

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, SENATOR DR IFEANYI OKOWA ON THE
OCCASION OF HIS SWEARING IN AS GOVERNOR OF DELTA STATE ON
FRIDAY MAY 29, 2015, AT THE CENOTAPH, ASABA**

PREAMBLE

Fellow Deltans, I am grateful to God, and consider it an honour, to stand before you today as your Governor. Indeed, I am humbled by the trust you have reposed in me, greatly inspired by our collective resolve to have chosen hope over suspicion and fear, and unity of purpose over conflict and discord. In the governorship election of April 11, Deltans reminded Nigerians once more that while tribe and tongue may differ, our strength lies in our diversity, that our wealth lies in the bonds that hold us together as a people, and that we can rise together as a family. Indeed, our cultural diversity presents unique opportunities for better understanding, greater collaboration, and more efficient resource mobilisation.

2. I stand here today more convinced than ever before about the greatness of our state. Ours is a state blessed with abundant resources, as well as high quality human capital. Deltans have continued to excel and play leading roles in our national life, be it politics, economy, the professions, finance and banking, academics, ICT, sports, and the media. As a people we possess the prerequisites for greatness; drive and innovation, optimism and resilience, faith and courage.

3. In recognising the assets and great potentials of our state, I also acknowledge the challenges that confront us, not least of which are the genuine and lofty expectations of our people amid the prevailing economic predicament. The national economy is in dire straits as direct consequence of

the turbulence in the global oil market, resulting in dwindling oil prices with negative impact on the revenues of the states. The picture that is emerging is that available funds hardly meet payment of salaries. We will need to borrow to pay salaries and may have nothing left to run the government or attend to capital development.

4. The challenges are not only real, they are diverse and complex. And there are no quick or easy solutions. But they can be tackled. What we will not do is to succumb to despair or allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the current difficulties. Indeed, times like these are often a good test of character and determination to succeed, for in the words of the Scripture, if you faint in the day of adversity then your strength is small.

5. In the days, months, and years ahead, we should be ready to make hard choices and take tough decisions that are imperative for the prosperity and welfare of our people. More than ever before, the need to diversify our economy and reduce undue dependence on the proceeds from oil has become quite urgent, and this is one agenda that this administration shall give great attention to.

6. We must keep faith in ourselves, trusting our God for a greater tomorrow. We must stay the course of our vision and agenda. We must be prepared to run the affairs of government differently, paying more attention to the voice of our people, and consolidating the gains where we have made progress. We will not shy away from admitting the mistakes of the past, and we will create opportunities for our people to participate and partner with the government.

7. Indeed, the downturn in the economy could be a blessing in disguise as we must brace the timeless virtues of hard work, excellence, integrity, foresight, teamwork, creativity, accountability, and discipline. And for all who have been elected at the polls, or may eventually be appointed into office, we must ensure that we hold such public office for the right reasons. As for me, I promise to govern our people with respect and the fear of God. The time for electioneering campaigns and division is now over. It is now time for us to reason together, work together, and collectively build the state of our dream. I believe we can.

8. The future that we all seek has no room for parochial interests and selfish ambition, but for mutual cooperation and benevolent spirit that recognises and caters for the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens. Building our state, a new Delta is not about Dr Okowa, but about ourselves, a people committed to doing what is right. I am ready to lead as your Governor, but **Deltans must be willing to commit themselves to the new order, an era of love for all, where the good of all takes precedence over the gain of one.**

9. We desire a state where peace and justice reign. We must, therefore, be prepared to be fair and equitable in all our actions. I pledge to be honourable and accountable in all my actions, and call on all Deltans who by God's grace find themselves in government to do same, or be shown the way out. If we must lead in service, our hearts must glow with love for our people. Greed must give way and sacrifice must take its place. Our people deserve opportunities to pursue their dreams of happiness and prosperity in an environment of security, peace, justice, and understanding.

10. I will drive the process by God's grace.

OUR AGENDA

11. As a Government we have a clear vision of what we plan to do in the next four years. It is to enthrone a legacy of wealth and prosperity for all our people and communities. We are committed to the building and consolidation of a state in which there shall be more employment opportunities, a flourishing agriculture and agribusiness sector, effective health and educational systems, renewed urban infrastructure, and enhanced security and peace to bolster economic growth and development.

12. Our promise of prosperity for all Deltans is not a catch phrase or campaign rhetoric. It is predicated on the fundamental premise that **we will succeed as a government when our people succeed**. It is borne out of our deep conviction that society is better, safer, and happier when the citizens do not feel deprived or disadvantaged, when they are provided the enabling environment to pursue their dreams of success and achieve their full measure of happiness.

13. We are convinced that this is the way to go and this agenda fully captures the dreams and aspirations of our people as was evident in our interactions with them during the electioneering campaigns. Our administration is fully committed to what Government is expected to do for its citizenry; which is to help them conquer their environment and enjoy decent living conditions.

