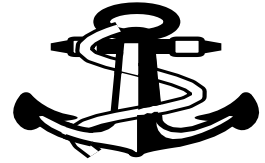


ANDONI FORUM (USA)

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2013 ANDONI FORUM USA (AFUSA) CONVENTION
THEME: Empowering The Next Generation of Andoni Youth Through Education
HILTON ROSEMONT
BY CHICAGO O'HARE AIRPORT
5550 North River Road
Rosemont, Illinois 60018, USA

5 – 7th July, 2013

COMMUNIQUE

Andoni Forum USA (AFUSA) is a Pan-Andoni non-partisan; socio-cultural organization founded 20 years ago by sons and daughters of Andoni from both Andoni Local Government Area of Rivers State and Eastern Obolo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. AFUSA is resident in North America and its primary purpose is to promote economic and educational development in the Andoni community at home (in both Rivers and Akwa Ibom States of Nigeria). It is imperative that the Andonis set an action-oriented agenda for the development of Andoni. To this end, this year's AFUSA convention, as a follow-up to the 2003 convention in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, is designed to channel the passion and energy of the Andoni people to take practical steps to address the problems of underdevelopment by "**Empowering the Next Generation of Andoni Youths through Education**". Over the years AFUSA has empowered Andoni youths by awarding scholarships to Andoni indigenes in Nigerian universities. This is to encourage the spirit of selfless service, give back to our community and ensure a rewarding future for Andoni.

The Chicago convention was well attended with representation from Rivers, Akwa-Ibom and Bayelsa states of Nigeria. We were honored by the presence of our invited guests namely, **from Rivers State:** Hon. Dakuku Peterside, Member of the House representing Andoni/Opobo-Nkoro Federal Constituency, Hon. Orom Nte Ereferokuma, Executive Chairman of Andoni LGA, Chief (Dr.) Silas S. Eneyo, Otu-Obolo II of Andoni, Engr. Emiyarei B. Ikuru, Chairman of the Andoni/Opobo-Nkoro Economic Zone Development Foundation; **from Akwa-Ibom State:** The Most Reverend, Archbishop & Lady Emmanuel Nglass, Rt. Hon. Okpolupm Ikpong Etteh, House Leader, Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, Mrs. Marjorie Abasiodiong, Special Assistant to the Governor of Akwa Ibom State on Project Monitoring; and **from Bayelsa State:** Hon. Lancelot Anyanya, and Hon. Erasmus Patrick on a delegation representing His Excellency Governor Seriake Dickson as the keynote speaker of the convention. The convention concluded on the second day with a gala-night fund raising event, during when Hon. Lancelot Anyanya gave the keynote speech on behalf of His Excellency Governor Dickson. **The sum of \$58,585 (fifty-eight thousand, five hundred and eighty-five dollars) and N220,000 (two hundred and twenty thousand naira) including pledges were raised** towards the mission of educating the Andoni youth.

An integral part of the "2013 Annual Convention" program is a panel-style discussion organized along the following major segments:

- ❖ Plenary Session for Invited Guests
- ❖ Youth Development and Empowerment Through Education
- ❖ Andoni History, Heritage and Culture
- ❖ Economic Development and Empowerment

where some of the perplexities we face as Andonis were subjected to critical and intellectual discourse, culminating in the following resolutions:

1. Plenary Session for Invited Guests

*In introducing our invited guests from Nigeria, the Convention General Co-Chair and Master of Ceremony, Dr. Ewuukgem Lomo-David observed that the name **Andoni** has been deleted from the name of the Federal Constituency (Andoni/Opobo-Nkoro) that the Hon. Dakuku Peterside, who was being introduced at the time, is supposed to be representing. As an invited guest speaker during the plenary session, Hon. Dakuku Peterside noticing the shocking reaction from the convention attendees and spent more than 70 percent of his allotted time to explain away the shock he felt in the room regarding what appeared to be a deliberate effort to remove Andoni from the legal name of the Federal Constituency that constitutes the basis and rationale for his invitation to the convention. **In his explanation Hon. Dakuku Peterside denied any involvement in the removal of Andoni from the name of the Federal Constituency.** One of the convention attendees, in his stark response, expressed regrets that the*

law does not know “Opobo/Nkoro” that appears on Hon. Peterside’s official website as a federal constituency. Be it known that the legal and legitimate name of the federal constituency that Hon. Dakuku Peterside represents is “Andoni/Opobo-Nkoro”.

Actions:

- a) Set up a committee to work closely with Andoni community in Nigeria to make the following demand:
 - i. That Hon. Dakuku Peterside and the Federal House of Representatives take proper action to change the name of the Federal Constituency on Hon. Dakuku Peterside’s official House of Representative website from “Opobo/Nkoro” to “Andoni/Opobo-Nkoro”.
- b) Will not accept all other versions or aspersions of the name of the Federal Constituency, such as “Opobo/Nkoro/Andoni”, or “Andoni/Opobo/Nkoro” and neither a do-nothing alternative.

