

LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

Blueprint for health in Edo State, Nigeria

PROTOCOLS

It gives me great pleasure to welcome our esteemed guests who have come from far and near to honor our invitation. I am also pleased to welcome illustrious sons and daughters of Edo State from all walks of life to this occasion. I feel deeply touched and humbled by your presence and the solidarity it represents.

I have invited you all, dear compatriots from and beyond Edo State, to witness the formal declaration of my candidature for the 2007 Edo State governorship elections and the launching of the Labor Party in Edo State.

For me, the presence in large numbers of the people of Edo State and our friends from outside the state demonstrates that many Nigerians, especially my fellow Edo citizens, share my vision and appreciate the essence of my mission.

WHY AM I IN POLITICS?

Many Nigerians have asked us, "Why go into politics?" Like many Nigerians of good conscience, I have always reflected over what we must do to fix Nigeria and make her a better country for the benefit of her people. This concern informs our involvement in the struggle for social justice, equity, public welfare, good governance and the democratic development of Nigeria.

In the process of our struggles, we have had critical engagement and contestations with the major players in the Nigerian polity, economy and society at all levels on a variety of issues concerning public welfare.

We have articulated and organized around the needs, interests and rights of all segments of Nigeria across ethnic, generational, gender, occupational, social and religious divides. We have marched and protested in virtually all the 36 states and the Federal Capital in pursuit of the interests and welfare of Nigerians, especially the working people, pensioners, self-employed, unemployed and the poor.

We have canvassed before government the concerns and problems of the private sector, including those of big business. This is because we appreciate that enterprise prosperity is critical to the employment of workers, growth of the economy and wealth-creation.

It is appropriate to say therefore that perhaps more than any other group of Nigerians, my colleagues and I in the labor movement understand the problems and needs of all segments of Nigeria. We appreciate the Nigerian reality and the developmen-



The Governor addresses a conference of Nigerians from Edo State in Newark, New Jersey, USA. Above, next to the Governor (in blue) is MJoTA Africa Foundation trustee Aleakhue Ekpabo BENG, MBA, PhD. Far right, the President of Cumberland County College (New Jersey), Thomas Isekenegbe PhD.

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tal policy options that can deliver our people from poverty and want.

Today, the main challenge in Nigeria is how to use public policy and public resources to deal with the grinding mass poverty. Despite the colossal endowments of Nigeria, our people have too much of too little.

Despite the resourcefulness, industry and zeal of Nigerians, we are still confronted with the nagging paradox of a rich nation of very poor people.

As I have always argued, the poverty of Nigerians and the underdevelopment of the country cannot be an act of God. The state of affairs of Nigeria can be explained by reference to our socio-economic and political history, which has been shaped by the character and orientation of successive governments. In particular, the endemic corruption explains the huge gaps between the resource endowments of the country and the deplorable fortunes of her citizens. Corruption largely explains the failure of governance and the consequent poor human development indicators.

As we speak, Nigeria has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world. More than 10% of our women die during childbirth. In other words, in Nigeria, the decision to bring forth a child potentially carries a death sentence. We also have a high infant mortality rate of 10%. Even countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia, which we deploy our army to help, parade better health indicators.

While other nations even in the Third World are close to the attainment of universal school enrollment, poverty still keeps many Nigerian children out of school. Today, we now have a real dynasty of the poor, as poor parents raise children, who cannot access the education and training to break out of the poverty cycle.

It is important to remind us that most of these problems were created or compounded by prolonged



Below left, Chair of Microbiology at Ambrose Alli University chats with another microbiologist, the Deputy Vice-Provost, Professor Afe Ekundayo. Below, Chemistry lab. Above, inside and outside the library.



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military regimes.

Although the Labor Party is in opposition to President Olusegun Obasanjo's Peoples Democratic Party, we have no problem acknowledging that since the dawn of democracy in 1999, there have been bold and imaginative reform measures to arrest the drift. As a Party, our approach to public policy analysis and national discourse is to acknowledge and help to foster national consensus around policies or measures that can move or has moved the nation forward.

