

## Investigation Report: Harvest Of Sundry Extortion And Return Of Criminal Entities In Anambra State

### Gov Obiano Must Not Allow The State To Crumble & Sink Under His Watch

**(Intersociety Nigeria: 14<sup>th</sup> September 2018)**-Intersociety is deeply worried and concerned that Anambra State of Nigeria under the present Government of Governor Willie Obiano is not only losing it at alarm rate but also heading back to her former vicious categorization as “Home for All” or era when the fear of retreatists, street urchins, brigands, touts, thugs and other social renegades was the beginning of wisdom for their fearers in the State.

Governor Willie Obiano must watch it before the State crumbles and sinks under his watch. Renegades must no longer be allowed to take over and oversee the collective affairs and patrimony of the good People of Anambra State. Late literary icon, Prof Chinua Achebe rejected a national honour on account of this when the then Federal Government of Nigeria in 2004 aided renegades and enemies of the human family to burn down the State and turned same into the “state of nature”. Such inglorious epoch must not be allowed a space in the State again; not under the watch of Governor William Maduabuchukwu Obiano!

Things are speedily falling apart in the State, to the extent that the State’s super road network is presently in tatters; likewise its flood channels, gutters and waterways. Road maintenance, completion of those already awarded including those started and advanced by the past Administration or construction and completion of new ones are presently at ground zero.

Serving commissioners and other key appointees of the present State Government are not helping matters and have permanently bottled themselves in their office chairs and tables in most despicable armchair manner, leaving the State to slip back into the hands of criminal entities. The commissioner-level appointees of the Government of Anambra State who waste tens of millions of naira monthly from the lean coffers of the State as “statutory remunerations”; without anything to show for it, must un-bottle themselves and return the State to the path of meaningful governance or resign.

How are we sure that these idly seated commissioners are not the brains behind or complicit in the ongoing “economic crimes against humanity” being unleashed on innocent and law abiding citizens of the State? We are totally at loss as when it has become a crime in the State to be hard working and depend less on Government for survival. The commissioner-level appointees of the Obiano Government are so dull, docile and incompetent that they do not understand the basic duties of their respective ministries.

The Government of Anambra State is totally condemned for flooding or encouraging the flooding of all nooks and crannies of the State with revenue touts instead of adopting the global practice of unification and sanitization of revenue generation using data base management and digitalization. It is most likely correct to say that the present Government of Anambra State does not know the number of market stalls, commercial buildings, boreholes, tricycles, SHUTTLE and L300 commercial buses and other commercial transport operators as well as other potential revenue windows available in the State. Even the Okada motorcycles and private motorcycles the same Government unilaterally and magisterially banned recently, we are now convinced than before that no in-depth study including database of their operators and social consequences of banning them was ever conducted.

A focused and development oriented State Government should have made maximum use of ICT resources to launch feasibility studies on State revenue potentials. It is totally unheard of and socially sacrilegious to ban citizens from owning and riding private motorcycles. This is a clear violation or breach of their fundamental rights to freedom of movement and ownership of moveable and immoveable properties as contained in Sections 41 and 44 of the Constitution of Nigeria 1999.

A detailed feasibility study should have opened the eyes of the State Government on great revenue potentials abound in the State. If Okada motorcycles and their riders were captured in database and decentralized including keeping them off all major roads but allowing them to operate in street routes, the State Government would have been raking in hundreds of millions yearly from Okada motorcycles alone and still use same to provide alternative employment and control social deviances and crimes.

Every Okada rider in the State should have been captured in a State database including capturing his or her biometrics. This would have made Okada riding in the State non-transferable and restrict same to designated route, making it offence to any Okada rider to operate outside his or her approved area. This process of digitalization of Okada riding would have achieved multiple purposes and gains including controlling criminal activities, curbing extortions and youth militancy, tracking and generating huge revenues from the industry, curbing incidents of Okada accidents, allowing private motorcycle owners to operate and phasing out road, traffic and environmentally unfriendly motorcycles and their models, etc.

Two of the major problems facing the present Government of Anambra State, apart from its over-bloated cabinet size, etc, are armchair syndrome and absence of data base. The Peter Obi Administration also failed in this area on account of zero database and non digitalization of its revenue generation. Lagos State is a typical example of a State with sound revenue database and digitalization, today, the State maintains yearly IGR economy of over N300b, generating over N25b monthly. The Obi Administration was consoled by its goodwill with several int'l development agencies; same acutely lacking in the Obiano Administration.

