



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

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 2016 MAY DAY CELEBRATION IN RIVERS STATE

Protocols!

1. INTRODUCTION

His Excellency, Guests and Comrades! The history of nations is essentially the history of work and the battle for the appropriation of the value created by work. It is the history of the enslavement of human beings by fellow human beings under several guises and the struggle to resist and overcome the enslavement. Just like Karl Marx puts it in the Communist Manifesto, "*the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.*" It is therefore not surprising that our progenitors and fathers 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 for their liberty.

Comrades and guests! As we remember the great martyrs and heroes of our movement, we want to welcome you all to this wonderful occasion taking place at the magnificent Liberation Stadium. The name of the Stadium encapsulates the history of man and the labour movement. The struggle to be liberated from the shackles of slavery, exploitation and indignation! **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. Your contributions to humanity are invaluable. You are the Greatest! And that is the truth. And I am only repeating what Karl Marx himself said about you that "*history calls those men the greatest who have ennobled themselves by working for the common good; experience acclaims as happiest the man who has made the greatest number of people happy*". **Together we have brought joy, hope and freedom to countless number of families! Together we have constantly provided the stability that our State and Country needs to move forward. On behalf of my colleagues in the State Administrative Committee and the State Executive Council of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State, I doff my hats for all of you!**

Comrades and guests! Permit me to welcome specially, **His Excellency, Chief Barrister Nyesom Ezenwo Wike CON, the Executive Governor of Rivers State to this year's May Day celebration.** On behalf of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State Council and all her affiliate-unions, I salute you and congratulate on your first May Day as the Executive Governor of Rivers state. It is an opportunity for you to really interact with the leadership of the trade unions and the workers in the State. It is a once in a year opportunity to share your plans, challenges and achievements as the Governor of the State with the workers and their leadership and solicit for our support. **On our part, we pledge to partner with your government for the peace, security and development of Rivers State!**

His Excellency, Comrades, Ladies and Gentlemen! kindly permit me to recall that the May Day also known as International Workers' Day is an annual holiday celebrated all over the world to mark the economic and social achievements of workers. It is also an opportunity to remind ourselves of the many sacrifices of working people in our struggle for freedom, dignity and social justice. Also take stock of the many challenges ahead. For instance, it is an opportunity to remind ourselves that *workers were shot so we could have the 8-hour day; and that homes with families in them were burned to the ground so we could have Saturday as part of the weekend etc.*

Back home, it is an opportunity to remind us that Nigerian workers were massacred at Iva Valley Coal mines, gunned down at Burutu, bludgeoned and buffeted in many other parts of the country because they fought for the untrammelled freedom and prosperity of their fatherland. Even in the post-independence Nigeria, many great labour leaders like our own Chief Milton Gilchrist Dabibi, Chief Frank Kokori, and Engr. Frank Addo etc. were incarcerated because of their tenacious struggle against the June 12 annulment and military dictatorship. It is on record that some of our members, civil society partners and even students paid the supreme price in that struggle which gave rise to the democracy that we take for granted today in Nigeria.

His Excellency, the significance of the May Day celebration is therefore beyond the festivity that pervades this arena. It is also an occasion for deep sober reflection and decision making. A reflection that, as stated by Martin Luther King, Jr., *"freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed"*. A reflection as stated by Thomas Paine that *"those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it"*. A deep personal and collective understanding that people fought for, and paid the price for the rights and dignities we enjoy today. The commitment that we will make the sacrifice necessary for the preservation and improvement on these rights and dignities so that the labours of our heroes past shall not be in vain, and the freedom and dignities of our children shall not be compromised!

His Excellency, it is in remembrance of, and understanding of the above 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, and our rich history. **This is why we celebrate the May Day and it is at the core of our movement.**

Instructively, the theme of our celebrations today is **"The Working Class and the quest for economic revival"**. This is also a reflection of the role of the working class in the struggle for economic justice and social inclusiveness. **This is so because economic revival without economic justice and social inclusiveness is essentially slavery redesigned.** Or as Edward Abbey puts in **"Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell"**. And indeed the main reason

why the working class is concerned about economic revival is for economic justice, social inclusion and inclusive economic growth.