Therefore, for the Labor Party, some of the reform measures represent real progress that the nation needs to build upon irrespective of the party in power. Some of these reforms that need to be sustained are the anti-corruption measures, due process and transparency in government procurement and the fiscal responsibility initiative.

We acknowledge the fresh initiatives in the improvement of infrastructure, especially the recent investments in the construction of additional power stations. The recent steps embarked upon by the Federal Government on railway development are similarly commendable.

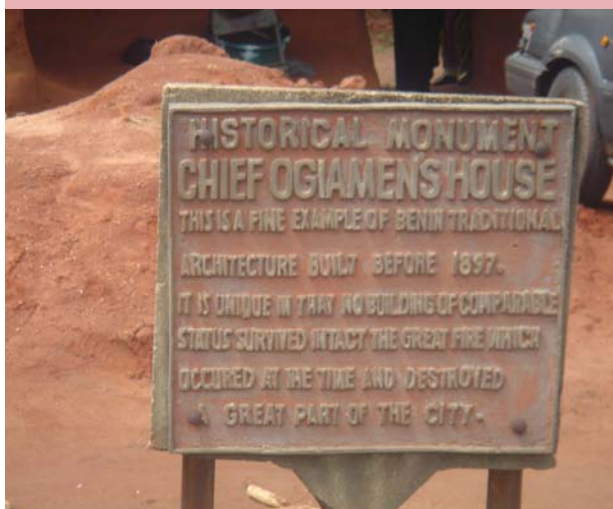
It is impressive that this administration has also laid the basis to deal with the pension crisis and initiated an institutional framework to deal with healthcare financing.

However, a lot still remains to be done. For example, until we find a national solution to the epileptic power supply, our economy can never operate at optimal level and it will remain uncompetitive.

Our main critique of the reforms and the overall economic paradigm of this administration is that they are not job-friendly. Yet, development scholars are rather unanimous that jobs are the means to fight poverty and distribute the gains of growth on a sustainable basis.

As things are today in Nigeria, we have all seen that the poverty of the majority of our people constitutes a danger to the prosperity of the few. The poverty situation now forcefully manifests in armed and violent crimes, the so-called youth restiveness, frequent riotous explosions in urban centers and general social tension. While the majority of the poor endure their hunger and lament their hopelessness, the few rich live in perpetual fear and cannot sleep in peace.

Unless we all rise up to the occasion, Nigeria is heading towards a potentially bloody explosion because of the effects of the agonizing mass poverty. This is evident in the restiveness and hostage taking in the Niger Delta. The danger signals are equally evident in the growing wave of violent



Above, bronzes in a Benin-city shop; marker for preserved historical house.

crimes, as our bitter youths have simply resolved en masse to use arms to settle scores with society.

All men and women of good conscience must be troubled by this degeneration of the Nigerian condition. However, as useful as advocacy, agitations and protests have been, it is clear that those tools have their limitations in engendering good governance on a sustainable basis.

To foster good governance, which is a precondition for economic growth, wealth creation, public welfare, social justice and pro-poor policies, require the direct intervention of people of good conscience, clear vision, courage and compassion. This is why I have resolved to seek election as the governor of Edo State in 2007.

MEN AND WOMEN OF GOOD CONSCIENCE CANNOT BE INDIFFERENT TO POLITICS

Many Nigerians express distaste for Nigerian politics

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Pax Herbs, a natural medicines manufacturing facility in Edo State outside Ekpoma.

because it is perceived as dirty and unworthy of decent people. Many Nigerians have given up on the possibility that decent and capable people can be elected because of our experience with election rigging. The growing violence and the use of assassination to eliminate political opponents have worsened the stigma associated with Nigerian politics.

I am conscious of all the dysfunctions in Nigerian politics. However, if we continue to lament and abstain, we will forever abandon politics and governance to the same spent forces, whose universe is limited to the primitive accumulation of public resources. These people will continue to bring into politics the same old tactics of ethnic and religious manipulation, foment violence and rig elections, because they have little vision with which to canvass support.