We therefore make bold to say that the harvest of extortions unleashed on Anambra citizens and residents are partly, if not substantially fallout of blanket bans placed on commercial and private motorcycles and their owners in the State since July 2018. It is a settled knowledge that human survival is non-negotiable in life and as a living member of human family; survival by any means especially that dealing with basic necessities of life is inevitable; which is why Government must at all times be careful in its policies and conducts. Throwing over 40,000 Okada riders into joblessness and acute hunger without realistic remedies is socially disastrous. It is tantamount to raising more armed robbers and kidnapers of today and tomorrow.

It is therefore deeply sad that rather than citizens depending on Government for alleviation of reasonable part of their social plight, Government of Anambra State and her genuine and crooked agents have turned around and held them hostage. It is correct to say that the chief motive behind the setting up by the Government of Anambra State of various agencies with their different names and operational styles is for extortionist money making which have never reflected correctly in the financial status of the State till date.

By the amount of Government extortion going on in all nooks and crannies of the State, the IGR status of the State should have been in the neighborhood of N8b to N10b monthly, but the reverse is acutely the case showing clearly that the citizens of the State are being punished for being hard working and law abiding. The citizens of the State have consistently paid through their nose and contributed immensely for the development of the State with little or nothing to show for it on the part of the present Government of Anambra State. With the available IGR potentials of the State, Anambra ought to be the second largest and richest non oil IGR State in Nigeria after Lagos.

Today, Anambra State is not only losing over N1b monthly to the Governor of the State including his over-bloated cabinet size of no less than 1200 appointees. The said over N1b is tagged “Governor’s monthly security votes”, yet the State through her citizens loses another N800m to N1b annually to sundry extortions by various security agencies of the Federal Government stationed in the State.

Citizens of the State are made to believe that chunk of the over N1b “monthly security votes” is spent to augment the logistical and operational supports of the army, police, navy, SSS and NSCDC formations in the State; yet the same citizens end up being at the receiving end with the same federal security formations turning their guns and beast sides against the same citizens they are supported to protect or defend.

**Statistics of the Sundry Extortions:** The sundry extortions and other social vices afflicting the State are perpetrated by the following twenty entities: *(1) Mobile and Regular Police units of the Nigeria Police Force through their roadblocks and custody activities, (2) the Nigerian Army, (3) the Nigerian Navy, (4) the Nigerian Security & Civil Defense Corps, (5) the Federal Road Safety Corps, (6) Anambra State Traffic Control Agency, (7) Anambra State Road Decongestion Agency, (8) Anambra State Urban Development Board, (9) Anambra State Building Construction Material Test Agency and (10) Anambra State Waste Management Authority.*

*Others are: (11) violent revenue taskforces stationed by the State’s 21 Local Government Areas’ transition committee chairmen, (12) extortionist agents stationed by greedy State and Federal lawmakers, (13) extortionist agents stationed by leaders of criminal youth groups/garage/motor park operators, (14) extortionist agents stationed by violent market leaders/vigilante commanders (i.e. pits or boots), (15) illegal revenue collectors privately stationed by greedy commissioners and other key government appointees, (16) violent revenue collectors maintained by landlords associations, (17) violent revenue collectors raised by town unions/traditional rulers, (18) violent commercial transport unions’ taskforces such as KEKE, SHUTTLE and L300 buses; lorries and trailers, (19) violent revenue contractors hired by the State Government and the 21 Local Government Areas and (20) violent revenue agents working for various federal revenue agencies stationed on Anambra Federal Roads.*

**Patterns:** The sundry extortions are majorly located on roads and building sites across the State. Some have their extortion modes “digitalized” while others have theirs done in the open. “Digitalized” mode of extortion is perpetrated when the extortionist squads hire civilians to extort for them with percentage rewards at the end of each day. Perpetrators of this crime or social vice are soldiers of the Nigerian Army and the personnel of the Nigerian Navy and the Federal Road Safety Corps.

Under this, every lorry or trailer that is loaded with goods is made to part with N1000 at every military checkpoint, while every loaded L300 bus parts with N200 or more. The Nigerian Navy checkpoint at Atani Road Junction is a typical case in point and used here as our case study. We had in our recent investigation in the area found various “digitalized” patterns applied to extort money. The Navy extortion in the area is called “ego navy” or navy fee.

Under this, a group of agents are appointed among the leaders of commercial transport unions and roadside markets in the area and charged to collect the fee with sheets of paper bearing those that paid and those yet to pay. This pattern is extended to the Fegge part of Uga Junction or areas under Onitsha South Local Government. There are also agents in charge of collecting “approval fee” from destitute before being allowed to beg for alms around the area.

Our checks show that every passenger-carrying KEKE operator parts with N100 daily as “navy fee”; likewise each SHUTTLE bus and L300 bus driver, while every 608 bus parts with N200. The case of each tipper lorry loaded with sand is different as it must part with N200 for each of the trips covered. This means further that a lorry tipper loaded with sand that passes the Navy checkpoint ten times a day must part with N2000.

