



PRESIDENT'S WELCOME ADDRESS

2ND ESAN NATIONAL CONGRESS INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

ATLANTA, GEORGIA USA – MAY 22ND - 24TH 2009

Executive Members, Association Presidents, Board of Trustee, Royal Highnesses (Inijies of Esanland), Chiefs, Members of Edo State House of Assembly, Senators, Distinguished Guests, Esan members, ladies and gentlemen, Welcome.

Here in Atlanta, GA, we mark our 2ND International Convention. Today is again historic to a point but most important, it is a reflection of our unity, our devotion to the growth of Esanland and our dedication to the development of our people who face abject poverty in a nation that makes billions of dollars in oil revenue.

I commend the Esan Progressive Association of Atlanta for hosting us. I commend the dedicated members of the ENC and affiliate chapters whose pain, hard work and focus make this event possible today. Your efforts are not unnoticed and your passions are reflective lights that brighten the Executives' undying desire to ensure that your voices are heard. The voices that call for us to ensure that we impact the lives of our people, our brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers through the provision of medical support to Esanland. Your voices, reflective of the collective wisdom of the general assembly members as recommended in Boston, MA this past January called for the enhancement of lives through medical equipment and prescription support. Today, on behalf of the leadership team I am here to report to you the progress we have made and the challenges we face.

The theme of this convention is "Education & Youth Development." I will speak on this subject in a few minutes, outlining strategic approaches to improving our youths. In the thrust of it all, our success this weekend will significantly impact the ultimate outcome of the theme of this convention and our short and long range goals.

Economist report that the average Nigerian lives on \$2 per day. This number is overly generous. The average Esan man or woman lives on \$1 or less per day in all true estimation and without the support of families in Diaspora and other parts of Nigeria. In a nation where a recent USA investigative report indicated that \$180M was offered as bribe to our national leaders by the Halliburton Corporation for the commencement of one oil project, we can only imagine the level of corruption that has pervasively overridden a country we call our own. We can not be discouraged. We have to plot our drives and collaborate with other associations with vested interest to support our people. Today, we are their best hopes. We are the shoulders they can lean on.

Our medical support goals when gradually achieved will alleviate their pain, moderate escalation of illnesses and resolute some sicknesses. It will meet a significant goal. One thing it won't change that I have observed is eradicate hunger. It is truism that our people are simply dying of hunger at a high level. Someday, sometimes in the future, I hope we will strategize on how to address this added concern once our current goals are significantly met. I know we can't change the world but I truly believe we can impact the lives of our people one person at a time.

Our Achievements so far

Yesterday, I made a *State of the Union* presentation highlighting our achievements so far. Some are relatively mild in comparison to others but these steps regardless of magnitude, are the core fundamental track ways to effectiveness. In a nutshell, I will repeat the critical points. As of today, we have (1) completed a website that showcases ENC around the world, (2) commenced our 501 C 3 non-profit status with the Internal Revenue Service, (3) Structured our financials in a transparent way with frequent reports to the COPs, Executives and BOT, (4) gained the membership of new affiliate Esan groups around the country, (5) established the Goals committees that passionately commenced intensive work on seeking medical equipment and services for Esanland, working jointly with the Chief Medical Director of the Otibhor Okhai Hospital and (6) identifying the critical components of being a Patron/Matron of the ENC among other projects and tasks.

Health Care Support

Based on the agreed criticality of this issue the committee responsible for ensuring that we get and transport medical equipment to Esanland sought donors and has almost reached an agreement on obtaining a 40-foot Container loaded

with Medical Equipment up to and including X-Ray, EKG, Blood Pressure Machines and lots of medical supplies for the Otiabor Okhai Hospital in Esanland. To ensure that we are not working in silo, we sent the list of supplies received to the Chief Medical Director of the hospital in Esanland Dr. George Akpede for review. He responded, by identifying the equipment that will be of immense value to our people. We are now completing all required official documentations and once finalized we will be ready to meet one of our major goals in a few months.

You challenged the leadership team of the ENC made up of the Executives, BOT and COP with several goals. Today, I stand before you proudly on behalf the leadership team to say we listened to your voices and recommendations and we are running with it. I must note that while a few members continue to do amazing work to ensure success of the ENC most are simply observers from the sidelines. We all need to find a way to participate regardless. If you truly believe in the mission of the ENC, you must break your silence and find an active way to support our goals. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr. "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." My challenge to our silent members and friends today is get active either in kind or in cash.

The estimated value of the items we will send to Esanland is approximately \$300,000.00 or N43, 500,000.00. Our efforts in collaboration with Dr. George Akpede's leadership will for sure ease the pain and suffering of our people. Please note that it is not all free. We have to pay for the shipping of these items. The estimated cost of handling and shipping 24 pallets of medical supplies in a 40-foot container as submitted to us by the donor is \$12,000. The ENC will be responsible for this expense among others.

