

Unity and Cultural Heritage of Edo People.

By

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at

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ANNUAL CULTURAL DANCE.

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The president Edo Union Barcelona,

The President Nigerian Community Spain,

The President Afenmai & Esan Unions of Barcelona,

My Brothers and Sisters,

All other protocols observed.

Introduction

- Why are we here celebrating Edo Culture in far away Europe?
- What is Edo Unity?
- How can we enhance Edo unity to facilitate socio- economic development of Edo people?
- Can we as Edo people ever go back having tasted the forbidden fruits of the foreign land?
- It is only by going back or preventing others from coming out can we sustain Edo Kingdom.

When we loose our history, we loose our identity, and when we loose our identity we loose the claim of being truly human. It is in holding on to our identity to keep us being humans that we are here more than 6000 miles from Edo Kingdom and keeping our humanity alive. The foremost cultural identity is language; where there is no longer a unique means of communication of a people; the community can correctly be described as extinct. In view of sustainability of our unique way of life as Edo people, we have a great task in our hand as Pidgin English has permeated the language of the youths in our homestead. We have to fight back and we are fighting back to regain our cultural heritage.

Wa gia gha z' Edo. Ama ze evbuomwan awiri.

An army general cannot wage a war with ‘cripples’ How much can we achieve when the brainiest, the brightest and the best have left Edo shores for greener pastures in Europe and America. We are here to introduce or strengthen our link with our home state of Edo and through that umbilical link, we can render services that will improve our state socio-economically, infrastructural and empowerment of our youths and reduction of crimes.

Wa gia ya dolor Edo yi; Oya, aghaya simwin evbuomwan.

Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted, the indifference of those who should have known better, the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most that has made it possible for evil to triumph. Edo People need to speak out always when they observe something going wrong. Edo Global is doing that presently, but we need more hands and voices to drown the proponents of the status quo and introduce a new order that will facilitate the progress of our people. Many hands they say make a light work. We have to support the present Edo State government as it is striving to remove the decay in the system in Edo State.

As Edo in the Diaspora, we have seen, we have experienced, we have felt the depth and the height of human ingenuity we can now say collectively ‘this is the way Edo People and Edo State should go’ That is; the way of justice, the way of transparency, the way of collective responsibility, the way of fairness, the way of honour and dignity in labour, the way of good leadership and accountability and the way that will reduce youth crimes and stop human trafficking and prostitution by our female youths.

In the time past, our elders worked in unity. They supported each other during the bush clearing, the bush gathering, the burning, the subsequent land clearing, the planting, the staking and finally harvesting and putting the yams in the barn. They helped each other. Why can we not do the same?

They supported each other in building their own homes, in marriage, in burial ceremonies, child naming and other community celebrations. They all worked together because that is the traditional way of life. Every child belonged to every member of the village and clan and thus protected from all harm. When there were wars they fought together with no one shying away from the heat of battle. Can we ever go back to our roots and develop the way of our fore fathers that kept us together?

There were age groupings, the juniors respected the elders of the clan, and the younger age group obeyed their elders and carried out their duties according to their age group. The elders also respected the juniors without allowing insubordination. The clan followed the leadership of the Odionwere who in turn followed the leadership of the chiefs or Enogie who in turn followed the leadership of the Oba. The system was foolproof. What is happening today is a far cry from what is our culture. The juniors want to eliminate the elders by all means possible so that they can take their place. The patience of our fathers is lost on the youth. The youth wishes to drive a Bentley without working for it. According to Osayomore the musician, ‘You should also, try and go through the path of the car owner and decide for yourself; if it is sweet or bitter.’ You all know the path you followed to get here. No two individuals here have the same story. Our stories are varied as the number of our people here.

Meetings were held in the village square with the Odionwere presiding; all that may have changed as well. To keep our culture alive, we must keep all the aspects of our culture that enhances socio-economic growth, peace, helping each other, supporting one another and being each other’s keeper either at home or in the Diaspora.

