



TRADE UNION CONGRESS OF NIGERIA

RIVERS STATE COUNCIL

... building a greater Rivers State & Nigeria

TUC Rivers State Office:

MBM Plaza, (Block C, 2nd Floor Rightwing)
By Shell I.A. Main Gate
48 Old Aba Road, Rumuobiakani
Port Harcourt.

E-mail: secretariat@tucrivers.org

Website: www.tucrivers.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/tucriversstate.council

State Chairman: Comrade H. Chika Onuegbu JP, ACTI, FCA (08037404222)

State Secretary: Comrade Jonas Ogundu Okere JP (08035254099)

AN ADDRESS PRESENTED BY COMRADE HYGINUS CHIKA ONUGBU (JP, FCA) STATE CHAIRMAN TRADE UNION CONGRESS OF NIGERIA (TUC) RIVERS STATE COUNCIL ON THE OCCASION OF 2015 MAY DAY CELEBRATION IN RIVERS STATE

Protocols!

1. INTRODUCTION

His Excellency, Guests and Comrades! The history of humanity cannot be complete without appreciating the key role which work, working and workers have played in defining its trajectory. Our societies have been driven by the changing nature and character of work and its associated relations. Our progenitors worked, our fathers worked, we are working and the future generation will work.

However our progenitors and fathers did not just work for themselves. They used the opportunity created by work to unite and fight for a better world. In response, they were severely persecuted under various restraint-of-trade and conspiracy statutes. But they persevered and remained determined because they were committed to the struggle against their exploitation and oppression.

Comrades and guests! As we remember the great martyrs and heroes of our movement, we want to welcome you all to this wonderful occasion. Welcome fellow comrades! Welcome all our affiliates, Units and Branches! Welcome all of you, our social partners - the Employers and our Government to this year's celebration. Much more, we welcome our enduring allies who over the years have stood with us at all the rallies, the picket lines, the trenches, the barricades and in all our marches against man's inhumanity to man - our esteemed masses - students, market men and women, artisans and the unemployed. You are indeed our partners. Together! We have changed the course of history, together we have rewritten global socio-economic agenda and together we shall all wither the storms and all the negative pressures presently confronting us as a people and make the world a better place for the majority of humanity to live. Together! We have constantly provided the stability that this nation needs to move forward. We doff our hats for all of you!

Comrades and guests! Permit me to welcome specially, a man of uncommon vision, tenacity and exceptional courage; His Excellency, Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi CON, the Executive Governor of Rivers State to this year's celebrations. On behalf of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers

State Council, I salute you and congratulate you on the creative ways you have run the affairs of this State and the successful handling of the Ebola outbreak in the State last year.

His Excellency, Comrades, Ladies and Gentlemen! **Please join us as we today remember the unsung worker who is a hero in almost all the disasters both in the past and in our recent history;** the worker is the one that got killed in the Creeks as he innocently engaged in his tasks of creating wealth through the various Oil/gas platforms – he was an Oil/gas worker; he is the one who also had to be killed by the Boko Haram insurgents before they could kidnap all the school children from our schools in the North East – He was the teacher and the non-academic staff who were innocently ensuring that our children acquire the right education so that our nation will continue recreating itself. He/she was the policeman who got killed on election duty while ensuring that the general election was free and fair. She was the journalist who was violently attacked while on duty in the service of his fatherland. Even the medical staff that in the course of duty died from the same illness he/she was treating.

We want to use this auspicious occasion today to thank these unsung heroes for their immense sacrifices and contributions to Nigeria. We are proud of their courage and determination in the service of their fatherland. Unfortunately, the political elites who are the greatest beneficiaries of these sacrifices have deliberately refused to recognise or reward them. It is so bad that even today all the martyrs and heroes of our movement who gave their lives and their wellbeing so that we can be where we are today have been forgotten by the leaders of the same country they fought and gave their lives for. They sowed the seed that has become this global and national movement; a formidable force that has contributed immensely in shaping the trajectory of global discourse and conversations since its formation

It is in this mood that we the workers in Rivers State and indeed all over Nigeria , under the auspices of the Nigeria Labour Congress(NLC) and the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria(TUC), will march today in unison, conscious of our oneness, conscious of our very rich history and common purpose as workers and as a mass movement .

It is therefore not surprising that the theme of our celebration this year ***“the working class, democratic consolidation and economic revival: charting a way to national rebirth”*** addresses the critical need for deeper understanding of who we are as workers; our place in history and the society; our place in the production relations and the inherent historical responsibilities for ourselves, the masses and our beloved nation. It is a theme anchored on the primacy of work to national rebirth and national development and an understanding that in the worker lays the seed necessary for building the Nigeria of our dream.

