



UNITY

URHOB0 PROGRESS UNION (UPU)

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Message from the President. General, Urhobo Progress Union (UPU), Olorogun Senator Felix Ovuodoroye Ibru to the Annual Convention of the Urhobo Progress Union America (UPUA) at Houston, Texas, August 29th - September 1st, 2008.

President of Urhobo Progress Union, America Dr.
Abel Dafioghor

Immediate Past President-General of UPU
Chief Benjamin Okumagba

Distinguished Dignitaries

Members of U PU of America

Compatriots

ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me immense pleasure to send you this message on the happy occasion of your 15th annual gathering. My pleasure arises from the fact that Urhobo Progress Union needs new frontiers for its expansion in order to attain its mission of serving the needs of the Urhobo people. In many ways, America is Urhobo's new frontier. The vibrancy of Urhobo organisations in North America has become phenomenal. I send this message through you to all Urhobo men and women in America as well as to young Urhobo boys and girls, who will become our leaders of tomorrow - there in America and back home in Urhoboland.

Before we celebrate your achievements any further, permit me to commiserate with you for the loss of important members of your communities in North America in recent times. These departed Urhobos have all left behind a legacy of service to which their living brethren have continued to contribute in significant ways. Urhobo Progress Union is highly pleased by the contributions of many Urhobo men and women to the welfare of their fellow Urhobo in America and to the greatness of the Urhobo nation. They have contributed to their local communities of Urhobo men and women across North America as well as to the overall welfare of Urhobo people at home in Urhoboland and Urhobo settled elsewhere in the world.

In addition to individual efforts, I wish to highlight organisational achievements in Urhobo affairs from North America. Although it has established a significant footprint in the affairs of Urhoboland, Urhobo Historical Society began its operations from North America. We salute Professor Peter Ekeh and other leaders of UHS for offering the Urhobo people the fruits of their intellectual labour in books, almanacs and conferences that have added so much to Urhobo history and culture. We particularly note with satisfaction the publication of Urhobo names and their meanings by Dr. Aruegodore Oyiborhoro. It has helped numerous young parents in selecting Urhobo names for their children.

In addition to the famous web site (www.waado.org) that is run by Urhobo Historical Society, many other web sites on Urhobo affairs are organised from North America. These include the vibrant web sites of Urhobo Progress Union, America (www.urhobo.org) and Urhobo National Association of North America (www.urhobona.org). These and many other web sites on Urhobo culture, which come to us from America, have added a significant new dimension to Urhobo history and culture. I personally regard these resources as very important for the expansion of Urhobo culture. And we salute those who built these web sites and now run them.

I have devoted this amount of space and time in enumerating your achievements because I believe that they are impressive and are important for the expansion of the mission of Urhobo Progress Union. The newness of Urhobo communities in North America -- as compared to older fragments of

the Urhobo Diaspora in Nigeria, West Africa, and Europe -- makes these achievements attractive. However, they have come along with fresh problems that deserve our common attention. North America is vast and complex with a multiplicity of cities. I understand that there are significant numbers of Urhobo people who are resident in New York City, Chicago, Washington DC. Metropolitan area, Toronto, Los Angeles, Houston, Atlanta and several smaller cities. Most of these Urhobo communities have associations that serve their special needs. In order to bring these diverse organisations under one umbrella, a pan-Urhobo organisation was formed in the 1990s. This sensible step, however, led to organisational disputes which have sapped the energies of Urhobo cultural associations.

While we fully understand that the complexity of North America can breed some form of problems in efforts aimed at bringing the various organisations together, we very much regret that these problems have led to such deep divisions that have created enmities that thus detract from the need for fraternal associations among the Urhobo people in a foreign land. First, we are concerned about reports of frequent court cases in which opposing sides have wasted precious resources in litigation. Second, Urhobo Progress Union is deeply concerned that such quarrels at the top have rolled down to metropolitan communities, like Toronto in Canada, where opposing sides have their separate organisations with loyalties to separate pan-Urhobo associations. Third, we understand that there is a growing trend in recent years of some leaders of the pan-associations using their offices to seek political appointments and opportunities in Nigeria. In certain instances, such leaders may have inappropriately involved their organisations in party politics without the consent of their members. These are worrisome developments that we urge you to resolve among yourselves without waiting for the intervention of the UPU Headquarters. However, I want to assure you that we want unity among you all and that we will not overlook any divisions that will create alienation of a significant body of Urhobos from the affairs of the Union.

The tradition of your annual gathering is important and we commend you for sustaining it. But we must remind you that you are a branch of Urhobo Progress Union (UPU). In organising your annual gatherings, therefore, you

must respect the age-old traditions of the Union. It is important that you do not use your local custom to formulate policies that may be at variance with the wishes of your parent Union, that is, Urhobo Progress Union. We implore you not to implicate the entire Union in delicate party politics. In the future, the Headquarters would like to discuss the agenda and protocols of gatherings to which you wish to invite the President-General and other officers of the Union from the Headquarters.

Unity is of high premium in the affairs of Urhobo Progress Union. The historic achievement of the earlier generation of our leaders would have been impossible without the unity of the Home Union and the branches. Today, the Urhobo people and Urhobo Progress Union are faced with fresh challenges that require united action from all of us. Because of its past successes, Urhobo Progress Union has become attractive to many people, including those who may wish to control its affairs by all means. I trust that if the Urhobo people maintain a united front, we will prevail once again over the challenges and difficulties now facing the Urhobo people.

I am fully aware that many Urhobo communities in North America would like to receive the President-General and other officers of the Union in their respective cities. I want to assure all of them, through this medium, that I would be delighted to visit, at some future date, such communities that can organise receptions that reflect true Urhobo unity.

God bless you all
God bless Urhobo



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