Each trailer loaded with goods pays N500 or N1000 and every truck or mini truck with goods that passes the Navy Checkpoint at the said Atani Road/Uga Junction parts with N200. To collect the N200 extortion, a group of fiery looking young men are hired and used with agreed percentage cuts at the end of the daily “extortionist business” Apart from the sundry extortions at the Atani Road/Uga Junction Navy Checkpoint, those coming from or heading to Atani are also made to pass through same extortion at the second Navy Checkpoint located in front of its temporary site along Atani-Ogwuikpere Road, Ogbaru. Sand excavators along same Road are also victims of the Nigerian Navy’s sundry extortions.

Similar patterns are applied at the Army Checkpoint situated at the Onitsha Niger Bridgehead; likewise that of the Asaba end of the Benin-Asaba Expressway. At these two army checkpoints, every loaded trailer or 911 Lorry or trailer with container-goods is forced to part with N1000 and above. All the transport unions around the area are also not spared. These “digitalized” patterns of extortion are also applied in other Army checkpoints where road users are many; and where such checkpoints are located in areas with less number of road users, the extortionist attention is focused more on commercial transporters; using hired civilian agents.

Personnel of the Federal Road Safety Corps in Anambra State are also found to be engaged in similar “digital” extortion especially those involving commercial road users who usually park their vehicles meters away from the FRSC checkpoints, locate the hired agents and part with agreed amount before continuing their journey.

The personnel of the Nigeria Police Force, on their part, apply open mode of extortion, which they brazenly apply with impunity. Major routes and corners of Anambra State especially in Onitsha, Nnewi and environs are presently flooded with police roadblocks. The patrol vans bought with Anambra public funds have since become instruments used for roadblock extortion. The police roadblock extortion in Anambra State is majorly drawn from monies they collect openly from commercial motorists and those paid to them by private motorists or extortions arising from checks on “stolen vehicles” or “incomplete vehicle papers”. Police stations in the State have also become bazaar scenes on account of “bail fees” associated with indiscriminate arrest, detention and commercialization of their so called “investigations”. Operatives of the Police SARS even go as far as inflicting physical torture and injuries on detained citizens so as to force them pay heavily as “bail fees”.

Amounts extorted at police roadblocks also vary. Each loaded KEKE or SHUTTLE bus is forced to pay N50 while each loaded L300 bus parts with N100; N200 for each loaded Coaster bus; and N500 for each loaded 608 bus. Those carrying passengers and goods at the same time are targeted for more extortion and payment of higher sums. Police road block extortion in Anambra State is so bad and untamed that women petty traders selling vegetables, corns, yams and other foodstuff are also stopped on their way to market and extorted. In rural areas of the State, police presence increases on specific market day of a particular community. For instance, police presence is found to increase along Nnobi-Igboukwu Road on every Nkwo-Igbo market day; likewise increase of police presence along Atani-Ogwuikpere and Atani-Ozubulu Roads on every Afor Atani Food Stuff Market day in Ogbaru Local Government Area.

Generally, harvest of extortions in Anambra State are concentrated in five major locations; namely: road based extortions, motor parks/garage based extortions, warehouse/parking store based extortions, building site based extortions and police custody based extortions. Police custody extortions occur when arrested and detained

citizens are forced or threatened to pay sundry sums of unlawful fees as bail fees to regain their temporary freedom. Road based extortions which constitute about 60% of the five extortion categories are rampantly used in the State by eighteen of the named twenty extortionist entities.

Building site based extortions are commonly perpetrated by the Anambra State Building Construction Material Test Agency and the Anambra State Urban Development Board; likewise Town Union Dev Associations and Landlords Associations. Building site based extortions are classified into “Landlords, Town Union and Anambra State Government Dev Levies”. In Oba Community, for instance, there exists another version of extortion called “Odinana Fee” which is pegged at N120, 000 per plot. The Oba Town Union Dev Levy is also pegged at N350,000 per plot while in other areas like Ogbaru, Obosi, Nkwere, Nsugbe, Nkpor, Ogidi, Ogbunike, etc, same amount or more is charged and collected by their respective town unions as “development levies”; excluding those charged and collected by their respective landlords associations.

In all these, the Government of Anambra State leads the way with different types of extortion, further duplicated by caretaker committee chairmen of the State’s 21 LGAs. The trio of the State Urban Dev Board, State Waste Management Authority and State Building Construction Material Test Agency are nothing short of extortionist agencies. Once a builder is capable of paying huge amounts demanded running into hundreds of thousands of naira per Government Agency and per builder/building site, he or she is allowed to construct his or her building even if it means erecting a petroleum filling station in a densely populated residential area or construction of a commercial building on the edge of drainage or gutter or waterway.