2. THE WORKING CLASS, DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION, ECONOMIC REVIVAL AND NATIONAL REBIRTH

His Excellency, guests and comrades! The benefit of a conscious and strong trade union movement cannot be overemphasised. Our nation’s history vividly attests to that. Therefore the government, employers and workers ought to collectively and consciously build such a movement for the consolidation of our democracy and the advancement of our nation.

However, the labour movement cannot be strong to chart a meaningful course to national rebirth without first of all re-engineering a rebirth within the consciousness of the working class. The truth is that we cannot play our historical roles to the nation's democracy without first of all rebuilding ourselves internally. We cannot radically contribute positively to Nigeria's economic revival without first of all engaging our inner imperfections creatively. A national rebirth is therefore not possible with a working class that is stripped of its strength and bereft of its potent force.

Without the working class operating optimally, our democracy or the entire political structure presents a façade that is not only highly distorted but seriously disarticulated thus unable to deliver its promises to the citizenry. The contributions which our past leaders such as Pa Michael Imoudu, the great Milton Dabibi and comrade Ovie Kokori etc have made in shaping and directing national discourses and conversations in Nigeria are all pointers to the critical importance of the working class to national rebirth and development.

Without sounding immodest Your Excellency, Comrades and our honoured guests, it is important to state that the nature, character and state of a nation's workforce determines the nature and character of its productive base. It is on this productive base that the strength of that nation's economy rests. **It is on this that all the quest for national development rests and without the worker therefore, all these talk about transformation, change and national rebirth becomes puerile and inchoate.**

The **theme therefore is also a clarion call** to all our social partners especially the Government and our Employers to do the needful and put their food where their mouth is. It is a call for a re-awakened understanding of the criticality of the worker to our collective wellbeing; the urgent need to build the working class platform as the foundation for national rebirth and national wealth creation.

In the light of recent developments in the Labour movement, I on behalf of TUC Rivers State, and indeed the workers of Rivers State and Nigeria, wish to call for unity and solidarity. **The labour movement and indeed the working class ought to remain united. For without unity, there cannot be any meaningful solidarity. And without solidarity, the capacity of the labour movement and indeed the working class to effectively discharge its role in the consolidation of democracy remains doubtful.** In fact the labour movement should remain standing even when all other sectors of the polity fail, and it should not be driven by religion, politics, tribe and other primordial considerations. More so, it should serve as the moral authority that other actors within the polity would defer to in times of crises, and provide a springboard for national unity and national rebirth!

3. THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTION, DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION, ECONOMIC REVIVAL AND NATIONAL REBIRTH

TUC Rivers state Council wishes to congratulate Nigerians on the successful conduct of the just concluded general elections. We are glad that Nigeria is still standing, united and strong despite all the prophecies of doom and fears to the contrary. **We look forward with hope! The hope that tomorrow will be far better for ordinary Nigerians than today and not vice versa!**

It is therefore on this premise that we want to congratulate the President –elect, His Excellency General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) on his victory in the elections. We also appreciate the

statesmanship exhibited by the outgoing President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who in a rare show of patriotism unknown to these parts conceded victory. We congratulate both of them for raising the standards of our democracy.

It is our considered view that the historic emergence of President-Elect Buhari is a clear indication that democracy is growing in Nigeria, the days of impunity numbered and that leadership is about the people who are the real owners of government. Nigeria through this election has become one of the few countries in the world holding aloft the banners of democracy for all to see.

We urge the incoming government at the centre to be prepared to hit the ground running from May 29th to fulfil its promises to the people. Nigerians will not accept any excuses for non-performance. We have been patient enough and are actually in a hurry to begin to enjoy the fruits of the promised change.

They should avoid any pressure to compromise the expectations of Nigerians on the altar of any foreign or local gods in whatever guise. Taking the people for granted is as dangerous as a fish deciding to jump out of water. The very factors that caused a revolution if not adequately addressed may also result to a counter revolution.

We therefore appeal to the new President-Elect to unite Nigeria; tackle corruption and insecurity; revive the economy with a view to addressing the twin evil of poverty and unemployment. The primacy of the focus on the fight against corruption and elimination of waste in governance is because corruption has become a culture in Nigeria and it is widely believed that some 40% of the budget is frittered away through it and inefficiency. Moreso, it was the main selling point of His Excellency's President Elect General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) campaigns since Nigerians perceive him as an honest man. The truth is that the continued haemorrhaging of our national resources as a result of blow-outs through corruption has undermined the capacity of Governments at all levels to deliver on the various promises of democracy to the citizenry. The genuine fight against corruption can no longer be put on hold especially now that oil prices have fallen by some 50% leading to severe reduction in government revenues.

