



## International Society For Civil Liberties & The Rule Of Law



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### Resident & Ancestral Igbo People In Benue Under Attacks & Threats Of Annihilation –Intersociety

#### Letter To Benue State Governor

2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019

- H.E., Mr. Samuel Ortom  
Executive Governor of Benue State  
Office of the Governor, Government House  
Makurdi, Benue State, North-central Nigeria
- Mr. Garba Mukaddas  
Commissioner of Police, Benue State Command  
The Benue State Police Command Headquarters  
Makurdi, Benue State, North-central Nigeria

Your Excellency & Dear Commissioner of Police,

#### Resident And Ancestral Igbo People In Benue State Are Facing Coordinated Attacks & Threats Of Annihilation

Above subject matter refers

**About Us:** International Society for Civil Liberties & the Rule of Law is a registered non-governmental and nonprofit human rights, democracy, rule of law and public security and safety advocacy group in Nigeria since 2008. It is based in Onitsha (430003), Eastern Nigeria (+234). Intersociety thematically campaigns for respect, promotion and advancement of *democracy and good governance, civil liberties and rule of law and public security and safety*. It has also earned a name in research, investigation, documentation and publications. Intersociety is led by professionals and grassroots activists including criminologists, security studies experts, lawyers, journalists and peace and conflict resolution practitioners, etc.

The immediate attention of Your Excellency and that of Benue State Commissioner of Police are drawn concerning coordinated, ceaseless and untamed attacks against resident and ancestral Igbo People in Benue State. Not only that the businesses of the resident Igbo Population in the State are in ruins but also their lives and liberties and those of their ancestral brothers and sisters particularly those located in Ado, Oju, Obi and Okpoku Local Government Areas of the State are severely threatened and endangered. As a matter of fact, Your Excellency, they are presently facing serious of threats of annihilation and total ruination of their legitimate businesses.

As Your Excellency is most likely aware, Igbo People in Benue State are presently made up of 'Igbo People of Benue' or ancestral Igbo People of the State and 'Igbo People in Benue State' or resident Igbo Population in the State. The former are those who migrated to the area on their own and those excised or carved into the State as a result of 'politics of State and Local Government creation and boundary adjustment' particularly in the exercises that took place in 1968 and 1976. The latter, on their part, are those who reside in the State for purposes of doing business and office work. A fraction of others are those who reside in the State for purpose of schooling.

The population of Igbo People in Benue State is independently estimated at one million or more with indigenously locatable 300 villages or more. The 'resident Igbo People in the State' are majorly found in Gboko, Adikpo-Kwande, Ukum, Zaki-Biam and Katsina-Ala LGAs of the State, while their ancestral brothers and sisters are found to be dominant in Ado, Oju, Obi and Okpoku Local Government Areas of the State. The two sets of Igbo Population are facing 'indigenized' violent attacks (i.e. armed robbery and abduction-for-ransom perpetrated by 'local gangs', notorious political thugs and other criminal elements of the State origin) and ethno-religious violent attacks (perpetrated by invading Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen and their sister "bandits" or 'business kidnapping variant of the terror Fulani Herdsmen'). The third form of the attacks is the structural violence or acute Government neglect including communal under-development, political segregation and exclusion, etc.

As publicly disclosed recently, Your Excellency, the situation is so dire that in the past eight months of 2019 or between Jan and August, no fewer than 50 Igbo citizens in the State were abducted for ransom and ethno-religious purposes. Among the abductees, scores have been killed or abducted without traces till date. This is even after huge ransoms involving millions of naira for each victim were paid. From available independent records, Your Excellency, not less than N277m (\$900,000) had been paid by the kidnap victims as ransoms from Feb 2017 till date. The leaders of the two Igbo Populations further disclosed that the kidnap-for-ransom and targeted armed robbery are majorly perpetrated by the indigenes of Benue State including notorious political thugs, local gangs and other criminal elements who double as kidnapers.

In the case of targeted killings, abductions and communal displacement including land seizure and confiscation and attacks on farmlands and sacred places of worship (i.e. churches), the invading Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen and their sister 'bandits' are strongly fingered or accused. Authorities of the Government of Benue State, the Federal Government and the aforementioned Local Government Areas are further accused of acute neglect of the ancestral Igbo communities. The neglect includes lack of access roads, safe drinking water, good health, educational and electricity facilities as well as political exclusion and insecurity of life and property. Members of the ancestral Igbo Population are also discriminated against on the grounds of language, tribe and religion.

The concerned Igbo People in Benue State (Igbo Union in Benue) had on 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept 2019 cried out through the trio of Mr. Okafor Nnolim, Mr. Ndokaku and Mr. Ikem Ani during which they alleged 'abduction of not less than 50 persons in the State since Feb 2017'. Again, on 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2019, a follow-up press briefing was held by the leadership of Igbo Union in the State, disclosing further that 'three prominent Igbo citizens in the State and not less than N277m had been lost to kidnapers'. The leadership through their Public Relations Officer further said that the N277m was spent in freeing 48 kidnapped Igbo business men and women.