2. Youth Development and Empowerment Through Education

By promoting education as a means for achieving individual goals and advancing the general interest of the Andoni community, AFUSA fundamentally believes that the best investment to make for posterity is to educate the next generation and provide/sustain enabling environment for community development. The painful swindling of the N50m naira (about \$385,000.00) that was pledged by Dr. Peter Odili, then Governor of Rivers State, to AFUSA’s scholarship program in 2003 and the concomitant setback of the AFUSA’s mission due to the avid greed of some unscrupulous elements in the Rivers State Government were encapsulated in a comprehensive video presentation of the 2003 Port Harcourt scholarship launching event to convention attendees who participated and contributed to the following action points:

Actions:

- a) For the record, note the following circumstantial affirmations regarding the N50m (fifty million naira) pledge by Governor Peter Odili to AFUSA in December 2003:
 - i. Towards the end of the Odili’s eight years administration [1999 – 2007], an authentic source in the Rivers State Executive Council verified and confirmed from the Treasury that the N50m (for AFUSA) was on the Voucher for payment to AFUSA and conveyed that information to Prof. Emmanuel S. Eneyo who happened to be in Nigeria on a short visit;
 - ii. The above affirmation was made a day before Prof. Eneyo’s scheduled departure to the USA. Prof. Eneyo, however, contacted Engr. Emiyarei Ikuru to apprise him of the information and that he (Emiyarei Ikuru) should coordinate the effort of collecting the money with Mr. Robert Elleh, then Special Adviser to Governor Odili and also a signatory to AFUSA account in **Guaranteed Trust Bank, Port Harcourt**, Nigeria;
 - iii. Hon. Kenneth Kobani, the then Commissioner for Finance confirmed to Engr. Emiyarei Ikuru, Chief (Dr.) Silas Eneyo, and other persons (who want to remain anonymous) that the AFUSA’S 50 million Naira pledge by Governor Odili was paid;
 - iv. Engr. Emiyarei Ikuru also stated that other sources from the Treasury said the money was paid through Zenith Bank; **in spite of the fact that AFUSA does not have an account with Zenith Bank.** He, Emiyarei Ikuru, stated that the church he belongs to received and cashed a Zenith Bank cheque (for a pledge made by the same Governor Odili) **at about** the same period that AFUSA’s cheque might have been cashed;
 - v. Other senior officials in the Treasury that want to remain anonymous confirmed payment of the N50m (fifty million naira), but that some of the documents in the file might have been shredded and referred us to our representative Mr. Robert S. Elleh, (who at that time was a Special Adviser to Governor Odili);
 - vi. **The persistent response from Mr. Robert S. Elleh, whenever he is contacted by AFUSA, is that the money was not paid, including one of the rare occasions in the presence of His Excellency Rt. Hon. Chubuikwe Rotimi Amaechi, Governor of Rivers State, in a Town Hall meeting on November 1, 2009 at the Hilton Hotel – Dulles Washington Airport, Washington DC, USA.**
- b) Accept the notion that Governor Odili honoured his N50m pledge, but the money was sadly/unfortunately stolen by some unscrupulous and corrupt elements of the then Rivers State Government operatives;
- c) **Set up a committee to pursue a complete investigation of what happened to the payment of the N50m and report its findings to the general membership for a full closure of this matter.**

3. Andoni History, Heritage and Culture

Understanding our past as the first indigenous settlers of East Niger Delta region of Nigeria and all its intricacies and alliances are important conduits to our progress and growth in the future. In this modern era, our evolutionary history traces and embraces all Andoni (Obolo) people wherever they may be in the Nigerian geographical entity – including those on the homelands who still speak the Obolo language (vis-à-vis Andoni LGA in Rivers State and Eastern Obolo LGA in Akwa Ibom State) and the dispersals who still retain the heritage and culture and speak some variants of the Obolo language. Andoni (Obolo) relations history with her neighbors namely Ibibio, Opobo, Nkoro,

Ogoni, Okrika and Bonny are not without conflicts; and therefore, call for more peaceful coexistence. However, it is imperative that peaceful coexistence does not necessarily mean the absence of conflict but the existence of justice.

Actions:

- a) We are to keep history alive by knowing and **understanding** our **own** Andoni (Obolo) history.
- b) Andoni (Obolo) people should resist “revisionary historiography” that is being spearheaded by our distractors/opponents who are delighted to distort Andoni history at any cost.
- c) We are to know and unite with our kits and kins in the dispersals, such as Ibeno and Oron in Akwa Ibom State, Ohafia in Abia State, etc.
- d) AFUSA will publish an article on Andoni history with respect to all its current neighbors in light of some of the distortions in recent news outlets.

4. Economic Development and Empowerment

*Strategies for economic development in Andoni and its surrounding areas from four principal actors – government (federal & state), industry (oil exploration), local government (LGA), and citizenry. Infuse intellectual capital from all works of life to generate a roadmap for the transformation of the Andoni (Obolo) community from infrastructural development to tourism. **Speaking on strategies for economic development and empowerment in Andoni, Hon. Orom Nte Ereforokuma, Chairman of Andoni Local Government Area presented a high level overview of the many projects and initiatives that the Local Government has embarked upon and many more that are on-going. Some of the projects include: linking Andoni to the National Grid for electrification; making Oyorokoto the biggest fishing port and tourist area in Rivers State; and ensuring that the Unity Road reaches Andoni mainland in a timely fashion. Some of the projects were captured in his video presentation titled "Building New Landmarks" that took the convention attendees through a tour of Andoni geography, occupation, and promising economy.***

Actions:

- a) Set up a committee to closely work with the Andoni (Obolo) community in Nigeria to develop and document the Andoni Community Development Master Plan (ACDMP).
- b) Market ACDMP plan externally (companies) / internal (self).
- c) Monitor and engage the Andoni LGA on the following promised/on-going projects
 - i. Linking Andoni to the National Grid for electrification
 - ii. Making Oyorokoto the biggest fishing port and tourist area in Rivers State
 - iii. Ensuring that the Unity Road reaches Andoni mainland in a timely fashion



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Ofiaja'.

Professor Nicholas D. Ofiaja
Convention General Chair



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Lomo-David'.

Dr. Ewuukgem Lomo-David
Convention General Co-Chair



A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'E. Eneyo'.

Professor Emmanuel S. Eneyo
Convention General Co-Chair

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