

**THE ROLE OF OLD BOYS ASSOCIATIONS IN NATION BUILDING  
WITH EMPHASIS ON EDO STATE.**

By

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**GUEST SPEAKER**

**At**

**EDO COLLEGE OLD BOYS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL DINNER.**

**(ECOBA UK CHAPTER)**

**At**

**LONDON HILTON HOTEL ON 3<sup>RD</sup> JUNE 2006.**

The National President of ECOBA,

Principal Edo College, Benin City,

Chairman ECOBA of the Americas

Chairman & Members of the Executive of the UK Chapter.

Distinguished Ecobites and their Spouses,

It is a pleasure to be amongst friends and alumni of our alma mater Edo College Benin City. (ECBC). ECBCCCCCCCC. The occasion of this annual dinner is timely, as it gives us the opportunity to reflect on ourselves, our progress, and the progress of our alma mater, our city, our state, our nation and our individual relationship with these institutions. I would therefore like to thank those who are physically oiling the wheel of the UK chapter of Edo College Old Boys Association (ECOBA) without which we would not be here today and for asking me to be the guest speaker of this august occasion of our 2006 annual dinner party.

In 2004 in Detroit, Michigan I was present at the first ever Diaspora inaugural meeting of Edo College Old Boys Association. We had consulted behind the scene to make that meeting happen. I am sure some of you must have read the minutes by the General Secretary, Mr Obasuyi on our ECOBA web site. During that meeting, Obasuyi and Felix Omorodion contributed immensely as the defacto Secretary and Chairman respectively. Their positions were normalised and I recall moving that motion. When it was finally agreed that what we were inaugurating was the North America Chapter, I knew we had to go back to the drawing board.

Did we have to?

No. Thanks to our brothers on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. Barrister Aihie was the first to inform me that our brothers in the UK had put something together he called the UK chapter. Today we are celebrating the second annual dinner party. I was unable to attend the first annual dinner as Chief Launcher because I had to give the toast at a childhood friend's birthday celebrations. Can we say a big thank you for the efforts of the organisers? The dichotomy between the UK Chapter and the North America Chapter should be healthy. But it is a call for a challenge; I mean a healthy challenge, as it will boost our Nigerian National chapter considerably. The ultimate beneficiary will be our alma mater and the national ECOBA.

Our alma mater contributed immensely to our development physically, educationally, and morally. Our attitude to work and our general attitude to life, which has contributed in no small measure to our success in life, derive immensely from our passing through ECBC. Look around you in this hall and you only see happy and satisfied faces; you will not be here in the first place if you have not excelled in your area of endeavour in life. All these successes is due to our grilling in our alma mater and our ability to absorb and effect changes that made us better human being as we were being put through that crucible in the preparation for life in the future. Gladly that future of our days at ECBC is now with us. Do we look back with pain or satisfaction or do we sometimes go into reverie and wish we were again back at school. On many occasions, I have felt like going back to ECBC when there was no worry in the world except completing assignments.

ECBC was a town within Benin City with her system of laws and order, which had to be obeyed. We were brought up to be respectful, to obey constituted authority, to regard our fellow human beings as equal hence we frowned as such terms as seniors or juniors amongst our ranks which were largely used in the other schools. The care we received was not only academic but idyllic, physical and sometimes spiritual. Our warm-men like elder brothers; gave academic guidance; mine was the late Bishop Gordon Osagiede. May his soul rest in the bosom of the Lord. Amen. The Head of Akenzua then Engineer Paul Idemudia, later Azike and much later Dr Aimighemen. We looked up to some of the HSC students Barrister Agho, Pa Igbinedioon from Eweka, Paddy Iyamu from Speer House, Dr Edomwonyi also from Speer and Engineer Nosa Eguavoen from Ozolua, Engineer Ogbeifun transferred to Nana House when the New house was built.

I recall when Dr Henry Asemota (Akenzua House) made aggregate six, all in my year changed gear in our swotting outfit and started work in earnest that all in Five Science one (5S1) had a distinction at the WASC examinations the following year. The question then was not if we would pass WASC examinations but at what aggregate level?

What did we learn as Old Boys of Edo College?

Our grilling was to produce citizens of character and integrity committed to social justice and service to humanity.

We were prepared not only to withstand the rigors of tertiary education but to excel in our chosen career with the sky as the limit.

We were prepared to excel in academic activities and curricular studies to enable us to become men of competence, compassion, conscience, and consideration who will assume leadership roles in transforming the societies we lived.

Have we been able to do that?

Have we not all checked out like Andrew when the kitchen became warm and nowhere near being hot to greener pastures in Europe and America?

The combination of our checking out and the attitude of incompetent and corrupt leaders have pulled back the march of civilization in our part of the

world for hundreds of years. Those who dared not look at our faces during school days now bstride the narrow world of our state like a Colossus and we like 'mean men' have to hide, finding ourselves in dishonourable places to disguise our whereabouts whenever we go home to the land of our birth. Should that be the case?

How do we reverse this trend? I mean how do we stem the decay?

When a civilization declines, it goes into reverse with all the wealth, power and wisdom realised by its rise being discarded. The quality of goods and services falls as the cost increases and this corruption extends into every aspect of existence. Incompetence and injustice will reign as delusion triumphs and the community dissolves into impotence.

Such a society is no longer engaged in creating a human heaven on earth, but is earnestly constructing the very opposite where the worst people are rewarded while the best are penalized, education system spread delusion and bureaucracy becomes a liability rather than an asset and the courts promote injustice because the richest buy justice.

However this trend will always be denied because truth will be vanquished by lies as poorly paid reporters publish articles in favour of the highest bidder.