Similar Government extortion follows construction of building site with sub standard building materials. Once the builder pays the amount being demanded, he or she instantly secures the nod of those in charge of testing of the building materials particularly the iron rods. A builder of private or commercial house in an Anambra urban area is specifically made to pay the State Government hundreds of thousands of naira each; for “approval to build”, “registration of the building”, “ASWAMA inspection fee”, “ASUDEB approval fee” and “approval fee for testing of iron rods, cement, bricks, etc”. These do not include obtainment of tax clearance, etc involving another huge spending.

In reality, payment of such huge sums demanded is the major focus of the concerned Government Agencies. The concerned Government Agencies such as ASWAMA, ASUDEB or that said to have been created to ensure strict adherence to prescribed building construction standards, are found to show little or no interests at ensuring strict adherence by building contractors and owners of same to prescribed standards. Indiscriminate erection of “boys’ quarters”, for instance, is a major contributor to littering of streets and roads with functional and mal-functional private and commercial vehicles. Spaces used in building “boys’ quarters” are spaces originally included in the plots of land for parking of vehicles when main commercial buildings must have been erected.

It is also extortionately hellish on-loading, trans-loading and off-loading goods in Anambra State today. Such commercial activity attracts over ten different squads in a location with many arming themselves with machetes and other dangerous weapons demanding sundry fees with different government tickets. It is very life threatening being sighted with a bag or a carton of purchased items or even a bag of rice from Onitsha Main Market or any other in Onitsha, Nnewi and environs; unless the owner is ready to part with N200 per pit or boot or thousands of naira before reaching his or her final destination.

All the roads leading to Onitsha Main Market are presently flooded with fierce looking and dangerously armed street urchins or retreatists. There are more than seven extortion boots from Onitsha Main Market to Niger Bridgehead attracting N200 per boot or N1400 per user of the route seen with a carton of purchased items even if it contains toilet tissues. Under this, a bag of rice bought from Onitsha Main Market instantly attracts N1400 between the Market and Niger Bridgehead or N2000 if the buyer lives in Iyiowa Layout in Ogbaru or Awada Layout in Obosi.

Just few days ago, a trader at the Allied Tools Market, near Onitsha Bridgehead told Intersociety how he was forced under threat of violence to part with N800 (at N200 per pit) when he encountered four extortionist pits mounted by revenue agents of the Government of Anambra State. He had gone to Onitsha Upper Iweka to deliver a small carton of goods worth N10, 000 when he encountered four extortionist pits manned by fierce looking revenue touts hired by the Government of Anambra State.

While one of the pits forcefully collected N200 from him and refused to issue him any ticket, the three others issued him tickets bearing: "Government of Anambra State Onitsha North Senatorial District KEKE Daily Toll", "Anambra State Waste Management Authority Loading KEKE/Mini Truck Sanitation Daily Toll" and "Ministry of Local Government Unified Anambra State Local Government Daily Toll Ticket". The victim trader further told Intersociety that when he complained to the KEKE driver that took him to Upper Iweka, he got dumbfounded after he was shown ten tickets worth N2000 which the KEKE rider had already paid for before noon of same day.

Other markets in Onitsha Zone such as Bridgehead, Relief, Ochanja, Old and New Motor Spare Parts, Electronics, New Tyre, Stockfish, Foodstuff, Electrical and Ogbunike Building Materials and Bakery Markets are also not spared; likewise other markets located in Awka, Nnewi, Ihiala, Ekwulobia, Nsugbe and Nkwere areas of Anambra State.

Intersociety further went around and counted over 100 sundry extortionist squads operating in different styles and names between Electrical Market along Owerri Road and Ezeiweka/Ogbaru Relief Market and Obodoukwu Road; Chioma Layout in Ogbaru and Harbor Industrial Drive/Ejimkonye and Navy Checkpoint at Uga Junction; Upper Iweka TRACAS Park and Onitsha Niger Bridgehead; Uga Street and Port Harcourt Road/Iron Dealers Market; Niger Street and Sokoto Road/Onitsha Main Market; and Bida Road and Venn Road/Modebe Avenue/Iweka Road/Ochanja Market Roundabout.

The number sighted and counted was done briefly, suggesting that their number was likely to be much higher. The sighted and counted extortionist squads did not include dozens of police roadblocks and other military checkpoints mounted in the areas visited.

**Photos: (1) Innocent passersby tortured and forced inside a pit at the Uga/Atani Road Junction Navy Checkpoint, Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria and (2) group of young men seen here in cluster at Atani Road/Uga Junction hired by Nigerian Navy to extort money for them from load-carrying lorries and trucks.**

Signed

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