Opening Remarks by H.E. Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim at
Daily Trust's African of the Year 2008 Awards
Congress Hall, Hilton Hotel,
January 13, 2009
Abuja, Nigeria

On behalf of the Advisory Committee of the Daily Trust's African of the Year Award, it is my pleasure to welcome you and to add a few words by way of introduction to this ceremony.

When I as Chair, and my distinguished colleagues, agreed to serve as members of the Advisory Committee, we did so with enthusiasm and without hesitation. We recognized this initiative to honour Africans by the Media Trust as one whose time had come.

We live in an Africa with boundless possibilities, and there are so many Africans throughout the continent doing great things- these range from the most high-profile and well known public figures and celebrities, to Africa's quietly-toiling and unsung heroes. In paying tribute to these Africans and recognizing their achievements, we had an onerous task in choosing only one.

Our thinking as an Advisory Committee was informed by a need to both make an immediate impact on the African landscape, and to highlight not only an individual but an issue that dominates the public sphere. The idea behind our selection process was not necessarily to reward people per se, but to generate the recognition necessary to highlight excellence and hopefully bring about change.

Recognition by Africa(ns)

It is a sad fact that the outside world often recognizes African excellence and African achievement, but rarely do we as Africans but with few exceptions honour ourselves, and here we must pay tribute to the Media Trust. In conceptualizing, and organizing the African of the Year Award, the Media Trust has shown leadership well beyond the borders of Nigeria. In my former role as Secretary General of the OAU, I have seen the concrete leadership that the Government of Nigeria has shown on Pan-African matters. With the Media Trust, as a private organization, demonstrating its leadership in instituting this Award, we can see that this Pan-African spirit is greatly shared by the people of Nigeria.

We would also like to recognize the United Bank of Africa (UBA) for joining the Media Trust in this initiative and providing a monetary reward attached to this honour. The purpose of the African of the Year Award was never financial, but UBA has also shown leadership in coming to the table. We believe other private organizations and institutions in Nigeria will in future also join us in honouring the African of the Year.

Selection Process

In selecting the African of the Year, the Advisory committee took numerous issues into consideration. We decided to choose an individual based not only on a compelling personal narrative, but someone connected to the burning issues facing our continent. These issues include the scourge of conflict still affecting large parts of Africa, the indignities against women and the use of rape as a weapon of war in conflict zones, the struggle for democracy in Africa, and the

discrimination against specific communities in Africa based on ignorance. The use of children in armed conflict and the fact that the children of Africa are being denied a childhood which is their right, and the corruption eating away at our beloved continent are all issues that continues to shatter out confidence as a people.

We decided to select an individual who has had the courage, despite tremendous odds, to impact on the lives of people and to sketch a bright future amidst this gloom.

Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee comprises individuals who personify not only the diversity of the continent, but who also through linguistic, gender, regional and religious diversity also exemplify what unites us as Africans, as opposed to what often artificially divides us. We do so as Africans on the Advisory committee, and all of its members responded spontaneously to the request to serve because we share an ideal whose time has come.

It is now my pleasure to introduce to this audience the members of the Advisory Committee:

Prof. Bdoulaye Bathily

Prof. Abdoulaye Bathily is a Senegalese Historian and long time Professor of History at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar. He has taught at several universities in Africa, Europe and the United States. Prof. Bathily is currently a political leader in Senegal, having served as a former trade unionist, former Minister in Government, former Deputy

Speaker of the National Assembly of Senegal and former member of the ECOWAS Parliament. Prof. Bathily also served as President of the African Association of Political Science (AAPS).

Prof. Kwame Karikari

Prof. Kwame Karikari is a Ghanaian Journalist and currently the head of a press freedom advocacy organization that works all over West Africa. He has formerly served as Professor and Head of the School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana. Prof. Karikari is not only a journalist by training, but a passionate advocate of human rights throughout the continent of Africa.

Prof. Tandeka Nkiwane

Prof. Tandeka Nkiwane is a South African political scientist and director of the Development Research institute. She has served as Research Professor and Chair of the Programme on African Intellectuals at the University of South Africa, and she has taught at several universities in South Africa, Zimbabwe and the United States. An expert in international relations and international political economy, Prof. Nkiwane is also a passionate advocate of women's rights globally.

Prof. Okello Oculi

Prof. Okello Oculi is a Ugandan poet, novelist and chronicler of African rural life. He is currently professor of Social and Economic Research at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria, and he is most recently the author of the novel, "Songs for the Sun in Us." Prof. Oculi is also a Political

Scientist by training and his work seeks to reassert the cultural heritage in Africa.

Ms. L. Muthoni Wanyeki

Ms. Muthoni Wanyeki is a Kenyan human rights activist and she currently serves as the Executive Director of the Kenyan Human Rights Commission. She specializes in development communications, gender and human rights. Ms. Wanyeki is the former director of the African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET). She is a regular columnist with one of the leading newspapers in East Africa, the Daily Nation and she focuses on African women's development issues

and

Dr. Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem

Dr. Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem is a Nigerian Pan-Africanist and currently the Deputy Director (Africa) for the Millennium Development Campaign, based in Nairobi, Kenya. He is the General Secretary of the Global Pan African Movement and acts as Chairman of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) based in Abuja and London. He is the author of the Thursday Postcard, which is a weekly column on African issues published by Pambazuka News. Dr. Abdul_raheem serves as Secretary to the advisory Committee.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This distinguished Committee sat together in Nairobi, Kenya from November 25-26th, 2008 to deliberate and select the African of the Year and the 2 runners-up. In choosing the runners-up we chose people whose roles and actions have made a difference in society. We hope that you will find our choices inspired.