

# STATE OF THE BOY-CHILD ADDRESS

Delivered by Solomon O. Ayodele at the BQA Global BoyChild Summit on Friday 22 May, 2026.

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Distinguished Guests. Parents. Partners. Policymakers. Educators.

And most importantly —

**The boys.**

I want to start with something we rarely say out loud in a room like this:

*We have been failing the boys, and this failure is not from cruelty but from silence. And the silence is over.*

Today is not another BoyChild Symposium where we talk about boys like they are a problem to be managed or where we find a way to commercialize this trouble with obnoxious lies. Today, we name what is happening. We sit with what it costs us. And then, we do something about it.

This is what I call the State of the Boy Child Address and by God's grace, I am going to keep delivering this, as long as God spares my life at all our Global BoyChild Summit, across London, Berlin, Kuwait, Singapore, Honolulu, Harare.

We are gathered today at the Largest Stage of Global BoyChild Conversation without foreign funding or institutional baby sitting. Infact, the many doors we've knocked has been returned with cynicism, as though, the BoyChild conversation is just another NGO talk. I have done this work in the last eight years and the simple way to describe the state of the boy child in Nigeria — and across Africa — is this:

**Confused. Capable. Demanding and in danger.**

I am going to share 5 Truths and go on to directly address the Boys, the Parent and every Partner in Progress in this room, and those who will get a chance to listen to this.

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T R U T H N U M B E R O N E

## The Trap called – ‘Silence’

Somewhere between the ages of 7 and 12, a terrible surgery happens to Nigerian boys. This is an unannounced and unscheduled surgery that pierces through their sould. It happens in homes, in classrooms, on football pitches, on islam prayer gound and church benches. This surgery removes something essential: the language of the expression.

This is not about Roby Ekpo or Sam Ekpo, Chike Osebuka or Chidi Mokeme. Frank Edoho or Alex Ekubo. This is about the many unknown boys without the massive social media following, whose inner child was murdered on the platter of ‘MEN DON’T CRY HERE’

The first time I ever saw my Dad cry was the day my Mom died.

We tell boys — in a thousand different ways — that their grief is weakness, their fear is failure, their tenderness is shameful. And then we wonder why the grown men in our lives are unreachable. Why they explode. Why they disappear. Why they die. They die, gradually. Dead at 17 but eventually buried at the age of 70.

*Do we need WHO confirming again that men die by suicide at 2 to 4 times the rate of women. In Nigeria, male depression goes largely untreated — not because men suffer less, but because we built a culture that punishes them for naming it.*

Boys who cannot name their pain do not eliminate it. They simply redirect it. It then becomes the hand raised in the home. The addiction at 22. The explosive boss. The absent father. The domineering boyfriend. The absent-minded husband. The man who never learned to stay because he never learned to feel.

Guess what, this is not individual failure. This is a systemic emotional education deficit — and it has generational consequences.

TRUTH NUMBER TWO

## The Trap called ‘Provider’

We are raising boys to be ATMs. And then we were surprised when their entire sense of self collapsed with the economy. The great OBO himself said ‘If you no get money, hide your face’

Nigerian masculinity has been almost entirely collapsed into one function: **EARN**. A man who cannot provide is not considered a man. This belief is so deep, so old, so woven into family language and religious teaching and peer culture that most men have never questioned it. So, we try to earn love, to earn affection, to earn support.. everything becomes a transaction.

This is a State of the BoyChild Address and not a State of the Nation. I hope the Men who currently reside at Aso rock knows that the cornerstone is also a stubming stone.

*Nigeria's youth unemployment rate stands at 42.5% — the highest on record. For every young man who cannot find economic footing, we have not just created poverty. We have created emasculation. And emasculation, in a society that has no other masculine identity available, creates desperation.*

The UNDP found that economic humiliation — not ideology — is the single strongest predictor of violent recruitment in the North-East. When a boy's only definition of worth is what he can provide, and he cannot provide, he will find another currency. Sometimes that currency is violence.

We are not raising boys with a rich inner life. We are raising boys with a single job description. And when the job disappears — the boy disappears with it.

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T R U T H N U M B E R T H R E E

## The Trap of Domination

A boy who is never taught how to influence without force will use force every time he needs influence.

Dominance — over women, over juniors, over rivals — is so deep in our masculine ideal that many boys genuinely cannot distinguish leadership from coercion. They have never seen the difference modelled. The men around them resolved conflict with authority, with volume, with the threat of consequence.

