



# TRADE UNION CONGRESS OF NIGERIA

## RIVERS STATE COUNCIL

*... building a greater Rivers State & Nigeria*

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## **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 2014 MAY DAY CELEBRATION IN RIVERS STATE**

### **Protocols!**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

I am indeed very thankful to God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, for the opportunity and privilege to celebrate another May Day in peace. I also appreciate Him for sustenance in our entire struggle .

Words are not enough to express my joy as I see all of you here, my comrades, attired in such beautiful colours, to celebrate the 2014 Workers' Day with the leadership of our dear State, led by His Excellency, Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi CON. A man of exceptional courage. May I on behalf of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State Council, seize this opportunity to formally salute the Governor of Rivers State on this 2014 May Day Celebration .

May I, on behalf of the TUC Rivers State , also use this opportunity to formally congratulate the Government of Rivers State led by His Excellency, Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi CON for the honour done our dear country Nigeria as Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, on April 23rd 2014 assumed its status as the UNESCO World Book Capital 2014 .We understand Port Harcourt is the 14th city to be designated World Book Capital and the first city in the sub-Saharan Africa to have won the designation from an open competitive bidding . It was indeed very exciting as we watched Bangkok ( the capital city of Thailand and the 2013 World Book Capital) formally hand over the baton to Port Harcourt.

His Excellency, 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 , 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 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 **"Building enduring peace and unity; panacea for sustainable national development"**. This is also a reflection that peace, not just in the form of absence of 'war' or some détente, but as an atmosphere of tolerance, harmonious co-existence and social justice is necessary for sustainable national development.

## 2. BUILDING ENDURING PEACE AND UNITY; PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Our Governor Sir, Peace is one thing we often take for granted and do not really appreciate until we lose it. Whether we are referring to peace in our nation, our state or our community or even industrial peace. Furthermore, peace like joy, has a slender body that breaks too soon. Nevertheless, it is at the epicentre of personal and national development. According to the Economist the *“the main constraint on development these days may not be a poverty trap but a violence trap. Peaceful countries are managing to escape poverty—which is becoming concentrated in countries riven by civil war, ethnic conflict and organised crime. Violence and bad government prevent them from escaping the trap.”*<sup>1</sup>. Peace is therefore very essential for personal and national development and transformation .

In fact PEACE provide the basis for SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT; and Sustainable national development by meeting the needs of **ALL sections** of the current generation without jeopardizing the ability of **ALL sections** of the future generations to meet their own needs is essential to guaranteeing peace. **The relationship between peace and sustainable national development is two way-there cannot be any sustainable national development without peace; and ‘peace’ without sustainable national development is a time bomb ticking to explode.**

But what is peace? There is no doubt that peace as a concept is better understood when you juxtapose it with the absence of peace – violence. Generally, people tend to perceive peace as ‘the absence of war’ or cessation of hostilities or some form of détente. This perception is grossly inadequate and does not allow for a good understanding of peace necessary for EFFECTIVE conflict resolution and sustainable national development. To have any understanding of peace necessary for effective resolution of conflicts and development of Nigeria, we must define peace not only as the absence of direct violence but also the absence of structural and cultural violence.

Our Governor Sir, kindly permit me to respectfully remind us that hardly does any day pass in Nigeria, without a report of a massacre of Nigerians by Nigerians or at least, coordinated by Nigerians. Hardly does a day pass, without the report of a major violent crime committed against Nigerians by Nigerians. Hardly does a day pass, without the story of how large sums of money are stolen by Nigerians who are in positions of trust. Hardly does a day pass without the stories of how Nigerian crude oil is brazenly stolen by oil thieves assisted by their collaborators in high places. The revelations at the various probes by the National Assembly are heart breaking as billions of Naira (and now trillions of Naira) meant for the improvement in the welfare and condition of living of ordinary Nigerians are brazenly stolen by those

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<sup>1</sup> The Economist(2011)Conflict and poverty: The economics of violence

who they are entrusted in their care. **All these are examples of violence against the people of Nigeria.** The killings and maiming of Nigerians, whether by Boko Haram, Militants, cult groups, kidnappers, armed robbers, misguided youths, political thugs and other forms of societal vices by deviant groups under whatever guise, are all examples of **direct violence**.

