

**Keynote**

**23<sup>rd</sup> Annual AKISAN National Convention**

**The Honorable Thomas E. Dernoga**

**Chair, Prince George's County Council**

**Saturday, August 7, 2010/8:00 p.m.**

**Baltimore, MD**

***“Preserving Culture – Celebrating Diversity- Achieving Unity”***

**IN THE WISDOM OF MAHATMA GANDHI—“I DO NOT WANT MY HOUSE TO BE WALLED IN ON ALL SIDES AND MY WINDOWS TO BE STIFLED. I WANT ALL THE CULTURES OF ALL LANDS TO BE BLOWN ABOUT MY HOUSE AS FREELY AS POSSIBLE. BUT I REFUSE TO BE BLOWN OFF MY FEET BY ANY.”**

**GOOD EVENING!**

**I DEEPLY APPRECIATE YOUR KIND INVITATION TO ADDRESS THE 23<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL NATIONAL AKISAN CONVENTION. PERHAPS GANDHI KNEW SOMETHING OF YOUR THEME, “SECURING A LEGACY FOR AKWA IBOM CULTURE IN AMERICA,” WHEN HE PENNED THAT QUOTE, BECAUSE HE SPEAKS TO YOUR DESIRE TO PRESERVE AKWA IBOM CULTURE, WHILE CELEBRATING THE GIFTS OF YOUR DIVERSITY, ALL IN THE NAME OF ACHIEVING UNITY FOR US ALL, AND BRINGING OUR COMMUNITIES TOGETHER, WITHOUT LOSING OUR “FLAVOR.” I SINCERELY RESPECT THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN AN EFFORT TO PRESERVE YOUR CULTURAL HERITAGE.**

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE AKWA IBOM ASSOCIATION LEADERSHIP AND THE 2010 CONVENTION ORGANIZERS ON YOUR EXEMPLARY ORGANIZATION AND COORDINATION OF THIS EVENT, WHICH HAS BEEN APPROPRIATELY DEEMED A SHOWCASE OF AKWA IBOM CULTURAL RENAISSANCE IN AMERICA.” FOR NIGERIANS NOW LIVING IN AMERICA....THE CONVENTION INDEED OFFERS A “HOME AWAY FROM**

**HOME," WHERE YOU CAN ENJOY THE FAMILIAR, WHILE THE REST OF US TRULY BENEFIT FROM THE AKWA "EMBASSY" EXPERIENCE AS CONVENTION ORGANIZER EMMANUEL EKOP CALLS IT, IN A DELIGHTFUL TREAT TO UNIQUE INTERNATIONAL CULTURE.**

**AS CHAIRMAN OF THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND, AND ON BEHALF OF MY COLLEAGUES AND THE CITIZENS AND RESIDENTS OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, IT IS MY PLEASURE TO WARMLY WELCOME ALL OF YOU AND THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING MARYLAND AS THE HOST FOR THIS YEAR'S CONVENTION OF THE AKWA IBOM STATE ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA, USA, INCORPORATED. I REPRESENT DISTRICT ONE OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY. AN AREA FILLED WITH YORUBAS, IGBOS, HAUSAS, BUT MOST IMPORTANT AKWA IBOS.**

**YOUR WELL-PLANNED, COMPREHENSIVE AGENDA SHOWCASES YOUR WONDERFUL STATE OF NIGERIA THROUGH SUCH IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES AS A BUSINESS FORUM FOCUSING ON PARTNERSHIPS AND ACTION PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE; FITNESS AND WELL-BEING, FEATURING THE YOUTH OLYMPICS, SPORTING EVENTS, AND A HEALTH FAIR; CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY WITH IMPORTANT DISCUSSIONS ABOUT PUBLIC SAFETY, GOOD GOVERNANCE, JOB CREATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DURING YOUR TOWN HALL MEETING; CULTURAL ACTIVITIES SUCH AS THE BEAUTY PAGEANT AND AFRICAN FASHION SHOW, AND DANCING FOR SINGLES; THE GOVERNOR'S BALL, AND BANQUETS FEATURING AUTHENTIC AKWA CUISINE; I OFTEN JOKE WITH MY WIFE OF MORE THAN 20 YEARS THAT MY FAVORITE FOOD IS NO LONGER HAMBURGERS, I FOUND A LOVE, I HAVE A NEW FOUND LOVE FOR JELOIF RICE & FUFU I HAVE ALSO HAD THE PLEASRUE OF ATTENDING YOUR FAITH-BASED ACTIVITIES INCLUDING YOUR CUSTOMARY PRAYER SERVICE; AND BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THERE'S EVEN A LITTLE SLICE OF MARYLAND IN THERE WITH BOAT RIDES ON THE CHESAPEAKE BAY!**

