

Joint Press Statement

Diversion Of N90B (\$300M) Budweiser/Heru Brewery Investment To Southwest As Confirmation Of Failed Political Leadership In Igbo Land

---SBCHROs

(Onitsha Nigeria: 30th August 2018)-It is shocking and heartbreaking observing the unfolding social, political and economic events or activities in Igbo Land of Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi, Abia, Delta (Igbo Delta) and Rivers (Igbo Rivers) as well as other Igbo speaking areas in Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, Benue and Kogi States. The most saddening of it all is that these disturbing social happenings are compounded, worsened and escalated on daily basis by chronic leadership failure, selfish, pedestal and clannish politics of the public office holders especially governors and state and federal legislators in Igbo Land.

The Igbo Nation and her indigenous Land have never been so desecrated, decimated, pierced, invaded and occupied; underdeveloped, destroyed, un-secured and unprotected in any non-war situation in Nigeria than since 2015. The Land is so militarized and conquered that the present governors who say they are “chief security officers” are nothing more than “chief dogaris” or “chief police/revenue agents of the ruling caliphate” in Nigeria.

The collective and territorial security of the Igbo Nation have been so porous, bastardized and compromised that “the fear by serving Igbo governors, of Fulani Herdsmen and their cattle as well lopsided federal police and military formations and their commanders in Igbo Land is not only the beginning of their wisdom, but also a non-tradable condition to be returned or continued in office as “elected governors”.

Just recently, a comrade, who hails from Oji River LGA of Enugu State, reported to Intersociety how he traveled to his hometown and met Fulani Herdsmen and their cattle running riot on his cultivated farmland and on reaching his farm, he found his crops completely razed and destroyed with the herdsmen and their cattle turning same into foliage and settlement, refusing to leave.

On account of his close relationship with one of the principal officers of the Enugu State House of Assembly who also hails from same area, he made a call to him to report the incident; only to be told by the said principal state legislator that “there is a standing order from the office of the State Governor that “nobody or community should disturb the movement and activities of the Fulani Herdsmen and their cattle in any part of the State for safety of the Governor’s second term bid and continuation in office”.

Despite dearth or acute shortage of lands and gross mismanagement of same by political office holders in Igbo Land, strategic part of what remains of virgin forests in the Geopolitical Zone has cowardly, fearfully, clannishly and selfishly been ceded to members of the Jihadist Fulani grouping and their godfathers in the federal political and security establishments. Using “army python dance series” and “leprous power protection” in Igbo Land as excuses, such forests or bushes are annexed and ceded with reckless abandon to the Jihadists by the cowardly Governors, in return for continuation and conclusion of their eight years maximum tenure as governors of their respective States as if power and political office do not have end time or expiration.

The worst and most shocking of it all is chronic turning into private business, power play, abuse of office, extravagant and lustful lifestyle and mindless thievery by many, if not most of these Igbo governors, legislators and other federal and state appointed public officers; of gubernatorial, legislative and appointive public offices. They are also fond of making maximum use of “psychology of politics” or deceit and brainwashing; cashing in on teething mass poverty, dry quest by Igbo private citizens to acquire private and material cash at all costs as well as mass ignorance among rural and urban adult population (i.e. limited education and intellectual clannishness).

Clannish or pedestal or selfish politicking or power tussle by these governors and legislators of Igbo stock is also another destructive factor responsible for present political, economic and social woes bedeviling the Igbo Nation and their land. Totality of these in addition to blatant lack of clear leadership direction and humanity service has grossly retarded growth and development in Igbo Land.

Political leadership in Igbo Nation is further acutely dominated by political actors who have no iota of attachment to humanity service except consumption and profligacy cloaked in the layers of nepotism and favoritism; especially where commonwealth that is traditionally meant for collective development and other public good is mindlessly diverted and shared by few political actors instead of using same for public good or socioeconomic turnarounds.

Particularly saddening and shocking was the recent diversion or relocation, construction, expansion and commissioning (28th August 2018) of a gargantuan N90billion (\$300M) Budweiser/Hero Beer Breweries in Shagamu, Ogun State, Yoruba Land or Southwest Nigeria. The Brewery; brewers of Hero and Budweiser Beers as well as Grand and Beta Malt, among over half a dozen other alcoholic and soft drinks, was originally attracted to Nigeria in the 90s by former Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State in his private capacity as an international investor-businessman. The Company, originally “SabMiller Breweries” from South Africa, was recently purchased and taken over by AB InBev (Anheuser-Busch InBev SA/NV), a multinational drinks and brewery holdings company, based in Leuven, Belgium with global net value of \$115 billion.

