

DEMOCRACY AND OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Speech presented by Hon. Ifeanyichukwu Ibezi (Ochiagha Idemili) during the stakeholders meeting of the Anambra State Association of Town Unions (ASATU)

Protocols

I feel honoured to be accorded the privilege of your esteemed presence. I offer my sincere appreciation. I am quite aware of the importance of this meeting organised by this august body - the Anambra State Association of Town Unions (ASATU).

As leaders of the town unions you have consistently applied yourselves to the task of developing our various communities through the bridging of communication gap and by drawing the attention of the government to the needs of the people. I am glad to note that Anambra State has the best organized and robust town unions in Nigeria. This is as a result of sociological and historical experience. I therefore urge you to ensure that this development institution is strengthened and sustained.

It is my hope that today's town hall meeting which takes a look at our democracy, the people and our collective aspiration will find answers to some of the critical questions that often confront us.

It is a fairly well-known fact that our democracy has progressed by fits and starts, surviving a lot of pull towards failure. Its survival has tasked every one of us, but the desire to have it succeed has sustained the beautiful form of government. What we have today in Nigeria may not be a perfect form of the people's government, but I believe it is part of why the town hall meeting is holding. The meeting will afford every one of us the chance to have a critical look on government, how it affects us and how best we can apply governance to our collective gain. The meeting will also afford us an opportunity to remind ourselves of our responsibilities towards the sustenance of democracy.

I believe the time is now ripe to ask ourselves what our interests in government is or should be. Who our representatives in government are or should be? What they are doing? How they do it? Whether they are representing our interests well enough? Whether they have caused their own interest to seem as ours? Whether they are in government to lord it over the rest of us? Whether they are in government as a status symbol?

It is only when we are able to find answers to these questions that we can claim adequate knowledge of our collective aspiration. Since every one of us cannot be in government at the same time we should strive to ensure we know who bears our collective interest. By so doing we will be able to send such people - those who will represent us well and curtail our chances of disappointment. What we have had in the past has not been encouraging.

By this time next year we would have had elections to various positions in the land. It is only in our dear state Anambra and maybe a state or more that election to the office of the governor won't hold. And we are expected to be guided by reason as we go out to reward those who have represented us well with our collective mandate, reject the ones who have failed us and elect new ones with promise.

We should not also forget to look at the platforms available to us. Some of them are more disposed to our collective aspiration than others. Most of us were witnesses to the landslide victory of our dear governor, Chief Willie Obiano, Akpokue Dike Aguleri. His 21/21 victory was a reward for the good work the governor has done and is still doing in the state. You will agree with me that the platform more than others has advanced the cause of the Igbo man. In the state as well as in the Upper Chamber of the National Assembly it has given our people a voice. Even the worst critic of the platform will admit this fact. We now have a voice in Abuja and we have development in the state.

As we approach next year's election our decision or lack of it will determine how far we intend to push our collective aspiration. But I know as much as you do that we will do the needful. I am confident that as leaders of our various communities and people who have excelled in different walks of life you will bring your wealth of experience to bear on the turn of events. You have not done any less before but the time to exert greater responsibility now.

Once again, accept my sincere appreciation of your invitation. I wish you happy deliberations.