**IN AMERICA, WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY MADE UP OF PEOPLE WHO REPRESENT THE CULTURAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF THE WORLD. IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, A MOSAIC OF CULTURES, LANGUAGES AND COLORS, WE ESTABLISHED A DIVISION OF MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS WHICH PROVIDES PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES THAT CREATE AN AWARENESS OF, AND APPRECIATE FOR, CULTURAL DIVERSITY WITHIN THE COUNTY.**

**WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF A NATION SPEAKS TO ITS HISTORY, EXPERIENCES, AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO MANKIND, AND TO THE VALUES THAT DEFINE A COUNTRY'S UNIQUE PLACE ON OUR GLOBE. WHAT BETTER WAY TO INSTILL PRIDE, INSPIRE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY, AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES THAN TO PRESERVE AND CELEBRATE CULTURAL HERITAGE!**

**YOU KNOW, BY YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE ACTIVITIES OF THIS GATHERING AND THIS ORGANIZATION, THAT YOUR CULTURAL HERITAGE, ESPECIALLY AS YOU SPREAD OUT ACROSS THE WORLD, IS THE BEDROCK UPON WHICH YOU MAINTAIN STABILITY, IDENTITY, AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY. "RELENTLESS GIVING" IS A CONCEPT YOU TAKE SERIOUSLY AND I COMMEND YOUR EFFORTS TO PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR HEARTS ARE WITH YOUR SUPPORT OF THE BUILDING FUND FOR THE "AKWA IBOM CULTURAL CENTER USA," SECURING A LEGACY FOR AKWA IBOM CULTURE IN AMERICA. I EAGERLY AWAIT ITS COMPLETION TO AID MY STUDY OF YOUR PEOPLE AND HISTORY.**

**THIS ORGANIZATION'S INTEREST IN THE AFFAIRS AND WELFARE OF THE AKWA IBOM STATE, AMONG NIGERIA'S 36 STATES LOCATED IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION, POPULATED BY APPROXIMATELY 3.9 MILLION PEOPLE, WITH A DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT, AND AN EMERGING ECONOMY RICH IN CRUDE OIL, NATURAL GAS, COAL, GOLD, SILVER NITRATE, GLASS SAND, AND OTHER MINERAL RESOURCES, IS NOT UNLIKE OUR INTEREST IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY WITH ITS MORE THAN 800-**

**THOUSAND CITIZENS, DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT, AND TREMENDOUS ECONOMIC OFFERING.**

**IS THE ONLY WAY THE TRUE LAND OF PROMISE CAN BE REALIZED. IN MARCH OF 2008, THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION SECURED A \$400-THOUSAND FEDERAL GRANT TO ESTABLISH THE COUNTY'S AFRICA TRADE OFFICE.**

**THIS OFFICE PROMOTES MARYLAND COMPANIES AND ASSISTS IN THE EXPANSION OF EXPORTS FROM MARYLAND TO AFRICA. IT ALSO WORKS TO INCREASE FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT INTO MARYLAND FROM AFRICA. IN ESSENCE, THE AFRICA TRADE OFFICE BUILDS ON THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED SINCE THE ENACTMENT OF THE AFRICAN GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 2000 THAT OFFERS INCENTIVES FOR AFRICAN COUNTRIES TO CONTINUE THEIR EFFORTS TO DIVERSIFY AND EXPAND THEIR ECONOMIES, WHILE BUILDING FREE MARKETS WITH THE UNITED STATES.**

**WHAT HAS THIS MEANT FOR TRADE WITH NIGERIA?**

**THE AFRICA TRADE OFFICE REPORTS THAT THE BOWLEM GROUP, INC., CONCLUDED A BUSINESS DEAL FOR THE SUPPLY OF TWO MACK TRUCKS TO EYE-OH-DEE (IOD) INVESTMENTS IN NIGERIA, AND THOSE TRUCKS WERE DELIVERED PER THE CONTRACT. WHILE THE SIZE OF THE ORDER AND TOTAL AMOUNT OF THE TRANSACTION WAS SMALL, IT PAVED THE WAY FOR MAKING FURTHER INROADS INTO THE NIGERIAN MARKET, AS WELL AS OTHERS IN THE SUBREGION.**

