**2024 Message**

**Message By His Majesty, Nnaemeka Alfred Ugochukwu Achebe, CFR, mni, Obi of Onitsha, Agbogidi, at the 2024 Ofala, Tuesday, October 15, 2024**

We give all glory to the Most-High God for this 23rd Ofala festival of my reign on the throne of our founding father, Ezechima. We never take the grace and benevolence of our Creator for granted. I also welcome our visitors who have come from various destinations to join our annual celebration despite the current travel challenges in the country. We trust that you will enjoy the festival as in the past.

**The State of the Nation.**

At Ofala last year, I stated that the previous twelve months were marked by uncertainties occasioned by the aftermaths of the general elections, further exacerbated by the continuing insecurity and the effects of the sudden removal of the fuel price subsidy. Unfortunately, the wellbeing of the polity has declined even more steeply in the last twelve months leading to a ten-day national protest in August 2024, tagged #Endbadgovernance. The two areas of most concern are the economy and security. Their combined effects are the spiraling rise in the cost of living, business closures, loss of employment, a general feeling of hopelessness, and lack of trust in the government.

Several individuals and organizations, including High Chief Gani Adams, The Patriots, League of Nigerian Columnists, Yoruba Council of Elders, Afenifere, Arewa Consultative Forum, etc, have variously drawn the attention of the government to the looming catastrophe if no constructive action is taken to reverse the decline. They have urged the government to give urgent attention to its fundamental constitutional responsibility, namely, the security and wellbeing of the citizenry. Some of the specific views put forward include devolution and down-sizing of governance; the nexus between insecurity, agriculture, and high cost of living; the impact of fuel price on the cost of living; bad governance driven by corruption; and ostentatious lifestyle of political leaders;

Meanwhile, Mr. President has been assuring the nation about the efficacy of his “*very bold and unprecedented decisions”*, even as petrol prices are sky-rocketing, the Naira is in free-fall, and the leaders of the #Endbadgovernance are being prosecuted for treason for expressing their constitutional right to protest. On our part, we urge Mr. President to also consider alternative views and urgently convene a non-partisan national economic and security summit to forge a collective way forward for the country.

In the South East Zone, we still face the unrelenting scourge of the unknown gunmen who kill, maim, and kidnap their fellow Ndiigbo for money. Schools, markets, and public facilities have remained closed on Mondays at enormous economic and social costs to Ndiigbo.

**Ofala Onicha.**

The theme for last year’s Ofala was *Better, Stronger, Together*. It reflected our commitment to build on the gains of the previous years while addressing the challenges ahead. It emphasized that we could become better and stronger by deploying our common bonds to work closely together as a community. We have this year added a further theme of *Courage, Perseverance, Self-Reliance (Onye Kwe, Chi’e Ekwe*). This theme responds to rapidly deteriorating situation in the country which demands self-sustenance as the government increasingly fails in its basic obligations to the governed.

We had pruned down the scale of last year’s Ofala due to the prevailing uncertainties then. Unfortunately, the present mood of the nation is even more foreboding that last year. Consequently, the Obi-in-Council decided to further deepen the austerity of this year’s festival without losing its core elements. Thus, the NIPR/COOU Annual Obi Achebe lecture was delivered last week by the eminent scholar and statesman, Professor Patrick Utomi. We also retained the annual Oreze Art Exhibition and introduced a week-long medical outreach programme that covered the entire metropolitan city. Finally, the Ofala Youth Carnival was stood down for this year as a mark of respect for the murdered leader of the Onitsha Youth Council (OYC), and the driving spirit of the carnival, Kpajie Barrister Ernest A.B.K Offiah.

Still, Ofala Onicha remains an iconic festival in Nigeria and beyond. This has emboldened us to seek the support of the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, and the Creative Economy in our quest for the UNESCO recognition of Ofala Onicha as a world heritage cultural festival. We are also in dialogue with the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) for support in line with its mandate.

