

## **A HISTORICAL COMMENTARY.[\[1\]](#)**

The Association was founded in 1967 during the Nigerian civil war under the name, Association of Students of South Eastern State of Nigeria in the Americas. The purpose was to organize us and fight for the cause of preserving our own identity as a people in Nigeria after the creation of the state, long yearned for. This was no small contribution from students who were not only thousands of miles away from the war-torn homeland but were also self-supported.

When Cross River State was created, the Association changed its name to The Association of Student of Cross River State of Nigeria in the Americas. With the creation of Akwa Ibom State, the name changed to Association of Students and Citizens of Akwa Ibom State in the Americas. The inclusion of citizens' in the name was to make it feasible - for those who have completed their studies and are no longer students, to continue their participation and contribution in the affairs of the Association. The name was further changed in 1990 to its present name of Akwa Ibom State Association of Nigeria, USA, Inc. The Association is incorporated in Washington, District of Columbia.

Since Akwa Ibomites reside in various cities of the United States, the Association is organized in most major cities. The Association started initially in New York City, and then to Washington, District of Columbia. During the late seventies, the activities of the colloquium included, among other events a soccer match competition between the perennial powers, New York City and Washington, District of Columbia. This match is now played between the eastern and western select teams.

For purposes of coordination, control of activities and sharing of information between these city organizations and home country, it was necessary to organize a National Executive Committee consisting of the National President and a cabinet and the different city organizations assumed the status of chapters. The National President is the pre-eminent officer and with his/her cabinet is responsible for the day to day running of the Association and the execution of its overall policies. The National President appoints all members of the national executive committee, and starting in 2004 is elected during the Convention to one term of two years. The Convention is the highest legislative body and is generally held in August each year.

The Convention, divided into Business and General Sessions, is a gathering of all the chapters of the Association for legislative, cultural and social reasons. Until the 1990 gathering at Atlanta, Georgia, this august gathering, the convention was called the colloquium. Each chapter has its own president, constitution and by-laws, and must conform to its chapter's name to the National Constitution, which is supreme whenever there is a conflict.

It is a matter of record to note that for the first time and during Mr. Paul Ekwere's administration in 1977, the colloquium was addressed by the Cross River State Military Governor His Excellency, Col. Ufuoma Omu, through the presentation of Mr. B.E. Bassey, the state Commissioner for Education. This gesture which demonstrated government concern and appreciation of our efforts to help in nation building, though far away from home, encouraged the Association to strive harder in its direction. As a further boost of energy to the Association, the elected civilian Executive Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Obong Victor Attah and his wife Allison attended the 1999 Convention in Houston, Texas. In 2007 the new Executive Governor, His Excellency Barrister Godswill Akpabio sent a goodwill message to the convention which was read by Mr. Sebastian C. Ikpe. That convention was attended by 2 ex-governors of the state Obong Victor Attah and Air Cmdr. Idongesit Nkanga (rtd.) among other dignitaries.

However, during the last year of Hon. Monday R. Affiah's administration, the history was rewritten. In 2008 the sitting executive governor His Excellency Barrister Godswill Akpabio of Akwa Ibom State led a very strong, impressive and high level 50 member delegation from Nigeria to the convention in Washington, DC. This convention was unique among other conventions. The governor announced an unprecedented donation of one hundred thousand U.S. dollars to the Association. He also used the occasion to deliver a major policy speech of his administration by declaring a free universal education to all citizens of the state from primary to senior secondary school level. In addition he rewarded the 2008 Miss Akwa Ibom USA beauty pageant contestants with \$2000 each and a round trip air ticket to Nigeria to attend the 21st anniversary of Akwa Ibom State creation in Uyo, the state capital.

Furthermore, His Excellency invited a dance troupe that entertained at the convention to Akwa Ibom State for performance. The governor further announced the creation of the Diaspora Desk to coordinate the flow of information between the state government and our Association. At this history making convention the *former United States Ambassador to Nigeria*, Howard *Jetter* who met with the governor and accompanied his delegation to the convention announced the donation of thousands of volumes of books to Akwa Ibom State during the governor's Town Hall meeting.