Therefore, if honest people refuse to take up the political challenge, they must be prepared to endure the rule of dishonest people. If people who abhor corruption remain politically indifferent, they must be ready to live under the rule of corrupt people. If decent people leave the terrain in frustration, they will be compelled to take orders from indecent people and will live in greater frustration.

For me, the verdict of history will be harsh indeed, if people of good conscience do not organize and mobilize to intervene in politics.

MY VISION, EXPERIENCE AND CAPACITY WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

My decision to seek election as governor of Edo State in 2007 derives from my conviction that I could utilize my capacity, experience and vision towards giving competent, transformational, people-driven

and people-centered leadership to our dear State. My involvement in public stewardship and in the struggle for social justice, public welfare, good governance and democracy has nurtured in me leadership qualities and commitment to serve the people. These qualities and experience will empower me to deal with the complex and multifaceted challenges of governance in Edo State, if given the mandate.

WE ARE NO STRANGERS TO CHALLENGES

The challenges of electioneering and eventually of governance are formidable indeed. However, we are not strangers to challenges. By dint of vision, courage, commitment and participatory leadership, my colleagues and I were able to transform the NLC into an effective national movement and a respected national institution. Under my stewardship of the labor movement, we have demonstrated that notwithstanding primordial divides, Nigerians can be galvanized to unite around people-centered developmental policy options.

I have consulted widely over this mission. I am much encouraged by the positive response from highly revered parsonages, traditional rulers, political leaders of all shades and across parties, community leaders, religious leaders and groups, youth and women organizations, professionals, self-employed and social groups. I am further encouraged by businessmen and women, who appreciate that good governance is a prerequisite for the growth of businesses.

THE PEOPLE ARE MY GREATEST POLITICAL ASSETS

The most important asset available to me in my quest for the governorship of Edo State is the goodwill and support of concerned people of Edo State

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and our friends.

I am enriched already by the overwhelming collective resolve I have seen here today, which is a veritable source of inspiration and encouragement. I am convinced that together, we shall make a difference.

MAKING POVERTY HISTORY IN EDO STATE – OUR MISSION

At this point, I wish to avail the good people of Edo State and our friends of some of the concrete measures we will initiate in order to move our State forward if elected.

Our vision is to foster people-centered, all-inclusive, participatory and result-oriented governance in furtherance of the development of Edo State and the welfare, prosperity and dignity of her people. With appropriate State interventions and through participatory governance, we will unleash the entrepreneurial passion, resourcefulness, industry, zeal, spirit of self-help, dignity of labor and competitiveness of Edo people.

These qualities are generally necessary to complement other public policy tools required to create and sustain a development impetus in the State.

THE PRIORITIES - PRODUCTION, INFRASTRUCTURE AND EDUCATION (PIE).

Central to our envisioned strategy is the improvement of the infrastructural profile of Edo State, including appropriate investments in human capital development, with emphasis on education, health and water. We will mobilize resources and use all available machinery to pursue the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

We will also prioritize the expansion of employment opportunities for our teeming youths. This will require massive investments in public works that can in turn encourage private sector investments and, thus, stimulate economic growth.

Although there is a variety of problems that require immediate State interventions and massive injection of resources, we have identified 3 priorities to be pursued in the short-term. These priorities will be Production, Infrastructure and Education (PIE).

Our evaluation of the situation of Edo State indicates that these 3 areas have the potentials to impact quickest on sustainable employment and poverty-reduction within the overall framework of people-centered development. Moreover, the 3 areas are linked and will reinforce each other, thus, creating the desired tempo for sustainable development.

PRIORITY ONE - THE THREE RS – RESTORING, RENOVATING AND REFURBISHING SCHOOLS

In a knowledge-driven world, qualitative, affordable and accessible education is the key to development.