Here is the challenge. Today, when you donate money or make pledges, please remember that you are directly impacting the attainment of this goal. Let your "YES be YES" in that your compliance and fulfillment of your pledge is a direct reflection of your integrity. Last year, pledges were made but unfulfilled. So again I ask you to let you "YES be YES." I challenge you to get off the sideline and contribute towards this goal. Upon arrival of the container in Nigeria, we will need a means to get the items from the seaport to Esanland. Promises won't help. Actions would. We need your actions today. We need our supporters and leaders both in the USA, Canada and Nigeria to be a part of this effort. We also will need a core group of representatives from the ENC and Edo State government to join us in Esanland when we make the journey to deliver the items.

Education & Youth Development

Edo State is being wrongly tagged as the "kidnap capital" of Nigeria. While many are buying into this false label we must not be quick to embrace this tag. Kidnapping has been prevalent in Nigeria especially the Niger Delta for years. Orchestrated by youths, sponsored by adult professionals with questionable integrities, this problem has recently infiltrated into Edo State. We can't address the problem by offering millions to whistleblowers. As we know this approach has not worked and will not work. Even victims are intimidated to a point that they are unwilling to confess the details of their kidnapers. If a retired Major General, spouse of a Commissioner, a mom with 3 kids and other innocent citizens can be kidnapped easily, it means we are possibly heading into a chaotic state of anarchy managed by thugs. To combat this crisis we must address the grassroots problems faced by our youths.

A collaborative approach of educational enhancement augmented through jobs creation and joint partnerships with foreign sponsors are required. To achieve this goal the Governor must implement a paradigm shift and hire highly qualified integrators to build collaborative international networks with corporations to establish service oriented businesses where our college graduates can be hired as employees. Within the confines of Edo State they would work for corporations in the USA, UK, Canada and many more. Our young college graduates are qualified to be Customer Services Reps or Information Technology Technical Assistants for Cisco, AT&T, Chevron and other corporations seeking cheap labor companioned with competent staff. The cost will be cheaper and English eloquence will be better than what they currently get from India, Grenada, China and other third world countries where some of these corporations have embraced this model.

We can't achieve this goal alone. We will create awareness and challenge the governor of Edo State or his Deputy to lead this mission. It is a possibility. Increased taxes alone will not resolute our problems. Collaborative approaches will. International corporations will be willing to pay \$3.00 per hour for a service that currently cost an average of \$15 per hour for a Customer Service Representative (CSR). At \$6240.00 (N904, 800.00) per year based on the average 2080 work hours (52 weeks x 40 hours per week = 2080) a USA corporation can retain an Edo State college graduate as a Customer Service Representative while the young graduate will be happy to make an average of N75, 400.00 per month. (Exchange rate @ \$1 to N145)

The above is just one of many options the governor can exploit if he engages qualified professionals to seek collaborative ventures on behalf of Edo State in efforts to generate jobs for our youths. It does not require scientific creativity but simple business negotiations that outlines mutual benefits to corporations on both ends of the globe. A young college graduate with a fixed income is unlikely to embrace other opportunities of compromising interests.

The ENC will do its best to support Edo State government when called upon in an advisory or operational capacity. In our circle today are professionals that could serve as great business liaisons for the state. In addition, we will seek to implement community awareness efforts that will be of benefit to our youths. The levels of details and step-by-step programs we adopt will be directly predicated on the generous contributions of everyone here today.

In closing, if I may rise to a point of personal privilege as your president, I wish to say thank you, as my people and as friends. I know I have made decisions that pleased a lot of you and offended some. Please be aware that my leadership outcome is not predicated on relationship building alone but also goals attainment. The ENC “*is greater than any one person*” (thank you Mr. Simon Ogbeide for these true words of wisdom) so when we make decisions, when it seem like we ignored your personal ideas, it is because we think of the holistic benefits to the ENC’s goals first and personal relationship needs later. Someday in the future your ideas may be of inherent value to the ENC. Ideas never die. In the words of John Fitzgerald Kennedy “A man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on.” The idea to form this association by visionary men and women like you in effort to impact the lives of Esan people in Edo State and build a strong collaborative bond among us, as reflected today, will forever be part of our success history.

Today, I again ask you to bear with us. Support and pray for the leadership team and most important, be patient with us. This time next year, when we step down and a new president and leadership team takes over, they may perhaps make the same request of you recognizing the challenges we face. After all, at the end of any tenure, in any challenging and goal-oriented position, all we can take away is our reputation and honor.

God bless you all. Ma Khato – Ma Khale, Ise.

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