While giving a breakdown of huge financial losses so far incurred by the Igbo communities in Benue State especially in Gboko, Adikpo-Kwande, Ukum, Zaki-Biam and Katsina-Ala LGAs of the State, Mr. Ezeadi, the Benue Igbo Union PRO noted that since February 2017 till date, there have been 48 recorded cases of abduction of Igbo business men and women across the aforementioned LGAs with a total ransom of over N277million paid out to these abductors and that some of the victims were murdered even after the demanded ransom had been paid.

Ezeadi gave a graphic picture of kidnapping activities against Igbo residents in the four local government areas as follows: Victims resident in Gboko LGA: Ugochukwu Ikechukwu, abducted Feb., 5th, 2017, paid N5 million before released; Ikeagwuonu Ifeanyi, abducted 28th Oct., 2017, paid N3 million before released; Chief Celestine Agbo, abducted 28th Sept., 2018, paid N5 million before released; Onyeka Okpara 11th Oct, abducted 2018, paid N4 million before released ;Ugochukwu Ikechukwu (Kidnapped for the 2nd Time) Dec, 1st, 2018, paid N5 million before released; and Aniegbu Chukwuka Kenneth, abducted 4th Feb, 2019, paid N10 million and yet murdered because of delay in payment of ransom.

Others are: Romanus Muoma, abducted 13th March, 2019, paid N6 million before released; Lolo Esther J. Nwoke (target was the husband but the husband escaped and the wife was abducted) 18th March 2019, paid N11 million before released; Oluchukwu Onah (a.k.a Orlando) May, 2019, paid N10 million before released; Mrs. Dycon (target was the husband but the husband escaped and the wife was abducted), abducted 7th June, 2019, Paid N8 million before released; and Chief Donatus Okeke Dunu, abducted 13th June, 2019, paid N5 million before released.

The rest are: Edwin Omeje, abducted 13th June, 2019, paid N3 million before released; Mrs. Chukwudi Arinze, abducted 1st July, 2019, paid N7 million before released; Leonard Nzere 8th Aug., 2019, paid N5 million released; and Cajetan Anya Ugochukwu, abducted 8th Oct., 2019, paid N10 million before released. Victims resident in Adikpo-Kwande LGA: Mr. Uzochukwu Okereke, abducted March, 2018, paid N5 million before released; Chief Fredrick Njida, abducted April, 2018, paid N5 million before released; Mrs. Okereke (Wife of Chief Okereke, who was earlier kidnapped in March 2018), abducted December, 5th 2018, paid N4 million before released.

Included in the list of kidnapped Igbo business men and women in Benue are Mr. Imo Okoko, abducted 13th January 2019, paid N3 million before released; Mr. Imo Okoko (2nd time of abduction) on May 7<sup>th</sup> 2019, paid N6 million before released; Mr. Charles Chukwu, abducted 17th July 2019, paid N6 million before released; and Mrs. Imo Okoko, abducted August 2019, paid N8 million before release. Victims resident in Ukum Zaki-Biam LGA: Mrs. Rita Arinze, abducted 4th June 2019, paid ransom of N8 million but still murdered; Ngozichukwu Onyedika Aghaedo, abducted 30th May 2019, paid N5 million before released; Mrs. R. N. Okeke, abducted August 2018, paid N6 million before released; Mrs. Emerike Udenweze, abducted December 2018, paid N8 million before released; Mr. Ifeanyi Ekeh, abducted August 2018, paid N5 million before released; and Mr. Christian Iloani, abducted 12th March 2019, paid N8 million before released.

Others from the same local government area are: Mrs. Ifeoma Eyiutche, abducted July 2019, paid N5 million before released; Mr. Chidi Okri, abducted September 2019, paid N4 million before released; Mrs. Chinelo Okafor, abducted August 2019, paid N7 million before released; and Mr. Fabian Ogochukwu Onah, abducted 7<sup>th</sup> September 2019, paid N4 million before released. Victims resident in Katsina-Ala LGA: there are 15 of them including; Mr. Leonard Enemu, abducted June 2018, paid N7million, but eventually killed; Miss Chinonye Ejikeme, abducted August 31st, 2019, paid N4 million before released; and Mr. Chinedu Onodo, abducted 10th Sept, paid N5 million, before released.

