

OHANAEZE: YESTERDAY, TODAY & TOMORROW: Ohanaeze & Its Leadership Challenges in Igboland

By

Engr. Chris Okoye.

PREAMBLE

Every people or group has its organisational formats. In Black Africa, only the Igbo and the Somali were traditionally democratic. Organisationally, the traditional Igbo society was acephalous. It developed what was called Igbo village democracies where decisions about how the village is run were taken by a gathering of all male adults in the village. A cluster of these villages formed the town. The town is the basic unit of Igbo society. Each town is autonomous and functioned virtually like a Republic. In Igbo land, there are over one thousand towns. In ancient times, the Igbo town was run very much like the polis of the Greek City States. In the more modern times, the Igbo town is run or governed through the Town Union, which is just a bloated form of the village parliament only that this time around, it is made up of the entire male adults from all the constituent villages of the town. A town may have anything from two to as much as twenty villages. Decisions are usually by consensus. But when knotty problems that are difficult to settle or resolve come up, they are usually left to the elders to deliberate on.

THE IGBO UNION

In the first half of the last century when many Igbo people began to move out and settle in distant cities and urban centres, townsmen from respective towns and villages recreated the town union meetings in the urban centres as a carryover of what obtained in their various local communities, as a way of keeping in touch with their brethren, mutual assistance to one another as well as for the development of their home towns and villages. As time went by, these town union groups began to interact among themselves. One thing led to another and before long they began to coalesce into County, District and lastly Provincial unions according to where one belonged. I come from the Njikoka County Council. So my Enugwu-Ukwu Town Union became part of the larger Njikoka Union.

Similarly, when the District Unions began to emerge, we became part of the Awka District Union (ADU), and then Onitsha Provincial Union. The Igbo Union

was to emerge to shelter all Igbo people within respective urban areas. Although the town unions were/are open to every adult indigene of each town for membership, the County, District, Provincial unions and the Igbo Union operated delegate systems in which the town unions within a city were enjoined to send their respective elected representatives to represent them in the County Union of their respective Counties. In the same way, the Counties sent delegates to the District unions; and the Provincial unions drew delegates from the District unions and at the same time supplied delegates to the Igbo Union of the city or urban centre.

In those days, it was customary that when a young man arrives the city, usually from his hometown, his relatives would take him to the monthly meeting of his town's people in that city. (Where his village union is large enough and had established the village union meeting within the town, then that would be the first port of call for the new comer.) Usually, in those days, the meeting place would be at the residence of the village or town union chairman. It is from these lower levels that delegates are sent to represent the town union in the Divisional Union meetings.

From the divisional unions, delegates are progressively elected to the provincial unions and then to the Igbo Union branch within that city, which was the Apex Igbo Cultural Union within that city. Collection of levies originate at the lowest level, and the collection traverses the higher levels until it reaches the Igbo Union branch of the given city. Aside from levies and dues, the well to do personalities within each level did make handsome donations, most times as a way of relieving the poorer elements from the burden of paying the levies.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE IGBO UNION:

(a) Apart from these levies that had political undertones or that were used to pursue the political affairs and wellbeing of the Igbo especially after the emergence of the Igbo State Union, the various levels of the Igbo Union – from the County through to District, Provincial to the Apex Igbo Union of the town or city – also served as agencies for socialisation, business contacts, sportive and physical education clubs. They also served as outposts for all manner of opportunities, be it for the purposes of chasing employment, scholarships, educational pursuits, etc. or for relating to other towns and villages within the townscape.

(b) Indeed, these organizations took care of the welfare of their clansmen in the new townships, away from home. They also got involved in bringing the manifest dividends of colonial modernity; wider roads, schools, scholarships, potable water facilities, health centres, etc. to their home communities. To the extent that each Igbo village and town always had village or town Ilo were in ancient times people gathered from time to time to hold meetings and deliberate on their respective affairs, one can say that the Igbo had always had village and town unions. However, we can say that these migrants' (Abroad) Unions also helped bring modernity to the Village and Towns Unions in their home communities (Home branch) by, for instance, introducing formal executive committees for the Village and Town unions in their rural communities. They also brought new ideas and methods that helped coordinate efforts, expectations and amenities at Community Development level.