Even in this desert of decay, there are oasis of descent gentlemen like Edo College Old Boys who will show respect to elders and senior citizens on the highway or the office, they make it a ladies first in disposition before gentlemen, they will correct children by smacking sensibly and with explanation, abhor corruption and sharp practices and will answer to their family name. At school I was called Ogbonmwan S like you were called Idemudia, Osagie, Ero, Aihie, Ikifa, Ojebuoboh, Habibu, Akpata, Ayuba etc. Given names or pseudo names were unheard off. As we answered to your family names, we never, ever did anything that brought disgrace to our family names. We were taught to believe that marriage is permanent unless one partner dies or betrays the other sufficiently for divorce. In my time we did not really have a sister school until Idia college was established in 1971. We competed healthily with ICC boys for Maria Gorretti girls and with Eghosa Boys for AGGS girls. We heard then from the grapevine that these girls actually preferred ECBC because we were described as being disciplined, being gentlemen, having clout and having a lot of respect for these future mothers.

On our way from the Ogbe Stadium now Samuel Ogbemudia stadium one day, we stopped to visit Ikponmwonba's mother. I greeted her in English and she

answered ‘**erhe ovhię edo ukhin?**’ I now genuflected and said ‘**la tọse**’ without thinking. She jumped from her seat and embraced me like any mother would, shouting ‘this is my son Oh!’ At the end, she gave her son Ikponmwonba five shillings and gave me two shillings. She told us we were relatives and that we should not ever quarrel. That incident has been indelibly etched in my memory especially when Ikponmwnba started teasing me with **la tọse**; that was home and Edo College molding. Why should we throw our culture away without effectively replacing it? Whatever good we have we should hold. Our culture is our life, we should not discard it.

To stem the societal decay, we have to go back to our roots of honouring academic and notable achievements, community service, sporting excellence, exemplary and other service achievements rather than wealth obtained by fraud and corrupt practices. We have to show transparency in our dealings and show team spirit at work as well as play. We have to move our society from where it is to where it has never been. That is from a familiar present to an unknown future is a challenge that political leaders cannot meet alone. We have to lead from the front.

We as old boys of the premier school in Edo State have to be in the forefront of removing this decay in our system and act as beckon for other old boys/students association in our state and country of birth. We should therefore not sit on the fence; we should engage in active participation in the political life of our people. If something is good we should applaud it, if it is bad we should criticise it. But we should do so constructively. To be indifferent is no longer an option. We have to come out and take our place in society building or we chance becoming a lost generation forever with the link handed to us by our ancestors broken forever.

To re-orientate our people, we have to start from school age i.e. catch them young. ECOBA should be in the forefront of supporting high flyers to reach their ultimate in life by supporting **Best Students Scholarship award**, support sporting activities and team work by supporting the provision of materials for team sports like football, volleyball, cricket etc. Competition improves competitive spirit. Joy when you win and being cheerful when you loose. This attitude will manifest in later life as a magnanimous winner at elections and a cheerful loser as well. We should also support school clubs, the Red Cross, the Boys Scout, the Man ‘o War Bay, Debating, Quiz and Science Clubs. Engaging students in school activities removes their mind from nocturnal cult activities, which has spread from tertiary institutions down to secondary schools level. If possible we should go beyond ECBC and assist youth clubs, leadership and

citizens training, youth sports and all other youth viable activities and thereby reduce the number of young men who end up as 'bush inspectors' youth gangs, local thugs that act as clogs in the wheel of development in Edo State especially in the area of procurements of land and erection of buildings in Benin City and its environ.

ECOBA cannot achieve all the above alone hence ECOBA must reach out to other old boys, old girls and old students association at home and in Diaspora to have a meaningful base to launch this drive for change in our society. If we do not provide the answers to our problems, who will? My suggestion is not new and every new theory encounters opposition and rejection at first. The adherents of the old, accepted doctrine object to the new theory, refuse its recognition, and declare it to be mistaken. Years, even decades, must pass before it succeeds in supplanting the old one. A new generation must grow up before its victory is decisive. To understand this, one must remember that most men are accessible to new ideas only in their youth hence all our efforts must be directed to students at their most receptive age.

Another evil that has grown massively in our society recently in addition to corruption is tribalism and ethnicity. At Edo College we were completely detribalised. Your age, size, tribe were grossly irrelevant. As we used to say 'immaterial'. What were relevant were your academic prowess, extracurricular activities and sporting excellence. Today some miscreants in our society have brought tribe and ethnicity to the fore in every level of human endeavour to further their parochial political desire; officials now ask where are you from? My usual answer is that I am a Nigerian of Edo State origin. What relevance does it make if I am from the south or north senatorial districts as all Edo people are from the same quiver? As I have said elsewhere, quota system, zoning, rotational positions such as being paraded in our state breed mediocrity. The best suited and most qualified for a post should have that post no matter where he or she is from. He should also see himself as representing all and sundry and should be fair, firm and friendly. ECOBA should now go forward to translate this detribalised attitude inherited at ECBC to our people starting from the school age.

I will abridge this speech so as not to spoil your dinner, as the dinner is getting cold. I hereby challenge all of us present to live by our house motto, Aim at the Highest (Akenzua House), The Best or Nothing (Speer House); Forward Ever, Backward Never (Eweka House), Forge ahead (Esigie House), etc

Having checked out like the proverbial Andrew, let us now like the salmon have a strong bond with our birthplace. Now that we have grown big and strong in the wilderness of the Atlantic Ocean like the salmon, let us return to our birthplace periodically like the salmon does to its original waterways several times in its life cycle and contribute our quota to the system that gave us life. Let us remember always that it is only in participating that we can effect desirable changes.

Once again thank you for the opportunity for this address.

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