Obi followed it up when he became Anambra State Governor and succeeded in getting the Company to invest and situate its giant Plant in the Harbour Industrial Layout part of Onitsha and Ogbaru; where it procured and paid for a parcel of land belonging to the General Cotton Mills (GCM) and injected not less than N30billion or \$100m (calculation based on official exchange rate) into the Onitsha Plant. The Plant at its commissioning instantly created 200 direct and over 2000 indirect jobs, mostly involving sons and daughters of Igbo Nation. Anambra State Government till date maintains 5% stake in the Company.

The Company, since its inception in the State in 2010, has continued to pay hundreds of millions of naira as tax into the coffers of the Government of Anambra State; making it the highest tax payer in the State with tens of millions of naira monthly. The Hero Beer Company has also doled out hundreds of millions of naira worth of cash, materials or kind in fulfillment of its corporate social responsibility obligations to Government and People of Anambra State in particular and the entire Igbo Nation in general. It has further served as a formidable source of investment, employment and poverty reduction mechanisms in the State in particular and Igbo Land in general. The Company and the Nigerian Brewery facility in Udi, near Enugu State Capital City are the two most surviving and largest industries in Igbo Land today.

Recent findings by Intersociety clearly show that the “Hero Beer” and its symbol was made to look as if it is uniquely designed for Igbo Nation and her heroic struggle to wriggle herself out of the age long persecution in the hands of other partners in the “Nigerian Project”. In subsequent informal field investigations carried out in some hotel bars and restaurants in Lagos State, Southwest Nigeria, for instance, Intersociety found that patronage by members or citizens of the Yoruba Nation associated with “Hero Beer” and her sister products is acutely low; compared to that of citizens of Igbo Nation resident in Lagos State which is very high.

It also means that “Hero Beer” is very unpopular among citizens of the Yoruba Nation because it is designed to look as if it is Igbo friendly, leading to its rightly or wrongly description by some Nigerians including both citizens of Yoruba (negatively) and Igbo (positively) Nations as “Ojukwu De Hero’s Beer”. On the other hand, the products of the Nigerian Breweries such as Heineken, Guilder and Star Beers and Amstel Malt and Maltina soft drinks, etc and the Nigerian Guinness products such as Stout, Harp and Malta Guinness, etc are found to have recorded high patronage among the citizens of the Yoruba Nation because they are not “Igbo or Ojukwu’s beers and soft drinks”. In many restaurants and hotel bars owned by citizens of Yoruba Nation in Lagos, “Hero Beer and associates” were scanty available whereas in those owned by Igbo citizens, reverse was the case.

Where their availability is high in hotel bars and restaurants of Yoruba citizens’ ownership, it was found to be chiefly on account of large patronage by citizens of Igbo Nation and those of South-south and non Muslim Northern Nigeria. In other areas of the Yoruba Nation with scanty presence of resident Igbo citizens, patronage associated with “Hero Beer and associates” is acutely low. During the recently concluded World Cup tournament in Russia during which Hero Beer’s sister: “Budweiser was the global lead sponsor and beer drink”, most of the patronage in Nigeria was drawn from the same friendly and liberal population of Igbo and other non Yoruba stocks.

In other checks carried out to ascertain the rate or percentage of patronage by citizens of the Igbo Nation concerning products of the Nigerian Breweries and those of the Nigerian Guinness (i.e. Harp, Star, Life, Guilder, Heineken and Stout Beers, etc and Maltina, Amstel and Malta Guinness, etc), the patronage was found unchanged with no sign of discrimination or tagging of same by Igbo citizens as “Yoruba Beers and soft drinks”.

The above analysis is therefore presented here to unmask the age long politics of hatred and discrimination going on in Nigeria especially against the Igbo Nation and her citizens. It is consequent upon these unbecoming treatments against the Igbo Nation and her People that Intersociety had in 2016 identified “physical violence, structural violence and cultural violence” as three hydra headed monsters responsible for ordeal which the Igbo Nation and her People had steadily been facing in the country; with Igbo political leaders worsening the situation by either playing to the gallery or becoming complicit in same.

