

# EDO UNITY: A MEANS TO STABILITY, GOOD GOVERNANCE, PROGRESS, ECONOMIC EMANCIPATION, AND PRIDE IN OUR ANCESTRAL HERITAGE.

**BY**

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## Summary

That all the people of Edo State are brothers and sisters in view of our ancestral origin. That the concept of Ishan-Edo, Afemai-Edo and Bini-Edo does not exist for the same reason. That the economic emancipation of the people of this ancient kingdom can only be realised only if the politicians are made accountable for their action irrespective of their political party of origin. That this accountability can only be achieved if the people speak with one voice that is in total unity. That the first step on the road to recovery is to be completely united in our dealings as a people with the state and federal governments. That Edo sons and daughters at home and in Diaspora must contribute to this self help development.

Distinguished brothers and sisters, I am delighted to be here today to discuss Edo Unity with you, a subject that touches my heart, and I am sure touches the heart of everyone gathered here today. The unity of Edo has become pertinent now than ever before due to globalisation factors and the disappearance of languages, customs and tradition according to the United Nations report. As the language disappears, the custom and tradition and the identity of the people disappears as well. If this should happen to Edo language, this will be a tragedy. In the course of this discussion, we shall define who we are, why we are worried about what could happen, why we are where we are and how can we progress in unity and present a common front to other Nigerian Nation and ultimately improve the lot of our people.

## WHO ARE THE EDOS?

The Edos are the people that occupy the old Bini province of the Western Region of Nigeria which is referred to as Edo State today. Historically, they were thought to have migrated south from the Nile valley having very strong affinity with ancient Egyptian gods. The Edo tradition which is very well preserved is very similar to the tradition of Egyptian Pharaoh. The Oba's grandeur, authority, reverence from their subjects are similar to that enjoyed by the Egyptian Pharaohs.

The Edos founded and ruled the ancient Benin Empire which is a focus for study for many historians.

The Edos have been ruled by two dynasties. The first, Ogiso dynasty ended with Ogiso Owodo who was probably infertile at some point during his reign as he had no other children apart from the one he had before his enthronement although he had a harem of wives. The second dynasty started with the enthronement of Oba Eweka 1 the son of Ekaladerhan (Prince Omonoyan), the first son of Ogiso Owodo, who found the Edos very difficult to rule and had to retire to his new home in 'Ile'fe'. This difficulty was orchestrated by Ogiamien who generated a lot of animosity in the whole of Igodomigodo (Edo Land) against Prince Omonoyan that led to his quick exit. (naiwu Osahon). Before his departure, he changed the name of Edo land into Ile Ibinu (a land of annoyance and vexation) which was later changed by Oba Ewedede to Ubini and further corruption by the Portuguese traders to the name Bini or Benin. Edo land has been ruled by several Obas spanning a period of over 1000 years some

achieving more than others. The Obaship is inherited by primogeniture that is, passed from father to son which prevents in-fighting and augurs well for stability and progress. After the coronation of Ogun as Oba Ewuare, he enacted a decree that Ubini should be called Edo in appreciation of the role played by the servant Edo in saving his life during the period his was on the run.

WE HAVE ALWAYS HAD PROBLEMS.

When Oba Ewedo moved his palace to Igodomigodo (Ubini) from Usama, a move which angered Ogiamien who was the de facto ruler of Igodomigo then. There was the battle at Ekiokpagma which the Oba's loyalists won. To this day, a mock battle is always fought by the heir apparent Edaiken with the forces loyal to Ogiamien during the coronation ceremonies of the Edaiken as the Oba of Benin. Symbolically, the land is given to the Oba throughout his reign by Chief Ogiamien.

Ogun was the wayward son of Oba Ohen who was banished from the city of Benin along with his uncle due to the strong allegations of treason made against them. Throughout the period when Obaship passed in quick succession from these usurpers Oba Orobiru to Oba Uwaifiokun, Ogun continued to make nightly raid into Benin supported by many loyalists, including Emotan who unfortunately was barren. During one of these raids Ogun was captured by Ogieva Nomuekpo who placed him in a dry well and requested his servants led by Edo to watch over him while he invited the palace functionaries. While Ogieva was away, Edo with the assistance of other servants alerted prince Ogun who made his escape. Edo was severely punished for this act by his master Ogieva. Edo was later rewarded by Prince Ogun after ascending the throne of his ancestors as Oba Ewuare Ogidigan. He did not only buy Edo from his master Ogieva, he buried him at the gate of his inner chambers in his palace, and he changed the name Ubini to Edo in honour of the loyal servant Edo. That was his first decree in 1500 AD.

