



# Efik Eburutu of Nigeria

Edidiana Edi Uforo

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## **National Dialogue Advisory Committee visit to Calabar (South-South Zone)**

On Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2013, His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR; President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, inaugurated a National Dialogue Advisory Committee as a historic and concrete step that will “strengthen our understanding, expand the frontiers of our inclusiveness and deepen our bond as one people under God”.

The committee is made up of eminent Nigerians with wide experience from various disciplines and include;

- |                           |                  |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| ➤ Senator Femi Okoruonmu  | Chairman         |
| ➤ Prof. George Obiozor    | Member           |
| ➤ Prof. Ben Nwabueze      | “                |
| ➤ Senator Khairat Gwadabe | “                |
| ➤ Senator Timothy Adudu   | “                |
| ➤ Col. Tony Nyiam (RTD)   | “                |
| ➤ Prof. Funke Adebayo     | “                |
| ➤ Dr. Mrs. Mairo A. Amshi | “                |
| ➤ Dr. Abubakar Sadiq      | “                |
| ➤ Alh. Dauda Birma        | “                |
| ➤ Mallam Buhari Bello     | “                |
| ➤ Mr Tony Uranta          | “                |
| ➤ Dr. Akilu Indabawa      | Member/Secretary |

The committee was set up to realistically examine and genuinely resolve long-standing impediments to the cohesive and harmonious development of a truly united Nation. The terms of reference for the committee included consultation with all relevant stakeholders with a view to drawing up a feasible agenda for the proposed national dialogue or conference and to make recommendations to government on structure and modalities for the proposed conference.

On Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2013, at about 4.00 p.m, the Advisory committee, led by its chairman, Distinguished Senator Femi Okoruonmu, paid a curtsey visit on the Obong of Calabar, His Eminence Edidem Ekpo Okon Abasi Otu V; Natural Ruler, Treaty King and Grand Patriarch of the Efik people, in his Palace at No7 Efaña Ansa Street, Calabar, Cross River State, to inform the Monarch of the reasons for their presence in his domain. The Senator considered it necessary to remind the Monarch of the invaluable role that his forebears played in the making of the Nigerian nation. He stated emphatically that “Calabar was the first capital of the polity now called Nigeria” and that the bulk of the treaties signed to enable the grouping of the different ethnic nationalities into one nation were concluded at the Consulate. He implored the Obong to send a delegation to the consultative forum



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scheduled to hold next morning, Friday 25th October 2013, by 9.00 a.m at the Main Bowl of the Cultural Center Complex, Calabar and concluded that “the Nigerian People will love to have the views of the monarch, seeing that they come from one of the greatest stools of Natural Traditional Rulership in the country.

His Eminence, the Obong of Calabar, in his reply, thanked the Chairman of the committee and promised to grant his request. He spoke highly of the esteemed Senator as one with whom he was already acquainted and who, on many occasions, proved himself as a forthright person who could be trusted with such an onerous assignment. The Obong expressed satisfaction with the respect accorded the Throne of his ancestors by the chairman and his team and concluded that the Palace will make a presentation at the consultative forum.

Below is the Memorandum of the Efik people of Nigeria issued from the Palace of the Obong of Calabar to the Presidential Advisory Committee on National Conference on their visit to Calabar (South-South Zone).

## **MEMORANDUM OF THE EFIK PEOPLE OF NIGERIA ISSUED FROM THE PALACE OF OBONG OF CALABAR TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THEIR VISIT TO CALABAR (SOUTH-SOUTH ZONE) ON 25-10-2013**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Sequel to the recent Federal Government initiative aimed at ensuring a re-evaluation of the terms of coexistence between the various peoples of Nigeria through dialogue at the national level in response to the growing agitation and discontent among different groups about their politico-economic position in the Nigerian enterprise, we wish to register our approval and satisfaction with the development. Although it is a long overdue event in our opinion, it nevertheless is an epochal opportunity for all the stakeholders to not only articulate the basis of their participation in line with their needs and aspirations, but it is also a platform to redefine this Nigerian project which effectively began about one hundred years ago in 1914. With sincerity of purpose, accommodation, empathy and understanding of one another's view points, the congenial and contrived problems that have served to polarize the people and stunt the socio-economic growth of the country may be resolved from the outcomes of the proposed national dialogue.