Our Three Rs Programme is therefore targeted at raising the quality of education at all levels primarily through improvement in physical infrastructure, boosting the morale of academic and non-academic staff, providing teaching and learning aid and ensuring pupil/student comfort.

Our vision is to re-invent the public schools system. In the primary and secondary school systems, there will be the following new initiatives in primary and post-primary Education

- Encourage communities to co-invest in education and co-manage secondary schools with the state government. Primary schools will be co-managed with local governments. To effectively coordinate this partnership, we will make provision for stronger community participation in the schools management boards;

- Our government will restore, renovate and refurbish at least 2 secondary schools and 2 primary schools in each local government area within 1 year of our stewardship. The idea is to develop these selected schools into models of high academic, moral, administrative and infrastructural standards.

- The overall restoration agenda will include provision for adequate staffing and for the motivation of teaching and non-teaching staff. Our vision is to restore the respectability of the teaching profession in Edo State, such that the teacher once again becomes the pivot of academic excellence and the restoration of moral values among our youth.

- The physical restoration agenda will be targeted at the provision of adequate furniture, libraries, laboratories, facilities for sports, recreation and leisure. We envision a school system that enhances the totality of the well being of students - academic, moral, social and cultural.

We will maximize the use of local materials, appropriate technology and labor-based approach in the restoration projects. The models we intend to restore will be designed and built with stabilized lateral bricks, which have proven to be strong, environmentally appropriate and aesthetically appealing. This construction methodology will produce positive spin-offs in other areas. For instance, we will encourage the private sector to invest in the commercial production of stabilized lateral bricks.

Additionally, the emphasis on labor-based technology will impact on employment and empower local communities from which labor will be sourced.

WE WILL ENCOURAGE PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION

Minimum standards will be set and enforced for private schools concerning provision of adequate phys-

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ical facilities, teaching and learning aid and quality of teachers. This will require invigorating the Inspectorate Division of the Ministry of Education;

-A plan will be worked out with the local governments to accelerate the school restoration programme after the initial first year work

-We will strengthen the colleges of education and other tertiary institutions to train and retrain teachers

-Our government will abolish summarily all frivolous levies and charges. We will ensure that no child is denied access to education on account of the economic circumstances of his or her parents.

TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

We will improve the standards of teaching and learning in the higher school system and, thus, boost the quality of human resources produced in the state.

At the core of the strategy to attain this will be enhanced funding of our higher institutions - Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, College of Education, Ekiadolor, Usen Polytechnic, Michael Imoudu College of Physical Education, Afuze, College of Agriculture, Igboriakhi, and School of Nursing, Benin.

The strategy will encompass physical restoration and expansion as well as construction of fresh lecture theatres, classrooms, hostels, libraries and laboratories.

-We will encourage public-private partnership in modernizing these institutions;

-Where necessary, scholarships and bursaries will be awarded to gifted students and children indigent of parents;

-We will also improve the working conditions of academic and non-academic staff and make their remuneration more competitive;

-In our efforts to improve the quality of education, we will create a culture of active partnership and engagement of such stakeholders as students' unions, workers' unions (of both academic and non-academic staff) PTAs, communities, private school owners and NGOs.

PRIORITY TWO - INFRASTRUCTURAL RESTORATION (ROADS, WATER AND POWER)

In the area of infrastructural restoration, emphasis will be placed on roads, water and power. Within 3 months of coming into office, we will complete stocktaking of the state of roads and water infrastructure to determine the scope and pace of the restoration agenda.

One identified aspect of the challenge of road restoration, especially in Benin City, is the problem

of flooding and erosion. This will require innovative solutions, including channeling of floodwaters and restoration of historical moats and natural pond sites.

Certainly, the challenge of restoration is enormous given the level of dilapidation and inadequacy vis-à-vis the expectations of the public. It is in this respect that we will convene an Edo State Development Summit, which will help galvanize support around some identified measures to be implemented.

