CELEBRATION SPEECH

FOR

KAZEEM AJALA

Hello everyone and thank you all so much for gathering together as we share this wonderful holiday. Every year we have special moments, festivals and traditions to celebrate our faith, our culture and the blessings of life, and to have the privilege of sharing Eid-al-Adah is truly a gift. This year is no exception. Celebrations such as this one are the perfect time to think about our heritage, our families and loved ones and to acknowledge the strength, support and foundation we receive through the power of our religious and cultural devotion. This is the time of year we celebrate Eid-al-Adah, and it is no accident that timing to celebrate such mercy and forgiveness comes at the part of the year dedicated to the harvest and new beginnings. Although many of us are from different religious backgrounds, and some of us here are Muslim while others are Catholic, we share our Nigerian roots and pride. No matter how far we may have traveled from our homes, we know that feeling of community, kinship and belonging are possible-and probable, thanks to our connections through this wonderful organization.

The history of Eid-al-Adah is a universal story and appears in both the Quran and the Holy Bible. It is the story of Abraham who was commanded by God to sacrifice his own son as an act of appreciation and faith. God saw how devoted Abraham was and then stepped in and made sure that Abraham had a lamb for the sacrifice instead of being forced into losing his precious son, Ishmael. The Festival of Sacrifice teaches us the goodness and mercy of God. The Eid holidays are days of remembrance, appreciation and acknowledgement, and as we do our best to dress in the finery this holiday calls for, this tradition also reminds us of the respect we have for our heritage and for those who created and nurtured our beloved traditions, namely our families, friends and neighbors. This holiday is also a time to come together and share the blessings of life, and whether it is sharing food or prayer or charity for those that might need more than others, the acknowledgement of Eid-al-Adah strengthens our belief in each other, our religion, and the importance of connection through our community.

I once heard an expression that is rumored to be an old Nigerian proverb, in fact if any of you know it, please let me know… and even if this is new to most of you, the message is still a very important lesson to learn-one to keep with you and remember as you go through life. It is:

“Not to know the good we have

Till time has stolen the cherished gift away,

Is cause of half the misery that we feel,

And makes the world the wilderness it is.”

It is through togetherness and celebration of our faith and each other that allows us to appreciate what we have; it allows us to acknowledge all of the blessings of life, no matter what challenges might face us, and our religion shines a light of understanding that banishes the wilderness. Through prayer and devotion, with friends, family and community by our side, we have a chance to truly embrace the meaning and purpose of life. Every year I look forward to this holiday-to new beginnings, to strengthening connections, and to giving thanks. Eid-al-Adah is the perfect time to do this and I am proud to acknowledge the following people and organizations:

* First, I want to thank my wife, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for her strength, support, and companionship. Thank you for being my partner and for sharing our journey together.
* I want to also thank someone who has done so much for this community. Hlhaja Moji Aranmolate from Nasfat, you have demonstrated your commitment to your friends, neighbors and community SEVENTY-FOLD!!! Yes, that’s how many people he has personally invited to be with us, and each and every one of you who are here is a special gift. Thank you for being our new friends!
* To Alhaja Ruki from Abulahi, welcome and thank you for being here. We are thrilled that you honor us with your presence on such a special day.
* And to Nana Iyalaje of Abe Igi Anu, we are so happy to see you. (**Say a** **few words why you are thanking this person**) It means so much to us that you are here and we appreciate that you \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

I am also so thankful for all of the people who work at my company, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and the job that is being done to expand the Nigerian community in Atlanta in order to bring our countrymen together in this, our new home.

The great African Basketball player Dikembe Mutombe once said, “God put us here to prepare this place for the next generation. That’s our job. Raising children and helping the community, that’s preparing for the next generation.” Remember as you celebrate with all of your Nigerian friends both old and new, that what we are doing right now is laying the foundation for the future of Nigerians, and as all of our parents, grandparents, and wise elders did for us, it’s time that we acknowledge the sacrifices made and the mercy given to those who passed this rich heritage down to our generation.

Lastly, I want to recognize all of you for being proud Nigerians in a new world. We all face circumstances in our daily lives that may threaten us to be abkle to “maintain our roots” while blossoming in the new soil of this special country and city. By gathering as we have done today, we show the world what it means to be of Nigerian descent, and it is my goal and passion to unite all of the Nigerians who have chosen to live here in Atlanta. Regardless of your beliefs or ethnicity, we believe in solidarity and unity and we look forward to a time in the near future when all Nigerians will stand tall and together, with solidarity, unity and faith, right here in Atlanta. Thank you all and God Bless you!