There is also **structural violence**, which is the violence that does not hurt or kill through fists or guns or bombs, but through social structures that produce poverty, chronic unemployment, death and enormous suffering such as: corruption, injustice and bad governance. It occurs when the social, political and economic order directly or indirectly causes human suffering and death.

Yet, there is also **Cultural violence**, which arises from the practice of cultural norms that create discrimination, injustice and human suffering. A good example include some cultural practices that cause pain and suffering to widows. Also the caste system which makes one child a slave and the other a freeborn, for no fault of their own.

The interdependence between structural violence, cultural and direct violence is well documented in the literature. Essentially when the legitimate desires of an individual is denied either directly or by the consequence of the way society is structured, impunity of the ruling class, corruption, or cultural practices, the feeling of disappointment may lead such a person to express his anger through violence that is directed at those he holds responsible or people who are directly or indirectly related to them.

Structural violence inevitably produces conflict and often direct violence. Research has shown that those who are chronically oppressed are often, for logical reasons, those who resort to direct violence. Cultural violence also creates conditions of hate, a precursor to direct violence. A few weeks ago, our nation awoke to the horrific news of how a 14-year-old child bride killed her 35-year-old husband and his friends because she was forced into marriage.

Let me quickly add that I am not by any chance providing any justification for criminal activities. I am only showing how one crime, for example corruption and abuse of power, could lead to another. This analysis in my view, is important if we must address the unacceptable violence, insecurity and wanton killings in Nigeria that is fast becoming a way of life in our beloved country.

**Our Governor Sir, permit me, on behalf of the TUC Rivers State to use this opportunity to formally condemn the recent senseless killings last month at Nyanya, a suburb in the FCT Abuja, the abduction of school girls in Bornu State and other mindless killings across the country. Permit me to also appeal to government at all levels to go beyond the issuance of condolence messages each time there is violent attacks to genuine determination to ending these attacks at least in memory of the victims.**

**Our Governor Sir** , the TUC Rivers State is deeply saddened that **life in Nigeria has become nasty, brutish and short with the kind of general insecurity that can only be comparable to countries like Somalia, Central African Republic and Afghanistan.** This general insecurity has also seriously increased the cost of doing business in Nigeria ,diverted investments from Nigeria and negatively impacted on the already bad unemployment and poverty situation. **These violent conflicts and senseless killings across the country will continue to deny the country of the highly needed foreign direct investments and developments. They will also worsen the original conditions that led to their emergence.**

**We are however disappointed at the politicisation of these killings and insecurity by the political class .** We believe that the situation in Nigeria requires the active collaboration of all Nigerians irrespective of religious , political and ideological inclination. This is more so as there is no better alternative to peace. Moreover violence of any kind begets violence, and then we are all in a cycle of violence and underdevelopment, hatred, frustration, and deep seated mistrust. We must reconcile with ourselves, our brothers and embrace dialogue as the way forward. We must build an atmosphere of tolerance and love, co-exist harmonious with our neighbours and treat others with respect. **No one can claim to love his/her fellow country men and women, if s/he inflicts pains on them through violent attacks and senseless killings, kidnapping, oil theft and other organised crimes. No one can cannot claim to love his/her fellow country men and women, if s/he steal from the commonwealth or abuse the trust reposed in him/her for personal and/or sectional gains. These views are also akin to the preachments in our various religions and therefore no one should hide under any religious orientation to cause pain and misery on his/her fellow countrymen and women.**

Our Governor Sir, permit me to say remind us that building an enduring peace requires our readiness as a people and a nation, to change the operations and mandates of existing political, social, security, cultural and development institutions and mind sets. **We must see the world from egalitarian perspectives and support the ideologies that promote peace, not just in the form of absence of ‘war’ or some détente, but as an atmosphere of tolerance, harmonious co-existence and social justice.** We must in words and action demonstrate our believe that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights which must be respected in words and action.