For more details Your Excellency, see the links below: <https://dailypost.ng/2019/09/02/50-igbos-kidnapped-benue-within-8-months/>. <https://dailypost.ng/2019/09/30/benue-lives-still-danger-igbo-residents-raise-fresh-alarm/?fbclid=IwAR0ZYuOI1M2HlILOd3HnkXeK--RiU5KzF5ImaVlgOD2PhCytngU3crPtG-Y>

It was further disclosed by the Igbo Union in Your Excellency's State that the abduction of the prominent members particularly business men and women is not done at gunpoint only, but also includes phone call threats demanding for pre-abduction payment of ransom involving millions of naira so as to avoid being kidnapped or abducted, extorted or killed. The threat calls have become routine, forcing scores to pay ahead and periodically or to relocate out of the State. **Intersociety** was told by the leaders of the Igbo Union that scores of well-off Igbo business men and women have abandoned the State and hurriedly relocated including one of the wealthiest Igbo business tycoons who hurriedly relocated at a State in the South-south. The number of those planning to leave Your Excellency's State is rising as days go by.

Fears are also rife among the two sets of Igbo Population and their leaders that the missing Igbo citizens who went missing after being abducted; with ransoms paid are most likely some of the nine, if not all the nine bodies of slain kidnap victims recently discovered in a mass grave in Benue State. According to them, there are likely more uncovered mass graves in the State where kidnapped Igbo citizens and unfound victims of Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen attacks were buried.

Your Excellency's attention is further drawn to another account below. This is with respect to the agonies of the 'settler and carved out (ancestral) Igbo People of Benue State. By the account of then President of Benue Igbo Development Union, Nweke Cedrick Ifeanyi in an interview with the Nation Newspaper of 10<sup>th</sup> April 2014 (*Agony of Igbos In Benue State*), *"the Igbos in Benue State particularly those in Ado, Oju, Obi and Okpoku LGAs of the state were in existence before the advent of Christian religion in Nigeria, but today suffer total neglect and abandonment by the Government of Benue State. Owing to this, the Federal Government should set up machinery immediately to return them to their kith and kin in the Southeast, particularly Ebonyi State, which is the closest State"*.

According to him, *"the Igbo found in Benue are: Umuezeokoha, Umuezeoka and Oriuzor (offshoots of Nri), as well as Umuogbara, Amaekka and Amaezekwe who are originally of Ezza, Izzi, Ezzamgbo and Effium Clans in Ebonyi State. These are the people who would have been in present-day Ebonyi State but due to the fact that the Nigerian government then carved us into Benue in order to use our population to suppress our Eastern population. If you are to calculate the number of Igbo-speaking villages in Benue State, you find out that we are more than 600 villages because three of the biggest markets in our area are all in the Igbo-speaking part"*.

The three Igbo markets are: Inikiri Ichari, Iddah, Iduokpe. *"But in all these places, we have been facing a lot of deprivation of our fundamental human rights to the extent that we do not have any project attracted by the government, be it local, state or federal. In fact we have become the rejected part of the country because local government identification letters are not given to us any longer. Before now we used to witness governmental attention in everything during and after colonial administration but since after the civil war we were dumped by the successive governments just because of our language difference. "We do not have any drinking water; our source of water here is a dam which Fulani herdsmen do carry their cow to drink at the same place with us because the water is not covered. In the process of stopping them from coming to the water with their cow, it later resulted in the loss of five lives".*

*"We have no representative in local, state and federal levels. Mosquito nets that were given free of charge to roll back malaria have been sold to our people at the sum of N6, 000 each. We have become slaves to our brothers because of language differences. No hospital, let alone health centre, we are seeing hell here in Benue State because of our language. I do not know whether it is a curse for someone to have fallen under a particular tribe like Ezza, Izzi, Ezzamgbo and Effium. Our women are dying every day during labour. Also our children are dying for lack of polio immunization program and other medical treatment needed to be given to a child at a tender age".*

*"Our roads are not passable. We have contributed so much not only to the development of Benue State but Nigeria at large. At least a place with over one million people in population has no primary school. We are therefore as a matter of urgency calling on federal government, our Southeastern brothers and any other corporate bodies to rush to our aid before water will come to our neck. It is obvious that if we are speaking the same language with them we wouldn't have found ourselves in this forbidden and undeserved situation like this one we are now. An area with over 50 polling units, but we are benefiting nothing even on every of our market days they do come and sell their ticket (tax). We have been regarded as slaves in the country of our birth and our fore-fathers. We can never regret why we are Igbos or deny being Igbo people before we are recognized in the country of our fore-fathers."*

#### **Tasks Before Your Excellency & The Benue State Commissioner Of Police**

As Your Excellency is aware, a firm directive (within the context of strong and inexcusable moral obligation) is issued by Section 14 (4) of the 1999 Constitution as it concerns need for balanced and non-discriminatory allocation or distribution or sharing of public offices and resources at the State level (i.e. LGAs and Senatorial Districts). Section 42, under Chapter Four of the Constitution (with legal binding effect), also guarantees right to freedom from discrimination by the state actors including Benue State under Your Excellency.