(c) As an ab initio Development Organization, the Igbo Union system initiated many other Pan-Igbo development efforts. Prominent among these were City Meeting Halls; the Igbo Union Secondary Schools (e.g. in Aba, Kafanchan and Kano); Scholarships; Initiation of Projects executed or supported and part-funded by the NCNC Government of Eastern Nigeria.

THE IGBO STATE UNION

All said, a distinction must be made between the Igbo Union, which was merely a cultural association and its later offshoot, the Igbo State Union, which was led for the most part by Chief Z. C. Obi of blessed memory. It started Ibo Federal Union in 1944 by the leaders of the Lagos Ibo Union, following the effort, from 1943, of Dennis Chukude Osadebay, the general secretary of the Ibo Union in Lagos who represented the Asaba Union, to federate all Igbo unions throughout Nigeria. The Igbo State Union emerged in 1948 as a response to the prohibition of admission of children of parents from southern Nigeria into Government Secondary Schools in Northern Nigeria. At the same time, there was acrimony generated by party politics during the dying days of British colonialism in Nigeria. While in the North, there was reluctance about independence, which the NCNC, led by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe was spearheading, in the West, there emerged *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, a Yoruba socio-cultural movement, opposed to Igbo participation in Nigerian politics in Lagos and the Western Region, generally. The Igbo State Union was formed to consider self-determination for the Igbo Nation, in the event that other nationalities withdrew from the Nigeria project.

In contrast, the original Igbo Union emerged as a traditional carry-over of local customary associations in Igbo towns and villages as soon as people began to migrate from the hinterland to the new cities or urban areas that developed in Nigeria. The Igbo Union was cultural while the Igbo State Union was political in outlook. But on the whole, the audacity of the Igbo State Union and its political leaning made it to somewhat push the old Igbo Union to the side-line. However, side-line or mainstream, both the Igbo Union and the Igbo State Union as well as the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, amongst other similar organisations from other regions, were banned by the military rulers that came after the collapse of the First Republic, under Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE IGBO STATE UNION:

At the time of the formation of the NCNC in 1944, the Igbo State Union was not in existence. But cultural unions like the Ijebu National Union were allowed to affiliate with the NCNC in 1944. And so, like the Ijebu National Union, the Bamenda Improvement Association, etc., the Igbo Union in Lagos also affiliated with the NCNC in 1944. However, after the death of Herbert Macaulay in May 1946, Azikiwe assumed office as President and leader of NCNC a year later on May 7, 1947. About one year into Azikiwe's leadership of the NCNC in June 1948, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was inaugurated with the object of mobilising the Yoruba against Azikiwe and the NCNC.

Levels changed and along the line the Igbo State Union was formed as a counterpoise to the *Egbe*. It immediately displaced the cultural Igbo Union from the NCNC and became the umbrella Igbo organization for the defence of Azikiwe and the NCNC, not really for the struggle for Nigeria's independence from colonial Britain, that the Igbo Union was committed to during its time in the party. So, the impact and usefulness of the Igbo State Union can only be measured or gleaned from and in terms of whatever fortunes Azikiwe and the NCNC may have garnered in Nigerian politics, especially in Western Nigeria vis-à-vis Azikiwe's membership and leadership of that organisation for a short duration. But it has to be admitted that the Igbo State Union centralised Igbo leadership! In other words, the core achievement of the Igbo State Union is that it's coming marked the very first time the Igbo as a people were to have such a unifying institution that exercised leadership across board.

OHANAEZE NDIIGBO: BEGINNING TO DATE

The Ohanaeze is a product of post-war Nigeria. Its roots were laid way back in 1976 when some prominent Igbo men came together to found an Igbo organisation to replace the Igbo Union/ Igbo State Union. They were probably actuated by the imposition, in that year, of monarchical rule on the Igbo people by the military rulers of Nigeria. The idea was to compel every town in Igbo land to have a chieftain, a king, that would exercise monarchical rule over the town. In the words of Uchenna Nwankwo:

At the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war, the Sokoto Caliphate, through the Nigerian military administrations it controlled or manipulated, sought to impose a new social structure on Igbo land by bringing back the British-styled “Warrant chiefs” in the guise of the so-called “Recognized Traditional rulers” in Igbo land. So through Lt-Col John Atom Kpera, then Military Governor of East Central State, the Caliphate enacted the Chieftaincy Edict in East Central State in the mid-70s. It became compulsory that every Igbo town must have its own king or “traditional ruler”. (Nwankwo, Uchenna, *Pro-Biafra Movements, Ohanaeze & the Future of Nigeria*, p. 48)

So, apparently worried about how negatively the edict would impact on Igbo culture and wellbeing, the following stalwart Igbo men decided to immediately establish an organisation that would replace the abolished Igbo Union/ Igbo State Union that epitomised Igbo village democracies, the republican and democratic nature of the Igbo culture. According to Prof Ben Nwabueze they included:

Dr Michael Iheonukara Okpara, Chief Dennis Osadebe, Dr Kingsley O. Mbadiwe, Chief M. I. Ugochukwu, Dr Pius Okigbo, Chief Jerome Udoji (who was Ohanaeze's first Secretary-General), and Dr Akanu Ibiam (the first Chairman) in whose Enugu residence the first preparatory meeting of the organisation was held in 1976, among others. (Nwabueze, Ben, *The Comet Newspaper*, Tuesday, October 2, 2001, p. 7)

The organisation that emerged from the efforts of these men was simply called the Apex Socio-cultural Organisation of Ndigbo. It had Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe as its grand patron. It made its debut in 1977 with Prof Ben Nwabueze as Secretary-General and Sylvester Ugo as Assistant Secretary. It was during the Second Republic, precisely between 1982 and 1983 that the NPN stalwarts who hijacked the organisation for their own political ends named the organisation Ohanaeze. So we can say that the above-named titans were the founders of Ohanaeze.

It is true that Ohanaeze suffered a short eclipse in 1984 because it was used by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Anambra State chapter to attack Zik and his NPP but a lot of selfless and dedicated effort by men like Prof Ben Nwabueze helped to resuscitate it from the temporary eclipse. Indeed, Nwabueze, as Secretary-General, had functioned as the Sole Administrator of Ohanaeze during its winter years, from the end of the Second Republic to the eve of the Fourth Republic, 1984-1999, when everybody abandoned the organisation over its pro-NPN leaning and antics. Then, late Honourable Justice Eze Ozobu (Rtd) was brought in as President-General of Ohanaeze. Ozobu handed over to Irukwu who in turn handed over to Ikedife under a rotational arrangement. Thereafter Uwechue took over and later handed over to Igariwey who handed over to Nnia Nwodo. Nwodo handed over to late Professor Obiozo, who was succeeded by late Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu. Nze Ozichukwu Chukwu completed the allotted presidency of Imo State which started with Obiozo and continued with Iwuanyanwu.

At the moment, Ohanaeze is more or less an elite club of selected notable personalities of Igboland. The organisation is a behemoth of sorts, albeit a floating one because it is not structurally connected to the grassroots. Membership is virtually appointive and undemocratic, and the members appear in this regard to represent themselves instead of the myriad Igbo towns or ‘village republics’ that make up the Igbo nation. The process of achieving the latter objective, of connecting Ohanaeze to the grassroots is already on although there has been a lot of foot dragging, but some people say that the effort is in fact gathering momentum!

As Ben Nwabueze has observed, it is “an irony that despite the widespread acceptability which the organisation enjoyed among Ndi Igbo, many Igbo either for shortcomings in its structure and activities or for personal objections to its leadership or for other reasons, disputed its mandate and authority. In terms of structure”, Nwabueze volunteered, “Ohanaeze is not yet the perfect organisation we all want it to be. But it must be realised that it is an organisation in the process of growth and evolution.” (Nwabueze, Ibid) Indeed, Ohanaeze is a putative reincarnation of the Igbo Union/ Igbo State Union of pre-war Nigeria. I say putative because, to date, Ohanaeze has not been able to attain the heights that the Igbo Union/ Igbo State Union attained in the affairs of the Igbo people in pre-war Nigeria. In the republican and traditional democratic system of the Igbo, the delegate system as an aspect of representation was sacrosanct.