It must be remembered that former Governor Peter Obi nearly died in a suspicious plane crash while shuttling in the air in the course of wrestling the strong forces from the Southwest who were bent at ensuring that the “Sabmiller” Breweries was never originally located in Igbo Land; an effort that just paid off in their favor. SBCHROs also has it on good authority that the Budweiser and Hero Breweries Company approached the present Governor of Anambra State twice for allocation and acquisition of a larger parcel of land to expand their facilities, but got cold response, forcing them to abandon their third scheduled meeting in frustration, leading to relocation to Shagamu in Ogun State, Southwest Nigeria.

At the commissioning of the N90billion project on 28th August 2018 with full support and presence of the Governor of Ogun State and members of his cabinet, instant employment of 600 direct or skilled laborers and no fewer than 2000 unskilled or indirect laborers was announced. The employment rate is also expected to hit thousands and tens of thousands for the skilled and the unskilled involving sons and daughters of the Yoruba Nation in coming years; in addition to projected monthly tax payment of hundreds of millions of naira into the coffers of the Government of Ogun State.

Social and economic consequences of loss of the gargantuan N90 billion Brewery investments to Yoruba Nation; on Igbo Nation and her People are innumerable. For instance, Anambra State and the entire Igbo Nation as the largest consumers of the Brewery’s products will now be pumping billions of naira into Ogun and Southwest or Yoruba economy; in the form of “let Okeke buys and drinks, but let Adekunle have the cash”.

More shocking is the fact that the God given brewery located at the heart of the Igbo Nation is now taken more than 150kilometers farther away from the heart of Igbo Land; to the extent that the products of the Brewery will now be produced outside Igbo Land with Igbo money, loaded in containers and long trucks and paid for with Igbo money, procured their trucks with Igbo money, crisscrossed over 150 kilometers from Shagamu (Yoruba Land) to Onitsha (Igbo Land) with sundry security roadblock extortions and government revenue ticket purchases.

The products will now, too, be trans-loaded and offloaded with Igbo money, warehoused with Igbo money and bought and consumed in Igbo Land with Igbo money. It is also most likely that the Company's original facilities in Onitsha will soon be dismantled and relocated to Shagamu with its zinc structures retained skeletally as its "Onitsha satellite warehouse or depot". Deep fears also abound over the likelihood of changing the name of "Hero Beer" with its perceived heroic Igbo symbol and replaced with a possible symbol of its new host geopolitical Zone or entity.

It is therefore heartbreaking and condemnable for the affairs of the Igbo Nation to be left in the hands of "apostles of stomach infrastructure and casino bar disco dancers" parading themselves as "elected" and "appointed" public office holders in Igbo Land. It does not border them at all that perpetrators of physical violence, structural violence and cultural violence against the Igbo Nation and her People have sworn never to allow the Race to reap from fruit of their hard labor.

Despite controlling over 60% of the country's trade and investment, yet hash federal and regional policies have remained in place ensuring zero presence of functional international passenger and cargo airports, seaports and wharfs, railways, seaport bridges and roads as well as establishment of diplomatic missions anywhere in Igbo Land. Such age long hash policies are designed to make Igbo Nation and her People mere spectators in the Nigerian Economy with political leaders in Igbo Land chronically circling and recycling political frivolities, irrelevancies, shortsightedness, leprously and brigandage.

Signed:

For: SBCHROs (Southeast Based Coalition of Human Rights & Good Governance Organizations)

- * **Int'l Society for Civil Liberties & the Rule of Law**
- * **Civil Liberties Organization, Southeast Zone**
- * **Centre for Human Rights & Peace Advocacy**
- * **Human Rights Organization of Nigeria**
- * **Society Watch & Advocacy Project**
- * **Anambra Human Rights Forum**
- * **Southeast Good Governance Forum**
- * **Int'l Solidarity for Peace & Human Rights Initiative**
- * **Igbo Ekunie Initiative**
- * **Civil Liberties Organization, Anambra State Branch**
- * **Foundation for Environmental Rights Advocacy & Dev**
- * **Society for Economic Rights & Social Justice**

*** Initiative for Ideal Dev & Emancipatory Leadership in Nigeria**

*** Igbo National Council**

*** Forum for Promotion of National Ethos & Values**

*** Easy Life Initiative for Rural Youths**

*** Voice of the Voiceless Int'l**