Some members of the delegation included Her Excellency Helen Udoka Esuene, wife of the late first military governor of Southeastern State Brigadier Udoka Esuene, His Excellency Air Cmdr. Idongesit Nkanga (rtd.) first military/indigenous governor of Akwa Ibom State, Hon. Umana O. Umana Secretary to the government of Akwa Ibom State, Senator Aloysius Etuk, Otuekong Sunny Jackson Udoh, Hon. Chairman of the Niger Delta Development Commission Barrister Bassey Dan Abia, Executive director of Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited Mr. Udom Inoyo, the first Akwa Ibom state female Head of Service Elder Grace Anwana, and the Convention Chairman Obong Stephen Udofia and his wife Mrs. Idongesit Asuquo Udofia, among many others.

Other attendees from Nigeria included Nollywood stars of Akwa Ibom state extraction led by Actress, song writer and television personality Ms. Anne Inyang with 8 albums to her credit and whose international hit song "Akanam Nkwe" was performed live to a standing ovation at the Convention.

The Association has gone through some restructuring over the years consistent with the constitution. A landmark restructuring occurred in 1975 during Dr. Edet Inwang administration in Chicago when chapter presidents were accorded the status of National Vice President with or without portfolios (distinguished from the National Executive Vice President appointed by the National President). All the National Vice Presidents together with the National Executive constitute the National Council, the policy making body of the Association. This reorganization introduced the involvement of all the chapters in administrative processes of the organization. The executive administration then has as its core responsibility the duty to execute the policies of the Association and report to the National Council and the Convention. This structure introduced a very professional internal administrative control and the involvement of chapters in all policy matters. Some National Vice president are assigned portfolios such as information, cultural, education, youth, membership, social welfare and economic & fiscal. Economic & Fiscal portfolio is usually reserved for the chapter hosting the National Secretariat. Hence the title of National Vice president for Information, etc. is reserved for chapter presidents with portfolios.

Another major step taken by the Association was the appointment of a General Counsel during the 1988 colloquium to advice and act on behalf of the Association and its chapters in all legal matters. This position was elevated to a constitutional officer with a constitutional amendment of the year 2000. The Association's first General Counsel was Dr. Emmanuel D. Akpan who was followed by Hope Umana, Esq, and Michael Essien, esq; the current Legal Counsel.

Dr. Augustine Usoro's administration enacted the 2000 constitutional amendment that introduced a nine-member Board of Trustees, elected at large to sit for three years on a rotational basis. At least three trustees are elected each year at the Convention. The trustees are the key advisers to the National President on financial matters and are responsible for Association properties and monies. The board is also responsible for helping the Association implement fund raising policies. The inaugural Chairman of the Board was late Dr. Nsidibe Ikpe.

The Hon. Monday R. Affiah administration recorded major achievements for the Association which include the commissioning of a borehole water project for the students and staff of Government Trade Center, Ikot Akata, as part of the School of Excellence program, the donation of 3 soccer trophies to Akwa Ibom State government for soccer tournaments among all post primary institutions in the state, the institution of the first youth challenge competition where the winner was crowned at the 2008 convention, the restart of Mbuk Akwa Ibom magazine

publication and the commissioning of infrastructure design for the building of Akwa Ibom Learning Center in Uyo. A total of at least 250 people made the trip from Nigeria to the convention. The 2008 convention recorded the largest number of attendance and the largest official delegation from Nigeria ever witnessed. The Akwa Ibom youth dance troupe led by the Youth President Mr. Paul Frank performed at the U.S Capitol to a packed crowd of spectators.