Roads

-Comprehensive pre-restoration assessment of the state of existing roads – both urban and rural;

-Needs-assessment on the desirability and technical feasibility of opening up of new roads;

-Discussion with the Federal Government, development partners and the private sector over resource-mobilization and financing options;

-Empower the Ministry of Works to undertake routine road maintenance.

Water

-In accordance with our belief that water is life, we will revive the water boards, expand existing water works and refurbish water distribution infrastructure where they have collapsed;

-Initiate a mass coverage borehole construction programme targeted particularly at rural areas and to supplement water provision to urban areas;

Power

-Work with electricity service providers to extend power supply to the rural communities to complement the state government's rural electrification programme.

PRIORITY THREE - RESTORING PRODUCTION IN AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY

In the final analysis, only a booming productive sector will in the end absorb the unemployed and the products of a revamped educational sector. Ultimately, we will evolve a strategy to use our interventions in other areas, complemented by other public policy support measures, to promote the growth of the productive sector of the State's economy.

Through the programme of investment in rural infrastructure, we expect agricultural production to be stimulated. In addition, through the process of community engagement, we will help farming communities to overcome problems that militate against increased productivity and larger farms. We will also assist farmers to access the export market to get good value for their output.

To combat rural poverty, we will deploy an imagina-

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tive agricultural policy with the suitable combination of incentives, including subsidies where necessary, to support rural farmers and raise rural income.

However, increased agricultural production would not be sustainable if much of the output cannot be processed and used in the manufacturing sector. Therefore, we will encourage private (domestic and foreign) investment in manufacturing, especially agro-based value-addition. This is critical to stimulating agricultural production, raising rural income and creating employment at the end of the chain.

Generally, the challenge at hand is to use the right mix of creative public policy mechanisms to put the people of Edo State to work as the prime strategy to fight poverty and crime. This will also involve the development of an appropriate combination of incentives and institutional reforms to create an enabling environment that can foster the growth of small, medium and large-scale enterprises and, thus, re-invent the economy of Edo State.

Through these and other imaginative State interventions, we will lay the foundation to make poverty history in Edo State.

HEALTHCARE

We recognize that the major problem in the area of health is affordable access and poor facilities. We are determined to confront this challenge by accelerating the state government's participation in sustainable healthcare financing mechanisms.

To combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic, we will create facilities for free voluntary testing and aim towards free provision of antiretroviral.

We will renovate, upgrade and establish hospitals of various levels, with emphasis on rural access in order to accelerate the attainment of the health-related MDGs in our State.

Our commitment to regulation of private medical facilities will be sustained, in order to ensure that they provide quality service backed by the right complement of equipment and trained staff.

The welfare of public medical personnel will be accorded importance because we recognize that without a motivated workforce in the health sector, the public is endangered and will not get quality attention.

COMBATING CRIME

We regard crime as largely a by-product of poverty, unemployment, social neglect and alienation. Crime is also very much a function of the educational system to provide firm moral and ethical anchoring for the youth.

In combating crime, the starting point is to ensure that the people have jobs that enable them to earn

a living productively. This is why our emphasis will be on creating employment through investments in public works, use of labor-based technology and promotion of direct labor where possible. In addition, we will strengthen the capacity of the private sector to create employment through the tools we have enunciated above. We also believe that we need to reform our schools and ensure that they inculcate the right values into the youth.

However, in the short-term, we will embark on measures in partnership with all stakeholders, to address the worsening crime profile of Nigeria as it affects Edo State. In particular, we will help to improve the operational effectiveness of the Edo State Command of the Police by assisting with logistics and boosting the morale of officers and men.

We will also encourage community-based initiatives in urban and rural areas in order to boost their security and crime-prevention capacities. We will explore means of firming up the community policing initiative of the Nigeria Police.

Our vision is to make Edo State bubble for 24 hours without molestation of anybody.

WORKERS' AND PENSIONERS' WELFARE

We believe that public sector workers have a great role to play in the overall effectiveness of government and in sustaining its capacity to deliver good governance. Therefore, we will motivate the civil service and ensure high productivity through training and retraining, a competitive wage structure and provision of appropriate working tools. Salaries and allowances will be paid as at when due.

