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**Formal Presentation of the JCCC Memorial Parks Project &
REQUEST FOR LAND GRANT
TO THE GOVERNOR OF LAGOS STATE
HIS EXCELLENCY
BABATUNDE RAJI FASHOLA (SAN)**

(A JCCC Communications Department report)

Tuesday, 28 July, 2009

The meeting with the Governor started at 1.45pm in the Lagos House, Alausa Ikeja. JCCC was represented by four board members and three staff members. The board members present were; the Vice Chairman of the Board, His Grace The Most Reverend (Dr.) Joseph Sunday Ajayi, Rt. Reverend (Prof.) Adebayo D. Akinde, Sir Jadegoke Adebonajo Badejo and the Visioner of the project Sir Demola Aladekomo. For the staff, the Chief Executive Officer of JCCC, Mrs. Yemisi Ikuomola, led the team of three to include Mr. Oluwasegun Peter and Mr. Tolu Akinsanya.

With the Executive Governor of Lagos State seated - in the person of his Excellency Mr. Babatunde Raji Fashola and six other state representatives, the session began with an opening prayer by His Grace, The Most Reverend (Dr.) J.S Ajayi. Afterwards, JCCC representatives were introduced to the Governor by the Commissioner for Physical Planning Mr. Abosede, he also introduced the government officials present. Thereafter, a very brief presentation was made by the JCCC Chief Executive Officer. The slides made explicit what JCCC stands for, the need for JCCC intervention and a call to action for the government ("Church collaboration with the state"). Then, it was time for questions and answers.

Several questions were raised by the state representatives present. How much land does JCCC require? Where does JCCC require land? Would the national parks be for Christian heroes strictly? What is the difference between JCCC Memorial Parks and the currently available private cemeteries considering the huge costs involved in setting up high standard memorial parks? Has the fact that most of Lagos State is barely above water level (before you dig a few feet in most areas of Lagos you hit water) been considered by JCCC? Would JCCC also offer cremation services?

The first question listed was answered by the Visioner, Sir Demola Aladekomo in a firm and most emphatic manner. He stated quite unequivocally that for the National Memorial Parks that JCCC intended to embark on in Lagos, two parcels of land, twenty five (25) hectares each, are required in the Epe and Badagry axis. As for the Epe axis, Sir. Aladekomo stated that JCCC requires land in that area in line with the Lagos State vision of building a world class zone of the Lekki axis. A State representative responded by asking if JCCC would accept a 25-hectare land near Epe on the border with Ijebu – the JCCC response was in the affirmative. Sir Aladekomo also answered the question concerning admission into the JCCC National Memorial Park. He stated that the cemetery will be a place to memorialize all Nigerian heroes, Muslim and Christian alike. He also took the opportunity to mention that discussion has already begun with NASFAT (a Nigerian Muslim umbrella organization) to get their cooperation with the JCCC Memorial Parks Project.

As to the difference between the JCCC proposed Memorial Parks and private cemeteries like the Vaults and Gardens, which already offer very high standards, the CEO stated firmly that having in mind the not for profit status of JCCC, there is bound to be a world of difference between the organization and private cemeteries. JCCC would be much more affordable than the private cemeteries, with standard prices under a hundred thousand (N100 000) compared to the costs in a private cemetery like the Vaults and Gardens, which starts at over three hundred thousand (N300,000.00). The not for profit nature of JCCC would also mean that the organization would be able to embark on fund raising activities to augment the income earned from its memorial parks. She also noted the fact that, while private cemeteries never make any promises as to leaving those interred in their graves in perpetuity, one of the JCCC core values is a commitment to those interred in its Memorial Parks and their families in perpetuity. As to the issue of Lagos State being

barely above sea/water level, the CEO made it clear that through technology and importantly support from the relevant ministries, JCCC would avoid placing its parks in areas overly marshy or close to the water table. Indeed, the issue of Lagos State's top soil closeness to water table had been duly considered before the session. As to offering cremation services, the CEO with the support of other Board members, stated quite firmly, that the very nature (JCCC Christian roots) of the project would not allow it to offer cremation services at any point.

After all questions had been duly answered, the Governor spoke. His opening words were truly inspiring as he stated that he was "particularly receptive to this idea" and wondered why people fought of other pieces of Land when the one which JCCC is requesting for is "the most important real estate... this is the one people should be fighting over and not the one we leave behind when we die" he said. The Governor then went on to say that due to constraints by the Land Use Act of Nigeria, it is impossible for him to grant JCCC land in perpetuity. The best he could do would be to grant JCCC land with the maximum tenure possible.

The Governor then went on to bring it to the attention of all the JCCC representatives that "if we give you land, what will be the value of the land for the government?" This question, he stated, is pertinent because for every piece of land that he, as Governor, gives out as a grant, he would have to justify to the people of Lagos the value they are to derive from such a grant. In other words, such a grant for social and civic purpose would have to be as a result of a "quid pro quo" arrangement. This will involve a more flexible arrangement than outright purchase in the case of a for-profit venture. An area in which the governor suggested that such an arrangement could be reached, would be in the area of JCCC logistic support of

public cemeteries and planning. How much value would JCCC commit to the various public cemeteries in Lagos State annually - in writing? He stated that although JCCC is not for profit, the Limited by Guarantee status of the organization does not mean that it would not make any profits. He suggested that if the rigors of putting together a “quid pro quo” agreement would be too much, JCCC might be better off buying the land they require from the government.

Finally, Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola stated in a most unambiguous and supportive tone, “I have no objection in principle, in fact, I am a supporter” of this project by the Joint Christian Cemetery Company. He noted that he has always been fascinated with the Arlington National Cemetery, which he visits anytime he is in the Washington D.C area and happy that such would be replicated here in Lagos State. His Excellency also stated that in a previous EXCO meeting, the poor state of public cemeteries in Lagos state had been discussed – but it was realized that the hands of his office were tied in any efforts to try and give the public cemeteries a facelift. He noted that “where emotion takes place, reason takes flight” and as such any effort to fix the public cemeteries by the government might leave his person labeled as a ‘ritualist’. He did say, however, that the JCCC Memorial Parks Project would shock recalcitrant communities into reality and have them request for similar projects in their communities. The Governor assured JCCC of his support and, in conclusion, gave the go ahead that the details of getting the land grant should be finalized between JCCC and the relevant committee set up at the meeting.

The committee has the Special Adviser to the Governor on Local Government and Chieftancy Affairs, Mr. Olalekan Ifemade, as Chairman. Other government representatives present at the meeting are also to serve on this committee. The

committee is to look at available land in the state, make choices and revert to His Excellency on modalities. These would include the value of the land to be granted, cost of giving it out, nature of technical support JCCC would give the state for the upgrade of existing cemeteries, the investment value of the land and other areas in which JCCC can provide support as identified by the committee.

The meeting rounded up by 2.15pm. To close, his Excellency posed for group pictures with the JCCC Board and CEO. After the meeting, the committee members agreed to draft a representative of the Ministry of Justice in from inception. The JCCC CEO is also to meet Mr. Ifemade on Friday, 31st of July to discuss the next steps.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS PRESENT AT THE PRESENTATION

1. Mr. Abosede – The Honourable Commissioner for Physical Planning
2. Mr Ashafa – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Lands
3. Mr Olalekan Ifemade – Senior Special Assistant to the Governor on Local Government and Chieftancy Affairs.
4. Mr Salami – Senior Special Assistant to the Governor on Lands
5. Mr Joseph O. Agbenla – Deputy Surveyor General