Have you ever heard men say, let's give women a sit on the table. This is with the assumption that the table belongs to Men. Men like President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo has been in power for **46 years**, coming to power in a 1979 coup. Men like President Paul Biya has led the country for **44 years**, serving as Prime Minister from 1975 to 1982 before assuming the presidency in November 1982. Men like President Denis Sassou Nguesso has ruled for **41 years** in total (first from 1979 to 1992, and continuously since returning to power in 1997)

Permit me to cite UN Women that found out that 47% of Nigerian women have experienced intimate partner violence. ActionAid Nigeria estimates that only 3% of cases are ever reported. Research out of Ahmadu Bello University found that boys who witnessed domestic violence were four times more likely to become perpetrators.

*This is not random cruelty. This is curriculum. Boys are learning exactly what we are teaching them about what men do when they lose an argument.*

Force!

And this script extends beyond the home. It shapes how men lead organisations, communities, and governments. It produces the boss who cannot receive feedback. The politician who cannot lose. The religious leader who cannot be questioned. The father who has never apologised to his child.

Coercion is not strength. It is the absence of skill. And we can teach the skill.

TRUTH NUMBER FOUR

## The Trap of ‘Brotherhood Void’

Nigerian boys are profoundly lonely.

We do not have a language for male loneliness. We barely acknowledge it. Boys are not taught how to be close to other boys without competition, performance, or ridicule. They are not taught that deep friendship is not weakness. That needing someone is not a defect.

And into that void — with extraordinary precision — step the people who want to recruit them.

*The CLEEN Foundation found that university cult membership in Nigeria has reached an estimated 500,000 students across over 200 institutions. A University of Ibadan study found that 78% of recruited members cited brotherhood and belonging as their primary motivation. Not money. Not protection. Brotherhood.*

The cult did not invent the need. The cult simply answered it.

And today, that recruitment has gone digital. Online 'manosphere' communities — which traffic in misogyny, grievance, and nihilism — are offering the same product: a tribe, an identity, a story that makes a confused young man feel like he finally matters.

If we do not build legitimate spaces of brotherhood — with real initiation, real accountability, real belonging — we are leaving the architecture of male community to people with violent intentions.

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T R U T H N U M B E R F I V E

## The Trap of the Mirror

Boys do not become who they are told to be. They simply become who they watch.

And most Nigerian boys — right now, today — are watching the wrong men. The good men are scared of opening up their vulnerability. They are hiding in churches and mosques, busy with the hustle of life and replicating the ‘No one looked after me now, so they’d be okay’.

No, they won’t be okay. They won’t be okay in the hands of accidental fathers, irresponsible uncles, recalcitrant musicians. Or how do you go to the studio to sing ‘Kirikiri joo soapy’

It is not because the right men don't exist. But because the right men are invisible. They are silent. The father who stayed. The man who repaired. The leader who served. The mentor who showed up. These men are real. We just haven't built the infrastructure to make them visible.

Kayode Adeniji saw me when I was a rough and unccordinated 13 year Old in State Senior High School Oyewole, Agege. He was my first picture of instagram feed.

But guess what, our boys are watching four hours and thirty minutes of social media daily — according to Statista's 2022 data on Nigerian youth — consuming content from men who display wealth, domination, and conquest as the coordinates of manhood.

*Over 45% of Nigerian children grow up without a consistently present father figure. This is not a statistic. It is a generation constructing their identity from screens and peers*

The Instagram economy has given visibility to the performance of manhood — and made the living of it nearly invisible. Our boys are learning to perform. They are not learning to be.

This ends when men of integrity become as visible, as compelling, as present — as the men who are performing.

## THE RECKONING

# What This Costs Nigeria

Let us be direct about what happens if we do not fix this. This is not alarmism. This is a projection from the data we already have.

A nation where boys are emotionally illiterate produces men who govern by fear and households that are war zones. A nation where masculine worth equals money — in an economy where 42.5% of young men cannot find work — is a nation actively manufacturing its own insurgency. A nation where boys cannot find legitimate brotherhood will continue to watch its universities, its streets, and its political spaces colonised by violent fraternities

Lekki Expressway is possibly the new Oshodi under bridge. Young, energetic, and homeless boys who moved from asking for 200 Naira, to cleaning your car without asking and now bashing your side mirror to get your phone.

We are not talking about a social problem. We are talking about a national security crisis. An economic crisis. A public health crisis. All wearing the face of an ordinary Nigerian boy.

*The question is not whether we can afford to fix this. The question is whether we can survive not fixing it.*

## — DIRECTLY TO THE BOYS & YOUNG MEN —

# What I Need You to Know

If you are a boy or a young man in this room — or reading these words — I want to speak to you directly:

You are not broken. You were handed a broken tool and told it was a map. It is not your fault that you are lost. But it is your responsibility — from this day — to find a better one.

## **Five things I need you to do:**

**Learn how to Name what you feel** — You have been taught that emotions are weakness. They are not. They are data. A man who cannot read his own interior cannot read a room, a relationship, or a nation. Start small today. Start by naming one thing you feel, to one person you trust.