### **2.0 Background of the Efik Nation**

Being a major stakeholder, upon whose foundational resources Nigeria became built, we state our position as follows:

- The Efik ethnic Nation, as a free, sovereign and independent federation predates the Nigerian entity and had existed in its present location in South-South of the Niger Delta area for over 800 years. It operated as a distinct national entity with its Headquarters at Calabar and covering a large expanse of territory with its people spread across Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Odukpani, Etono, Ikot Ana, Umon and Uwet in Cross River State; Idua Asang, Efiat, Enwang, Esuk Itu, Ibeno, Itu Mbauzo, James Town, Obot Itu, Obot Etim and Atabong in Akwa Ibom State
- The territory consisted of vast arable land notable for important agricultural produce, a rich variety of mineral resources, rivers, waterways, creeks, islands and a large human population. Calabar



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was the main trading centre in the Southern part of today's Nigeria and commanded the commercial interest and attention of the British, Dutch, French, German, Portuguese, Spanish and other foreign merchant's right from the 15th Century.

- Upon the invitation and express permission extended by Kings Eyo Honesty II and Eyamba V of Calabar in 1842, the Europeans established on the land; went beyond trading and launched Christian missionary work and Western-style education, which culminated in the opening in as early as 1846 a primary education institution, Duke Town Primary School, in Calabar. Prior to this time, a number of Efik persons had received Western education through informal tutorship within the holds/chambers of the merchant ships, and several of them went abroad and obtained formal education in schools in the United Kingdom. For instance, a famous Efik merchant, Ntiero Edem Efiom (Antera Duke Ephraim) kept a hand-written diary in English language documenting his personal activities and the affairs in Old Calabar between 1785 and 1788. It is on record also that the first polytechnic-style institution in Nigeria, Hope Waddell Training Institution, was established in Calabar in 1895 by the Scottish missionaries.
- Calabar's antecedents are a rich record of firsts in many fronts in the present day Nigeria. For instance, Efik was the first native language into which the New and Old Testaments of the Christian Holy Bible were translated in 1862 and 1868 respectively in this part of Nigeria. The first mono-rail line was built and commissioned in Calabar in the early 1890s. Calabar housed the first maximum security prison in Nigeria, the Brickfield Prison, which was built in 1890. Calabar was effectively the first capital of what eventually metamorphosed into Southern Nigeria between 1891 and 1906 before the Headquarters was moved to Lagos. It nevertheless maintained its status as the capital of the Oil Rivers Protectorate until the capital was moved to Enugu. The first public hospital in Nigeria, St. Margaret's Hospital, was also established at Calabar in 1897. It was in Calabar that the first mental health/psychiatric hospital was opened in 1903. The game of cricket was introduced to Nigeria in Calabar in 1903. Similarly, football was first introduced to Nigeria in Calabar; and both the first league and cup matches were played here in 1906. The first commercial trunk telecommunication service was established in Nigeria in 1923 between Calabar and Itu.
- The interaction between the Efiks and Europeans culminated in the latter actively settling in Calabar from the mid-19th Century. Taking advantage of this intercourse, the British insinuated themselves into the social fabric of the Efik Nation and eventually established, first, as trade associates/partners, educators and social-change agents, then as 'protectors' of the Efik people and Old Calabar through a series of treaties made in 1841 (abolition of slavery and slave trade), 1874 (humanity, trade and commerce), 1884 (British Protectorate), and finally as colonizers of the very people whose interests they covenanted to champion. Following from this was the onset of the British colonial rule through the creation and establishment of the Oil Rivers Protectorate (comprising all the coasts and rivers, east of the Niger Delta up to the border of German Cameroon) with Calabar as the Headquarters in 1891, and then the Niger Coast Protectorate (extending the Oil Rivers Protectorate to cover the immediate hinterlands of the rivers and western flank of the Niger Delta) in 1893 still with Calabar as Headquarters.
- It was under the colonization circumstances that the British began to compromise and undermine the commonwealth of the Efik Nation by bonding it, willy-nilly, into an incongruous geo-political fresco with the other protectorates it had secured further up the coasts of the Bights of Biafra and



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Benin and on the divides of Rivers Niger and Benue. It is instructive to note that the Efiks were neither privy, nor gave their assent, to these arrangements, which culminated in the amalgamation that produced the Nigerian entity in 1914. It is still under the machination of a non-consultative colonial regime that the British, as was recently established, purportedly pawned away surreptitiously part of the Efik territory, Bakassi, to Germany.

- Even with the 1960 independence of the Nigeria, the interests, needs and aspirations of the Efik people have continued to be treated with levity or abandon thereby calling to question the continued relevance of the Nigerian nation to our well-being and future. A clear example is a failure or unwillingness to protect the Efik people's interest by judiciously prosecuting a defense of their ownership (and, by extension, Nigeria's) of Bakassi, or first holding a referendum to establish its people's continued interest in remaining in Nigeria, or seeking their consent to cede the Peninsular to Cameroun, and subsequently entering into an agreement (Green Tree) without any reference to the rightful owners, the Efik people.
- The primacy of the Efik nation and general development of its people have been whittled down and negatively impacted over these years under the various civilian and military regimes of Nigeria through deliberate disposition, marginalization, non-representation, shutting-off and other forms of real and perceived injustices. This sad and painful experience therefore warrants an urgent review.

