**ASSITEJ Nigerian Theatre (ANT) Festival 2018 Strengthen Theatre’s Value to Children**

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The value of Theatre to the children and young person got strengthened through Theatre Festival organized by the *Association Internationale du Theatre pour les Enfants et la Jeunesse* (ASSITEJ) Nigeria

This maiden edition of the festival that took place from 27th to 29th September, 2018, organized by Mrs Pamela Udoka-ASSITEJ Nigeria recorded quality participation of theatre companies, theatre artists; both professionals and amateurs, theatre scholars, directors, producers and journalists committed to theatre for childrenand young persons. The festival was tagged ASSITEJ Nigeria Theatre (ANT) Festival 2018

The presence of the International President of ASSITEJ Yvette Hardie, the Global Vice-President, International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC), Prof Emmanuel Samu Dandaura, ITYARN Chair and EC ASSITEJ International, Prof Manon van de Water, President and Country Rep of the Nigeria Centre of the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ); World Congress of ASSITEJ appointed African Counselor, Mrs. Pamela Udoka, Dance Scholar and renowned choreographer, University of Calabar, Dr. Arnold Udoka, Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA), President Drumboat Theatre Foundation, Calabar, Dr. Yta EdisuaMerab represented by Dr. Chinyere Okam, Department of Theatre and Carnival Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar; University lecturers, Students from the department of Theatre Arts from University of Lagos and Lagos State University, Makinde Adeniran, Chairman, National Association Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP), Lagos Chapter; and the members of many known theatre companies like Segun Adefila-led Crown Troupe of Africa, Dayo Liadi-led Ijodee Dance Company among others made the festival outstanding.

The AssociationInternationale du Theatre pour les Enfants et la Jeunesse French version from where the abbreviation ASSITEJ is coined has International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People as the English version of its name.

The 3-day festival witnessed workshop, performances and visit to tourist attraction in Lagos, annual general meeting of the association. The facilitators in the workshop are International President of ASSITEJ Yvette Hardie, who is also the president ASSITEJ South Africa, the Global Vice-President, IATC, Prof. Dandaura represented by Nwagbo Partick Obi, the Director, Publicity and Membership Services, IATC-Nigeria, ITYARN Chair and EC ASSITEJ International, Prof Manon van de Water, HOD, Department of Psychology, University of Lagos, Nigeria, Dr. Esther Akinsola, President ASSITEJ Nigeria, Mrs. Pamela Udoka. In her paper, Yvette discussed the benefit of ASSITEJ to theatre companies and the values their activities would impact on the children and young persons. Prof. Dandaura’s presentation is on,the Grown up Critic and the Children’s Theatre: The African Experience, where he called for an interface between the critic and the creative artist of the children’s theatre, saying it would bring about advocacy and standard. Prof Manon’s lecture centered on Research and Theatre, where she captured historical research on children’s theatre, stating that the need for research arises because there must be accurate information and documentation of what the theatre for the children and young persons, aim to showcase to the society. She added that theatre research should aim at reaching the socially secluded in the society

The participants contributed and asked questions on the issues raised by the resource persons. For instance, Dr. Okam, spoke about the use of theatre as a tool for research to get to the root of belief system of ostracism. She cited the instance of Skolombo, a group of children between 4-12 years ostracized to the streets of Calabar. The reason for their being ostracized by their parents was that the native doctors and pastors said they are witches. The therapeutic functions of the theatre were exhaustively discussed.