We recognize that pensioners have a right to timely and adequate pension. We will honor pension commitments as at when due. We will also avoid measures that create stress for pensioners such as the frequent verification procedures. With the use of information technology, we would capture the details of our pensioners and tackle the menace of ghost pensioners, without inflicting hardship on our senior citizens.

SPORTS

Sports once brought national and international honor to our State and its people. In days gone by, the old Bendel State won virtually all National Sports Festivals and sports competitions. We had outstanding men and women who excelled in all kinds of sports and in all areas of sports, be it administration, coaching, or officiating. We will revive sports through the following measures:

- Rehabilitate public sports facilities and encourage private sector investment in facilities;
- Create a state-wide school sports programme that

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Benin City according to film-maker and Howard University graduate (2009) Jesusemen (Jessie) Egoro (born 1987). She attended schools pictured as a child. Pictures courtesy of Jessie Egoro.

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will involve rehabilitation of school sporting facilities, setting up grassroots sporting academies among students and youths, promoting sporting competitions and using scholarships and other incentives to encourage outstanding talents;

-Raise to international standards the Michael Imoudu College of Physical Education, Afuze;

-Encourage the development of rural and community sporting facilities;

-Collaborate with the private sector, especially in supporting competitions, rehabilitation of infrastructure, kitting and other areas.

CULTURE AND TOURISM

The Bini bronze heritage is of world historic importance. It excites scholarly and cultural interest across the world. The Oba's Palace, Benin Moat and other historical sites around the state have potentials to attract tourists.

We will re-evaluate potential tourist sites and attractions with a view to developing a tourism-promotion policy that can help to earn more income, create employment, enhance the growth of the hospitality industry and increase our State's global popularity.

We will also encourage the culture of Edo State by reviving the State Festival of Arts and Culture, encouraging the use of indigenous materials, languages and artifacts.

TRADITIONAL RULERS

We regard the Edo State Traditional Council of Chiefs under Omo N'Oba N'Edo Uku Akpolopolo Oba Erediauwu, Oba of Benin, as the repository of our collective wisdom. The council under the Oba of Benin is the custodian of the positive values we have evolved as a people. It has helped to foster peace, unity and stability in the State.

As such, we will encourage and give both moral and financial support to the Edo State Traditional Council of chiefs under the Oba of Benin.

Edo State is particularly special because we are one people, united by a common ancestry and source of ethical, humanist and cultural enrichment in the person and institution of the Oba of Benin. We will harness this cultural homogeneity to make the development process inclusive.

CREATION OF DEVELOPMENT AREAS

We appreciate the legitimate grievance arising from the imbalances in the current local government structure, which is not equitable by reference to the critical factor of demography. This situation is the result of arbitrariness associated with the creation of local governments under the military.

Although creation of local government areas is out-

side the constitutional purview of the state government, we will initiate administrative measures in the short-term to restore equity in the distribution of local government areas by creating additional development areas. This will redress the imbalances and bring development closer to the people in the affected areas.

OUR VISION FOR THE OIL-PRODUCING AREAS

We will make judicious use of the revenue accruing to Edo State through the oil producing local governments. We will institutionalize the involvement of the state government, the Oba Of Benin, the local governments and the communities concerned in the management of the funds. This strategy will maximize the impact of the funds and ensure that priorities are well thought out and transparently determined.

WE WILL MAKE THE JUDICIARY MORE EFFECTIVE

I remain a passionate advocate of a well-remunerated and motivated judiciary. I believe that justice can hardly be objectively dispensed when the people who should dispense justice are themselves victims of injustice. It is a great injustice to pay judicial officers so low and subject them to tortuous work regimens, including unending manual recording. This is even more so when it is considered that neither can judges use the tools of agitation nor exercise executive authority to allocate resources even for their own welfare.