**Community Development.**

**A. Onitsha Advancement Foundation (OnAF).**

The Onitsha Advancement Foundation (OnAF) is our key driver of community development, aimed at lifting Onitsha out of poverty and bringing the community into the 21st century. Its focus is on empowering Onitsha indigenes to improve their livelihoods and contribute meaningfully to their homeland. It delivers its mandate through various entities and work groups as covered below.

**1. Implementation Team (OnAF IT)**

The OnAF Implementation Team is at the helm of the activities of our community development vehicle. It provides governance, assurance, reviews and approvals of the activities and budgets of the work groups. It challenges their projects along the lines of envisaged impact, budget cover, and prioritization and the ranking of our various development projects against each other, etc.  It also drives the collaboration and cooperation of work groups and sub-committees, and the efforts across teams to deliver more integrated and impactful results. It further ensures the annual audit of the OnAF accounts.

**2. Shared Services Resource Centre (OnAF RC)**

As the secretariat of OnAF, the Shared Services Resource Centre (OnAF RC), continued to offer strategic and operational support to all work groups, enabling the sharing of resources, collaboration, and cooperation for service planning, implementation, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation. The Resource Centre team has been key to maintaining momentum on activities that address mission of providing services to foster economic empowerment for Onitsha indigenes. It is undoubted that the shared services concept is a proactive and cost-effective approach to systemic change, and to achieving sustainable outcomes.

**3. Onitsha Leadership and Entrepreneurship Centre (OLEC)**

OLECengaged in twomajor activities in the last twelve months, namely, the One Youth Two Skills Programme and the Onitsha Youth Leadership and Vocational Entrepreneurship Programme.

OLEC Enterprise Development Institute was selected by the State Government to facilitate the second edition of the One Youth Two Skills programme which kicked off in August 2024. This was due to its sterling performance on the first edition, when the OLEC - EDI successfully trained 243 participants on leadership and entrepreneurship skills. The graduates were provided with single-digit loans of up to N5 million in conjunction with Anambra Small Business Agency (ASBA) to expand their business ventures. All OLEC-EDI trained graduates are believed to have benefitted from the loan. The Ministry of Youth’s Development has also established a mentoring programme to support the graduates.

The Onitsha Youth Leadership and Vocational Entrepreneurship Programme
was organised in conjunction with LEAP Africa. The programme was fully sponsored by the Umuawale Age Grade, Abuja Chapter. It ran for six months during March to September, 2024. The classroom sessions on leadership and entrepreneurship were facilitated by LEAP Africa faculty members. The sessions covered such topics as: Transformative Leadership; Self-Leadership; Personal Effectiveness; Entrepreneurship; and Values and Moral Ethics. This was followed by a six-month vocational entrepreneurship training and mentorship. Participants were trained on various vocational trades. The graduation ceremony was held on September 17, 2024, at Ime Obi, Onitsha.

The next partnership between the State Ministry of Youth Development and OLEC-EDI to train both Onitsha indigenes and non-indigenes will commence in October 2024. This program also has the benefit that successful graduates will be empowered with N300,000 for business start-up.

**4. Ado Business Incubation Centre (ABIC)**

In March 2023, 30 Onitsha indigenes were awarded scholarships for a Backend Web Development specialization program. Twenty-two trainees began the program after being selected from 500 applicants through a rigorous screening process. The 8-week training program, which included workshops, mentorship, and job placement support, concluded on Saturday, 10th August 2024, with the graduation of 16 participants, ⁠80% of whom have secured full-time employment in IT across various sectors. There is ongoing plan to start another cohort as well as secure funding for scale.

**5. Microfinance Institute (MFI)**

The work group, in collaboration with OLEC-EDI, secured sponsorship from LEAP Africa and the Umuawele Age Grade Society of Onitsha, Abuja Chapter for the OYPL mentioned earlier. This sponsor empowered the successful graduates with additional N250,000 to enable business start-up as cooperatives. Four cooperative teams will be supported in graphic design, head tie and make-up, tailoring, paint production and painting.

A sub-committee was established to facilitate ASBA loan default repayment. To date a total amount of N45,546,545 has been repaid out of N65,000,000, with N19,453,455 in default and accrued interest of N8,401,049.50 as at end September, 2024. Agbogidi has vowed to personally drive the recovery of all outstanding loans and interest.