The performances in the festival took place at Bariga and St. Anthony, Mary land, Ikeja, Lagos. At Bariga, children from secondary schools showcased an ensemble of games, dances, drama, traditional wrestling. It took place in the open space of Ajayi Crowther Grammar School. The children’s traditional performances by the ten secondary schools across Shomolu and Bariga are *Tinko* (Hand game), *Suwe* (leg and pebble game), *Omoba Fawusa* (round the circle game), *Gidigbo* (traditional wrestling), *ten-ten* (simultaneous clap and leg game), the heavy rain that fell disturbed the drama presentation, the cast recite the dialogue in the play, Toyin Abiodun’s *The Marriage of Arike* in the makeshift building the participants and the spectators ran in to avoid rain from beating them. The play’s theme dwells on the value of the children, where Abike (Jennifer Huzzain) asserts herself on the society that if the children are denied their rights and values, certain awareness will implant the consciousness in them. The schools that participated include St. Luke’s Junior Grammar School, Jagunmola Senior Girls Secondary School, CMS Senior Girls School, Bariga Junior Grammar School, Adelakin Adelaga Grammar School, Ajayi Crowther Grammar School, Angos Memorial School, Igbobi Junior Grammar School, Shomolu Junior Grammar School, Eva Adelaja Junior and Senior Girls Secondary School, Lanre Awolowoko Grammar School and Gbagada Senior Secondary School.

The Performing Arts Instructor to all the schools with Lagos State Secondary school Cultural Troupe, Mr. Koffivi Fabunmi, who organized the children, explained that the festival has really opened an opportunity for the children to showcase their talents beyond Lagos State: “The truth is that the children are excited over the ANT festival 2018 that has to do with children entirely. Of course, they have always performed but you can see that this is an international gathering, where they display all they have been learning. So, ANT festival is a platform for exposure for the children. The platform is relevant. They feel motivated as they have seen that with theatre they can go to places. It has shown how important the children are. It also helps to keep them away from negative thinking and vices.”

In her own, remarks ASSITEJ International President, Yvette Hardie commended the children, urging them to always keep themselves busy in their leisure with the theatre, as it will help to develop them into strong personalities in the society, while Prof Manon van de Water, praised the children for concentration in the game, which they sustained.

At Shodex, there was variety of both traditional and contemporary theatre performances by the children, including storytelling theatre, dance drama, full length drama, in which Ahmed Yerima’s “The Fall of a King” was staged. The international participants were taken to the Freedom Park Lagos where Mrs. Udoka conducted them round, showing and telling the history behind the park, artifacts and monuments found there. Lekki Conservatory was also visited for sightseeing. For its enthusiasm towards children and arts, the Olushola Adekoya-led management of Shodex Gardens, Anthony Bus Stop, Lagos gave ASSITEJ Nigeria mandate to feel free in using its Centre for rehearsals and performances; hence the declaration and commissioning of Shodex as ASSITEJ Nigeria friendly Centre. The President of ASSITEJ International Yvette Hardie did the commissioning

In ASSITEJ annual general meeting (AGM) that took place on the 29th September, 2018, members across Nigeria and beyond were in attendance. The venue was the Shodex Centre but members who were not present took part in the AGM via ASSITEJ WhatsApp group; *ASSITEJ Nigeria*. The meeting presided by the duo of the International and Nigerian presidents, Yvette and Mrs. Udoka respectively had Nwagbo Patrick Obi, IATC as Secretary but standing in for Dr. Chinyere Okam whose phone had low battery.

The agenda treated in the meeting includes introduction of members, introduction of the purpose of meeting, objectives of ASSITEJ, membership, strength and opportunities in ASSITEJ, ASSITEJ Nigeria; the way forward, election of ASSITEJ Nigeria officials. These issues were exhaustively discussed; as the following resolutions and observations were made; different levels membership defined, ASSITEJ and IATC to interface for advocacy in the theatre for children, there should be unity among ASSITEJ Nigeria, the entire ASSITEJ Africa, Mrs. Pamela Udoka has worked in creating credible ASSITEJ, secretariat for ASSITEJ Nigeria to document all Nigerian activities so that they will be published in the ASSITEJ Newsletter for credibility, Dr. Chinyere Okam is to be the secretary, while Emmanuel Adejumo will document all ASSITEJ events, strong playwriting tradition in Nigeria, good tradition of troupes performing for children and young people exist in Nigeria among others.