

BEING THE TEXT OF A PRESS CONFERENCE ORGANIZED BY INIBEHE EFFIONG ESQ. ON MATTERS ARISING FROM THE GRUESOME KILLING OF INIUBONG UMOREN AND THE PRIORITIES OF AKWA IBOM STATE GOVERNMENT HELD AT WATBRIDGE HOTEL & SUITES UYO ON 7//5/2021.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press,

I seek your indulgence to observe a one minute silence in honour of Late Miss Iniubong Umoren.

I have called this press conference out of a deep sense of moral, civic and historical duty as a conscientious citizen, stakeholder in the Akwa Ibom project and a member of the human rights community and the civil society in Nigeria to address salient matters and issues arising from the gruesome killing of Miss Iniubong Umoren and the priorities of the Akwa Ibom State Government under the leadership of Governor Udom Emmanuel.

THE GRUESOME KILLING OF INIUBONG UMOREN

In the last one week, the entire country has been mourning the tragic killing of Miss Iniubong Umoren, a graduate of University of Uyo, by a felonious, beastly and horrible character identified as Uduak Frank Akpan. The suspect tricked the deceased to his residence under a false pretense that he was going to offer Iniubong a job but ended up abducting, raping, assaulting and murdering her.

This horrific murder is condemnable and is hereby unreservedly condemned and excoriated. The right to life is a fundamental right guaranteed by Section 33 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), Article 4 of the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights and Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1945. It is the responsibility of every government to safeguard this right.

Like most young people in Akwa Ibom State, Iniubong was desperate for a job to sustain her pending call-up for National Youth Service. Instead of being offered a job, she was offered death. Her killer(s) took advantage of her vulnerability and criminally exploited her youthful determination to work and be useful to herself and the society.

THE ALARMING HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN AKWA IBOM STATE

Data published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) shows that Akwa Ibom is among the top five States in Nigeria plagued by high unemployment rate. In the second quarter of 2020, Akwa Ibom State recorded 45.2% unemployment rate and 51.00% in the fourth quarter.

As at the third quarter of 2020, Akwa Ibom ranked second in the unemployment rate index in Nigeria. This is not only embarrassing and scandalous, it reveals the criminal neglect of the youthful and employable population of Akwa Ibom State.

MASS POVERTY IN THE MIDST OF PLENTY

It is pertinent to state that the problem of Akwa Ibom State has never been paucity of funds but gross mismanagement of the humongous revenue accruing to it as a leading oil producing State in the country.

The financial profile of Akwa Ibom State between 2015 and 2020 stood as follows:

2015 – N243,487,156,965; 2016 – N197,897,843,609; 2017 – N247,158,385,572; 2018 – N314,308,703,102; 2019 – N361,632,433,765; 2020 – N221,329,981,636 amounting to N1,585,814,504,649.

The National Bureau of Statistics published the above figures which has been corroborated by the Annual Report of the Accountant General of Akwa Ibom State.

MORE REVENUE, MORE DEBTS: THE CASE OF AKWA IBOM STATE

To further assault the sensibilities of Akwa Ibom people, a report published by the National Bureau of Statistics shows that as of December 31, 2020, the External Debt of Akwa Ibom State rose to \$47.926 million while the Domestic Debt stood at N230.807 billion. This placed Akwa Ibom State as the fourth most indebted State in Nigeria. Governor Udom Emmanuel should explain how Akwa Ibom that is among the five richest States in Nigeria is at the same time among the five most indebted States; while standing shamefully as second in the high unemployment index in Nigeria.

It is a tragedy of monumental proportion that having a “seasoned banker” as the Chief Executive of the Akwa Ibom State has become a curse instead of a blessing to the people of the State. How did we end up in this state of endless misery?

UNFORGIVABLE MISPLACED PRIORITIES OF GOVERNOR UDOM EMMANUEL

As Nigerians continue to mourn with us over the killing of Iniubong Umoren, history will judge us harshly if we fail to examine how her own Government by omission or commission, contributed to her untimely death.

I say this with every sense of responsibility. Indeed, it will be intellectually dishonest for us to discuss the killing of that young lady without relating it to what led to her death.

Iniubong was an orphan, a 26-year-old graduate of Philosophy. She was poor and unemployed. Instead of deploying the huge resources of the State for job creation, Governor Udom Emmanuel has ostensibly sworn to continue to waste the resources on frivolities. It has been a painful harvest of misplaced priorities since this governor assumed office in 2015.

Few examples will suffice.

In the 2021 approved budget of the State, a whopping sum of N64.828 billion has been earmarked for the administrative or running cost for the Government House, Deputy Governor, the SSG and allied offices whereas only N14.557 billion has been

budgeted for the Social Sector including Health, Education, Youth/Sports, Life Enhancement Agency and the likes.

