

**MESSAGE OF HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO OUR ESTEEMED PARENTS AND
STUDENTS IN THE FACE OF THE CURRENT COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

It has become necessary to draw your attention to the enormous challenges posed to the educational system by the Coronavirus Pandemic otherwise known as COVID-19 and the efforts of the Rivers State University to mitigate its impact on our academic programmes.

It would be recalled that since the outbreak of the Coronavirus in Wuhan, China, in December, 2019, the virus has spread across the globe leading to the unfortunate death of several persons and the quarantine of an even larger number of persons for treatment. A reasonable number of persons have however been discharged from the isolation and treatment centres. As at Thursday, 22nd May, 2020, the sad global picture of the pandemic is as follows: Confirmed cases – 5,227,331, Death cases - 335,223, Recovered cases – 2,103,949 and in Nigeria, Confirmed cases – 7,016, Death cases 211, Recovered cases – 1,907.

In Nigeria, the Federal and State Governments have been making concerted efforts to contain the spread of the virus leading to the adoption of a number of unpleasant but very necessary measures in this regard. Some of such measures include the closure of State Borders, the lockdown and suspension of economic activities, introduction of physical and social distancing, protocols on the wearing of nose masks, hand washing and the use of sanitizers, all in a bid to stay safe.

It is pertinent to mention that here in Rivers State, the Government, under the able leadership of the Governor Nyesom Ezenwo Wike, CON, GSSRS, POS(Africa) was the first to adopt the policy of State Border closure knowing the implication of allowing free movement across Borders, especially considering the position of Rivers State in the Country's economic, social and political equation. That singular measure, among others, ensured that the number of index cases in the State remained considerably far below the situation in places like Lagos and Abuja.

As a University, we have also contributed our own quota in the efforts to contain the Pandemic through the production of hand sanitizers by the Chemistry Department of the University. We presented over one hundred cartons of these sanitizers to the Rivers State Government and made available several cartons for use by the various Units and

Departments of the University. We have also ensured the full implementation and enforcement of the various protocols such as hand washing and the use of hand sanitizers and face masks in all Departments and units of the University.

In relation to our academic programmes, the Senate at an Emergency Meeting held on Tuesday, 28th April, 2020, approved the on-line resumption of academic activities through the commencement of on-line lectures for the Postgraduate programmes of the University and subsequent scheduled commencement of on-line examinations for the Undergraduate programmes. We immediately commenced the on-line training of our Lecturers and other non-academic staff on the use of the zoom platform for lectures and the holding of Faculty and other University meetings. I am happy to inform you that these measures have been hugely successful, and the postgraduate lectures are now on-going in all the Faculties and Institutes.

However, in respect of the Undergraduate examinations, we have been unable to conclude the programming of the robust on-line examination platform for the commencement of the examinations due to the lockdowns which affected the movement of some of the service providers to the University. Happily, we have (working within these challenges) been able to attain a reasonable level of success in this process and it is our intention, upon completion of same, to test-run it and ensure that the observed inherent challenges and possible abuses of an on-line examination process are completely taken care of. We are being extremely careful in this area to ensure not only the integrity of our examination system but also that our students are not adversely affected by this novel system. In this regard, we are conscious of the challenges that some students may have concerning the non-availability of laptops, compliant handsets, internet services, power supply, inadequate data and similar issues.

*On this score, we are also committed to ensuring that upon the deployment of this on-line examination method, students who are **genuinely** unable to have access to the on-line facility would subsequently be taken care of through a well-coordinated and structured physical examination arrangement. The ultimate objective is to ensure that our students do not lose the 2019/2020 academic session due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, an unfortunate situation that could arise if some of these hard decisions and actions are not taken now.*

At this juncture, we wish to reiterate our earlier plea to the esteemed parents and guardians of our students to be prepared and willing to make the necessary sacrifices to

support their children and wards through the provision of laptops, compliant handsets and data so that they can seamlessly participate in the on-line examinations at the appropriate time. It is important to note that these are sacrifices parents and guardians are required to make at this crucial period in the academic life of their children and wards for a better tomorrow.

On our part, we are committed and determined to do all in our power to minimize the unpleasant consequences of this global pandemic on the academic lives of our students. While we anticipate and await the gradual easing of the lockdown, we encourage our students and esteemed parents to continue to comply (fully) with all the prescribed protocols for responding to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

By the grace of God, we shall overcome this challenge imbued with the knowledge that everything that has a beginning must have an end. Our trust is in the Almighty God.

Sgd

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