### 3.0 Inputs/suggestions for the Proposed National Conference

Given the background of the above antecedents, and in response to the terms of reference of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Convocation of National Conference, we present the following inputs and/or suggestions:

#### (a) Structure of Dialogue

1. The conference should take the form of an open dialogue that does not prescribe any "no-go" areas for discussion, debate and decision-taking.
2. The conference should be structured primarily on the basis of the different ethnic nationalities of the country. To this end, a clear framework needs to be provided to establish the exact identity and number of the ethnic nationalities making up Nigeria.
3. In order to ensure a bottom-up approach as well as a better-articulated and more brief discussion/talk time at the National Conference forum, we propose a step-wise modality for the exercise in which dialogue should be organized at 3 (three) sequenced levels as follows:
  - (i) Ethnic nationality level
  - (ii) Geo-political zone level
  - (iii) National level
4. The composition of delegates or representatives should give *fair and equal opportunity* to all the ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian nation. This is imperative because most of the groups really never willingly entered into the Nigerian contract in the first place; their association with it was entirely the decision of the occupying colonialist, the British. As such, and in the light of Nigeria's independence from Britain, their continued stay must necessarily align with their self-determination and interest. And, this can best be guaranteed only on a *level playing field*. We therefore recommend that each identified ethnic group should provide equal number of representatives to the conference. In this way, the major ethnic groups



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(Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba) and minority ethnic groups (Efik, Ibibio, Ijaw, Kanuri, etc) will all have a fair chance without the disabilities of small population or access to the levers of power.

5. A maximum number of 5 (five) delegates per ethnic group is recommended for the conference. Delegates or representatives to the conference should be elected/selected through transparent and democratic processes by each of identified ethnic groups. A maximum total of 200 (two hundred) delegates should be produced equally from each of the 6 (six) geo-political zones of the country. Major professional groups and service organizations such as the Nigerian Bar Association, Nigerian Medical Association, Nigerian Union of Journalists, Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy, Nigeria Police Force, etc, as well as major traditional rulers should be represented by one delegate each at the conference. The total number of participants at the National Conference, including observers, should not exceed 1,500 (one thousand five hundred) persons.

6. Local and international observers should be identified, appointed and accredited by independent civil society organizations to monitor the processes leading up to the proceedings and outcomes of the conference.

7. The sessions of the conference should be held at Abuja. The cost of logistics of delegates to the conference should be borne by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

## (b) Legal Framework

1. The conference should be *sovereign*. In effect, its decisions will supersede any other prior constitutional enactments, and they shall not be subject to review by any other body.

2. The National Assembly should be caused to pass an enabling law backing the National Conference.

## (c) Duration of Conference

A total of 7 (seven) months, January to July 2014, should be used for the conference as follows:

(1) Pre-Conference activities - preparations, setting-up, mobilization of delegates, ethnic nationality level and regional level dialogues: 2 (two) months (January to February 2014)

(2) Conference presentations and deliberations: 3 (three) months (March to May 2014)

(3) Referendum, conclusion, presentation of the outcomes of the conference to the Federal Government and integration in the constitution: 2 (two) months (June to July 2014).

## (d) Agenda

We propose the following issues for inclusion in the agenda of the national debate from which a substantially new charter should emerge:

(i) The national government structure: A *Loose Federation* is recommended as the structure of national government for Nigeria. Having experimented with Federalism in its current form for fifty three years now, and finding that it has created more division than integration of the various ethnic nationalities that were amalgamated into Nigeria, it is imperative to review this system and replace it with one that recognizes the fact that there are manifest irreconcilable differences among some of the ethnic groups, which make it impracticable or difficult for them to continue to operate under a dominant and virtually unitary national government structure that considers and treats issues on a *one-size-fits-all* basis. Under the proposed system, each federating unit should have its own constitution, police and internal security.

(ii) Parliamentary system of government.

(iii) Resource control.

(iv) Contribution of federating units to the central government for maintaining the national government structure, defense/armed forces, territorial integrity, national currency, etc.



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- (v) Basis of citizenship and protection of the rights of indigenous people.
- (vi) Retrieval of Bakassi.
- (vii) The environment and ecological impact of mineral exploitation on surrounding areas.
- (viii) The traditional institution.
- (ix) Multi-Religion principle/freedom of worship and secularity of the state.
- (x) The land tenure system.
- (xi) Gender equality.
- (xii) Preservation of historical sites and locations.
- (xiii) State creation.
- (xiv) The population.

## (e) Legal Procedure and Integration into Constitution

The enabling law backing the National Conference should contain provisions that guarantee the sanctity of its decisions/outcomes and the emergence of a people-driven constitution.

Thank you.