You will recall that in 2017, I had the privilege of leading hundreds of Akwa Ibom people into the streets of Uyo to protest the provocative decision by the governor, contrary to wise counsel, to build a needless new Governor's Lodge in Lagos State. While the House of Assembly claimed that it budgeted N1.2 billion for the project, the State Commissioner of Information at the time, Mr. Charles Udoh, claimed that the amount was N2 billion. The government later sided with the House of Assembly. Despite the popular rejection of that project, Governor Udom Emmanuel stubbornly went ahead and completed it. The amount used in building that lodge could have generated employment opportunities for many young people like Iniubong.

As part of his ungodly agenda to worsen the unemployment rate in Akwa Ibom, Governor Emmanuel decided to further waste the State resources on an unconstitutional, unreasonable and idolatrous white elephant project called Ecumenical Centre (otherwise called the State Worship Centre).

I say unconstitutional because Section 10 of the Nigerian Constitution expressly forbids the Government of the Federation or of a State from adopting any religion as state religion. Akwa Ibom State is not a theocracy. It is not the business of a governor to prepare citizens for Heaven. It is also not the duty of a governor to build a place of worship. Religious diversity is recognized under Sections 10 and 38 of the Nigerian Constitution.

One wonders how a governor whose own Christian denomination where he was consecrated as a Deacon, has been violently factionalized without any solution in sight, will be able to unite the many Christian denominations in Akwa Ibom State to

worship God under one roof. If he is truly embarking on evangelism, Governor Udom Emmanuel should start by uniting his own Church which is now factionalized and fragmented into two entities.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, in 2020, the sum of N2 billion was budgeted for Design and Preliminary Works while N3 billion was budgeted for building works of the Worship Centre. In the 2021 budget, N6.750 billion has been budgeted for the same project bringing the budgetary provision for the two fiscal year for the Worship Centre to N11.750 billion. If this amount were to be deployed as interest free loans or business grants to the teeming youths of Akwa Ibom State at the sum of N1 million per person, at least 11,000 people would have been empowered with N1 million each which will reduce the frightening high unemployment rate in the State.

When the decision to build the worship centre was announced, Akwa Ibom people roundly rejected it. In his attempt to defuse public anger, you may recall that the Governor declared that the project will be funded from private donations. He even provided a dedicated bank account for people to contribute into. Time has since exposed that declaration as a lie. The project as we all know is being financed from the public treasury. How can a project founded on lies, rooted in deceit and conceived by a sinful mind be a sanctuary for God and a place of worship?

Again, as you may well be aware, Governor Udom Emmanuel spends N2.5 billion annually for “routine maintenance” of the State aircraft. For those who may not know, I am not talking about Ibom Air, I am referring to the private aircraft purchased by his predecessor for the governor’s exclusive use. If N2.5 billion is invested annually to upgrade public schools in Akwa Ibom State which are currently in a state of comatose, it will enrich the human capital of the State and produce more employable graduates. As we sit here today, Akwa Ibom State University is on strike because the governor has not paid workers of the institution.

Instead of creating jobs for teeming youths, the governor has been playing religious politics in the State by blasphemously deploying God's name for his partisan and selfish interest. Every month, the governor organizes a sham called "Akwa Ibom Youth Prayer Submit" through the office of the SSA on Youth Matters. According to the 2019 audited Report of the State Accountant General, the sum of N22,500,000 was spent in 2019 alone for this political gimmick and fake spiritual adventure. The more they "pray", the worse things become in Akwa Ibom. The reason for this can easily be found in the Bible in the book of Galatians 6:7 which states thus: "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap". They cannot sow corruption and reap development.

In the guise of creating jobs, the Governor has introduced an initiative known as Ibom 3000 project aimed at training youths in various fields. While this may appear commendable, it is worthy of note that only a paltry sum of N50 million has been budgeted for this project in the 2021 budget.

The Governor as you are already aware refused to assent to the Akwa Ibom State Youth Development Fund Bill which would have created opportunities for economic empowerment of the unemployed youths in the State.

So far, the State Government has spent N526 million on reactivation of the moribund Peacock Paints. The company has collapsed due to corruption while staff of the state-owned company have not been paid for 16 months. The staff are susceptible to scammers, rapists and murderers.

I have only highlighted few instances of how the Akwa Ibom State Government has orchestrated the monstrous unemployment rate in the State in order to

perpetually keep young people as political salves and use them as thugs during elections. It is my submission that the best way for the Akwa Ibom State Government led by Governor Udom Emmanuel to honour the memory of Iniubong is to immediately retrace from the diabolical pilfering and dissipation of public funds and channel resources into sensible, economically viable and employment generating initiatives and projects.

