

The Kono Conference Chairman's Handing Over Speech.

Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Let me first of all apologise for not being here in person today to perform my sacred duty to this August body of likeminded people determined to bring positive change to our beloved district. This is due to a variety of converging events beyond my control.

As the outgoing Chairman, I deem it fit to give you a brief background of the Conference and the successes and challenges we have experienced to this point.

The Kono Conference for me is a dream, which at one time seemed farfetched for numerous reasons chief of which were the disunity and lack of trust in our community. Ironically, these are some of the reasons that prompted some of us to come together and create this forum to serves as a platform for us as a people to deliberate on the future of our District.

I have always believed that as a people, considering our strategic position geographically and politically, coupled with our mineral and agricultural endowment we need to have a plan as to what will make our district a viable entity that is less prone to exploitation and abuse from within and from outside forces. I also believe that the quality of life in any geographical area depends on the planning of that area, hence the need for a Conference.

I relocated to the UK from the USA IN 2004 and the very first thing I realised was that the community was divided into

factions with brothers and sisters fighting each other. I started preaching the idea for a Kono Conference at KDDA-UK meetings but because of the prevailing status quo, not much was done about it. Dr Kai Ngegba the then interim Chairman of KDDA-UK and some of his executive members namely Mr. Aiah Sodengbe and Mr. Aiah Tondoneh saw the need for a Conference and started discussing the idea. In 2013 an event took place and some youths from Kono were arrested and detained for political reasons; this prompted some of us to start an online collection of funds to alleviate the suffering of the youths in jail. As the fund-raising was successful, discussions about an umbrella Kono Organisation to defend the youths of the district from abuse and to protect their interest commenced. This resulted in the birth of The Kono Global organisation with Mr Wura Jalloh as chairman. Amongst other aims and objectives, a global conference was paramount and I was asked to chair that project.

To organise a Kono Global Conference by then was not that simple as it seemed. In London we were divided with a protracted case in court between two groups which created serious animosity in the community. The USA also had their own issues. I then asked myself how I was going to accomplish such a herculean task with such odds against me. I prayed to my God for wisdom and understanding and embarked on a peace mission to bring peace in the UK community. After due deliberations and frank speaking, not to bother you with the details peace was achieved.

The next challenge was funds to organise and host the conference. With a budget of zero pounds it was not easy but the faith I have in my community that when it comes to the crunch we will pull through motivated me to move on with the project. Supported by the KDDA-UK executives and Dr. Joseph Mondeh, arrangements to host the Conference commenced. Unfortunately for us just as we were in the middle of planning, the Ebola menace reared its ugly head and work on the Conference was suspended indefinitely.

In 2015, KDDA-UK started discussions about restarting the Conference planning. Dr Fuambai Sia Ahmadu the then President of Kono Union USA and Dr. Ngegba along with Mr. Aiah Fanday of Kono Development Global Organisation discussed the idea and it was agreed that work on the Conference should commence. Dr. Ahmadu at one point was in London and assisted the UK team in finding a venue for the Conference. I was then asked to continue in the capacity of Chairman to organise the Conference. It was at this point I decided to get some the best brains amongst us that are willing to take up this challenge in the interest of the Kono people. Dr Mondeh, Dr. Sahr Kondeh and Dr. Sahr Kabuta were approached and were very willing to be a part of the project.

Work on the project commenced, and we prayed that nothing would interrupt it this time. Various committees were put in place and the theme of PAVING THE WAY FOR BETTER PROSPECTS was adopted. At this point our biggest handicap was finance. We had no money in the kitty and we

were to look for sources to fund the project. I decided to turn to the community saying to myself that we should be able to fund our own conference. I was not wrong in my assessment. I should proudly say that the conference was funded by the Kono People with thanks and great appreciation to Mr. Ade Daramy a friend of the Kono People through whose influence the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) auditorium was made available to us.

The conference convened and five resolutions were adopted. The Conference agreed to:

- 1) Launch a one thousand man \$100.00 contribution to initiate projects in Kono District
- 2) To organise the Kono Conference annually and convene the next conference in the USA.
- 3) To insist on the reinstatement of the elected Mayor of Koidu City.
- 4) To open a Diaspora office in Koidu City
- 5) To set up Standing Committees to implement policies in the following areas : a) education, b) mining, c) energy, d) culture and tourism, e) infrastructure, f) environment and water quality, g) health and sanitation, h) youth development, l) business.

Challenges during the conference.

During the conference we were faced with some challenges that had to be dealt with.

- 1) The Conference started very late on day one due to the fact that SOAS has another campus away from the venue were most of the attendees went only to find out that they were in the wrong place
- 2) The Conference programme was very ambitious for a two day conference creating some unpleasant scenes whilst trying to accommodate some agenda items.
- 3) Speakers failed to leave copies of their speeches with the Secretariat which caused delay in putting the report together.
- 4) Inexperience in putting the whole project together as there was no template to follow.
- 5) Not sending invitations on time caused some delegate not to be able to make it to the conference as they got their visas after the conference.

Challenges after the conference.

After the Conference we had a few challenges that should be noted.

- 1) The Secretariat failed to follow up with its mandate to collect and disseminate data for the conference.
- 2) Delay in producing the report
- 3) No follow up of Conference resolutions.
 - A) The elected mayor of Koidu City is still in suspension without being tried for any offence.
 - B) The thousand man \$100.00 drive did not take off the ground.
 - C) The Diaspora Office in Kono still needs to be acquired.

D) Only two Standing Committees commenced work which were the environment and water quality committee headed by Dr Kabuta and education, which was ultimately spearheaded by Mayor Saa Lamina who launched the Kono Children's Education Foundation.

Successes of the Conference

Despite the challenges we faced with organising and hosting the conference, I am proud to say that we succeeded in some other areas like:

- 1) The Conference was able to bring people from all over the globe together under the same roof to deliberate on issues pertaining to our beloved district
- 2) Raising funds and organising the conference demonstrated that nothing is impossible for us as a people if we set our minds to it.
- 3) We successfully organised the second Conference in another host country, which demonstrates dedication and continuity. Bravo to the USA.

The Kono conference though in its embryonic stage is here to say as a platform for us to have frank and honest discussions on the way forward for our District. The Conference is apolitical and all-inclusive regardless of one's status or station in life. The only qualification for participation in the conference is to be a Kono District descendant.

Before I hand over the Conference to the very capable hands of Dr. Aiah Ndomaina and his team who have done such a fantastic job organising and hosting the Second Kono Conference 2017, I advise that the Conference Secretariat be rearranged to reflect the increasing work load of the Conference and a robust pursuance of the Conference resolutions set in motion.

Let me now please thank the following people for making the Kono Conference a reality. These are people who never took no for an answer, their tenacity and dedication to purpose is inspiring and Kono is blessed to have such people as sons and daughters of the land.

In no particular order of preference, I say thank you to my wife and family for putting up with me during our protracted meetings, Dr. Kai Ngegba, Dr. Sia Fuambai Ahmadu, Aiah Fanday, Aiah Tondoneh, Aiah Sodenbge, Dr. Sahr Kondeh, Dr Sahr Kabuta, the KDDA-UK Social Department and the entire KDDA-UK membership for their support in making the Kono Conference a reality.

I now hand over the conference to Dr. Aiah Ndomaina, Chairman Kono Conference 2017

I thank you all.

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