The principle of equality of every human being, which governed Igboland guaranteed each delegate the right to free speech and to speak up in these gatherings and meetings of the Igbo Union and its later offshoot, the Igbo State Union. Fund raising for the apex Igbo Union largely originated from the lower levels and was channelled upstairs to ensure that the Union did not lack the means to carry out its mandate. Decisions and directives of the apex organisation to the town unions were handed down via the same route. Because the town unions were part and parcel of those build ups, the decisions were respected and were religiously carried out as the decisions of the people themselves. In other words, the Igbo Union/ Igbo State Union had the authority to act for the people. That's why Ohanaeze must imbibe these principles that were part and of the Igbo Union in order to win the acceptance of all.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE OHANAEZE:

On the achievement side, Ben Nwabueze has listed as an achievement the presentation of the Ohanaeze Petition to the Oputa panel on Human Rights Violations sitting in Enugu from April 25 to May 5, 2001. According to the former Secretary-General of Ohanaeze, "The presentation of the petition provided Ohanaeze the opportunity to revisit and re-focus the attention of the Nigerian public and international community on the atrocities, the barbarities and injustice perpetrated against Ndi Igbo in Nigeria. The latest of these heinous crimes," he added, "was the abduction from prison custody of one Gideon Akaluka, whose head, brutally severed from the body, was paraded in the streets on a spike, for an ill-defined profanity against the Quran". (Ibid)

Some other achievements of Ohanaeze include, according to Nwabueze, the establishment of the Patriots and the Southern Governors Forum, which he claimed as its initiative.

"We have been in the forefront of the struggle against State enforcement of the Sharia under the Quran, which is the holy book of Islam. Our vigorous campaign, in collaboration with our associates, the Afenifere, the Union of the Niger-Delta and the Middle Belt Forum, for a national conference and our stand on other national issues have impacted in no small way upon the country", Nwabueze concluded. (Ibid)

It is interesting that the current leadership of Ohanaeze has continued on the path initiated by Nwabueze and to have consolidated the rapprochement with our sister apex cultural associations of the Niger-Delta, Afenifere and the Middle Belt Forum into the cultural handshake across the Niger as well as promoted the struggle for the Restructuring of Nigeria.

On a general level, we can say that Ohanaeze has raised both the profile and the consciousness of Ndigbo toward a need for the pursuance of collective group interests. This new consciousness flows into the mainstream of Igbo life across the world and Chapters and Branches have started emerging everywhere. This, although a good idea, was without guidelines and structures to harmonize it and thus the pressure on the mother-group became such that even today we still see the problems this created. This has made us to become aware of the political weaknesses of Ndigbo within the political mainstream of Nigeria. To address this, Ohanaeze tacitly gave support to a few people who were pursuing the registration of a political party that would have a clearly Igbo mandate and membership. This was achieved when APGA became a reality. But this also led to other political parties angling to control Ohanaeze. The years leading up to the elections of 2003-4, saw a clearer identity of Ndigbo, mirrored through Ohanaeze. However, these were not without their flip sides.

One thing is certain: over the years Ohanaeze has become extremely politicized and in most cases partisan. The Igbo agenda seems to have become subsumed into the political agendas of Igbo politicians and their non-Igbo Masters ~~eremies~~, which appears to be a major distraction. Nine Presidents and 20 years after, what do we have as an apex Igbo Socio-Cultural Organization? Have the consequences of rotational Leadership served us well? Have the highest standards of excellence been promoted by our choices of leaders and actions over the years? Has Ohanaeze proved to be the most effective Vehicle for the advancement of our collective interests? Answers to the questions posed here will give us a clue as to what the tomorrow of Ohanaeze and Ndigbo will be.

The nature of Ohanaeze as described in the Ohanaeze constitution – its vision, its aims and objectives, its composition and organs; the functions and powers of its organs

THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF OHA-NA-EZE ARE:

- i. To serve as a focal point of reference, of direction and of collective leadership in matters affecting the interest, solidarity and general welfare of Ndigbo.
- ii. To promote, develop and advance Igbo Language and Culture;
- iii. To promote honour, dignity and self-respect among Ndigbo and encourage their achievement orientation in various aspects of life;
- iv. To liaise with all tiers of government in Nigeria in order to ensure rapid socioeconomic development in Igboland;
- v. To assist and encourage the formation of Igbo self-help, mutual assistance and improvement organizations wherever Ndigbo may reside; and
- vi. To settle intra-Igbo disputes and promote peaceful coexistence with other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.