**AFTER PRACTICING DENTISTRY IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, DOCTOR ANU ESUOLA LAUNCHED *DENTISTRY ON WHEELS*, A START-UP COMPANY CREATED TO PROVIDE SMALL CHILDREN AND THE POOR WITH DENTAL SERVICES. SHE PROVIDES THESE SERVICES IN A MOBILE UNIT THAT IS DRIVEN TO COMMUNITIES AND**

NEIGHBORHOODS. DOCTOR ESUOLA TOOK AN EXPORTING CLASS THROUGH THE AFRICA TRADE OFFICE, COMPLETED HER EXPORT MARKETING PLAN, AND NOW VARIOUS TRIPS TO NIGERIA ARE PLACING HER COMPANY IN A POSITION FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONTRACT THROUGH STATE AND FEDERAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS.

TEZ MO ENTERPRISES, INC., HAS LAUNCHED A PARTNERSHIP WITH A NIGERIAN COMPANY, *MAGAZINE AFFAIR ONLINE*, TO PROVIDE AMERICAN MAGAZINES AND PUBLICATIONS TO NIGERIAN RETAILERS AND SUBSCRIBERS. THIS PARTNERSHIP WAS ESTABLISHED THROUGH THE COUNTY'S AFRICA TRADE OFFICE.

ULTIMATELY, WHAT WE ALL SEEK IS A UNIFIED, THRIVING COMMUNITY, GLOBALLY, NATIONALLY, AND LOCALLY. DIVERSITY IS ONLY AN ASSET IF UNITY COMES FIRST.

IT'S BEEN SAID THAT "MELTING POTS THAT DO NOT MELT BECOME PRESSURE COOKERS, AND DIVERSITY CARRIED TOO FAR IS DANGEROUSLY DIVISIVE."

LET ME SHARE WITH YOU THE LEGEND ABOUT A PRIEST SPEAKING WITH GOD ABOUT HEAVEN AND HELL.

"I WILL SHOW YOU HELL," SAID GOD. THEY WENT INTO A ROOM WITH A DELICIOUS BEEF STEW ON THE TABLE.

VERY HUNGRY-LOOKING PEOPLE SAT AROUND THE TABLE HOLDING LONG-HANDLE SPOONS THEY WERE TRYING TO USE TO REACH INTO THE POT.

DIDN'T WORK. THE SPOONS WERE TOO LONG AND THEY COULDN'T GET THE STEW INTO THEIR MOUTHS. THEY REALLY SUFFERED.

**“NOW I WILL SHOW YOU HEAVEN,” SAID GOD. AND THEY WENT INTO AN IDENTICAL ROOM WITH THE SAME STEW ON A TABLE AROUND WHICH VERY HAPPY PEOPLE SAT.**

**THEIR SPOONS AND HANDLES WERE THE SAME LENGTH AS THE OTHERS. THE PRIEST WAS BAFFLED, WONDERING WHY THESE FOLKS WERE SO NOURISHED.**

**“QUITE SIMPLY, YOU SEE, THESE PEOPLE HAVE LEARNED TO *FEED ONE ANOTHER.*”**

**FROM MANY, WE CAN BE ONE PEOPLE. NO MATTER OUR RACE, ETHNICITY, GENDER, AGE OR RELIGION, WE ALL VALUE QUALITY EDUCATION; SAFE PLACES TO LIVE, WORK, PLAY AND WORSHIP; A STRONG ECONOMY; AFFORDABLE HOUSING; RELIABLE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION; ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE; AND A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT.**

**I COMMEND THE LEADERSHIP, ORGANIZERS, AND ATTENDEES OF THIS 23<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AKWA IBOM STATE ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA, USA, INCORPORATED FOR YOUR VISION AND YOUR WILLINGNESS TO WORK HARD TO PRESERVE A CULTURE....CELEBRATE DIVERSITY....AND ACHIEVE UNITY.**

**IN THE WISDOM OF THE AFRICA, A PROVERB READS, “THE PEBBLES ARE THE STRENGTH OF THE WALL.”**

**FROM MANY, WE CAN BECOME ONE PEOPLE.**

**THANK YOU AND CONGRATULATIONS ON A SUCCESSFUL EVENT**