

***THE IJAWS, POST AMNESTY, PEACE, SECURITY AND THE
NIGER DELTA***

**A PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE 36 STATES OF NIGERIA
(GOVERNOR'S FORUM) MEETING IN YENAGOA**

BY

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The Vice President Federal Republic of Nigeria Dr. Goodluck Jonathan GCON

The Chief Servant of the Governor's forum of Nigeria – Alhaji Bukola Saraki

Your Excellencies, Governors of the 36 States of Nigeria

Distinguished Guests

Members of the press

Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to welcome you to the heartland and Mecca of all Ijaws – Yenagoa. I want to also on behalf of all Ijaws in Nigeria and in the Diaspora welcome you to this meeting in our traditional language by saying Nua! and Obosa!!

Indeed these are auspicious times in the collective history of Nigeria and the Niger Delta in particular. These are times in which we can indeed come together the way you have and prove to the whole world that Nigerians can develop home grown solutions to their internal problems given our sense of sincerity, justice, purpose and suitable environment. Indeed, these are the realities we face and they are sustainable. I say these with all sense of responsibility.

You are aware of and witnesses to the fact that the Niger-Delta region had gone through a lot in recent times. This traumatising had taken its toll on both humans, capital, infrastructure, economy and the environment. Thank God, we are now in a season of amnesty or post amnesty.

This presupposes that we are, in a season of moral, national, regional and intellectual rebirth. That rebirth means we can now begin to do new things and old things differently.

We can become our brothers and indeed sisters' keepers. We should not fall into the temptation of what the Nigerian playwright and noble price laureate Professor Wole Soyinka describe as being amnesiac.

I am in the medical sciences. I do know that amnesia is one of the two cardinal processes of anesthesia. Anesthesia itself can be induced therefore amnesia by extension may be induced or assumed out of a state of convenience.

In INC, we believe your forum is a proactive organization that seeks to be alive to its responsibilities in the management and co-operate governance of the Nigerian state. An American president once said that the strength of America lies in the collectivity of the states of America. By extension the strength of Nigeria lays in you the governors of the thirty six states. So we have come to equity. The equity we seek from Nigeria is not born out of selfishness but of a sense of justice.

There were issues that led to the instability in the Niger Delta from 1914 – 2009. These issues borne out of insensitivity and lack of **justice** I must confess led to

socio-political frustration and therefore infractions on the law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

I must also confess that the present administration had tried to give some attention and also perceived solutions to the matter. For which I congratulate you all. This led to the Amnesty declared by the Federal Government but we are behaving as if amnesty is all that is needed. Indeed it is an important step and deeply appreciated but I must stress and the Federal Government had alluded to our position that it is part of a process.

The next step should therefore be **dialogue** with the authentic socio-cultural and political leaders of the area. In the dialogue, the original issues that led to this sorry pass would and could be canvassed and addressed.

We appreciate the level of meetings and dialogue with the militant leaders but I dare say that they are only part of the aggrieved population with a vibrant and intellectually sound eldership and leadership. There are ominous signs in the horizon which point to the fact that the level of discussions, consultations and representations needed to be broadened.

Post-Amnesty activities of the Federal Government also show that the Federal Government is not on top of the matter. Let no one pretend that they know what

Ijaw people want better than them. Let no one assume they know the solutions and how to develop us more than ourselves. We want to develop at our own rate. What Ijaws need is **political space** and not **interventionism**. Indeed, there may be need for a stimulus packages for political, social, economic, intellectual and infrastructural development but that is for the immediate. In the short, medium and long run, of this post-amnesty era, what we want are:

- 1) Friendship, love and understanding from our brothers in the federation
- 2) Friendship and love borne out of a true sense of moral rectitude and trust.
- 3) Transformation of that friendship into tangibles to solving our mutual problems and interests in the executive, legislative, judicial and indeed in the court of public opinion.
- 4) These friends as so gathered here, should use their leverages, and advise the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria – Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to send a bill to the federal legislative arm creating as a matter of national security, interest and stability two more states for the Ijaws (Toru Ibe State in the West and Oil Rivers in the East), they should also increase the number of Local Government Areas in Bayelsa State from the present eight to twenty four as others.

- 5) That this bill having been received by the legislature, our friends by that I mean the governors will help us to lobby their representatives in Senate and the House of Representatives to give that executive bill a speedy hearing and passage.
- 6) The resolution of that bill I can assure you will bring lasting peace to the region
- 7) The Federal Government had announced that they want to spend two hundred billion naira in the Niger Delta. Thirty five billion naira will go specifically to Bayelsa. Thank you, but it is not enough. N35 Billion Naira cannot build a senatorial road in Bayelsa. Please what we need are states. We will generate income. Be circumspect and targeted in our expenditure, detailed and environmentally driven in our designs and we will transform this region and our environment.
- 8) I call on you our brothers and friends. What Ijaw need now are true brothers and friends. Not pity, not tokenism, but **equity, justice and fair play.**

We appreciate that we have to forget the past and press on to a greater future and picture.

However, that future and picture can only arise and come forth in the physical and in the hearts of men when there is justice, equity and fairness and where the past is not repeated nor reminded.


Your Excellencies, you are at a point in history where your attitude and the **freshness** you bring to the debate on this nagging problems will redefine our nation and indeed our collective survival. We trust and hope that you will rise to the occasion. We believe in a common and collective destiny called Nigeria. We believe that the prices, pains and bloodshed of our heroes past for the unification of this country shall not be in vain.

Therefore, I call upon this august gathering of eminent Nigerians to rise to the occasion and create a new Nigeria where no man is oppressed.

Ijaw need friends, friends of honour and the time is now.

Nua! Aaazon!

Thank you and God bless you.



Dr. A. W. Obianime (JP)
President, INC.