We must maintain the family unit of father, mother, and children, single mother or single father is un-African. Those who are not married, they should be encouraged to marry and settle down as that is our culture. We should enhance the extended family system and continue our morning salutations. On my mother's side, we greet La'tose and on my fathers side we greet L' Emore, with this, my family is identified anywhere I greet anyone traditionally. This is an important aspect of our culture which we should ensure we keep. Good morning and La 'Jesu is not our culture. Our culture does not prevent you from being a Christian or Moslem. The bible says give that which is Caesar to Caesar and that which is God to God. You are an Edo first before being a Christian or Moslem.

For our unity to thrive in the Diaspora we should work together, progress together, interact with one another more closely, encourage marriage within our ranks so as to sustain our tradition and culture so that our offspring's are not lost to the world. A tree without root will wither in no time. We should work hard to earn a decent living in the most respectable manner as our name is being smeared by prostitution and human trafficking. To reduce economical cost of rearing too many children, our families must be planned and spaced as there are effective methods of contraception. The use of barrier methods of contraception is also encouraged to reduce the likelihood of infection especially HIV and AIDS.

The purpose of an organization like Edo Global Organization is to sustain our culture, tradition and socio-economic progress of our people. It is to create an avenue for us to determine the course of events in our home land. To act as a pressure group and ensure that governmental activities is for the benefit of the greatest majority of Edo People. By Edo people I mean Edo citizens from the Atlantic Ocean in the south to Agenebode in the North, from Evbonogbon in the west to Ubiaja in the east as Edo people are from a single source which is Benin City. An organization is like a seedling which should be watered and pruned to enable it thrives so that it can grow into a tree and flower and bear fruits. You cannot reap from a seedlingss, you have to wait patiently for it to grow and develop deep tap root and then you can cut branches for propagation. Those who are in a hurry have selected out themselves from our organization which they will regret doing in the future because as our people say *ai zeto khe enorowa.* ***You cannot barb or style the hair of the one not available.***

When we also plant too many seeds too close together, it results to too much competition and over grazing and none of the seedlings will thrive. That is why all organizations should support and feed into Edo Global so that it can continue to blossom to achieve the original aims and objectives of its Founder. Smaller organizations today want to use our resources to grow and stunt us in the process, but no sensible person will allow that. Secondly, some organizations that came in seven to eight years after us want us to join them rather than they joining us. That is also not possible because the tail does not wag the dog. It is the dog that wags the tail. All these unhealthy competitions come because of lack of good follower ship and good leadership. A leader is as good as the aggregate of its followers. There are always too many critics in the house. Leaders want suggestions on how to move from point A to point B. in the direction of progress.

Today one can say we have been encouraged by several and sickened by some, sincerely, we can only make impact when we get involved. The scripture says the Righteous are the salt of the earth, how can the salt sweeten the soup without being involved through the fire of cooking and preparation? if indeed we qualify as righteous within the Edo or Nigerian context, since we profess to know what is wrong by our commentaries and criticisms, we should also know what to do, but we are not sufficiently empowered in that we don't have the executive power to right the wrongs hence we need a viable organization to act as a spear point for Edo in the Diaspora.

WHAT IS EDO UNITY?

Edo are now a minority in Nigeria and if well thought out, this status can be used to the best advantage of our people if we present a unified front. The Edo are a monolithic unit in linguistic terms, in terms of worship of traditional gods, physique, ancestral origin, customs, and traditions and in being in a defined area of the Nigerian Nation. The Edo like the Nupes, Tiv and Kanuris in the north and the Usobo/Isoko, Ijaw and Ibibios in the south were distinct as at the 1953 national census in Nigeria.

The concept of Benin-Edo, Esan-Edo, Afemai-Edo as espoused by Prof. Omo Omoruyi should not really exist because there are only one indivisible Edo people with different Edo dialects as in Central and North senatorial districts of Edo State. The phonetics, proverbs nuances, and phraseology are the same. The names, their meanings and attitudes are the same. Why is this disunity then?