2. THE WORKING CLASS AND THE QUEST FOR ECONOMIC REVIVAL

His Excellency, guests and comrades! **The Nigerian economy is in bad shape. All sectors of the economy are bleeding profusely due mainly to the fall in crude oil price from \$115 per barrel in June 2014 to the current levels some \$44 per barrel.** The situation is exacerbated by pipelines vandalism, Crude oil theft, general insecurity (**especially the activities of Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, cultists and kidnappers**) and an uncertain global economic outlook. Also, Power shortages, lingering fuel scarcity, scarcity of U.S. dollars, the high value of the U.S. dollars in parallel markets which is some N321 per dollar and the 2016 budget imbroglio have all combined to worsen the economic situation of our dear country. **The result is mass hunger, poverty, increasing desperation to survive, anger and increasing hopelessness in the land.**

The quest for economic revival and the improvement in the lives of the ordinary people should therefore pre-occupy our minds. This is because; except very drastic actions are taken to fix the Nigerian economy, more jobs will be lost. More workers will be owed salaries. More students protests will take place and if nothing is done, then ultimately a revolution may ensue and our democracy will be threatened to its very foundations!

That revolution will start first as a mutiny within the labour movement as workers will be forced by the economic hardship to replace their more liberal leadership with more militant ones. The new militant leadership will be forced by the pressure from their members to collaborate with more militant sections of the society to form an alliance for popular militant protests, civil disobedience and mass resistance to the government of the day.

It is therefore important for the government at all levels to listen to the people and their cries and take the necessary actions needed to revive the Nigerian economy and make it truly resilient! Nigeria is currently a mono-product economy and hence vulnerable to the shocks in international crude oil market. Despite the existence of solid minerals deposits, fertile land, and a population of over 170 million people, the country continues to ignore agriculture, development of solid minerals, knowledge economy and manufacturing. The result is that when crude oil price or production falls, the Nigerian economy bleeds. Reducing the vulnerability of the Nigerian economy to commodity prices and strengthening its capacity to absorb and overcome severe shocks while supporting strong growth- that is strengthening Nigeria's economic resilience, should be the key policy priority of governments at all levels.

It is similarly important for the current leadership of the labour movement in the local governments, States and National to quickly forestall the looming danger by engaging the governments at all levels for genuine revival of the Nigerian economy for the benefit of the ordinary people.

Unfortunately, there are some discordant voices within the labour movement occasioned by some disputations in our sister Congress at the national level. **And this has lasted for too long due to the**

pursuit of self. The labour movement should therefore as a matter of emergency revive itself. The need for revival within the movement cannot be overemphasised. The truth is that we cannot play our historical roles to the nation's democracy and achieve our quest for economic revival without first of all reviving and 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 and inclusive economic revival is therefore not possible with a divided working class!**

The contributions which our past leaders such as Pa Michael Imoudu, the great Milton Dabibi, Alhaji Hassan Sunmonu and Comrade Ovie Kokori etc. made in shaping and directing national discourses and conversations in Nigeria are all pointers to the critical importance of a united working class to national rebirth and economic revival. History and even our Solidarity song is very clear-**without unity the working class is doomed! Without unity, the Union cannot make anybody or us strong! And the deliberate pursuit of self over the ideals of the labour movement, which is the main reason for the disunity in our sister Congress, is to say the least unconscionable and a dishonour to our founding fathers and past leaders who gave their all for the movement.** The least the discordant voices in the movement ,especially in our sister Congress, can do to remember Pa Michael Imoudu, the great Milton Dabibi, Alhaji Hassan Sunmonu , Comrade Ovie Kokori etc. is to unite with the rest of their Comrades and continue from where our great past leaders stopped in this quest for Nigeria's economic revival and social inclusion. **We cannot afford to fail Nigerians!**

3. 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 appreciate you for **regular payment of salaries to the civil servants on the Rivers state payroll.** However, they frown at the refusal of officers to exit from the service after attaining the mandatory age. Furthermore they appeal for the repeal of the Rivers State Contributory Scheme.

Permit me however on their behalf to request the Rivers State government to quickly review the Rivers State Pension Laws to conform to the Pension Reform Act of 2014. You would recall that the Rivers State Pension Law as amended was essentially a domestication of the 2004 Pension Reform Act now repealed and replaced with the 2014 Pension Reform Act with effect from 1 July 2014. Furthermore, Our Congress is constrained to draw your attention to the capricious manner the subsisting Pension law is administered across the MDAs. For the record, there exist the following awkward instances to wit: Many instances where deductions were made without remittance to Retirement Saving Account; non-deduction from both the Government and some Public/ Civil Servant years after enrolment; Poor funding of the Rivers State Pensions Board thereby making the board comatose; imposition of Pension Administrator on Public/ Civil Servants; among other irregularities. We assure you that we are ready to collaborate with your government to ensure that workable remedies are crafted into the State Pension Laws to address the aforementioned challenges.