Secondly, I recognize that a poorly remunerated judiciary is a danger to democracy and good governance. This is because we cannot count on judges to be faithful to their ethics and act in the overall interest of society and the polity when their needs cannot be legitimately met.

We will substantially enhance the salaries of judicial officers, provide decent courtrooms and chambers, invest in modernization of court procedures, including provision of IT equipment, and ensure regular retraining.

I WILL RUN A PARTICIPATORY AND ALL-INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT

International best practices today demonstrate that sustainable development is more easily achieved if the people are active participants in the development process. The success of the self-help projects of the 1960s and 1970s indicate that development can be more rapid if the people own the process.

To institutionalize popular participation in the agenda setting for the state and to facilitate the mobilization of resources from all stakeholders, we will convene within the first 3 months an Edo Development Summit. The state government, local governments, traditional rulers, private sector, social

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organizations and development partners will all be involved.

We shall not run a personalized government. We will run an open, transparent, accountable and all-inclusive government. We shall institutionalize consultation with opposition parties in particular and other stakeholders in general.

I am convinced that we can collectively transform the State under my stewardship through our accustomed bottom-up participatory leadership style, creative use of public policy tools and harnessing the resourcefulness of Edo people.

I WILL BE FAIR TO ALL, YET, FIRM AND DECISIVE

In particular, we will promote gender equity in all things that we do. We will do justice to the aged, disabled and socially vulnerable. We shall be fair to all; we shall listen to all and we shall seek to serve the interest of all to the best of our ability, guided by our firm belief in social justice and equity. Yet, I shall remain firm and decisive. Edo State will continue to be a safe and hospitable haven for all Nigerians

I feel proud that Edo State remains one of the most hospitable States in the country, where indigenes and non-indigenes co-exist in impressive harmony. Under the current administration in Edo State, non-indigenes feel a real sense of belonging. This is rare in many other parts of the country where violent and bloody clashes frequently ensue between so-called settlers and indigenes. Under this administration, there has also been great progress in inter-faith harmony. In a nation whose constituents often erupt in bloody ethnic and religious crisis, this is creditable.

Our government will build on the existing inter-faith harmony and inter-ethnic cohesion through collaboration with traditional and religious leaders, civil society organizations and other social groups.



Flower in Edo State. Photo courtesy, Jessie Edoro.

Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole was born in Iyanmoh, near Auchi in Edo State. After his secondary education, Adams Oshiomhole majored in economics and industrial relations at the Ruskin College, Oxford. He is also an alumnus of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru.

In 1969, he worked in the Arewa Textiles Company and was active in the union. His coworkers elected him union secretary after a shop-floor revolution, which he helped to organize. He became a full time trade organizer in 1975.

In 1982, Mr Oshiomhole was appointed by the National Union of Textile Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria as their General Secretary; a union with over 75,000 workers. As General Secretary of the union, he became a major actor and catalyst in the Nigerian labor Congress and the wider radical movement in Nigeria. With the restoration of democracy to Nigeria in 1999, Oshiomhole became the 4th president of the NLC. He led the NLC movement to resist arbitrary increases in the prices of petroleum products. He led strikes, demonstrations and protests, which decisively helped to moderate the Obasanjo Administration on its harsh fuel pricing policy and other social and economic policies.

In 2006, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma awarded him a honorary doctorate of law.

He represented African workers for 2 terms on the Governing Body of the International labor Organization (ILO).

He served on the committee on Freedom of Association of the ILO, which is the only international tribunal on workers' rights issues. He had been on the Executive Board of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the Executive Board of the African Regional Organization of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

In April 2007, he was elected Governor of Edo State under the Action Congress Party, with which Oshiomhole's labor Party had entered a strategic alliance. However, he was robbed of victory by the Peoples Democratic Party, which installed its candidate. Edo State and the rest of Nigeria rose in unison to protest. Oshiomhole led the people to defend their votes and this struggle was rewarded first by the Edo State Election Petition Tribunal. He was re-affirmed and restored on 11 Nov 2008 by the Court of Appeal. On 12 Nov 2008, he was formally sworn in as the Governor of Edo State.