According to the Ohanaeze constitution, any adult Igbo who registers with his home town union, town unions outside Igboland or an affiliate organization automatically becomes a member of Ohanaeze. As such the town unions are grassroots components of Ohanaeze according to the Ohanaeze constitution.

According to the Ohanaeze constitution, it generally has 3 organs at all levels: the executives, the Ndieze and the general assembly. The general assembly is comprised of town union executives, senior serving and past government officials (legislature, judiciary or executive) at all levels (local, state and federal) and captains of industry. In addition, at the national level it has a council of Elders and an Ime-obi. The Council of Elders includes all members of the Ime-obi and the Ime-obi is charged with rapid response to urgent issues. The imeobi is comprised of:

- All past and serving Presidents, Vice Presidents, President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who are of Igbo origin
- All past and serving Governors of States or former regions of Nigeria who are of Igbo origin
- Six distinguished leaders from each Igbo State nominated by the State and endorsed by the Council of Elders
- Two each from Delta and Rivers distinguished leaders
- The Chairman of the National Executive Committee (The President General)
- The Secretary General of Ohanaeze
- Past President General, Past Secretary General and Past Deputy Secretary-General

- Seventeen eminent National Leaders nominated by the Councils of Elders
- Two members of the National Assembly of Igbo origin, representing Senators and Head of Representatives.

According to the Ohanaeze constitution, Ohanaeze shall be organized at the following levels:

- a) Town Unions and Affiliate Organisations
- b) Local Government Area Ohanaeze
- c) State Ohanaeze
- d) National Ohanaeze

With each upper level's membership of the general assembly being elected from the lower levels. The town unions are to elect representatives to the LGA Ohanaeze who in turn elect representatives to the State Ohanaeze. The state Ohanaeze in turn elect representatives to the national Ohanaeze. It is therefore clear that the town unions are important cells that make up Ohanaeze.

RE-POSITIONING AND ENTRENCHING OHANAEZE

There is no gainsaying the fact that we need an organization like Ohanaeze to be a melting pot of ideas and a repository of Igbo history, culture, knowledge, and a reference point for our values and mores, including those pertaining to our cherished republican disposition, democracy, freedoms, collective gerontocracy and coordination of our viewpoints and interests. In order to be inclusive of all shades of opinion, it should be above partisan politics or at least those who head it should be seen as above partisan politics though they should be politically savvy, so that when there is a threatening schism, it can rally everyone around and seek a solution.

A restructured Ohanaeze is worth the effort. It will give us unity of purpose and unified collective leadership. The main thrust of the restructuring is to anchor the body on the republican disposition and democratic traditions of the Igbo by making the town unions the grassroots foundation of the body, which, we have already observed, is ongoing. By that the issue of all-inclusiveness will be settled, there will be two-way flow of information, sanctions can be imposed and implemented easily as the organisation will have traditional legitimacy. There would be three levels of Ohanaeze – the local council, State and the core

membership with Igbo adult who belongs to a town union made to participate in its activities.

At the local council level, representatives of town unions will form the local government area association of town unions, which will be christened Local government area Ohanaeze. In addition to electing representatives to the State Chapter, they would be expected to help maintain the peace in the Council Area and advise the Local Government on the development of the area. The State association of town unions would elect representatives to Ohanaeze national and engage in conflict resolution within the State and advise the State Governor on the development of the State. The two bodies are to be known as Local Government Area Ohanaeze and State Ohanaeze respectively, and are expected to meet at least twice a year, pre-budget and post-budget. In addition to tackling their Local/State matters, the two bodies are to consider and make recommendations on Igbo wide issues and also relay the decisions and directives of the apex organisation to the town unions.

The core membership of Ohanaeze in the new dispensation is expected to be elected by the State Association of Igbo town unions in the Southeast States and the Igbo enclaves in Delta and Rivers states. Representatives of State associations of town unions operating in major centres outside Igboland are also among the category of people to form the core membership of Ohanaeze in the new dispensation.