14. To achieve this goal, we have outlined a Five-Point agenda encapsulated in the acronym **S.M.A.R.T** which means:

- ▶ **Strategic Wealth Creation Projects and Provision of Jobs for all Deltans**
- ▶ **Meaningful Peace Building Platforms aimed at Political and Social Harmony**
- ▶ **Agricultural Reforms and Accelerated Industrialisation**
- ▶ **Relevant Health and Education Policies**
- ▶ **Transformed Environment through Urban Renewal**

15. It is pertinent to point out that **S.M.A.R.T** is not so much a new policy as it is a new approach to addressing our most pressing needs. It will sustain and deepen the Delta Beyond Oil policy, and lay a solid foundation for economic growth and infrastructural development. Essentially, S.M.A.R.T is a programme designed to create jobs, generate and sustain businesses, and stabilise families and communities within a framework of equity, fairness, and justice.

JOB CREATION

16. Job creation will be the cornerstone of all our policies; it is the common thread running through our policies and programmes in education, health, agriculture, industrialisation, and infrastructure development. We shall embrace and embark on projects and programmes only when we are convinced and satisfied with their job creation content. Reflecting our strong conviction that deliberate government focus and action is needed to stem the tide of rising unemployment, we shall deploy and harness every resource

available, especially through agro-businesses, to create jobs and put our people to work.

17. A key component of our wealth creation strategy is to encourage and even partner with multi-national businesses and industrial activities to settle down and operate in the host communities; and the aggressive promotion of Micro, Small, and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs). Our policies and programmes shall impact greatly on our rural dwellers, women, youths, as well as our physically challenged brothers and sisters.

AGRICUTURAL REFORMS & ACCELERATED INDUSTRIALISATION

18. It is our earnest desire to encourage and create the enabling environment for commercial farming to thrive through the private sector and Public/Private Partnership. Delta State has vast potentials and capacity in the production of rubber, oil palm, rice, yam, cassava, maize, potato, plantain, tomato, and fish. **We shall forge and sustain a structured relationship with the farming population with a view to enhancing production, storage, and marketing of all farm products.**

19. In the same way, the multiple products and by-products of the oil and gas available in the state deserve better focus for industrialisation which, in turn, will foster increased commerce. We shall sustain the Warri Industrial Park Project and establish other Industrial Parks targeted at the agro-industrial sector.

20. The Agricultural Extension Service, being a key component of agricultural development, will be given a prime place in this administration. **We will pursue a coordinated linkage from agricultural production to marketing and agro-processing.**

EDUCATION

21. Without prejudice to the sustenance of the present quality of education at all levels, this administration shall refocus our schools' curricula as an urgent response to the increasing complexity and challenge of the world we live in. Emphasis will be on technical and vocational education that will empower our people with the requisite knowledge and entrepreneurial skills for business, trade, and commerce. Towards this end also, some of our existing polytechnics shall be restructured for appropriate specialisation. We shall complement these with regular skills building and training programmes to empower our people to prosper. We will ensure even provision and distribution of education infrastructure, especially in the rural and riverine areas, **while establishing Teachers' Professional Development Centres for regular in-service training.**

HEALTH

22. Health for all Deltans will be paramount and dear to this administration. We shall consolidate the good work of the out-going administration in this matter and advance the policies, programmes, and facilities of the health sector. Hence, we will bring to bear upon the health sector in Delta State my great concerns for best practices, grow the institutions of health, advance the quality of health and medical practitioners and improve on the general environment and conditions for the practice and delivery of medical and health services.

23. We need to find ways to deliver a comprehensive and integrated healthcare, not just at the secondary healthcare level only, but also at the primary healthcare facilities. **The poor and vulnerable must be given**

opportunities to access health services in such a manner that brings hope to the families.

24. As part of our strategy to achieve this, we shall undertake legislation to support and promote **UNIVERSAL HEALTH INSURANCE POLICY** for all Deltans. This will ensure that over time every Deltan would have access to primary health care whether they have money in their pockets or not. The Teaching Hospital at Oghara shall be consolidated as a Centre of Excellence, while other hospitals across the state shall be appropriately developed, equipped, and staffed to sustain general and specialist services in various fields of medicine. We will ensure adequate community involvement and participation in our health system; and create better collaboration between the government and private healthcare providers. This, I believe, is the way we must go.

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL

25. We shall strive to upgrade the infrastructure of selected towns in each federal constituency to ensure even development in the state so as to attract investments, boost tourism, and stimulate economic growth. Our urban renewal programme will also stimulate environmental cleanliness and beautification, reconstruct the city roads and bridges and waterways, and hence augment business and commerce, facilitate movement of people, farm produce, and goods and services to and from our cities, towns, and villages. We shall partner with the private sector to bridge the housing gaps in our cities and put processes in place to address the housing needs of our poor and the civil service class.