**6. Women Empowerment Project Committee (OLEC-WEPC)**

* OLEC-WEPC secured sponsorship from the Otu Odu Europe (OOE) to deliver the Basic ICT Training for Onitsha market women in collaboration with ABIC.
* The Effective Parenting training is helping families with Social Inclusion
* The work group successfully conducted the U-15 football tournament with teams from Onicha Ebo Itenani. The Final on 31st December 2023 was won by Umu Chimaevi with a prize of N50,000.
* Agricultural training for self-sufficiency for over 80 women with focus on “*Ugbo Azu Uno*” was conducted by the State Ministry of Agriculture. Seedlings, inputs, and 10 Sets of Tools as WEPC Prizes were presented.
* WEPC monitored past beneficiaries to strengthen their resolve to use micro credit facilities. Additional funding is required for greater impact.

**7. Health and Wellbeing (HWB)**

The past twelve months were very busy, productive, and rewarding for the HWB work group, with engagements in the following areas:

* The health insurance scheme has been running for two years following its launch. Over 400 Individual have been enrolled in the scheme in the last twelve months, and 185 have renewed their enrollment. There is a campaign to urge members to utilize the insurance cover as much as possible.
* In collaboration with HWB team in USA, established a walk-in weekly Screening Clinic at Ime-Obi Onitsha for checks on blood sugar, blood pressure, weight measurement, and counselling.
* Commenced the monitoring of cancer related deaths among indigenes and their poor awareness of cancer. A cancer awareness and screening programme will be launched during the 2024 Ofala one-week health outreach in collaboration with US based oncologist, Dr. Kelechi.
* Working with a group of US based mental Health experts to develop a mental health First Aid tool kit to support families with mental health challenges.
* Establishment of a *‘Walk in Health Centre”* in collaboration with the Ofala Health and Wellbeing sub-committee with effect from October 2024.

**8. Stroke Action Nigeria – Life After Stroke Centre (LASC)**

The Stroke Action LASC in Onitsha in 2015 by Chiebunigom Rita Melifonwu in collaboration with Obi-in-Council. It continues to serve the needs of over one hundred stroke survivors, their careers, and at-risk people in Onitsha each year, supported by volunteer Stroke Ambassadors. In 2024, 125 stroke survivors and 114 carers were supported in the LASC. Stroke Action is now working with the Philips Foundation and OSCAIL, (Organized Stroke Care Across Income Levels) and the World Stroke Organisation (WSO) to conduct research on stroke education for building the capacity of health workers for stroke rehabilitation, and, to test effectiveness of the LASC so that lessons can be learnt for global replication. Stroke Action has developed a model Stroke Survivor Entrepreneur Training to enable recovered stroke survivors of working age to return to work through micro-entrepreneurship. Collaboration with OnAF enabled Stroke Action to secure an ASBA loan for the development of the first Hydroponic Greenhouse in Anambra State.

**9. Cooperatives**

This initiative was designed to aid qualified Onitsha indigenes to form themselves into cooperatives groups for easier access to loans for their businesses proposals. We recorded mixed results in the last twelve months. While some cooperatives paid back their loans, others have been in default despite reminders. Consequently, OnAF has suspended further disbursements pending a full review. More details are under the MFI section above.

**10. Education –Remedial Tutorial and Long Vacation Tutorial Programmes.**

**The Free Remedial Tutorial Programme**: was initiated in 2015, aimed at secondary school students who did not obtain the requisite minimum of five (5) credits to qualify for admission into tertiary institutions. Since inception, the programme has helped the beneficiaries to gain admission with excellent scores in their repeat examinations. From 2015 till date, a total of some 3435 students have benefited from the programme, which is run with 11 teachers and 3 administrative staff for 6 months.