I bid every true Igbo man to stand up to be counted in the fight for the completion of the ongoing Ohanaeze re-positioning. It is time to smash and uproot every problem in the way to anchoring Ohanaeze to the grassroots, to the Igbo town unions in much the same way the Igbo Union of yore was. We must be prepared to curb the powers, stature and tenure of any political officeholders that engages in this act of sabotage, of obstructing the process for the restructuring of Ohanaeze or of implementing to the letter its constitutional provisions for the anchoring of the organisation on the town unions. We must elevate Ohanaeze to its traditional pride of place. And in the coming restructured Nigeria, we should strive to put Ohanaeze in the position to function as the Southeast Senate or Upper Legislative House like the House of Lords in London or as some other regions in Nigeria might institute houses of Chiefs.

It is a shame that the constitutional provisions for the re-positioning of Ohanaeze has not been completely implemented to date. There is no doubt that the present subsisting structure of Ohanaeze is part of the reason why the organisation has remained rather weak, with its authority suspect and actually being disputed in certain quarters. Apart from issues of source of authority for Ohanaeze, there is also the concomitant problem of poor funding for the organisation. Presently, Ohanaeze derives its funding from the benevolence of State Governors of Igbo extraction and other private voluntary donors. As such, Ohanaeze is always short of cash. This is a dire source of weakness. And this goes a long way to negatively affect its performance.

we hope the incoming president-general will devote his time and energy towards the immediate completion of the implementation process of this new structure for the organisation. That should immediately relieve Ohanaeze of its three serious sources of weakness: **Doubtful or Questionable authority, non-Inclusiveness & Poor Funding**; because the organisation will then be able to raise its own funds directly from the proposed lower tiers of Ohanaeze. Surely, concluding this business of restructuring Ohanaeze will give it the strength and power we desire the organisation to be imbued with.

OHANAEZE NDIIGBO GOING FORWARD

1. Town Development Unions as a Basic Unit of Ohanaeze/Town Governments

Ohanaeze needs to be properly constituted such that the Town unions play the role they are supposed to play; this is not a huge task to accomplish; it will jump start Ohanaeze and leap frog it into playing the roles envisaged by its founding fathers. It should be clear that in accordance with Article 5 of Ohanaeze Constitution, Igbo Community Development Unions will henceforth be the grassroots organs of Ohanaeze Ndigbo. They are the grassroots institutions which if re-enforced and refocused, should act as the agents of economic, social and political change. State Governments and Local Government Councils should therefore enact legislation to empower them appropriately and give them the Institutional/Legal Town governments platforms and resources to carry out their enhanced duties. The need to recreate our town unions as veritable instruments for sustainable growth and development is long overdue. Ohanaeze, our State Governments and the State Legislature shall work closely towards the achievement of this laudable goal.

2. Igbo Unity

Ohanaeze should call upon Ndigbo wherever they may be in the Federal Republic of Nigeria to come together for self-help and mutual support through their town unions, churches, professional bodies, traders' associations and cultural organizations. Ohanaeze is the federation throughout the nation of all these groups. It is not an alternative government or a political party. Its objectives are supportive of the aims of Government and it is not hostile to national integration. Ohanaeze is simply Igbo people doing what they have always done for their welfare, organizing themselves to help the needy.

3. Ohanaeze Leadership/Implementation of the Organizational Structure of Ohanaeze

The Ohanaeze Constitution does not give the leadership of Ndigbo to one person. Article 6 and 10 (v) provide for collegiate leadership in which all members of Ime-Obi which includes present and past governors, legislators, ministers, traditional rulers, industrialists, judges, bishops, business men and professionals, share the leadership. The idea is to create a typical Igbo democracy in which there is discussion and consensus on all important matters. To achieve its aims, the future Ohanaeze leadership must not see itself as an elitist group of very eminent persons sitting in Enugu, Lagos or Abuja.

Ohanaeze must invite all designated members of Ime-Obi, the entire Igbo elite and the general assembly to wake up to the duty of taking collegiate control of the content and wearing of the life we all share.

- a) Aligned with the Ohanaeze leadership question, is the perennial problem of the failure of the leadership to implement a suitable organizational structure/framework (as outlined in Ohanaeze's Constitution) for executing Ohanaeze's matters. This is one of the greatest weakness in Ohanaeze's capacity to re-invent itself.

