Yusuf Suleiman who secured the Federal Executive Council (FEC) approval for the

upgrade of the Academy had noted that the primary purpose was to put the graduates of the academy at par with their contemporaries in the world.

It was in line with the plan to transform the academy into a University that the Federal Government took steps to secure and formalize its funding. The National Assembly, in passing the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) Act, 2007 made provision for statutory allocation for the funding of the academy. This Bill seeks to maintain the full funding as captured in the NIMASA ACT, 2007.

Following IMO's approval for the upgrade, the sum of 2 Billion Naira was approved by the Federal Government to the Academy to upgrade its facilities in preparation for the upgrade to University in 2013.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, in 2015, the federal government issued an executive order for the upgrade of the university. It is also important to note that, the 8th Senate had passed this same Bill, however, other processes were not concluded for assent of Mr. President before the wind up of the 8th Eight Assembly.

The Bill:

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues, this Bill seeks the upgrade of Maritime Academy of Nigeria, Oron to University of Maritime Studies, Oron. The essence of the Bill is to create a specialize institution for specialize field of studies. Nigeria is the economic hub of Africa and needs indigenous and better trained personnel to manage its maritime sector. The upgrade of the Academy into a University would go a long way in solving the acute shortage of well trained manpower in the maritime industry which is quite worrisome.

Dear amiable colleagues, in 2018, stakeholders in the maritime sector declared that shortage of manpower in maritime specialties was a threat to maritime sector, this was contained in a communiqué titled "Urgent Call to Rethink Maritime Education and Training" issued in July, 2018 and published by Punch Newspaper on 19 July, 2018. Year in year out millions of dollars are spent on training our nationals abroad; having University of Maritime studies would put a stop to such wastages of scarce resources.

In line with our current developmental needs as a country, we need to upgrade the Maritime Academy to University status so as to accommodate more intake of students, more courses of studies and better training.

The objectives of the University of Maritime Studies, Oron shall be as stated in Section 2(a)-(j) of the Bill.

This University would provide opportunity for Nigerians to learn in a leading maritime institution and stop the wastages of funds being expended in sending Cadets for abroad training.

Dear Distinguished colleagues, Nigeria is amongst countries in the world without functional Maritime University or a University that offers maritime courses; while others countries such as United Kingdom have over = 10, USA = 10, South Africa= 3, Singapore = 2, Philippines = 14 and Australia 2 amongst others.

Mr. President, Distinguished colleagues, Maritime is at the heart of commerce and Nigeria is an apex destination in Africa, which has made it imperative for this University to be birthed. The attainment of a University status would enhance the operations of the school, attract better personnel and equal our graduates with their contemporaries in the world. It will give more opportunity for greater number of students and stimulate research and study of maritime field in Nigeria. In time, with our creativity and ingenuity, Nigeria will build her boats, vessels and Warship as the University develops.

Mr. President, dear Distinguished Colleagues, I am fully satisfied that the institution has the necessary land mass, structures, facilities and personnel to ensure the take off as a University. To ensure continuity, it is provided that all property held by or on behalf of the Academy shall be vested in the University.

Worthy to note is that the interim management of the Academy inspired with vigor to prepare the Academy for this upgrade, had build structures, refurbished and renovated old ones and had purchased equipments to make the school a world class. The institution is ready for an upgrade and need the legislative stamp of approval for it to happen. I urge my colleagues to support this bill at all stages of its journey to come to reality.

I wish to state that the school currently enjoys budgetary provisions and therefore there is no need for financial compendium in line with Rule 77(3) of our Standing Rules. The upgrade of the Academy to a University is at no extra cost.

I therefore urge you to support the expeditious passage of this Bill.

Thank you.