**The** **Free Long Vacation Tutorial Programme**: was introduced in 2007 by the National Association of Onitsha Ado Students. It was aimed at providing a platform that would positively engage both the tertiary institution undergraduates and secondary school students residing in the city during the long vacation periods. The programme engages an average of 60 undergraduate students as instructors on various subjects in accordance with the State Ministry of Ministry of Education Scheme of Work. About 4000 secondary school students participated in 2024 at two locations in Onitsha North South Local Government Areas, respectively. Besides Ime Obi, financial support for the programme was also given by Ikporo Onicha U.S.A and Agbalanze Onicha.

**11. Values Re-Orientation**

The Values Reorientation campaign aims to empower the poor by shifting mindsets from consumption to production, employee to entrepreneur, individualism to collaboration, and short-term to long-term focus. With the completion of the takeoff phase of the campaign which focused on messages through various organs and platforms, and sampling audience response, a second phase commenced. This is designed to facilitate the implementation of the Values Reorientation Initiative at the grassroots level.

A Taskforce comprising heads of the various Onicha constituent groups, heads of Youth Groups, President of the National Association of Onitsha Ado Student, representatives of Onicha centric media outlets, and Onicha based members of the Values Reorientation Initiative team is charged with ensuring the desired facilitation. Despite the efforts to deliver on the mandate, progress has been hindered by the reluctance of two key constituent groups, Agbalanze and Otu Odu, to cooperate with the Taskforce. Ime Obi has initiated intervention to address this challenge and ensure the campaign's success.

**12. Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E)**

No monitoring and evaluation have been carried out for any project in 2024 as most were still ongoing. Plans are on hand to evaluate the training programmes that were recently completed in both OLEC – EDI and ABIC.

**B. Other Activities.**

**1. Onitsha Rules and Regulations.**

 The latest review of our Rules and Regulations lasted longer than expected, albeit in the effort to ensure accuracy. The 7th Edition was eventually adopted on 22 August, 2024 and it became binding on every indigene, family, village, and constituent group, superseding all previous Editions. I highlighted three key issues in the Preface. First is the obscene display of opulence during our traditional rites tend to deter indigenes of modest means from undertaking these essential rites. Second is the continued delays in the second burial obsequies for deceased relatives for the primary purpose of qualifying posthumously for the ancestral Ukpo (Ipu Iba). Third is that tariffs will henceforth be reviewed more frequently during the lifetime of a particular Edition of the Rules and Regulations. I also stressed that Ndichie, Ndi Diokpa and heads of families will be held more directly accountable for any failures to comply with the Rules and Regulations within their spheres of responsibility.

**2. Community Governance.**

One Ndichie was elevated from Okwareze to Okwa rank, and four new ones wereappointed in the last twelve months, bringingthe current total on the Obi-in-Council to twenty-five. Two of the appointments were particularly significant. Due to a combination of circumstances, Umu Obi Omozele, Umu Ezearoli did hitherto not have Ndichie for over one hundred and thirty (130) years since Chief Egbuniwe, Ede. Similarly, Ogbeozoma did not have Ndichie for over one hundred and sixty years (160) since Chief Morah Ojiede Eze. It is intended to fill more vacancies on the Obi-in-Council, with particular attention to younger candidates who can grow in stature. Future appointments will also eliminate the remaining imbalances in the distribution of Ndichie amongst the villages and kindreds.

After several reviews, I have approved a Code of Conduct for the Obi-in-Council for its own self-regulation. The codes are a distinct message to the community at large that Ndichie are expected to lead by example so as to earn the loyalty and respect of the populace. Significant energy of the Obi-in-Council in the year ahead will be on further improvements to our justice delivery system and embedding the revisions to the Rules and Regulations in the community.

**3. Engaging with Our Indigenes Outside the Domain.**

I paid a two-day visit in July 2024 to Indianapolis, USA, accompanied by four Ndichie at the invitation the Umu Onicha Amaka Association of Indiana and the Nigerians in Diaspora Organization (NIDO) of Indiana. My delegation was very well received on the first day by the Mayor of the City-County of Indianapolis, Mr. Joseph Hogsett, and we signed an addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding of the Sister City accord between Indianapolis and Onitsha of seven years ago. The addendum re-focused on educational and cultural exchanges as well as commercial relationships. It was of great pride that the second in rank in the governance of the City-County as President of the Council is our son, Nnabuenyi Arc. VOP Osili of Umu Iseli Sub-kindred of Umudei Village.