Discrimination and sectionalism are further forbidden and prohibited by Sections 15 (4) and 17 (2) & (3) of the Constitution. This is under **Fundamental Objectives & Directive Principles of State Policy**, contained in the Chapter Two of the Constitution. Section 14 (2) (b) of the Constitution mandates that, "the security and welfare of the People shall be the primary purpose of the Government (including Government of Benue State)". Specifically by Section 15 (2), it is mandatorily stated "accordingly, national (and regional) integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited"

By Section 15 (3), it is further directed that "for purpose of promoting national (and regional integration), it shall be the duty of the State (including the Government of Benue State) to (a) provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of people, goods and services throughout the Federation or Region (across Benue State), (b) secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation or Region (including Benue State), (c) encourage inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin or of different religious, ethnic or linguistic association or ties; and (d) promote or encourage the formation of associations that cut across ethnic, linguistic, religious or other sectional barriers".

Above all and most importantly, Your Excellency, Section 13 of the Constitution mandatorily directs that, "it shall be the duty and responsibility of all organs of Government, and of all authorities and persons exercising legislative, executive or judicial powers (including Your Excellency, the Governor and Mr. Police Commissioner), to conform to, observe and apply the provisions of this Chapter Two of the Constitution".

Under Chapter Four of the Constitution (Fundamental Human Rights Provisions), Section 41 clearly states that every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to free (lawful and peaceful) movement and residence throughout Nigeria including Benue State and no one shall be prevented or expelled or threatened for purpose of same. And by Section 43 under same Chapter Four, every citizen of Nigeria shall have the right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria.

## Our Demands:

Your Excellency is prayed to:

- Stop all forms of discrimination against the two sets of Igbo Population or settler and resident Igbo Population anywhere in Benue State
- Capture the two Igbo Populations in the security mappings and strategies of the State
- Protect the Igbo businesses and their operators throughout the State esp in the aforementioned areas of the State
- Practically disassociate the Government of Benue State and its machineries from the 'indigenized' abductions, killings, torture and extortion of the Igbo citizens in the State
- Go after the perpetrators with full weight of the law and avoid aiding and abetting vicariously, if any, of the criminal activities and other atrocities of the so called "local gangs" and "political thugs" and others who may most likely be perpetrating the criminalities using the cover of Government or as leading or ruling political parties.
- Capture the ancestral Igbo communities in the State's special security and safety arrangements or policies as captured in the Benue State Anti Open Grazing Law, among others
- Draft adequate security and intelligence operatives in those ancestral Igbo Communities.
- Install or encourage the installation of CCTVs and other detective devices particularly in the business and residential areas of key Igbo business men and women in Benue State as well as inside their cars and the sacred places of worship
- Carry along at all times the Igbo Union in Benue State and their leaders and assist them in ensuring that their businesses are safe and not ruined
- Reverse the present ugly trend in the ancestral Igbo Communities in terms of acute Government neglect and ensure provision of safe water, good health and electricity facilities, shelter, access and tarred roads, etc
- Ensure inclusion of the ancestral Igbo Communities in the State's socio-political arrangement or alternatively liaise with the Govs of Ebonyi and Enugu States so as to meet the National Boundary Commission for purpose of returning them to their original home lands and Local Government Areas in Enugu and Ebonyi States.
- Order for coroners' inquest into the recently unearthed bodies from the mass graves and ensure more searches for possible discovery of others for purpose of ascertaining how, where and when they were slain and who killed them and who they are.
- Set up a Judicial Commission of Enquiry into the kidnap of not less than 50 Igbo citizens particularly leading business men and women in the State as well as the loss of over N277m paid as ransoms.
- The consequences of leaving the above mentioned criminalities and associated atrocities unaddressed are dangerous and far-reaching including ruination of the economy of Benue State, victim-citizen reprisal radicalization and earning the State local, regional, national and international investment pariah status.

Signed

For: Int'l Society for Civil Liberties & Rule of Law

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- Executive Director, Human Rights Watch, USA
- Governor of Ebonyi State/Chairman, Southeast Governors Forum
- President, World Igbo Congress, USA
- President, Ekwenche Research Institute, USA
- President Gen, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Enugu
- President, Ala-Igbo Dev Foundation, Enugu
- Former Governor Peter Obi
- Governor of Enugu State
- Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abuja
- Prince Chukwuemeka Onyeso, Oba Agbala-Nze N' Nri Ancient Kingdom
- Igbo Ekunie Organization, UK
- Civil Liberties Organization, Southeast Zone
- Southeast Based Coalition of Human Rights & Democracy Organizations
- Executive Director, the Int'l Human Rights & Equity Defense Foundation
- His Honor, Mr. Oseloka Obaze, Former SSG, Anambra State
- Mr. Emeka Diwe, President, Association of Southeast Town Unions

