

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE MR. LLEWELLYN OLAWALE WILLIAMS (5732), DELIVERED BY E.B.OSHO COKER ON WEDNESDAY 10TH APRIL, 2013 AT THE HOLY TRINITY CHURCH KISSY ROAD, FREETOWN

I stand here with a heart full of sorrow and pangs of excruciating grief to pay tribute to the life and work of a dear friend and colleague, the late Llewellyn Olawale Williams who departed this earthly life for the great beyond on Monday 1st April, 2013. On that Easter Monday, family, relatives, colleagues and friends were absolutely devastated by the news of Ola's sudden demise. Since it was April Fool's Day, some people felt that it was the traditional playing of pranks to celebrate the day and therefore received the news with great caution. What a macabre joke that would have been. The truth of the matter was that we lost Ola on that fateful day. However, in the Book of Hebrews 2 : 5-17 we are told that death does make fools of us all but because of the work of Christ on the cross, death has lost its power.

2. On the Thursday preceding his death, he called me. The telephone conversation started on an official note and ended with our usual banter. He wanted my comments on a draft paper he had forwarded to me, and we reached agreement that I would peruse it over the long Easter weekend and discuss it with him on the following Tuesday. Little did I realize that it was our last conversation and that his appointed time to meet with the great Creator was only days away. We acknowledge the finality of death, and the legendary William Shakespeare expressed it clearly when he said "All that live must die, passing through nature to eternity". However, such a sudden and painful parting is too difficult to understand and it leaves an aching void that cannot be easily filled.

3. The late Llewellyn Olawale Williams and I joined the Sierra Leone Civil Service as Assistant Secretaries in 1971. He was posted to the Cabinet Secretariat, while I was sent to the Office of the President. We entered the world of bureaucracy and officialdom with trepidation, but with dogged determination and unrelenting zeal we endeavoured to learn the tricks of the trade. The friendship we had developed at Fourah Bay College helped us in comparing notes and made our professional interaction very stimulating and rewarding. He later pursued post-graduate studies in Public Administration and after serving in a few government ministries including the Ministry of Interior, his quest for fresh challenges compelled him to seek a transfer from the Administrative Service into the Planning Unit of the erstwhile Ministry of Development and Economic Planning. He was attached to the Social Services Division where he excelled himself to the extent that he attracted the attention of our donor partners because of his proactive approach and devotion to duty. He then moved over to UNICEF where he carved an enviable image for himself and established useful contacts both nationally and internationally.

4. Our professional paths crossed again in 2002 after he retired from UNICEF. I was Coordinator of Public Service Reform at the Public Sector Reform Unit of the then Governance Reform Secretariat, Office of the President which was supported by the British Department for International Development (DFID). We were looking for a Management Analyst, and with his background in Public Administration and Social Planning he was an ideal candidate. Two DFID British Consultants and I interviewed him and he sailed through. Here is what one of those consultants wrote when he heard about Ola's death, and I quote:

"It was very sad to hear the news about Ola's death. I think he was an inspired choice when we were selecting candidates for the Review Team in 2002 and he proved a great team member with a wide range of contacts that seemed to embrace the whole of Freetown at times. He was a great

support to me during this time.....and proved a tower of strength. Although I have had little contact with him in recent years I still remember the time we worked together with great affection.”

5. Ola was a hardworking, reliable, and efficient person who was always willing to go the extra mile and beyond the call of duty. His organizational skills were remarkable and he used them in furtherance of the Unit’s work. He was a competent and performance-oriented specialist, a committed team player, and a professional of unbounded energy, drive and enthusiasm. He was part of the Review Team which completed seventeen Management and Functional Reviews by 2008, the year I left the Unit for my present assignment. He walked the corridors of Ministries, Departments and Agencies like a colossus and got results through the use of his great powers of persuasion, motivation and mobilization. In the eyes of Ola nothing was insurmountable and he would strive relentlessly to achieve set goals and objectives. Together with other members of the Unit, he worked on most of the transformative changes that are presently taking place in the civil service in terms of effective service delivery. He approached his duties with meticulous diligence and would never shy away from any responsibility. He was au fait with a range of fields including building, entrepreneurship, technical maintenance, transportation, and real estate; and he used his knowledge to assist everyone in the office. The Unit will never be the same without the versatile and ubiquitous Ola.

6. On the social front, he was always cheerful, lively and confident, and he enjoyed being with other people. His trademark friendly greeting to me was something we had shared at Fourah Bay College: “Kiskidi” he would say and I would reply “Pompiodor”; “Soup sweet” he would continue and I would reply “Nar money kill am”; “Eat good eat” he would end, with me saying “Die lef det”. It was only our way of reminiscing about the past and not any form of encouragement to live a reckless life. Indeed you will agree with me that Ola was an embodiment of success, and a great man. As John Ruskin said and I quote” I believe the first test of a truly great man is in his humility”. Ola was humble, a grass-roots man and the poor man’s friend. He traversed the length and breadth of this country sharing the milk of human kindness on his way and many people benefitted from his generosity. He was comfortable everywhere and would effortlessly adapt himself to new surroundings. He was a trusted friend, loyal and dependable, whose word was his bond. He had this larger than life character and exuberant personality that never ceased to amaze me. When he was not telling hair-raising stories about his hunting of wild animals, he would give vivid accounts of his days in the then Bo Town (sweet Bo) and his numerous official treks to some remote areas of the country. I can say with conviction that he lived a good life. I will always remember him as a genuine friend, a professional par excellence, a devoted family man, and an incredibly sincere and compassionate person.

7. On behalf of his friends and colleagues, I extend to the bereaved family heartfelt condolences for this irreparable loss. God in his infinite mercy will surely comfort and console you in this time of grief. We also pray that God will grant him eternal rest and that perpetual light will shine on him.

8. Goodbye dear friend and colleague, adios amigo. Go gentle soul into the sweet presence of Jesus.