On the second day, I held a well-attended Town Hall meeting with Onitsha indigenes who had converged from various locations in the USA. Two significant take-aways from the meeting were the need for a development fund for Onitsha, and the proposal for a comprehensive register of physically challenged and disabled indigenes and their aspirations. The visit concluded with a rousing Gala Night during which a substantial amount of money was raised for the takeoff of the Sister City educational exchange programme.

**4. Security**

The most pressing challenge we faced during the last twelve months remained inadequate funding for our two Vigilante teams, namely, the State Government sponsored Anambra Vigilante Group (AVG) and our local Onitsha Community Vigilante Unit (OCVU). The State Government had earlier doubled its contribution for the AVG of N10,000 each from ten to twenty persons. That still left our community and others with a significant additional cost since the actual salaries of the AVG members range from N25,000 to N30,000 per month, in addition to the cost of equipment and supplies. The burden has now increased with the newly approved minimum wage of N70,000 per month.

Despite the above situation, the Governor has declared categorically that the State Government would not provide any additional funding for the Vigilante Service, while maintaining that traditional rulers, as the chief security officers of their communities, would be held accountable for any security breaches. Already, our urbanized and sprawling domain is stretched beyond limit to adequately meet the bare essentials salary so as to avoid the loss of morale and commitment amongst our combined vigilante personnel numbering thirty-six.

Armed criminal activities in the community increased drastically in the month of August 2024. The new Chairman of the Onitsha North Local Government Transition Committee and the heads of the security agencies in the city have since briefed the Obi-in-Council on the security readiness for the domain. We shall cooperate with fully to ensure success.

**5. Golibe Festival**

The Golibe festival, which is conceived, planned, and executed solely by Onitsha youths, held its fourth edition in December 2023. It has become an integral part of the Christmas season in Onitsha, bringing unforgettable experiences and fun for everyone. With the support of international partners, such as the British Council, the festival has evolved into a powerful force for job creation and youth empowerment. From the performing arts to media, sports, hospitality, and entrepreneurship, the festival opens doors for young people to showcase their talents and thrive in different industries. Plans are in motion to grow these opportunities further. This is no longer just a festival; it has become a beacon of hope for our youth and a testament to the bright future that awaits them!

For the 2024 Festival, the organisers promise a bigger, bolder, and even more thrilling experience, bringing back the legendary parades, the colourful Street Carnival, the Children’s Dreamland, the Chill Zone, and so much more. They are set to break boundaries and welcome visitors from across Nigeria and beyond. Their vision is to take Golibe to the world stage, showcasing our culture and creativity on an international level. It has become a movement and a celebration of our heritage, a boost for our local economy, and a symbol of the unity and resilience of our people.

**6. Onitsha Development Trust Fund (ODTF)**

On Thursday 22 August 2024, I announced the establishment of the Onitsha Development Trust Fund, which will become the repository of all monies beneficial and due to our indigenous community, and the source for executing our key community projects. It will be managed by an independent Board of Trustees with Ezennia Dr. Onyechi Ikpeazu, OON, SAN, as Chairman, Mr. Nebolisa Arah, OON, as Deputy Chairman, and ten other trustees of impeccable integrity and wealth of professional experience. The current challenges in the country will not end soon, and it behoves every community to rely on itself for communal well-being. The initial flow of monies into the Trust Fund would be the levies payable by initiates into Nzele, Ozo and Odu Onicha as acknowledgment of the distinction, dignity, pride, and self-esteem conferred on the initiates by our ancient kingdom.