We all can recall that all the Enogies in Edo Central and Edo North senatorial districts are princes of the Benin Kingdom with the Okaigiesan as their leader They were required at sometime point in our history to administer these lands on behalf of the Oba who is our spiritual leader and custodian of our customs and traditions. The desire of one section of Edo State to seek another traditional council stimulates disunity, the desire to create another kingdom within Edo kingdom is seeking disunity. The creation of a political Iyase of Esan to subjugate all the Enogies of Edo Central senatorial district; a title unheard of in our many centuries of history is courting disunity.

As an individual, I do not see disunity in the desire of the people in the north and central Edo senatorial districts to seek a separate state as working for disunity so long it is done without friction

and in good faith. The creation of Afesan State as proposed would bring development nearer the people. The input from the Federal government would increase into Edo kingdom. In Western Nigeria, there are several Yoruba speaking states. Like the Egba Yoruba, Ekiti Yoruba, Ondo Yoruba but they all pay allegiance to their ancestral home at Ile Ife and the Oni who is the spiritual head of the Yoruba people. The Edo spiritual head and the custodian of our culture and tradition is the Oba of Benin no amount of politics or wealth can rewrite or change our history.

Edo unity is speaking with one voice in dealings within the State and more importantly the Federal government.

Edo unity is aligning and re-aligning with the government at the centre for the benefit of our people.

Edo unity is pursuing a common goal for the benefit of Edo people.

Edo unity is realising that although we are many and varied but we constitute a part of a single whole which is Edo Kingdom.

Edo unity is those at the helm of affairs using the available resources for Edo people without damaging Edo economy by taking the people's wealth abroad.

Edo unity is Edo in Diaspora taking active part in the issues that concern Edo State and contributing their widow's mite to the self-help development of Edo State.

Edo unity is constructive criticism and the avoidance of smear campaigns.

Edo unity is disagreeing in harmony without drawing each other's blood.

Edo unity is all things good for Edo people wherever they may be.

Edo unity is facing our worst fears and turning our failures into success.

Edo unity is re-orientating ourselves, our thought processes towards honour for achievements rather than praise and respect for ill-gotten wealth.

Edo unity is celebrating our achievements and cultural heritage.

A united Edo State is a bastion and building block for a strong and united Nigerian Nation.

Edo carvings today rules the world as Edo created the most popular piece of art work the Queen Idia Mask which is popularly known as the Festac Mask. This is the symbol of Black unity, Black struggle and emancipation in the world. It is the emblem of numerous Black organizations all over the world. We should not disappoint seekers of their origin from many parts of the world by presenting a disunited front.

HOW CAN EDO UNITY BE ACHIEVED?

Edo sons and daughters are adventurous and can be found in all corners of mother earth so they need to be brought together under a single umbrella.

Edo Global Organization(EGO)was therefore established to bring all Edo indigenes wherever they may be together so that they can function as a unit in addressing issues in Edo land, and in seeking to prioritise the development of the infrastructure, economy, education, youth emancipation as well as development of health services in Edo State. As the name implies, it is a global

organization. It is acting and will continue to act as an umbrella organization for Edo Associations in Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada, USA, South Africa and the Netherlands etc. The President or Chairman of these Edo Associations will be in the Board of Trustees of EGO which will liaise directly with the Edo State governor politically and the Oba of Benin as our spiritual leader.

In addition, EGO has set up a list of all Edo professionals in Diaspora which we call the FOCUS GROUP in accordance with their specialities to act as a pool from which volunteers in teaching, provision of healthcare, carrying out feasibility studies, engineering, site inspection, planning and execution of architectural and engineering projects, forest management, people mobilization, actuarial projections, accountancy and audit will be sent to carry out work for nominal fees for Edo people in the state. In this way Edo state resources will be spent more judiciously and wisely for the benefit of the people instead of paying exorbitant consultancy fees to political surrogates and their companies.

Various standing committees have been committed into specialist areas like, housing, transportation, education, health, social welfare, security, and publicity committees etc. These committees and governing board will co-operate with the state government and the traditional council for the good of our people.

The people of any great nations in the world made sacrifices to achieve the status they have today. We must make similar sacrifice to progress and be a source of inspiration to our competitors in the other Nigerian Nation. If the Oheneze in the