Our Governor Sir, my members in the music and entertainment sector – the **Performing Musicians Employers Association of Nigeria (PMAN)** is pleased to announce that the lingering factions that

led to the suspension of the Rivers State Chapter elections has been laid to rest as a Court of competent jurisdiction has recently delivered a judgement in favour of their national leadership. They however appeal that they should be included 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 increasing problems in the nation's oil and gas sector which has led to the loss of some 150,000 direct and indirect jobs between 2013 and February 2016. Some of these challenges could be categorised into global and local. The global challenges include the steep fall in international crude oil price from some \$115 in June 2014 to some \$40 now. The local challenges include the inability of successive governments since 2000 to conclude the reforms in the oil and gas sector and pass the petroleum industry bill (PIB) into law. **The non-passage of the PIB has cost the country some \$80billion in lost investments. Even the 8th Senate on April 26th 2016 suspended debate on the new Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) as most Senators kicked against its second reading on the grounds that copies of the bill were not made available to them.** One wonders why such an important bill could be included in the Senate agenda and introduced for debate on the floor of the Red Chamber without making a copy available to the Senators as is normal practice. **Even the PENGASSAN National PIB Committee which is chaired by me was also surprised to learn that the copy of the PIB we just worked on between February and March 2016 is Not the copy at the National Assembly.** So the PENGASSAN National PIB Committee will have to painfully start all over again! The new PIB which is a part of the two or three PIBs expected is titled the "Petroleum Industry Governance and Institutional Framework Bill". It has no provision for fiscal framework, Refinery operations and host community funds. Its purpose is to Provide for Governance and Institutional Framework for the Petroleum Industry and for other Matters Connected therewith.

Other equally serious challenges confronting the nation's oil and gas sector include the massive crude Oil theft and pipeline vandalism; severe Underfunding of Joint Venture (JV) operations and unprecedented Cash call arrears. In fact it is estimated that between 300,000 to 400,000 barrels of Crude Oil is stolen daily through Pipeline vandalism, Well Head vandalism and illegal Crude Oil Diversion **leading to loss of some \$1.5billion monthly.** They explain that the Nigerian government owes Cash call arrears of some \$5billion to the JV Partners. Government also last year mandatorily forced a 40% reduction in JV approved programme budget mid-year 2015. The JV funding challenges has even worsened in 2016 as crude oil prices continued its downward spiral. These are in addition to the significant security challenges leading to increased cost of doing business in Nigeria. There is also the scarcity of refined petroleum products which is as a result of the neglect of the government owned refinery subsector over the years as successive government since the advent of this democracy were fixated on selling the government owned refineries.

What is however disturbing is the inability of successive governments since the advent of this democracy in May 1999 to muster the political will and commitment necessary to address the challenges in the nation's oil and gas industry. The problems have now become intractable and causing untold hardship to ordinary Nigerians.

His Excellency, Guests and Comrades! **PENGASSAN is deeply worried, and I personally share in that worry, that if nothing is done quickly to fix the problems in the nation's oil and gas sector, the sector is headed for an imminent collapse.** Already the sector has witnessed massive divestment by international oil and gas companies. Moreover the discoveries of oil and gas in the Gulf of Guinea and other regions of the world , the application of new technology making hitherto unreachable reserves reachable and massive investment in alternative forms of energy globally should worry Nigeria and force a sense of urgency on the political class to quickly fix the oil and gas industry, which for now is the main source of revenue for the country.

Our Governor Sir, PENGASSAN is also 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 as the host State Governor of most of the oil companies to forestall avoidable strikes and other forms of industrial actions which could worsen the already difficult operating environment!**

Our Governor Sir, my members in the aviation sector- **Air Transport Services Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (ATSSSAN)** have asked me to urge your administration to incorporate the dualization of the two (2) kilometers Airport Road in your development programme to significantly reduce incessant road accidents and loss of lives. They said that the security situations around Port Harcourt International Airport due to incessant kidnapping and other criminal activities are of concern to our members; however they convey their appreciation to the present leadership of Trade Union Congress, Rivers State Council under Comrade Hyginus Chika Onuegbu for their contributions and overall welfare of their members.

Our Governor Sir, one of my affiliates in the Health Sector, the **Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research & Associated Institutions (SSAUTHRIAI)** has asked me to inform you that the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital which is the only Federal Government Health facility in Rivers State grossly lacks certain medical diagnostic equipments, machines and functional power supply which has affected the effective treatment of Patients, training of medical students and accreditation/rating. They are worried over the deliberate stagnation of Senior Staff in the 2014 and 2015 promotion exercise and request for your urgent intervention to avert further industrial actions by the Joint Health Sector Unions(JOHESU) of the institution.

