



COMMUNIQUE OF THE FIRST JOINT MEETING OF WORLD IGBO CONGRESS, INC., ZUMUNTA ASSOCIATION USA, INC., AND EGBE OMO YORUBA, NORTH AMERICA ON THE STATE OF NIGERIA

Saturday, February 25, 2006, Tampa Florida. On Saturday, February 25, 2006, the leadership of three Nigerian apex socio-cultural organizations in the Diaspora - Zumunta Association USA, World Igbo Congress, Inc., and Egbe Omo Yoruba, North America - met for the first time ever in Tampa, Florida, USA.

At the meeting, Egbe Omo Yoruba, North America was represented by the National President Adeola Odusanya, the National General Secretary, Oladapo Odunlami, the past President and Ex-officio member of the Executive, Dr. Olu Otubusin and Professor Bolaji Aluko, a member. World Igbo Congress delegation included the Chairman, Ichie Chibuzo E. Onwuchekwe, P.E., the Vice Chairman, Mr. Joseph Nzezuome, the Secretary General, Attorney Charles C. Chikezie, and Dr. Louis O. Okonkwo, a member of WIC Board of Directors. Zumunta, USA was represented by the National President, Dr. Mohammed Ladan, and the National General Secretary, Dr. Ezekiel Macham.

The groups had a good spirited daylong dialogue on a litany of issues facing Nigeria and resolved on a position statement on the way forward for their country. The issues discussed and the proposed action plan include:

UNITY OF PURPOSE AS NIGERIANS: We agree on the need for a unity of purpose and concerted agenda as Nigerians in the Diaspora on issues affecting our country. We agree to speak with one voice and not to allow detractors to come between us.

CURRENT EFFORT TO AMEND NIGERIAN CONSTITUTION, AND MOVES TO PERMIT A THIRD TERM OR EXTENSION FOR THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION: While we recognize the constitutional authority of the legislative arm of the government to amend the Constitution within the parameters of the Constitution itself, we view with serious suspicion and hence, unequivocally reject any attempts by the Nigerian Legislature to amend the Nigerian Constitution at this late hour of the current administration, believing strongly that it is a pretext to unconstitutionally extend the present administration's two-term limit.

NIGERIAN 2007 ELECTIONS: There must be free and fair elections in 2007, which MUST not be a repeat of the seriously flawed 2003 elections. The Independent National Election Commission (INEC) must immediately announce the electoral deadlines, timetable and guidelines for the upcoming elections. Under no circumstance or pretext must security forces be used to intimidate the electorate. There should neither be a curfew to abridge the movement of citizens during election nor the involvement of the military, except to prevent clear and present indications of mayhem and to restore law and order. We pledge to participate in voter education, and election monitoring in collaboration with international agencies, and urge all Nigerian citizens to protect their voting rights and their free expression of choices at the ballot box. We will lobby both national and international agencies not to recognize any outcome of future elections, including the 2007 elections that are not free and fair.

ABSENTEE BALLOT AND DIASPORA FRANCHISE: Our constitutional rights as Nigerian citizens as enshrined in the Nigerian constitution must be respected by the Nigerian government and hence we demand that INEC take every step to actualize absentee ballot and Diaspora franchise in all future elections.

RULE OF LAW: We firmly subscribe to the principle of rule of law as enumerated in the Nigerian Constitution. We urge those in the Executive and the Legislative branches of government to respect the principle of rule of law. We urge the Judiciary to faithfully and with true independence (particularly of the Executive branch) adjudicate between the arms of government and within the citizenry. We urge all to respect both the spirit and the letter of the law. The rule of law must ensure and protect the dignity of individuals. We propose the enumeration and publication of a justiciable *Nigerian Citizens Bill of Rights*, which will be massively distributed across the country in different Nigerian languages to adequately educate the citizens of their rights under the law. We commend the

present administration's efforts with the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and ask that its efforts be replicated at the State level. We further demand that EFCC should not be used as a tool for witch-hunting and selective prosecution.

SECURITY OF LIFE, LIMB AND PROPERTY OF NIGERIAN CITIZENS: The effective provision of security of life, limb and property is fundamental to the gaining of confidence of Nigerian citizens (individual and corporate; at home and abroad) in their government. We hold the government accountable for the security of life and property of all Nigerian citizens. We unequivocally condemn the recent spate of sectarian killings centered in Maiduguri and Onitsha regardless of the motivation and justification advanced by the perpetrators. We urge the investigation and prosecution of the perpetrators of these recent killings and earlier ones, as well as other numerous assassinations, including those of some high-profile individuals. Considering Nigeria's history with these conflicts, the government should anticipate and preempt future occurrences.

We demand that the Nigerian government take necessary steps to curb armed robbery by creating enabling environment that will ensure gainful employment.

Acknowledging that the Nigerian Police Force is the citizens' first line of defense against armed robbery, we unambiguously urge the Nigerian government to ensure that salaries, benefits and pensions of active and retired police officers, members of the armed forces and other security agents be promptly paid.

We urge that ways of significantly improving the effectiveness of a highly centralized police force be urgently devised. Community policing should be implemented to address the peculiar needs of various states and communities under the close supervision of a federal police command, with significant financial and personnel contributions from the local communities.

NIGER DELTA ISSUE: We deeply sympathize with the poverty level, soil, water, air and other environmental degradation in the Niger Delta - the region where Nigeria's major financial revenue (through petroleum gas and crude oil) is currently derived. We identify with all the legitimate aspirations to correct the injustices faced by all Nigerian citizens living in that region. We are concerned about the violence and armed conflict in the region and urge all parties concerned to refrain from those acts. We therefore demand that the government, as a matter of urgency, address all these issues. We also call on all oil companies operating in the area to live up to their corporate and social responsibilities. We further call on all the people of the Niger Delta States to hold their elected leaders accountable for the fiscal resources allocated to their states, which are matters of public record. We also call on citizens of other states in the country to do the same.

DIASPORA INVOLVEMENT: We urge all Diaspora citizens of Nigeria to get involved in individual and organized ways in all facets of the social, political, economic, technological and cultural development of our country Nigeria and in particular, to urgently seek ways to increase opportunities for employment of our youths within the country.

NEXT STEPS: We resolve to continue the dialogue and to expand the diversity of apex organizations. A date and venue for the next meeting will be announced soon.

SIGNED THIS 25th DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2006:

Dr. Mohammed Ladan
President, Zumunta, USA, Inc

Ichie Chibuzo E. Onwuchekwe
Chairman, World Igbo Congress, Inc.

Adeola Odusanya
President, Egbe Omo Yoruba, NA

Ezekiel Macham, Ph.D.
Gen. Sec., Zumunta, USA, Inc.

Charles C. Chikezie, Esq.
Sec. Gen., World Igbo Congress, Inc

R. Oladapo Odunlami
Gen. Sec., Egbe Omo Yoruba, NA