Other achievements recorded by the Association include the publication of its first magazine, then called "SEARCHLIGHT", by the late Dr. Bassey Obotette, as editor and later changed to "MBUK AKWA IBOM" with Okon W. Akpan as Director of Information. Mbuk Akwa Ibom is presently edited by Sebastian C. Ikpe. Other achievements are the establishment of the emergency trust fund, and the establishment of the project fund and obtaining tax exempt status, the introduction of the beauty pageant, shipping of dialysis machines to the state, the book project, project hope, sending various communiqués to federal and state governments, establishment of the strategic planning committee, appearance at the U.S. Cherry Blossom Festival and the American Folks-life festival.

The Association has not been without some growing pains. Such pains included an unsuccessful lawsuit in 1988 to prevent the holding of the convention in Washington, District of Columbia. Other growing pains were the lawsuit against the chapter president in Southern California and lawsuit filed by Mr. Okon Akpan against the Association, ex-president Dr. Augustine Usoro and Editor of Mbuk Akwa Ibom Mr. Sebastian C. Ikpe.

In keeping with the Association's goal of serving Akwa Ibomites, there are various program services called portfolios and these are assigned to the National Vice Presidents. This assignment of portfolios was introduced to decentralize the major program services to the chapters and leave the National Executive to concentrate on the day-to-day administrative process. The technique brings participatory management to the Association, and is for the good of our organization. In addition to chapter involvement in portfolio management services, it must be noted that the success of the system depends upon active participation of the general membership. This is the reason for the clarion call for all of us to get involved so that we can jointly achieve our goal of serving ourselves, our state and our country.

As we move into the future, we must get our children involved. We must teach our children to respect and know one another. We must pass our culture to them. We must understand that though we have been taken out of our culture, our culture has not been taken out of us. We must organize children talent show in each chapter. Each chapter should develop a language instruction class to teach our children the language. Our language is the best medium of learning and transmitting the culture to our children. Our Convention should increasingly feature workshops, seminars, children talent show, and essay competition in our native language. We must learn to read and write our language. We must strive

for financial independence by the Association diversifying its revenue sources. The academic secondary school-the school of excellence and holding of a Convention in Akwa Ibom must become realities.

This brief history would be incomplete without recognizing the past National Presidents who worked tirelessly so that the Association can remain alive till today. Following is a list of past National Presidents:

1	Mr. Ernest Ikpe, 1967-69	11	Mr. Paul Ukpa, 1980	21	Mr. Thompson Essien, 1993
2	Dr. Basseyy Umoh, 1969-70	12	Mr. Emmanuel Eyo, 1981	22	Dr. Phillip Udo-Inyang, 1994
3	LateDr. Daniel Akpan, 1970-71	13	Mr. Eyobong Usanga, 1981-83	23	Mr. Inyang Umoh, 1995-96
4	Mr. Obot Essien, 1971-72	14	Mr. Ndanyong M. Ibanga 1983-84	24	Mr. Jerry Essienumoh, 1997
5	Mr. Mbong J Mbong, 1972-73	15	Mr. Basseyy Ekpono, 1984-85	25	Ms. Obot Okoko, 1998
6	Mr. Akpan Edet, 1973-1974	16	Mr. Joe Offong, 1985-87	26	Dr. Augustine Usoroh, 1998-00
7	Dr. Edet Inwang 1974-1976	17	Dr. Samuel Esema, 1987-88	27	Mr. Sylvanus Akpakpa, 2000-02
8	Mr. Paul Ekwere, 1976-1978	18	Prince Charles Akpabio, 1988-90	28	Mr. Chris Oyobio, Sr., 2002-04
9	Mr. Basil Ebong, 1978-1979	19	Mr. Chris Ekpoudom, 1990-91	29	Mr. Emmanuel Umoh, 2004-06
10	Mr. Ibanga Ekpo, 1979-1980	20	Mr. Mark Etuk, 1992	30	Mr. Monday R. Affiah, 2006-08

We call on you to join and contribute as we strive to make our Association a better place for our children and a vehicle to economic development of Akwa Ibom state. God bless America, long live Akwa Ibom State and long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

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[1] Originally written by Dr. Emmanuel Akpan with update and revision by Hope Umana, Esq. and Sebastian C. Ikpe.