THE PUBLIC SERVICE

26. We are fully aware that the public service remains the main vehicle for implementation of government programmes, projects, and policies. It therefore must function effectively to change the fortunes of Deltans.

27. We shall continue to strive to create an enabling environment for the state public service to perform excellently, and it is our sincere hope that it will justify the trust and confidence of our people. Our expectation is that all public officers should uphold the ethics of the service, conduct themselves with dignity, and take pride in their work. There will be progress and development if and when every public officer says 'I am going to work', they do that with the understanding that the phrase is more of a verb than a noun, bearing in mind that productivity is the key determinant of economic growth.

28. We also expect all the labour unions in the state to appreciate the prevailing economic situation in the country and cooperate with the government in a manner that puts the interest of our people first. We are not unmindful of the challenges on ground, especially as a result of the dwindling receipts from the Federation Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC), and its toll on the payment of salaries both at the State and Local Government Council levels. I therefore wish to plead with our labour unions and all workers to be patient with us especially in the early months of our administration.

29. We will be worker-friendly as an administration, but we must be ready also to accommodate the large army of unemployed youths, our rural dwellers, and urban poor who need a lot of help and economic support. **Our vision is to drive an inclusive economic growth policy that works for all.**

CLOSING REMARKS

30. Fellow Deltans, I have briefly highlighted some areas of focus of our administration that the available time permits me to do today. You have our highest assurances that this administration shall be a highly focussed one driven with great passion to transform our state.

31. Exactly a month ago, a Transition Committee was set up to provide the blueprint for the implementation of our S.M.A.R.T agenda. The report of the Committee will enable us to hit the ground running, and we shall spare no time, energy and whatever resources that will accrue to the state, both from the Federation Account and internally generated revenue, to execute our projects, policies, and programmes. We shall put great emphasis on enhancing our revenue generating capacity by ensuring that all eligible taxable adults and organisations are brought within the tax net, and all leakages blocked, without necessarily creating further hardship in the family economy.

32. Let me reiterate that this administration is irrevocably committed to the principles of fairness, equity, and justice. We shall endeavour to carry everybody along. The oath I swore to some minutes ago is an oath to God and the people of Delta state. By the grace of God I intend to faithfully discharge this pledge without fear or favour. Therefore, beginning with me, every political appointee, and public official in this government is expected to regard the entire state as his constituency and work for the common good. **We must esteem merit over mediocrity, performance over favouritism, and unity over nepotism.** In view of the pan Delta mandate that brought us here, we cannot afford to do any less. To whom much is given, much is expected.

33. And on this day let it be known that the business of government can no longer be business as usual. Those of us who are politicians must realise that promises are meant to be kept; the promises that we make during electioneering campaigns matter and we are under obligation to keep them. That is the only way to maintain the trust and confidence that is necessary between the people and their leaders. The vital lesson to be learnt from the last general elections is that the electorate has become more politically aware and we must conduct government business with the realisation that the day of reckoning will come sooner than later.

34. And to those of us entrusted with managing public funds, it is mandatory that we carry out this weighty responsibility with the fear of God. We must avoid waste and profligacy, and never lose sight of the fact that we will be held accountable to God and man for our stewardship.

35. Wherever we are, we must present ourselves to be judged by the content of our character, and not by riches, be you a public servant, church leader, traditional ruler, business executive, or even the unemployed. We must self-convict our persons, build a new confidence, and have a renewed commitment to our state and nation.

36. Fellow Deltans, we promise you that we shall open up the political space to encourage more citizen participation in government. We therefore call upon you to be ready to play your part in this government. We believe that no matter how committed we are to working for you, no matter how smart we are, no matter how fantastic our policies and programmes are, and no matter how much revenue we generate as a government, we will not succeed without your support, cooperation, and understanding. So the contentions, hostilities,

resentments, and animosities of the past must give way to love, patience, understanding, and mutual cooperation.

37. In driving the initial process of governance and our commitment to our people, and considering the need to rapidly develop our State Capital, Asaba, the following Executive Bills shall be forwarded to the Delta State House of Assembly within one week of its inauguration:-

. Delta State Contributory Health Commission Bill, 2015

. Technical and Vocational Education Board Bill, 2015

. Asaba Capital Development Agency Bill, 2015

We will also give strength to the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC) Law, by restructuring the Board and Management in line with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) model through an Amendment Bill.

38. Before I end this address, I wish to formally congratulate President Muhammadu Buhari on behalf of our people. I look forward to a robust working relationship with him and the Federal Government. We offer our sincere cooperation and partnership for the collective development of our nation.

39. Finally, what is required of us now is a realisation that it is going to take all of us working together to build the Delta State of our dreams, an awareness that the road ahead demands a new spirit of sacrifice and generosity, and a willingness to accept that each of us can make a difference

in our own little corner. This, I believe, is the clarion call to our generation; to transform this state and make history.

I thank you all.

God bless you.

God bless Delta State.

God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.