Ultimately, Emotan had to lay down her life as a sacrifice to facilitate Prince Ogun to realise his successful ascent to the throne of his forefathers as predicted by Okutukutu the diviner. She was gratefully remembered by these kind words said by Oba Ewuare 'Emotan I mourn you. Generations yet unborn shall praise you. etc Binis will be inspired by your memory' (Emotan, a Benin heroine by Irene Isoken Oronsaye-Salami)

As if the above problems are not enough let me remind you about Oba Ewuakpe's problems when Edos refused to provide tributes, what about Ehue ni Ikpoba who confiscated all royalties paid to his brother the Oba. What about the recent Benin massacre in 1897, the referendums for the creation of Midwest region, what about the Owegbe crisis in 1963. In recent times the problem from the military governors of Edo State in suspending the traditional councils, the challenge of the Omo n' Oba by the Esama of Benin in a court of law. The problems of Edo people have been numerous but the Edos have always prevailed over their problems. We shall prevail again.

What so far has been with us is our lack or inability to pull the same string, to work together for a common purpose and achieve results. Could this be the course of Oba Ewuare Ogidigan the great physician and metaphysician that stated that 'Umaigba ne Edo' Is that the cause of our problems? If we repeal this cause, will things change for the better for our people.

Is this traditional course responsible for our lack of unity that we continue to fight and smear one another why the generality of Edo people continue to languish in poverty and squalor?

## WHAT IS EDO UNITY?

The Edos are a minority in Nigeria and if well thought out, this status can be used to the best advantage of our people if we present a unified front. The Edos are a monolithic unit in linguistic terms, in terms of worship of traditional gods, physique, ancestral origin, customs, and traditions and in being in a defined area of the Nigerian Nation. The Edos like the Nupes, Tiv and Kanuris in the north and the Usobo/Isoko, Ijaw and Ibibios in the south were distinct as at the 1953 national census in Nigeria. The concept of Bini-Edo, Esan -Edo, Afemai-Edo as espoused by Prof. Omo Omoruyi does not exist. There are only one indivisible Edo people with different Edo dialects as in Central and North senatorial districts of Edo State. The phonetics, proverbs and phraseology are the same. The names, their meanings and attitudes are the same. Why is this disunity?

We all can recall that all the Enogies in Edo Central and Edo North senatorial districts are princes of the Benin Kingdom with the Okaigiesan as their leader. They were asked at sometime point in our history to administer these lands on behalf of the Oba who is our spiritual leader and custodian of our customs and traditions. The desire of one section of Edo State to seek another traditional council stimulates disunity, the desire to create another kingdom within Edo kingdom is seeking disunity. As an individual, I do not see disunity in the desire of the people in the north and central Edo senatorial districts to seek a separate state as working for disunity so long it is done without friction and in good faith. The creation of Afesan State as proposed would have brought development nearer the people. The input from the Federal government would have increased into Edo kingdom. In Western Nigeria, there are several Yoruba speaking states. Like the Egba Yoruba, Ekiti Yoruba, Ondo Yoruba but they all pay allegiance to their ancestral home at Ile Ife and the Oni who is the spiritual head of the Yoruba. The Edo spiritual head and the custodian of our culture and tradition is the Oba of Benin no amount of politics or wealth can rewrite our history.

The obstacle to create many local governments from Benin City as was done in Lagos was an unnecessary impediment to progress and loss of income from the federal purse coming into the Edo Kingdom. With the benefit of hind sight, that was a mistake that should not have been made and should never be repeated. It should be clear to all that the populations of the domain of Chief Oliha of Oliha quarters, Chief Ezomo of Uzebu, Chief Ero of Urubi and the many dukedoms in Iyekogba, Udo, Eyaen. Abudu, Obadan, far exceed populations in the domains of other members of Edo State Traditional Council. In any civilised society today and with the advent of democracy, proportional representation should be the norm. This should be carefully married with our tradition and customs. The Edo State traditional council crisis was instigated by those who would do anything to satisfy their greed for political power and this has somehow led to the unsuccessful attempt of the erosion of the power of the custodian of our customs and traditions. The resolution of this issue should be a priority for the next Edo State governor as soon as he settles down after the elections.