4. The Economy of Igboland

Ohanaeze must call upon Ndigbo leaders in Nigeria and the diaspora to note that the re-building of the economy of Igboland is the major challenge facing the Igbo Nation. Every Igbo entrepreneur is of course free to go wherever he finds economic opportunities. But massive emigration of people out of Igboland creates problems. Gradually there is a depletion of men, resources and purchasing power. Investments begin to fail and new jobs are not created.

Ohanaeze, working closely with state governments of the South East, the organized private sector and the communities have a duty to begin a planned recapitalization of the economy of the South East. The effort cannot be made easily by single investors acting on their own initiative. Even the states lack resources to be able to act one by one. It is for this reason that all the states in the region should cooperate to support create an Economic Commission of the South East to pull resources to exploit opportunities in coal, petroleum and gas, palm produce. ICT, eco-tourism, manufacturing, infrastructure, Education, health and the film industry. These are regional/local matters in which an over-centralized Nigerian government does not have the capacity to give attention. The reversal of the population flow can only begin after the change in economic conditions.

5. Igbo Language and Culture

Article 2 (ii) of the Ohanaeze Constitution asks us to do a duty which should also be a pleasure. It asks us, that is, to promote our language and culture. This objective is in accordance with the Nigerian Constitution. It is not sufficient in this regard to use the Igbo Language at all times and accord respect to our customs and values. There is need to promote the language through scholarly study of its linguistic history, structure, resources and dialectal varieties. Ohanaeze has a reservoir of all the reports of various technical committees that were set up to study these and other matters and they had been ready for many years. Action is now overdue to endow institutes of Igbo studies in the Universities of the South East to host regular international conferences on Igbo Studies, and to sponsor prestigious prize for the promotion of Igbo literature, language studies, films history and ethnology.

6. Education for the Future

Ndigo want a modern education for all our children. In 1940s and 1950s, we created for ourselves, through self-help efforts, the best community educational system in black Africa. The schools and colleges which we built in those days enabled us to catch up with other people who started the process of modernization a century before us. Those institutions were also the base of the prosperity we enjoyed at the time of independence. But things have changed rapidly in the last 30 years. While our schools have deteriorated, education worldwide have moved forward in standards and conception.

Today only a handful of fee-paying schools can provide the mathematics, science and technology instruction, ICT education needed in the 21st century. We must start afresh in conceptualization, in funding, in staff training, in the equipment of libraries, laboratories and recreational facilities. We need to re-energize the inspectorate and the competitive spirit in our educational system.

Ohanaeze, working through the relevant South East institutional plat forms, must prevail on our governments to recognize the obvious difference between funding of education and management of it. We must therefore begin the process of creating a new institutional framework for the management of education in Igbo land. The proposal to set up a South East Nigeria Economic commission would be relevant in the mobilization and sustenance of this initiative.

7. Igbo Politics

Igbo Politics must change. It has become well known nation-wide for factionalization and extra-zonal sponsorship. Everybody, no matter how eminent is in the game for private gain. Even the electorate expects to be paid for its votes. It is time for our elders and civil society leaders to realize that while they rest on the sidelines afraid of taking the risks involved in leadership, some irresponsible ruffians jumped in to fill the gap. Recent events have, however, shown that it is only when politics is based upon community programmes that democratic processes become transparent and governance itself becomes responsible. We need once again to take communal control of our politics, to empower our cultural institutions, to re-invent Ohanaeze as a council of trusted elders. From now on, we must trust in our own internal strength to keep our politics and politicians in line.

The true leaders of the people have a duty to make sure that those whom we choose to contest for political offices are men and women of tested character, persons who are worthy of our trust because they had been leaders in lower ranks of civil society and were not corrupted by the power they exercised. Probity in the new politics will depend upon the right things being done by both the electorate and by the elected. The two things go hand in hand. The Igbos have always sought for the soul of Nigeria as a group and have never achieved that milestone as individuals. This philosophy of group action had worked in the past and I'm convinced that there are no indications that the contrary will prevail in the future. In order to take communal control of our politics, Ohanaeze must play a decisive role to mobilize Ndigbo to embrace the Free, Fair and Credible election

initiative. In this way, the quest to ensure that all those that will win elections in Alaigbo will do so Freely, Fairly and Credibly.

The restructuring of Igbo politics will create firm ground upon which improvements in the community, in educational standards, public security, health services, public sanitation etc will be based.