We also, urge the incoming government to give serious attention to reforms in the oil/gas industry. This should be done with a view to quickly ending the issues of endemic corruption prevalent in the industry; under funding of the Joint Venture operations, Oil theft and Pipeline vandalism, importation of refined petroleum products and the institutional bottlenecks in the industry. If effectively and efficiently done, this will bring in the needed foreign direct investment, enhance exploration and exploitation of petroleum resources, significantly increase domestic gas supplies especially for power and industry, create competitive business environment and efficient regulatory institutions, and engender transparency and accountability.

This will also provide the spring board for the effective diversification of the nation's economy away from oil and gas. Examples throughout history and current realities abound to show that diversification is a common sense approach that other societies have adopted to escape the mono-product trap. ***Where we have found ourselves today as a nation is therefore a "classical case" of leadership failure at all levels of governance.***

We also urge the incoming government *to pursue the sanitisation of the electricity sector with the view to perfecting the privatisation of the unbundled PHCN. Nigerians need steady power supply at affordable prices and not denials or reasons for non-performance. If this means revisiting the entire privatisation exercise, they have our support.*

Nigerian workers will want to see the perfection of the various institutional processes of governance to reduce the chances of greedy fat cats manipulating them for personal gains at the detriment of the nation. Oil subsidy thieves must be prosecuted, the stolen Pension funds returned and the graft in the US16b IPP unravelled, the alleged \$20bln unaccounted crude oil revenue thoroughly investigated and the culprits brought to book.

Also, we want an inclusive government that is peopled by men and women of integrity. No part or region should be neglected or ignored. It will be wrong headed for anybody or group to feel that they have conquered power and should therefore appropriate all its benefits.

Our suggestion is that the incoming government should end the reign of impunity and ensure the entrenchment of the rule of law. *In pursuit of this, we want an honest, fearless, effective, strong and independent Judiciary at all levels. If we want to practice democracy, let us not pretend about it, let us practice it truly. The financial autonomy of the judiciary must therefore be guaranteed as the judiciary cannot be independent if they are not financially autonomous.* To this end, the various court judgments on this matter must be respected. This has been the main reason why the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) has embarked on several strikes. *Respect for these court judgments on the Judicial autonomy and indeed all other court judgments is crucial for the development and consolidation of our democracy.*

His Excellency, Comrades, ladies and gentlemen! We want a new Nigeria. One that we and our children will be proud of! One that will guarantee equity, good governance and justice to all Nigerians allowing them to freely express their God given talents and skills and giving them unfettered access to social services and public infrastructure. We know that four years will not be enough to solve all our national problems but we believe that it is more than sufficient to significantly end corruption and impunity, and lay a strong foundation for national unity, national rebirth and inclusive economic development. It is therefore our hope that the incoming administration of His Excellency President-Elect General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) will not disappoint us!

4. RIVERS STATE

His Excellency, Comrades, Ladies and Gentlemen! We have thus far spent much time on the Government at the Federal level and expectations from the incoming administration of His Excellency President-Elect General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd). **This is because of the distorted federalism run in Nigeria where the government at the centre controls virtually all the institutions of governance that are necessary for the consolidation of democracy, Economic revival and National Rebirth.** This should NOT howsoever be construed to mean that we are underestimating the importance of other tiers of government. We have simply chosen to apply the 80/20 rule and focus our energy on where it matters most.

Notwithstanding, Your Excellency! We are living witnesses to the good work which your government has done in this state. Yours was indeed a government anchored unequivocally on strategic service to the people of this state.

The peace your nearly 8 years of governance brought to Rivers State is a milestone that gave all of us succour from the violence that preceded your ascension. **You created an ambience of camaraderie between your government and the workforce NOT by inducing its leadership but by creating one of the best labour friendly governance processes in Nigeria. Nigerian workers and the TUC are indeed proud of your achievements.**

However, we have followed all your political struggles with keen interests and we acknowledge the doggedness and creativity that has kept your government throughout the trials and we also acknowledge the issues in the last gubernatorial and House of Assembly elections. We condemn the violence that led to wanton loss of lives and properties.