Our Governor Sir, one of my affiliates , the **National Association of Plant Operators (NAPO)** appreciates His Excellency Chief Barrister Nyesom Ezeunwo Wike CON on his laudable road construction projects in Rivers State with competent companies. They request that the National Assembly sponsors bills that would regulate Plant Operators and their employers with a view to minimizing the hazards in the entire working environment.

Our Governor Sir, one of my affiliates the **National Association of Community Health Practitioners of Nigeria (NACHPN)** said I should thank His Excellency Chief Barrister Nyesom

Ezebunwo Wike CON on his developmental strides in the state. They request that I bring to your notice that most of their members who have been due for promotion for 2 or 3 promotional periods are yet to be promoted even the promotion exercise that was done in 2014 and back dated has not been implemented. Also, their members that have been retired are still finding it very difficult to get their retirement benefits. They have asked me to bring to your notice the shortage of community health practitioners in the state service. They appeal that you direct the Rivers State Primary Health Care Board to employ community health workers in the state to cushion the effect of those retired. They also complained that their members have not received salaries in the last three months and appeal to you to direct the local government Councils to pay them the outstanding salaries.

Also, another of my affiliates - the **Construction and Civil Engineering Senior Staff Association (CCESSA)** has asked me to inform you that they are deeply worried about the menace of casualization and Contract Staffing in the Construction industry. They are pained that jobs that should ordinarily be permanent and pensionable is speedily being replaced with contract staff and other precarious work forms as Construction companies look for all manners of ways to cut cost by all means possible. They vow to resist all manner of exploitation of their members and urge His Excellency to intervene.

Our Governor Sir, time and space would not allow me to mention one by one, what each of the TUC affiliate-unions have asked me to thank you for; as well as their concerns. On their behalf, I want thank you for the continuation and completion of some of the projects of your predecessors. This in our view is one of the greatest achievements of your administration in your first one year in office. We also thank you for the rehabilitation of the Eleme/Onne Section of the East-West road. This is particularly important to our members in the Oil and gas and Maritime sectors who spent several hours commuting on the road because it had become essentially impassable. We also thank you for the regular payment of salaries. As at Friday April 29th 2016, monthly salaries of civil servants in Rivers state payroll have been paid up to March 2016 although there have been hitches in remitting some components of the salaries(i.e. contributory pension, union dues, federal mortgage housing etc.) . Also Pensioners under the defined benefit scheme have been paid up to february2016. We however appeal to you to direct the Accountant General to remit the State's statutory contribution and the deductions it made from the salaries of civil servants as stipulated by the contributory pension law and other extant laws.

Our Governor Sir ,we are particularly happy with the way your administration used the Bank verification numbers (BVN) to eliminate duplicate personnel and ghost workers on the payroll. We see great cost saving opportunity in the exercise and encourage you to continue with the programme. **On our part, we assure you of our continued support to ensure that only bonafide workers in the employment of the Rivers State government receive salaries.**

4. THE NEW MINIMUM WAGE PROPOSAL

His Excellency, Guests and Comrades! As you may be aware, the National leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) on April 26th 2016 jointly proposed and presented a new minimum wage of N56, 000(Fifty Six Thousand Naira) to the Federal Government. **The amount translates to just \$164 per month, which is less than a day and half minimum wage pay in the United States of America!** It is therefore our expectations that in line with the principles of Social dialogue and tripartism, the Federal government through the Federal

Ministry of Labour and Employment would immediately convene a meeting of the tripartite parties to commence negotiations that will ultimately usher in a new minimum wage for Nigerian workers many of whom can be best described as **working poor**. This is to forestall any possible industrial crises that might arise as a result of the new national minimum wage proposal as Nigerian workers have been patient enough and cannot afford to wait any longer!

5. THE STATE OF THE TRADE UNION CONGRESS OF NIGERIA

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! Permit me to respectfully inform you that this is my last May - Day address as State Chairman TUC Rivers State! As I depart, expectedly, on July 21st 2016 (which is incidentally the birthday of my dear wife-Agantem) 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, resilient and focused more towards the delivery of the desires and interests of Rivers State workers and peoples.

6. 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 Chief Barrister Nyesom Ezenwo Wike CON for the cordial relationship that exists between the Rivers State Government and the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State Council.

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 2016 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 economic revival. 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 TUC Rivers State 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**