**It is therefore our hope that the on-going National Conference will engender genuine dialogue that will usher in a new Nigeria. If the Conference fails to do so, then it is a huge waste of public**

resources and more important a painful loss of another opportunity to build the Nigeria of our dream. Also if the Conference fails the delegates should be made to return whatever money was spent on them and offer public apology to the peoples of this country. Their duty is a very serious one and must be taken very seriously by all. To this end, we urge all Nigerians to support the on-going National Conference find a way to achieve peace and justice necessary for national development in Nigeria.

We also call on the National Assembly to immediately make laws that will allow states have their own police and deepen the framework for community policing. We should also be courageous enough to review our system of fiscal federalism such that state and local governments would be motivated to grow their economies in their areas of comparative advantages.

### 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 introducing electronic payment to Civil Servants. They are sincerely happy for the introduction of banks in the State Secretariat Complex. These initiatives have not only provided comfort to civil servants but also eliminated other forms of corrupt practises. They however frown at the increased tax burden of the average civil servant. They also appeal that salaries should be paid on or before the 25th of every month.

Another of my members directly under your watch, **the Nigerian Union of Allied Health Professionals (NUAHP)** has asked me to thank you for the harmonisation of salary for health workers. They however asked me to remind you of the vehicles which you graciously approved for senior members of the Joint Health sector unions(JOHESU) since August 2013. They have been eagerly looking forward to taking delivery of these vehicles. They also appeal for the Creation of a Directorate of Medical Laboratory Services in the Ministry of Health as stated in the extant scheme of Service and recently ruled by National Industrial court (NIC) , which is the apex court for labour issues. **Also, they request that you upgrade at least two hospitals for Internship training of Health Care professionals and replace the operational Buses for TUC and NLC since the buses have lasted over 5 years.**

Our Governor Sir, my members in the chemical and non-metallic products sector- **The Chemical and Non-Metallic Products Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (CANMPSSA)** are deeply worried about the humongous challenges bedevilling their sector especially the constant closure of companies. The most recent is **Rivers State Vegetable Oil Company, RIVOC**, which for two year was out of Production. More pathetic is that 95% of the workforce of 1000 has been thrown into the ominous Nigerian Labour Market. Despite all reviving efforts put in by the General Manager, Mr. G. A. Agorom the present



investors, the Bulla Group, who are on rescue mission appear to be backing out. They also asked me to remind you about the painful story of the West African Glass Industry, Port Harcourt. They are shocked that the Foreign investor Mr. Mirchandani, despite the Court Award has brazenly refused to pay the sacked workers their benefit even after the Federal Government had gazetted the Award. They also complain that Government skewed policies are making the Cement Companies moribund and leading to avoidable hike in cement prices across the country.

Our Governor sir, another of my affiliate in the health sector, **the Senior Staff Association of Universities, Teaching Hospitals, Research & Associated Institutions (SSAUTHRIAI) are appreciative of your various development projects.** They however asked me to inform you that the only Teaching Hospital in Rivers state (University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital) has serious challenges with power supply as all their generators are faulty with serious consequences for health care delivery. They are also worried about the frequent industrial disharmony (strikes) that have taken place in UPTH due to short fall in allocation of funds from the federal government to the institution, which had made the management of UPTH pay only percentage salaries to staff, led to none payment for services rendered by contractors, none payment for training programmes and allowances owed staff from January 2013 to date. They appeal for His Excellency's quick intervention in resolving these vexing issues.

Also another of my affiliate, **the National Association of Plant Operators (NAPO) extends gratitude to you and your dependable team.** They however request for the establishment of a Technical training school for heavy duty plant operators in the state. They are however worried about the undue interference of Bonny integrated Recruitment centre in employment in all the companies in Bonny and appeal for your intervention.

