

FUTURE WORLD WILFRED UKPONG

I consider it a great honour to be chairing this event, which celebrates the first ever Golden Film Award to be won by a Nigerian at the Internationale Tourismus Borse-Berlin's Golden City-Gate Film Festival. Mr Wilfred Ukpong and his film company **Blazing Century Studios** have produced a piece of work that provokes discussion around some of the most topical issues of the day: environmental pollution and climate change, youth unemployment and migration, energy mix and international trade. It actually falls within the realm of post-structural discourse in International Relations, making it all the more important for someone such as myself who is a student of international relations theory, thrust into the limelight of diplomatic practice. This crossroad of **theory** and **practice** exists in other disciplines: When the fictive or fictional--movies/films/literature/art-- such as **Future World** intersect with the factive or real-life governmental and corporate decision-making processes/policies-and-laws, there is an opportunity to proffer innovative pragmatic solutions to real life problems.

Yet, the story of the causal effects of international trade on the Niger Delta's environmental and communal challenges is not a new one. Before hydrocarbon big oil appeared on the Bonny horizon, there was the West African palm-oil trade in the 19th and 20th centuries and earlier than that, there was the **slave trade**. The empty bright-blue gin bottles still to be found in the river beds of the Niger Delta give a glimpse into the legacy and impact of this *pre-crude-oil* trade, on this delicate Nigerian wetland's ecosystem. Interestingly, it was the advent of the sugar plantation (what today would be considered clean(er) energy) that turned human beings- **Africans**- into highly sought-after commodities in the 17th and 18th centuries (and even well into the first half of the 19th century). The wealth that accrued from this triangular trade in humans financed the European industrial revolution and, ironically, precipitated the abolition of the slave trade. A second irony from the West African and Nigerian perspective is the new demand for lubricants to oil the machines of the industrial revolution that gave rise to the palm oil trade. But make no mistake, the palm oil trade was also cruel to the people of the region and their environment as the race for profit gave rise to those that came to be known as *Palm Oil Ruffians*, mostly slave traders-turned palm oil merchants. In Nigeria, the export of palm oil only took a backseat when crude oil was discovered and volume production began in earnest. And here we are today trying to deal with the effects of oil and gas production on our environment and communities. To this, Wilfred Ukpong's **Future World** is succinct and inspirational, in that it taps into what can be referred to as the *Intertextuality* of the three stories: Slave Trade, Palm Oil Trade and Crude Oil Trade. Future World addresses all these stories in one.

But it is not just the stories **Future World** addresses, it is how it addresses them. Utilising industrial oil-and-gas waste to project a positive Afro-futuristic feel-good effect is a significant departure from most of the negative stereotypical African horror stories of poverty, famine and underdevelopment. The German born artist Joseph Beuys that he takes inspiration from was right in believing art can exercise a healing effect on both artist and audience. It is truly a **Gesamt kunst werk**- a total, comprehensive work of art, and, universal human creativity has the effect of bringing us all together.

In conclusion, I would like to state that I hold the firm belief oil in Nigeria is a blessing and not a curse, so long as we utilise it responsibly. We need to continue to harness our 187 trillion cubic feet of gas-reserves to power our expanding industrial base and manufacturing capacity, in order to achieve sustainable development. We cannot achieve this relying entirely on renewable energy. Sustainable development through industrialisation will provide employment for our youth and address the migration problem decisively. We do not have to make the same mistakes others made if we can leapfrog them, but where necessary, we should reserve the right to make our own mistakes in order to learn from them. As pioneer Africanist historian Professor Kenneth Dike once suggested, we must be accepted as creative agents of our own history.

Thank you and God bless.

Yusuf Tuggar

Nigerian Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany

24th May 2018.