While we salute your courage to stand for the truth no matter the size of the opposition at all times, we also appreciate your deep love for our dear state which has always made you to turn the other cheek and rather follow the path of justice. ***It is in this vein that we thank all aggrieved candidates in the last elections for their resort to the judiciary, rather than taking laws into their hands. We appeal to them to wait patiently for its various processes to run its course. We have no doubt that the Judiciary will do right and deliver justice.***

His Excellency, Comrades, ladies and gentlemen! It is on this note, that TUC Rivers State congratulates the Rivers State Governor-elect Chief Barrister Ezebunwo Nyesom Wike CON and urges him to immediately grapple with the task ahead. We implore him to follow the giant strides and accomplishments which was the hallmark of the present administration. It is a standard we believe can still be surpassed because the expectation of every preceding administration is that those who are taking over from them are able to build upon their foundations and do greater works. Our expectation is that the excellent relationship that existed between the present Government and Organised Labour will be continued and even perfected with the incoming administration so that all workers in the state will enjoy greater welfare packages which will encourage them to produce more for the development of the state.

5. HIS EXCELLENCY'S 2008 PROMISE, REVALIDATED IN 2012 AND 2014 REGARDING TUC SECRETARIAT

Our Governor Sir, you would recall that in 2008, you made a promise to the TUC Rivers State to assist us build a befitting secretariat for our congress. Consequently, His Excellency directed the then Secretary to the Rivers State Government (SSG), Senator Magnus Abe to look into the matter and advise as appropriate. In line with Our Governor's directive, the then SSG reviewed our submission and forwarded a memo in September 2010 for Our Governor's kind consideration and approval. That memo was not attended to.

We raised the issue again during our 2012 May Day and His Excellency personally directed the incumbent Secretary to the Rivers State Government, Hon. George Feyii FCA to ensure that we hold our

TUC Triennial State Delegates' Conference (SDC) in the new secretariat. Again, during the 2014 May Day, we reminded His Excellency again, and Our Governor assured that it will be done. ***This is 2015!***

They say that when a man succeeds in climbing an Iroko tree, he should take everything possible because climbing an Iroko tree is not an everyday event. ***We therefore use this opportunity to once again, remind our Governor of this all important promise he made to us in the TUC towards our quest to build a Secretariat for the federation in the state. The remaining days in office Your Excellency, are still enough to make this happen.***

6. THE STATE OF OUR MOVEMENT

Comrades! It is important that we inform you that TUC Nigeria and indeed TUC Rivers State Council, your platform, remains vibrant and united at all levels of its activities. We are proud that against all odds we are stronger today than ever!

His Excellency, Comrades, ladies and gentlemen! This is my penultimate May - Day address! As I depart, expectedly, towards the end of the second quarter of 2016 as the State Chairman of Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State and a member of the National Executive Council of TUC Nigeria, I feel fulfilled that together with other leaders, we have grown the TUC Rivers State to become a signpost for vibrant and effective articulation and projection of workers' and people's rights and privileges within the labour movement in Nigeria. I am particularly proud that, the TUC Rivers State of today is undoubtedly one of the best organized State Councils of the TUC and indeed of the movement in Nigeria.

Together with our colleagues in the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) we have surmounted obstacles and engaged issues both national and domestic for the benefits of the workers of our beloved state. Issues that would have rather divided us were turned into platforms for unity and these have all contributed in no small measure to the camaraderie that surrounds the industrial relations environment in the state. We therefore on behalf of the TUC congratulate our brothers in the NLC for this continued understanding and cooperation.

With your support, worthy comrades and the leadership of the various affiliates in our state including the active partnership of our social partners, we hope to continue building a movement that would forever remain cohesive and focused more towards the delivery of the desires and interests of Rivers State workers and peoples in the future.

His Excellency, Comrades, ladies and gentlemen! Please permit me to inform on a sad note that we lost Comrade Charles D. George, the Immediate Past State Secretary of TUC Rivers State to the cold hands of death on Sunday 18th January 2015 after a very brief illness. He will be buried on 30th May 2015. Also the immediate past State Chairman of TUC Rivers State, Comrade Edward Orupabo recently lost his father. We appeal that in the spirit of solidarity; we all visit and support their families at this very difficult time.

7. COMMENDATIONS AND CONCERNS FROM OUR AFFILIATES

Our Governor Sir, one of my members directly under your watch, the **Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria (ASCSN)** has asked me to commend the State Government for its labour friendly posture and swift response to the yearning of Senior Civil Servants in Rivers State. They however frown at the moves to compel retiring Directors to return the car allocated them in contradiction to the Governor's pronouncement that benefitting Directors would retire with their cars. They further frown at the delay in the payment of gratuity and pension of retired civil servants, demand that the Rivers State Contributory Pension Law be repealed with prompt remittance of deduction to pension custodians. They also appeal that salaries should be paid between the 24th and 27th of the month, payment of all the outstanding allowance from January 2008 to date to Law Officers and recruitment of fresh brains into the State Civil Service.