Similarly my members in the hospitality sector- **The Hotel & Personal Services Senior Staff Association(HAPSSSA)** have asked me to thank you for using the Hotel presidential for the opening ceremony of the Port Harcourt World Book Capital. They once again implore our amiable Governor to include them in the State Tourism Board in view of their immense experience in hospitality and tourism.

Our Governor sir, my members in the oil and gas sector- **the Petroleum and Natural gas senior staff association of Nigeria(PENGASSAN)** have asked me to thank you for the cordial relationship that exist between them and the government of Rivers state under your amiable leadership. They however asked me to inform you that they are worried about the inability of the government and her security agencies to address the menace of oil theft and pipeline vandalism which is now a well-established industry in Nigeria. They note that by government's own admission, **more than 10% of Nigeria's total crude oil production i.e. about 200,000 barrels is stolen every day,** this is almost double the total production

of our neighbour, Ghana. The nation therefore loses between \$6billion yearly to crude oil theft and another N165billion to theft of refined products. As if this is not enough, there is also the brazen vandalism of pipelines which has adversely affected the supply of crude to the refineries resulting in low or no output from our 4 refineries. In addition, the general insecurity of lives and property in the country has among other things adversely impacted on the oil and gas industry . **The combined effect of oil theft, pipeline vandalism and insecurity is forcing the multinational oil companies to divest from the Niger Delta thereby throwing thousands of Nigerians into the already saturated labour market.**

Our Governor sir, PENGASSAN has also asked me to inform you that **they can see very clearly that the government is not committed to honouring the agreement signed early this year with NUPENG and PENGASSAN over the planned sale of the nation's refineries. They note that in order to lay the ground for its privatisation, government ensures the refineries are unable to produce.** They argue that government blinded by its privatisation glaucoma, fails to see that much of the gains ascribed to privatization by the proponents of the policy are actually gains from other reforms. **For instance, the government did not privatize NITEL for MTN, Econet (now Airtel) etc. to sprout and grow. They simply created the enabling environment and the GSM market blossomed. They therefore appeal to the government of Nigeria to honour the agreement signed with NUPENG and PENGASSAN in January 2014 over the planned sale of refineries to avoid any unnecessary industrial crises in the nation's oil and gas sector.**

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. Let me therefore on their behalf inform you that we are proud of your achievements and delighted to be your social partners . We therefore urge you to integrate organised labour represented by TUC and NLC into all the processes of governance so that workers and people's interests will be articulated and protected at every level.

#### **4. HIS EXCELLENCY'S 2008 PROMISE, REVALIDATED IN 2012, 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, our Governor 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. The State SDC has come and gone , and this promise is far from being fulfilled. **Congress is deeply worried about this unfortunate development and has asked me to once again remind His Excellency about the promise.**

**Our Governor Sir, the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State Council, and her 31 affiliate-unions most respectfully and humbly appeal that you graciously actualise this all-important promise as it is an enduring symbol of the cordial relationship between the Government of Rivers State led by His Excellency Rt.Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi CON and the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria(TUC) Rivers state council.**

**Congress and our affiliates will continue to remember and appreciate the actualisation of the promise, just as the Ghana Trades Union Congress continues to remember the Government of Osagyfo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah who built a massive 6 storey building, “Hall of Trade Unions” in the Centre of Accra, for the Ghana Trades Union Congress.**

## **5. APPRECIATION**

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 exist 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 exists between us 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 2014 May Day with us with, we sincerely thank you and pray that God Almighty reward you exceedingly.

Finally, on behalf of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) Rivers State, I wish ALL workers in Rivers State and all over Nigeria a wonderful May – Day celebration! I thank you and pray that we ‘let brotherly love continue’. Heb13:1

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, FCA**

**State Chairman, TUC Rivers State**