I wish to remind Nigerians that while hunger ravages Akwa Ibom State, Governor Udom Emmanuel built a multi-billion Naira mansion for himself at his country home in Awa in Onna Local Government Area within the first six months of his assumption of office. Meanwhile, many of the few road projects undertaken by the same governor remain uncompleted for years. As if that was not enough, VKS Nigeria Construction Limited, the same company that started and completed the Governor's personal mansion within six months, has been awarded numerous contracts in the State. I pray God should rescue Akwa Ibom State from corruption and corrupt leaders who are profiting illicitly from our collective patrimony.

On behalf the students, civil servants, professionals, Okada riders, artisans, roadside sellers, market women, drivers, pensioners, the poor, hungry and traumatized youths and the masses of Akwa Ibom State who believe in me and what I stand for, I hereby demand that the following should be done by the Government:

1. The case of Iniubong Umoren must be scrupulously investigated and the culprit(s) diligently prosecuted. Although judicial workers are currently on strike due to refusal by governors, including Mr. Udom Emmanuel, to comply with the Constitution on autonomy of the Judiciary, we want to see the suspect arraigned in court when the strike action ends.

2. A public building or institution in Uyo should be named or renamed after the Late Miss Iniubong Umoren to honour her memory and to constantly remind predators that rape, assault, murder and other forms of violence against women are intolerable in Akwa Ibom State.

3. A Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Taskforce should be created immediately with a specific mandate to handle cases of domestic and sexual violence against women in the State. This should be complimented by a Law, dedicated phone lines for victims to call and report abuses, and a Special Court to try cases related thereto.

4. The Bill for a law to establish Office of the Public Defender pending before the Akwa Ibom House of Assembly should be accelerated, passed, assented to and given the needed resources to work efficiently.

5. The State Government should immediately come up with specific, concrete and verifiable policies and measures to address and significantly reduce the alarming high unemployment rate in Akwa Ibom State.

6. Immediate stoppage of the Akwa Ibom State Worship Centre project. The over N11 billion budgeted for this shameful project should be distributed as business grants or interest free loans to 11,000 youths in the State through a credible selection process which should be supervised by representatives of the civil society, professional associations, the World Bank and the State Government.

7. The Akwa Ibom State Youth Development Fund Bill should re-passed by the State House of Assembly and assented to by the Governor without delay.

8. The new Akwa Ibom State Governor's Lodge in Lagos should either be sold outright or leased and the proceeds or rents as the case may be should be paid into a dedicated account to be known as Akwa Ibom State Youth Development Fund Account pending the passage of the Akwa Ibom State Youth Development Fund Bill. The money paid into the account should be used to kick-start the implementation of the said Bill upon its passage.

9. The Governor's private aircraft should be immediately advertised for sale and the proceeds used to establish cottage industries across the 31 Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State.

10. Allowances of the Governor and other political office holders in the State should be reduced by at least 50%.

11. The Governor should sell 50% of the cars in his extravagant convoy and reduce the running cost of the Government House by 70%. The proceeds derived therefrom should be used to revive technical colleges and polytechnics in the State.

12. Workers in Akwa Ibom State University should be paid immediately so that the school can reopen to allow students concentrate on their studies and not be vulnerable to crimes and criminals.

13. The Governor should forfeit 70% of his security votes which he has never properly accounted for and used the proceeds to invest in agricultural schemes to generate jobs.

14. Stealing, dissipation, mismanagement and profligate use of public funds must stop forthwith in Akwa Ibom State. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

15. An Independent Judicial Commission on Asset Recovery headed by a reputable retired Judge of the State High Court should be appointed to trace and recover all stolen government assets, funds and properties particularly for the period between 2007 to date. I estimate that this initiative alone if properly done, will lead to the recovery of over N1 trillion Naira from former and serving corrupt State officials.

It is our belief that if the above demands are swiftly attended to, the high unemployment rate in Akwa Ibom State will drastically reduce with a corresponding reduction in cases of rape, abduction, murder and other violent crimes. This is the best way to ensure that Iniubong Umoren and other victims do not die in vain.

However, if the Akwa Ibom State Government continue in her nonchalant attitude to the issues raised and the demands made during this press conference, the youths of Akwa Ibom State will be led on a peaceful protest to occupy the Government House and the State House of Assembly until these issues and demands are attended to. I will happily lead the protest. We did it before, we will not hesitate to do it again. Intimidation from the authorities will not deter us and we shall never be silenced.

Aluta Continua, Victoria Acerta.

Thank you.

Signed:

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