Another of my members directly under your watch, **the Nigeria Union of Allied Health Professionals (NUAHP)** are deeply worried about the sudden kidnap of Mrs Uju Onotai (Physiotherapist) and Dr Ferdinard Ezaruaku (Medical Laboratory Scientist), and wish to use this medium to request for your assistance regarding their releases from their abductors. They however asked me to remind you of the buses for health workers, building of the Labour House and employment of more health workers to cope with the more manpower needs in Rivers State.

Our Governor Sir, my members in the music and entertainment sector – **Performing Musicians Employers Association of Nigeria (PMAN)** frown that the Government of Rivers State has not carried out them along and implore our amiable Governor to include them in the Rivers State Tourism Development Board in view of their immense experience in music and entertainment.

Our Governor Sir, my members in the Oil and Gas sector- **the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN)** has asked me to inform you that they are greatly worried about the non-passage of the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) and the inability of successive governments since the advent of this democracy to make progress in the reform of the nation's petroleum sector. They are also worried about the recent loss of over 10,000 jobs due to massive divestment in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry and the fall of crude oil price. Also, the problems associated with operational and security challenges, lack of strong political will for the enforcement of the Nigerian Local Content Law, inadequate supply of crude oil and inability to disburse the agreed quantum sum of money for the upgrade and rehabilitation of Port Harcourt Refinery.

They are pained about the undue delay of dispensation of justice by the National Industrial Court (NIC), prevalence of unfair labour practices and abuse of Trade union rights in the oil and gas industry. They are surprised that some companies have invented some nomenclatures such as ICA (Individual Contract Agreement), Seconded, no solicitation etc. aimed at preventing workers from exercising their constitutional rights to join trade union and bargain collectively. They appeal for your urgent intervention.

Our Governor Sir, my members in the food , beverage and tobacco sector - **the Food ,beverage and tobacco senior staff association of Nigeria (FOBTOB)** has asked me to inform you about the unnecessary planned sale of Port Harcourt Flour Mills and the impending sack of all the workers. They believe that the Board of the company are deliberately running it down so that they can provide justification for the sale to their cronies. **This is unacceptable and we appeal to you to put the planned sale on hold and investigate the activities of the Board and management. The business of Flour is a very lucrative one .**

Our Governor Sir, time and space would not allow me to mention one by one, what each of the TUC affiliate-unions has asked me to thank you for; as well as their concerns.

8. APPRECIATION AND CONCLUSION

Once again, on behalf of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State, I thank the Executive Governor of Rivers State Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi CON for his labour friendly disposition and for the cordial relationship that exists between the Rivers State Government and the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State Council. **We assure your Excellency Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi CON that Nigerian workers and indeed the TUC will never forget you and all the good works you brought to bear on governance in Rivers state. And as you take your glorious bow from the Government House Port Harcourt later this month, we join your numerous admirers to recommend you to the highest office possible in Nigeria.** You are a great son of Rivers State and we are proud of you!

Let me also use this opportunity to congratulate ourselves and our colleagues in the NLC for the unity and brotherly love that permeates our relationship and the chance to have another memorable May Day celebrations together. For all our guests who despite their busy schedules came to personally celebrate this 2015 May Day with us, we sincerely thank you and pray that God Almighty rewards you exceedingly.

As we celebrate today, we urge workers of Nigeria and Rivers State to arise with renewed understanding of their place in history. Reinvigorate the movement, organise better and expand our frontiers to once again become a potent force in Nigeria with an overwhelming influence that can never be ignored in our quest for national development. We must use our movement to build the kind of Nigeria that we want. It is possible. It is feasible and collectively and determinedly, we can do it!

Finally, on behalf of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State, I wish ALL workers here in Rivers State and all over Nigeria a wonderful May – Day celebration! I urge you to look forward to the incoming administration with hope and with renewed determination and vigour. On our part, we pledge to continue to stand by the workers and the ordinary people as well as on our original ideology as a mass movement. We thank you !

Long live the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC)! Long live the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)!! Long live workers in Rivers State!!! Long live Nigerian workers!!!! Long live Rivers State!!!!!! Long Live Federal Republic of Nigeria!!!!!!

**Aluta Continua! Victoria Acerta!!
Forward ever!!! Backward never!!!!
Solidarity forever!!!!**

Comrade Hyginus Chika Onuegbu JP, ACTI, FCA

State Chairman, TUC Rivers State