8. Review of Ohanaeze Constitution

Over the years, persistence attempts have been made to carry out a major review of the Ohanaeze Constitution.

The key areas of the constitution that have remained a source of concern to a majority of Ndigbo are thus:

- Article 11

Office of the President General of Ohanaeze mode of election clauses a, b, and c.

- Article 14

Office of the Secretary General of Ohanaeze clause ii

Majority of Ndigbo are of the considered opinion that the two offices should not be by election but that the occupiers of the offices shall be chosen by the council of elders and ratified by the National General Assembly.

9. Funding of Ohanaeze

Article 27, Financial guidelines of Ohanaeze constitution stipulates that the management of Ohanaeze Finances (at all levels) shall be in accordance with the provisions of the Financial guidelines set out in schedule 1 of the Ohanaeze's constitution.

Schedule 1

Financial Guidelines

a. Income/Revenue

Sources of Ohanaeze income/revenue shall include: -

- i. Dues and Fees
- ii. Donations
- iii. Subventions
- iv. Grants/Gifts/Aid
- v. Levies
- vi. Fines
- vii. Loans

All payments to Ohanaeze shall be properly receipted by the Financial Secretary.

b. Bank Accounts

Each Ohanaeze tier, on the recommendation of its Ime-Obi or the Executive Committee, shall open and maintain bank accounts in reputable bank into which shall be paid all Ohanaeze money receipts before approved disbursement are made therefrom.

c. Accounting Procedure

An accounting procedure prepared by a qualified and reputable firm of accountants shall be submitted to Ime Obi for approval.

d. Budget

The secretary-General, in collaboration with the Finance Committee, shall prepare a budget for each financial year, and present it to the General Assembly for consideration and approval

e. Cash Imprest

The secretary General shall keep an impress account the amount of what shall be determined from time to time by Ime Obi or the National Executive Committee.

f. Accountability

The secretary-General shall be the accounting officer, and shall be responsible for the proper management of the finance of Ohanaeze; as such he shall be a compulsory signatory to all bank accounts of Ohanaeze.

g. Signatory to Ohanaeze Bank Accounts

Ime Obi shall from time to time determine the signatory to Ohanaeze bank accounts

h. Audit of Ohanaeze Accounts

Ime Obi shall engage the services of a reputable firm of external auditors to audit the Ohanaeze accounts at the end of each accounting year.

Two key observations from the schedules are thus:

1. Ohanaeze has been unable to implement item 1, sub i, which would have been the primary source of Ohanaeze's funding.
2. Ohanaeze has failed to implement items 2 to 8, which has succeeded in reducing the trust and confidence of Ndigbo in its activities.

I believe the reversal of these two observations by the incoming leadership of Ohanaeze will mark the beginning of a sustainable funding system for Ohanaeze's activities and programmes

Conclusion

Within the coming years, as we usher in a new leadership of Ohanaeze, it is compelling that we begin the process of re-making Ohanaeze Ndigbo as the coordinating council of our civil society organizations and the conscience of the people. In that position, Ohanaeze will be the foundation upon which a disciplined modern industrial democracy will rise in Igboland. Those who stand to profit from the present chaos will resist the tide of change. But all devoted Igbo men and women will exert every muscle to remake the Igbo nation. You are the key. The power of Ohanaeze is what you do in your community, your town unions, your professional associations, your women organizations, your chambers of commerce, your market associations, and your local government councils, to raise consciousness, to mobilize colleagues, to promote unity of action and to win converts to the development of a new Igboland. It is now realized world-wide that governments do not perform optimally until society is conscious, vigilant and mobilized to take them to task. In Europe and United States, new structures are being set up to make civil society the partners of governments. This concept of partnership has always been a part of Igbo political traditions. The prosperous and peaceful homeland we want can be built, not only in Igboland but throughout Nigeria, if only our communities would stand

shoulder to shoulder with our governments to lay the foundations and raise the structure.

Thank you for listening.

Engr. Chris Okoye, FIMC, FIOD, FNICA, FNIT, FNIA, FNSEME, FNIHTE, F. ASCE, FNICE, FNSE, FAENG.

NB. Engr. Chris Okoye, is a Past Chairman, Ohanaeze Planning & Strategy Committee, Member Of IME OBI and President, ANYA-NDI-IGBO.