

OKPE UNION OF NORTH AMERICA

Secretariat:

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October 16, 2005

MEMORANDUM TO OKPE LEADERS ON THE ORODJE OF OKPE

Introduction

At the 1st Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Okpe Union of North America held in the City of Ontario, California, USA, on October 07 - 09, 2005, the ongoing controversy over the Orodjeship of Okpe was discussed. We recall our letter of January 04, 2005 to the Udogun Okpe, with copies to Major-General Felix A. Mujakperuo (RTD) and Admiral Frank O. Ajobena (RTD), appealing for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We regret that the issue has not been resolved. Given the gravity of the impasse, we decided to address this letter to Okpe nationals at home and in the diaspora, once again appealing for a speedy resolution of the conflict.

The Orodje of Okpe

The Orodje of Okpe is not just the King of Okpe Kingdom and the head of the Okpe Nation, he is also the preeminent traditional ruler of Delta State. He presides over a Kingdom with almost a third of the population of Delta State. The uniqueness of the Okpe and the status of the Orodje in the affairs of Delta State combine to enhance the prestige of Okpe in Nigeria. It is the wish and desire of all Okpe that this position be retained. As a people, we have experienced the painful period of being without an Orodje. That the Okpe Nation did not disintegrate in the almost 300-year interregnum between Ezezi I and Ezezi II was a testimony to the character and distinctiveness of the Okpe. We endured the delay caused by the British colonial regime to crown Ezezi II. We also endured the delay to crown Orhoro I, the successor to Ezezi II. While the current impasse in crowning the successor to Orhoro I since July 2004 is a relatively short period, we are nevertheless troubled by the impact of the internal discord on the consciousness of the Okpe. Though some may argue that the situation is not unique to the Okpe, we will like to stress that no other kingship system in Nigeria has experienced the history of succession like the Okpe. We deserve a smooth succession, a succession without rancour, and one that should be the envy of other kingship systems in Nigeria. There is no reason why we must deny ourselves of this goal.

Our inability to resolve this conflict has caused severe dislocations in the activities of our political leadership, as several of our leaders have pitched their tents on either side of the divide. Thus, the energy that could have been employed to pursue Okpe interests in Delta State and in Nigeria, have been diverted to dividing the Okpe Nation as a result of the struggle for the Orodjeship. While other ethnic groups unite to promote and defend their respective interests in Nigeria, as witnessed in the recent National Conference on Political Reform, our leadership is torn by internal discord because of the struggle for the Orodjeship. In the process, we deny ourselves our rightful place in Delta State and in Nigeria. This vacuum or disarray in Okpe leadership has a negative effect on the socio-economic and political development of Okpeland.

Resolving the Conflict

We cannot gamble with the future of the Okpe, and neither can we pursue Okpe interest with diffident detachment. While we recognize the role of the judiciary in our legal and political systems, we are however saddened that we have mortgaged the determination of our Orodje to the judiciary. We remain convinced that this conflict can be resolved internally within the Okpe system of adjudication. We must not permit the judiciary to determine our Orodje. We therefore appeal to both contestants, Messrs Mujakperuo and Ajobena who, we gather, have been friends for more than three decades, to withdraw this case from the courts. We appeal to them to return to the Orhue Ruling House and the Udogun Okpe for a peaceful resolution of this unfortunate conflict, a conflict that brings no benefits but pains to the Okpe Nation. No matter who “wins” the legal battle, it is our view that a court verdict will leave an indelible stain on the consciousness of the Okpe Nation, as the Okpe Nation will be the loser.

Our collective interest as Okpe is greater than our respective personal interests. When we pursue personal interests at the expense of our communal interests, we forfeit our claims to leadership. We believe that Messrs Ajobena and Mujakperuo are committed to the Okpe cause, hence they contested for the throne to serve the Okpe people as their Orodje. We also believe that one does not need to hold a position of power or authority in any polity, in order to demonstrate leadership. We need an Orodje to be crown as soon as possible. To deny the Okpe people their Orodje because of any personal aggrandizement, whether real or perceived, is a disservice and a betrayal to the Okpe Nation. We believe that Messrs Mujakperuo and Ajobena do not belong to this category of leaders. Therefore, we urge them to discard their bitterness and sit down, like brothers, with fellow Okpe leaders to resolve this conflict without any preconditions.

Our Okpe leaders also have a crucial role to play in facilitating a resolution of this conflict. As peace facilitators, they must be seen to be neutral and not permit their individual views on the conflict to influence the process of reconciliation.

Concluding Remarks

The Okpe Union of North America will be pleased to render its services to facilitate a peaceful resolution of this conflict. We intend to play an active role in helping to foster credible leadership and good governance in Okpeland. But this is a task that requires our collective collaboration. We appeal to all Okpe to contemplate the common good of the Okpe Nation. We

must not permit personal interests, greed, and nepotism to override the collective interests of the Okpe Nation.

God bless the Okpe Kingdom.

Long Live the Orodje of Okpe.

Sincerely,

OKPE UNION OF NORTH AMERICA
Delegates to the 1st AGM, Ontario, California, USA.

ALLOH, Emmanuel

ASENIME, Elizabeth

EDERAINE, Alfred

EDERAINE, Edward

EGBEDI, Style

EKEJIJA, Frank Ojogwa

ENAJERO, Samuel Enajite

FIEBOH, Edward

NATUFE, Omajuwa Igho

OGBEIDE, Alero

OJAGBEGHRU, Victor