*Edited from Edo State website,
www.edostate.gov.ng/governor.php*

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WE WILL DOMICILE THE ANTI-CORRUPTION AGENDA IN EDO STATE

Although the State Government is independent of the Federal Government, we recognize that we belong to the same federation and one economy. What is good at the federal level cannot possibly be bad in the states.

Therefore, we will introduce and adapt to Edo State aspects of the Federal Government's reforms that are positive and which are yielding tangible benefits. Foremost among these, I will combat corruption and financial crimes, instill a culture of due process and transparency in government transactions and uphold fiscal responsibility.

I remain an unapologetic advocate and supporter of these particular aspects of the Federal Government's reforms because they will ensure more judicious use of public resources, give the people value for their money and foster good governance.

WE FOCUS ON THE FUTURE, NOT THE PAST

Overall, our approach and campaign will focus and direct attention to the challenges that lie ahead. We will not be bogged down into inviting the people to lament the past. This is the traditional escapist route for many politicians lacking the vision and clarity of purpose to grapple with the daunting challenges of good governance and the deliverables expected by the citizens. I want to be judged based on what I shall have done at the end of the day. Ask not what I shall do about the past, as my mandate will be to secure the future.

I WILL PUT THE PEOPLE FIRST

It is common practice for many Nigerian politicians to make promises without ultimately delivering on them. This is not in our character and antecedents. With modest pride, I invite you to assess my pedigree. As a person and as chief steward of the Nigerian Labor Movement, my word has always been my bond. The most important asset I am bringing into this electioneering contest and, if elected, into government is the name and reputation I have labored over the years to build.

Even when the people of Edo State and of Nigeria did not elect me, I have risked my career, freedom and above all, my life, in the quest to put our people first. We have demonstrated courage, commitment and deep sense of sacrifice in putting Nigeria and Nigerians first in our stewardship in the labor movement.

Even now, although I seek to be governor, many Nigerians and foreigners believe I should seek the presidency because they think that I can make a difference positively and fundamentally.

For my compatriots from Edo State, I say this is our time to put our heads and hands together to create a commonwealth of Edo State that will take care of the needs of everyone. Let us rally together, so that we can lay the basis to make poverty history in Edo State. Edo State has the human resources, cultural institutions, natural endowments and rich tradition of governance that can be harnessed to make our State the epicentre of national development.

I present this vision to you, good people of Edo State, with humility, deep appreciation of the challenges but also with a clear vision as to how we can proceed. We have risked life and limb to serve our nation as a whole. We will do even more for our State and her people.

I am seeking your mandate as governor of Edo State in 2007. I believe that as the Chief Steward of the people of Edo State, I can galvanize our collective energy, vision and resources to make life better for all of us under a Government of the Labor Party in alliance with other progressive parties. 2007 – the will of the people must prevail at all levels.

To those people who insist that the 2007 election is already rigged, we must tell them this time around that they are liars and jokers. Collectively, we must put out of business those who are confident that they will deploy their old strategy of manipulating election results. In Edo State and indeed in all parts of Nigeria, we must insist and ensure that the will of the people must prevail at all levels in 2007. Never again will Nigerian people surrender to election rigging. We must put election-riggers out of business. We must come out to vote and defend our vote with all that we have.

The people of Edo State, nay of Nigeria, are courageous and illustrious in defending our rights. I join us to deploy our collective courage and will in 2007 to defend the sanctity of the ballot, which is the only way we can guarantee the sustainability of democracy.

I have faith in the leadership of INEC and call on Nigerian people to give them all the support they need, while we remain vigilant and critical.

For me, the real struggle for change begins today. I thank you all for your attention and for your presence. God bless you all.

By Governor Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole

Speech delivered by Comrade Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole at the formal declaration of his candidature for the governorship of Edo State in 2007/Formal Launching of the Labor Party on Wednesday 6th September 2006 in Benin-city, Edo State. He was elected governor in November 2008.