**Some Notable Achievements by Ndi Onicha**

During the last twelve months, the following sons and daughter of Onitsha made us proud through their professional and vocational achievements:

* Ojinnaka Obodoechina Asika, of Ogbeozala Village, was appointed the Director General of the National Council for Arts and Culture by President Tinubu.
* REWA, daughter of Nwakibie George and Nwachinaemelu Nwando Umunna of Umu Osodi, Ogbeabu Village, opened an art exhibition, titled *Women of the Elephant Tusk: Ndi Otu Odu*, on 09 September, 2024 at the Africa Centre in London. The exhibition curator was Mrs. Sandra Mbanefo Obiago of Odoje Odimegwugbuagu.
* Uchenna Charles Emembolu, of Umu Okoloigbo, Umudei Village, is the Co-convener of Omniverse Africa which will partner UEL Esport Inc and two other companies for the internet gaming centre at Omniverse 2025. He is the leader of the Ado Business Incubation Centre (ABIC) of OnAF.

* Rev. Fr. Cyril Chinwendu Ononye, son of late Mr. Alexander and Mrs. Evangelista Ononye of Mgbelekeke Village, was ordained a Catholic priest on 13 July at the Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, Onitsha.
* Rev. Sister Mary Augusta Olimma, Umu Inwagwe, Ogboli Eke Village, of the Order of The Immaculate Heart of Mary, marked her 50th anniversary of her ordination on 22 September, 2024.
* Rev. Sister Felicita Iwenofu of Umu Okakwu, Ogbeodogwu Village, of the Order of The Immaculate Heart of Mary, marked her 25th anniversary of her ordination on 22 September, 2024.

**My Engagements Outside the Domain.**

**A. Anambra State Traditional Institution.**

On 12 January, 2024 I was constrained to address a public letter to the Honourable Commissioner for Local Government, Chieftaincy and Community Affairs of Anambra State in my capacity as the Chairman of the Anambra State Traditional Rulers Council (ASTRC). My latter was sequel to the suspension of the traditional ruler of Neni and the demand for apology from two other traditional rulers by the Commissioner through correspondence posted on the social media by the Ministry. Both correspondence by the Commissioner and I naturally generated much attention on the social media resulting in the discontinuation of the monthly meetings of the ASTRC by the Government since March, 2024. This was on the pretext that the ASTRC, which was constituted and hitherto supervised by the State Government, had suddenly become illegal.

Besides the inability of the ASTRC to meet to deliberate on matters of interest to the State, the State traditional institution, consequently, has no mandate to participate in the affairs of the nation’s traditional institution at national or sub-national levels. This is most unfortunate at this period that other States, as well as the Federal Government and the National Assembly, are seriously seeking ways to enhance the relevance of the traditional institution in the country.

**B. Lecture to the 2024 MBA Graduating Class of the Lagos Business School.**

I, once again, delivered a virtual lecture to the above class of the Lagos Business School on 12 July 2024. My first opportunity was in July 2020. The subject of my lecture was “*The Challenge of Change Leadership at the Community Level*”.

My presentation was a 22-year journey without end in change leadership since change is a continuous process. I identified the enormous challenges that I met on ascending the throne and outlined my strategy for re-inventing and re-positioning the community based on my personal philosophy of “*Peace and Reconciliation based on Truth and Transparency as Foundation for Sustainable Development*”. I then outlined the various workshops and study groups that worked through the years, each building on its predecessor and culminating in 2017 in the massive initiative of *Taking Onitsha to the Next Level*, involving 16 work groups. I added that our successful strategic response to Covid-19 pandemic provided the springboard for our Economic Empowerment Programme initiative and the Onitsha Advancement Foundation (OnAF) as the vehicle for a broad-based development agenda for the community.

The interactive session was equally illuminating for me as the questions drew my attention to issues that warranted further attention on the transformation journey. The lecture was at the instance of our son, Mr. Henry Onukwuba of Ogbeozala Village, who was the lead faculty for the MBA programme.

**C. Participation at the 2024 Annual Conference of the Nigerian Bar Association.**

On 27 August, 2024, I participated at the Traditional Rulers Roundtable of the annual conference of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA). The subject for the roundtable was *“Proposals for Integrating Traditional with the Contemporary in Justice Delivery”*. With me on the session were His Highness, Justice Muhammad Sidi Bage, CFR, JSC Rtd, Emir of Lafia, His Majesty, Oba Adeyeye Ogunwusi, CFR, Ooni of Ife, and His Majesty, Ogiame Atuwatse III, CFR, Olu of Warri.