Edo unity is speaking with one voice in dealings within the State and more importantly with the Federal government. Edo unity is aligning and re-aligning with the government at the centre for the benefit of our people. Edo unity is pursuing a common goal for the benefit of Edo people. Edo unity is realising that although we are many and varied but we constitute a part of a single whole which is Edo Kingdom. Edo unity is those at the helm of affairs using the available resources for Edo people without damaging the Edo economy by taking the people's money abroad. Edo unity is Edos in Diaspora taking active part in the issues that concern Edo State and contributing their widow's mite to the self-help development of Edo State. Edo unity is constructive criticism and the avoidance of smear campaigns. Edo unity is disagreeing in harmony without drawing each other's blood. Edo unity is all things good for Edo people wherever they may be. Edo unity is facing our worst fears and turning our

failures into success. Edo unity is re-orientating ourselves, our thought processes towards honour for achievements rather than praise and respect for ill-gotten wealth. Edo unity is celebrating our achievements and cultural heritage. A united Edo State is a bastion and building block for a strong and united Nigerian Nation.

Edo carvings today rules the world as they created the most popular piece of art work the Queen Idia Mask which is popularly known as the Festac Mask. This is the symbol of Black unity and emancipation anywhere in the world. It is the emblem of numerous Black organizations all over the world. We should not disappoint seekers of their origin from many parts of the world by presenting a disunited front. It was for this reason I commended Governor Igbinedion for transforming Igun Street in Benin into a tourist attraction. If you have not visited recently, please do as you will not be disappointed. My children were pleased when they walked the length of Igun street and marvelled at the art work by our people using simple traditional tools.

#### HOW CAN EDO UNITY BE ACHIEVED?

Edo sons and daughters are adventurous and can be found in all corners of mother earth. Edo Global Organization (EGO) was established to bring all these Edos wherever they may be together so that they can function as a unit in addressing issues in Edo land. In seeking to prioritise the development of the infrastructure, economic development, educational development as well as development of health services in Edo State. As the name implies, it is a global organization. It is acting and will continue to act as an umbrella organization for Edo Nation Associations (ENA) in Britain, Germany, Italy, Canada, USA, South Africa and the Netherlands. The Presidents or Chairmen of the National ENA will be in the Board of Trustees of EGO which will liaise directly with the Edo State governor and the Oba of Benin as our spiritual leader..

In Edo State, the organization will start from the streets which will be organized into wards. There are already street meetings (evbo ni kho ude) for security reasons in Benin City. The street meeting group will send representatives to the ward meetings, the wards will all be represented at the local government levels. The local government committees will send representatives to the state government committees. This will be repeated in all the senatorial districts in Edo State. Leaders in the senatorial districts will form the home committee. The fusion of the home committee with the committee from Edos in Diaspora will form the Board of Edo trustees.

If the use of the above organization chart is not feasible, then all progressive unions, market women organizations and professional clubs and associations can be approached to send delegates to the state committees.

The State committees will meet with EGO Board of Trustees annually to discuss their agendas.

From this group comprising Edos in Diaspora and Edos in Edo Land, a sitting committee is chosen to take decisions, make press releases and congratulate or castigate government on behalf of all Edos. This committee will be faceless and all releases will be signed Edo Global Organization.

In addition, EGO will set up a list of all Edo professionals in Diaspora in accordance with their specialities to act as a pool from which volunteers in teaching, provision of healthcare, carrying out feasibility studies, on site inspection, planning and execution of architectural and engineering projects, forest management, people mobilization, actuarial projections, accountancy and audit will be sent to carry out work for nominal fees for Edo people in the state. In this way Edo state resources will be spent more judiciously and wisely for the benefit of the people.

Various standing committees will be committed into specialist areas like, housing committees, transportation, education, health, social welfare, security, publicity etc. These committees and governing board will co-operate with the state government and the traditional council for the good of our people.

The people of any great nation made sacrifices to achieve their status today. We must make similar sacrifice to progress and be a source of inspiration to our competitors in the other Nigerian Nation. If the Oheneze in the east, Arewa in the north and Aferenifere in the west can be united and present a common front then Edos must be united to counter these extreme forces. Our forefathers did succeeded, we should and must do succeed. Failure is out of the question.

Once again thank you for this opportunity to discuss these very pertinent issues with you. Can you join me to shout that Uma gha gba ni ma, uma gha gba ne Edo.

Oba ghato Okpere Ise.