



RE-INVENTING OUR AGE GRADES

An *Opening Speech*
Presented by



Chief Solo U. Akuma, SAN

As the Chairman of the Occasion

EZUMEZU IGBERE
Festival

On: Friday 26th Day of December, 2008
At: Igbere Secondary School Playground, Igbere

RE-INVENTING

OUR AGE GRADES

PROTOCOL

1. It is with joy that I most warmly welcome all our distinguished guests and all the Ndi Igberere in Nigeria and Diaspora to this auspicious and epoch making triennial ceremony otherwise called EZUMEZU IGBERE FESTIVAL. Please join me to thank the Almighty God for granting us journey mercies from our respective destinations. The Ezumezu Festival affords our Clan the singular opportunity and privilege to pull out or retire the oldest age grade who served the Clan meritoriously from communal service; this is called Traditional Retirement Ceremony (IGBOTO NMA). On the other hand, to recognize a new Age Grade. And this aspect is called Outing/Naming of a New Age Grade (IZARAFI). The occasion is also used to raise funds for the development of our Clan.
2. It is the turn of Echee Eme Age Grade of Igberere to retire from active communal service and perform their traditional Igbotonma Ceremonies while the Umuebiri I, will be officially recognized as full-fledge Age Grade with the appertaining responsibilities to our Clan. Let me on your behalf heartily congratulate the President and entire members of the Umuebiri I Age Grade for being part of this milestone as well as the President and entire members of the Umuebiri I Age Grade for attaining manhood according to Igberere tradition.
3. Prior to 1987 the Anniversary Ceremonies were organized by ad hoc Communities set up by the Igberere Welfare Union (IWU). However, the successive hosting of the ceremony by the various Committees did not meet the expectations of the Igberere Welfare Union. The failures noticed in the hosting of the festival were attributed to incompetence, infighting among Committee members, mismanagement of funds and in some cases outright embezzlement of proceeds.
4. In 1987 the name Ezumezu Igberere was recommended by Echee Eme Age Grade and adopted by the Igberere Welfare Union. The union, for the first time

mandated Echee Eme Age Grade to organize the 1987 Ezumezu Festival which was also used to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Igber Welfare Union. The Age Grade was chosen because of their vision, unity of purpose and organizational acumen exhibited by the Age Grade when in the previous year they built, equipped and donated to the Igber Clan an Ultra Modern Health Centre. Besides, it was further reasoned that the Age Grade were in a better position to do a good job, not only to preserve their pride and image but also help in the developmental strides of the Clan. From 1987 till date, six successful Age Grades namely, Umannabuike, Akajiebiri, Oganihu, Omeziebiri, Udo Ebiri II and Odinma Ebiri have organized the Ezumezu Festivals, but the 2005 edition organized by Odinma Ebiri Age Grade was the best so far. Let me state without fear or favour that Echee Eme Age Grade is the progenitor of modern Ezumezu Igber Festival.

5. The Age Grade system in Igber Clan is the vehicle of development. It is through the developmental effort of the Age Grades that Ulo Nkuma, Health Centres, Culverts, Bridges and Roads were built. Regrettably, in recent time, our Age Grades have become very complacent towards development. In the last 10 years no new project has been completed by any Age Grades except those projects completed by the retiring Age Grade within this period. All the Age Grades are enjoined to reinvigorate themselves in order to assist in developing our Clan. And in order to make our Age Grade be conscious of their role as agents of development in our Clan, I will most respectfully suggest that for any Age Grade to qualify for Igbotonma Ceremony it must have successfully completed and donated three projects to our Clan, The era of donating uncompleted projects are gone. We are moving forward and backward never.
6. The projects are to be executed in this order:
 - i. Izarafa project to be completed either on or before the year of Izarafa or within three years after Izarafa Ceremony of the Age Grade.
 - ii. Ezumezu project to be completed and commissioned in the year it is the turn of the Age Grade to organize the Ezumezu Igber Festival.
 - iii. The Igbotonma project to be completed and handed over in the year the Age Grade will retire from active communal service.
7. I will therefore call on the Igber Welfare Union and the Igber Clan Council of Traditional Rulers to see to the adoption of this proposal. Our Age Grade should re-invent themselves and wake up from their slumber. It is imperative to adopt this proposal in order to sustain the development and transformation of our Clan from its rural status to a bustling Town. You are aware that this transformation was brought about by His Excellencies,

Commodore Amadi Ikwechegh (RTD) and Chief Dr, Orji Uzor Kalu during their tenure as Governors of Old Imo State and Abia State respectively. We shall continue to remain eternally grateful to them.

8. What I have advocated above is feasible and attainable. It is the desirable change we need at this stage of our development. The Obiebiri II Age Grade has demonstrated that with determination, we can embark on development projects and complete them in record time. The Obiebiri II Age Grade built the Unity Tower at Igbere junction which can be regarded as their Ezumezu project. They simulated the building of International Nursery School, Onu Ibina Igbere by Chimaobi Anyaso and beautification of Onu Ibina Roundabout by Messrs Kalu Uche and Ikechukwu Uche both Super Eagles Players. The Obiebiri II Age Grade has done well. They deserve our commendation.

9. In this year's ceremony, some distinguished sons of this Clan will be recognized because of their various contributions to the development of our Clan. These gentlemen are complimenting the developmental effort of our own Chief Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu, Aha ejemba of Igbere and the former Governor of Abia State who single handedly undertook the re-roofing of all the buildings in Igbere Secondary school with long span roofing sheet among other projects he had completed. Those of you who were here 3 years ago will agree with me that this school is wearing a new look.

10. I wish to heartily congratulate all the Award Recipients for your achievements and pray that God will replenish your resources and pray that God will replenish your resources and give you the spirit to continue to do more. For those who are not recognized, I pray that you will be in future provided you make visible contributions to the physical and infrastructural development of our Clan.

11. According to our cherished custom and tradition over 200 members of the Echee Emee Age Grade will from 28th to 31st December, 2008 celebrate their respective Traditional Retirement (IGBOTONMA) receptions in their various homes. Their invitations have been sent out but these ceremonies are not restricted. I will urge you to make out time and visit these celebrants in their homes and appreciate them, see how Ndi Igbere celebrate life and use the same opportunity to taste the hospitality of our people.

12. Let me once again welcome you to this great occasion. And to thank immensely the Obiebiri II, the hosting Age Grade for the opportunity given me to chair today's occasion.

May God bless you all.

May God continue to bless Igbere.

May God continue to bless Abia State.

May God continue to bless Nigeria.

Ebiri Ezumezu!

Ezumezu Ebiri!

Chief Solo U. Akuma, SAN,
Otumba Okpegbuoha of Igbere
Former Attorney General of Abia State

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