In my presentation, which was adopted as the concept paper for the session, I used the Onitsha Traditional Court to illustrate the benefits and challenges of the traditional system of justice delivery. I observed the overlap in the roles and responsibilities between the statutory Customary Court and the non-statutory Traditional Court under the traditional ruler, which is relied upon by a very large majority of the citizenry. I recommended that the Customary Court should be subsumed under the Traditional Court, which should continue to remain under the traditional institution and be recognized by the Constitution. I further recommended that the NBA should set up a working group to deliberate on how to align the traditional and the contemporary systems of justice delivery.

In his letter of appreciation, the outgoing President of the Association stated that “*It is imperative to pursue constitutional/legislative interventions that will ensure that the role hitherto and still being played by our traditional institution in dispensing justice in our communities is acknowledged, recognized, and integrated as part of our justice delivery system”.*

**D. The Joint Body of The South East Council of Traditional Rulers and Representatives of Igbo Archbishops and Bishops on Peace and Reconciliation.**

I have continued to lead and coordinate the activities of the Joint Body, which comprises traditional, religious, and civic leaders from the South East. Our focus has remained peace building in Ani Igbo for which purpose we have continued to engage with the South East Governors, the Federal Government, and other Igbo organizations without fanfare. The JB has worked assiduously to convince the Governors to meet regularly on the platform of the South East Governors Forum (SEGF) for sharing ideas, as well as adopting a regional/zonal approach on broad issues of interest to Ndi Igbo. Recently, the J B robustly drew the attention of the Governments and international organizations to the hate speeches and potential atrocities crime against Ndi Igbo, particularly in Lagos and the South West. Also, the J B is persevering with a major values re-orientation exercise for Ani Igbo, launched last year. The study will probably continue for another year before embarking on the implementation stage.

**Our Focus for The Year Ahead:**

Last year was another very busy period. We consolidated on our past gains, learned from our mistakes, and broke new ground. We worked more closely together as a community on the journey of re-positioning our homeland for the 21st century. Going forward, we will continue on paths of consolidation, correction, and discovery with focus on the following issues.

\* Continued support for our young entrepreneurs and the women micro-businesses with emphasis on closer supervision, audit, and mentoring.

\* Recovering all outstanding loans from the defaulting cooperative associations.

\* Growing the synergies among various community work groups and sustaining the existing external partnerships even as we explore new opportunities.

\* Revitalizing our strategy on the war against illicit drug peddling and addiction.

\* Completing and equipping the training and work facilities in the East Pavilion, and the installation of high-speed internet access for the entire Ime Obi.

\* Preparing a register of challenged indigenes, and their needs and aspirations.

**Gratitude and Appreciation:**

Again, we thank God Almighty for the enormous blessings received in the past year as we humbly pray for continued guidance and protection. We hold our ancestors in highest esteem. They are our intercessors to God, and the source of our culture, norms, and practices. Again also, we thank our visitors for coming and wish you a safe return to your destinations. Please come again next year.

We warmly thank Globacom Limited and International Breweries Plc, for their steadfastness. We trust that our mutually beneficial partnership will continue to grow. We also thank the Nigerian Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) and Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation for their support in projecting Ofala Onitsha nationally and internationally. We are also grateful to our many other supporters, including individuals, corporate bodies, and media. We appreciate our development partners, particularly LEAP Africa and Anambra State Ministry of Youth Development, for your trust in us.

OnAF has become a reality. I am most grateful to its Boards, and the leaders and members of its various entities, as well as the large number of our indigenes all over the world whose productive energies were unleashed as part of this selfless epochal journey of community transformation. I am profoundly grateful to all my subjects for their belief in and support for the journey. *Ive eji abu Onicha Erika!!!*

The Ofala Steering Committee, under the leadership of Chief Dr. Mike Okey Areh, Onya Ozoma, has again delivered an exquisite festival in line with our objective of continuous improvements and the current mood of the nation. We thank them for their devotion to *Olu Obodo*.

May God bless and keep us all.

**Agbogidi.**

**18 October, 2024.**