**PRESS RELEASE**

**RE-CORONATION OF PERE OF OLODIAMA**

The attention of the Traditional Rulers, the Amaokosuotus (Village-Heads) Chiefs and the good people of Egbema, Olodiama, Okomu, Furupagha and Gbaraun clans with over fifty (50) communities balkanized into three (3) Local Government Areas of Ovia South-West, Ovia North-East and Ikpoba-Okha LGAs of Edo State, has been drawn to a statement issued by the Edo State Government and the Bini Traditional Council as published in pages 33 and 39 of Vanguard newspaper of Thursday November 16, 2017 to the effect that the coronation of the traditional ruler of the indigenous Ijaw people of Olodiama, Pere of Olodiama in Ovia North East Local Government of Edo State is sacrilegious. We have carefully gone through the statement by the Edo State Government and the Bini Palace and wish to state as follows:

By the very nature of our geographical location along the coastal board of the nation, the Ijaws are found in six (6) states, namely; Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo and Ondo States. In five (5) of these States, namely; Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Ondo States, there is no question about their status as indigenes with equal rights and privileges except in Edo State. Why? One may ask.

It is on record that in 2001, there was an attempt by the Binis through the Edo State House of Assembly to change the Names of Ijaw Communities to Bini names. If they were the owners of these communities, why the need for the change of names that have existed since origin?

We are not bothered with the press conference addressed by the Bini Traditional Council on behalf of the Oba of Benin, but we are shocked with the statement of the Governor of Edo State Mr. Godwin N. Obaseki who at the course of his electioneering campaign came to the Ijaw people at Gele-gelegbene to solicit for votes. These izon people comprising of all the five (5) ijaw Kingdoms of Edo State, where you were duly introduced to the Ijaw Peres (kings) and elders. You recalled that this same Pere Godwin Ogunyiebo was the person you solicited for his support and blessings. He prayed for you to win the election with our Native Kola nut and Local gin.

It is our worry that Government all over the world stands as the umbrella body that protect its people irrespective of tribe, race and religion and cannot be different in the case of Edo State.

Every Government must be non-political, non-religious and non-tribal. However, we felt disappointed that the Government of Edo State under the leadership of Godwin N. Obaseki through the SSG (Osarodion Ogie Esq) have become the official mouth piece of the Bini Traditional Council, what a pity, we don’t know why these educated persons and political leaders should allow themselves to be used as a free tool in the hands of the Bini Traditional Council to do injustice within Edo State.

It is ironical that the Government of Edo State through its SSG to have exposed their crash ignorance when they claimed that Ikoro community and all other Ijaw communities in Edo State and the title of the Pere of Olodiama Kingdom are non-existent as such criminal.

We agree with the submission of Senator Matthew Urhoghide that the Binis in the South Senatorial District have just one traditional ruler who is the Oba of Benin, but that is not applicable to the Ijaws who are not Binis.

Our position is that our communities with the Peres as king have being in existence since time out of mind.

We wish to remind the Edo State Government and the Bini Traditional Council that the Pere of Olodiama is gazetted in the mid-western State of Nigeria. Gazette No. 56 of 18th October 1973.

Even before the said gazette, the Ijaw people of Olodiama clan have their recognized Pere of Olodiama with his seat at Ikoro in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. A case in point was the coronation of Ogunyiebo Asulu as the Pere of Olodiama at Ikoro which was evidenced as published in the Daily Times Newspapers of 27th February. 1958.

These recent display of the Edo State Government and the Bini Traditional Council speak reasons behind the wisdom of the Nbanefo led Federal Government Constituent Assembly report of 1988 – 1989 vol. 2 p. 492 which recommended the creation of a separate Local Government Area for the Ijaws of the present day Edo State for the following reasons;

(i) **Riverine locations** (ii) **Inaccessibility** (iii) **Not thoroughly assimilated by the Binis** (iv) **Denial of development** (v) **very rich in natural resources** (vi) **population** **high** etc.

It is our further contention that the Edo State Government in the said Statement claimed that the actions of the Ijaws of Edo State to continue with the coronation of the long existing title of their Pere (king) of Olodiama is sacrilegious is another irony. They know that our culture, language, dressing code and custom from birth to death are different. Can the Binis impose their king and traditions on the Ijaws?

What can be more sacrilegious than to denying a people (the Ijaws of Edo State) of their right to existence and their good customs and traditions? This we state is contrary to our fundamental rights as preserved in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 and the African peoples rights, etc.

We further state clearly that the Ijaw people are distinct tribe/ethnic group from the Binis people and do not have anything in common; traditionally and historically except that we are neighbors.

According to Professor Allan Rider in his book “Bini and the Europeans” 1485-1897, published 1967, page 27.

Whichever of the “Slave Rivers” the Portuguese frequented, the people they first met would have belonged to the Ijohs (Ijaws), which dominated the coastal belt and swamp forest, extending hinterland to a depth of 30 to 40 miles in this region.

He went further to State in page 28 thus…

“The Bini Edo lived now as they seem then, outside the swamp forest area…. And there are no reasons for believing that it ever extended to the coast, nor are the Edo of Bini ever river farers or canoe men…

It is on record that Late Oba Akenzua II of blessed memory sent his son, then crown prince Erediauwa (Late Oba Erediauwa of blessed memory) in 1958 to Ikoro to represent him in the installation of the Pere of Olodiama, Pere Asulu Ogunyiebo (the traditional head of the Ijaws of Olodiama). Why is Olodiama and other Ijaw clans now a threat to the Binis?

We owe His Excellency the Executive Governor of Edo State, his Deputy and all those in places of authority our genuine prayers and blessings for them to succeed in their endeavors trusting that God the creator of the Heavens and the Earth is seated on HIS THRONE.

For and behalf of the traditional rulers, the Amaokosuotus, Chiefs and good people of Egbema, Okomu, Furupagha and Gbaraun clans (kingdoms).

Rev. Professor C.A. Dime
Deacon Robinson Agbede
James Okubokekemi
Chief A. Oweikoru. Chief J. Wodubam. Chief AfroToidegha

Elder Paul Atite
Elder Jacob Owu