**Choose your mirrors carefully** — You become who you watch up close. Not who you follow online. The man posting the cars is performing — and you cannot see the private cost. Find men of substance, in real life, who will let you watch them up close. That is your curriculum.

**Build real brotherhood** — Not group chats. Not cliques built on exclusion. Real friendship — the kind where you can say 'I am struggling' and not lose status. That kind of friendship will protect you from every predator who tries to recruit you with belonging.

**Divorce your worth from your wallet** — You are not your income. You are not your grades. You are not your performance. You are a person — with a soul, a perspective, a capacity for love and thought and courage that no economy can take from you. Build that. The money will follow.

**Speak up and stay** — In every room you are in — be the person who stays. Stays in the conversation when it gets hard. Stays in the friendship when it gets complicated. Stays in the family when it demands something of you. Nigeria needs men who stay. Be one.

— FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS —

## **The Home Is a Classroom**

Everything this boy becomes — you are teaching right now. Not in the lectures you give. In the life he watches you live.

### **Five things you must do:**

- 1. Permit the tears** — The next time your son cries — do not say 'stop crying.' Say: 'I see you. Tell me what happened.' This is not softness. This is the foundation of every emotionally healthy man. The permission to feel is the permission to heal.

- 2. Let him see you apologise** — Nothing teaches a boy accountability like watching a man he respects say: 'I was wrong. I am sorry.' It is the most powerful lesson in leadership you will ever give. Let him see it.
  - 3. Expand the definition of success** — Before you ask your son what he wants to be, ask him what kind of man he wants to become. Teach him that wisdom, integrity, presence, and courage are masculine achievements — not consolation prizes for those who do not get rich.
  - 4. Curate his world** — Know what he is watching. Know who he is watching. Social media algorithms are not neutral — they are optimised to show boys the most extreme, most provocative version of masculinity available. You are in competition with that. Show up for the competition.
  - 5. Get him a mentor — and be one** — Your boy needs men beyond you in his life. Deliberately connect him with men of integrity. And deliberately make yourself available to the boys in your community who have no one. Mentorship is not optional. It is survival infrastructure.
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## A N N O U N C E M E N T

# Introducing MyGuy — Africa's First Digital Space for Men

All of this — every truth we have named today — requires infrastructure. It requires a place. A place where men in Nigeria and across Africa can come as they are, not as they perform.

Today, I am honoured to announce the birth of that place.

## **MyGuy.** [Africa's First Digital Space Built for Men.]

MyGuy is not a social media platform. It is not a content feed designed to keep you scrolling. It is the opposite of everything we have criticised today.

MyGuy is a digital community — purpose-built, trauma-informed, and culturally grounded in the African masculine experience — where men can:

MyGuy is for the boy who does not know how to talk to his father. The young man who moved to Lagos and has no one in his corner. The husband who loves his wife but does not know how to show up. The professional who is excelling publicly and

collapsing privately. The elder who wants to mentor but has never been taught how.

MyGuy is for every Nigerian man who has ever thought: there should be a place for this.

*There is now. MyGuy is that place. Africa's first. And it was built because 1,000 boys like the ones in this room deserve better than the mirror the world has been holding up to them.*

More details on MyGuy will be shared at the close of this summit. What I want you to know today is this: the announcement is not the solution. The solution is the work. MyGuy is one piece of the infrastructure. But infrastructure only matters if people use it, build it, and refuse to let it become another performance.

We are building a house. And we are inviting every man in Africa to come and live — actually live — in it.

[www.myguy.me](http://www.myguy.me)

## C L O S I N G

### **The Challenge Within the Culture**

Before I close, I want to name something clearly: nothing said today is an attack on Nigerian culture. On African masculinity. On our traditions or our faith.

This is a challenge from within. Because the greatest masculine virtues our culture has ever produced — responsibility, courage, sacrifice, community, wisdom — are being undermined, every single day, by the very distortions that claim to uphold them.

The Nigerian man who stays. Who shows up. Who admits he was wrong. Who holds space for his children's fear. Who leads without coercion. Who builds without destroying. That man is not un-African. That man is the best of Africa.

*We are not asking our boys to be less. We are daring them — and the men they will become — to be more.*

To the boys in this room: You are not the problem. You are the answer. And today is the day we begin to equip you properly.

To the parents and educators: your proximity is the curriculum. The most important thing you will ever do for this nation is show up — honestly and consistently — to the boys in your world.

To the policymakers: you have the power to fund the future or to fund the crisis. There is no neutral position. Every choice is a choice.

And to Nigeria — to Africa — I say this:

**The state of the boy child is critical. But it is not hopeless. And it starts with the one thing we have never given him enough of: Our full, undivided, fearless attention.**

**Thank you.**

— End of Address —

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