

Chairman and his wife, President and his wife, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, young people, I salute you.

It is indeed an honor for me to give the keynote address at this, the second annual convention of Nembelbe people. The mission of this organization is to make the case for and help actualize unity (which translates to peace), health, education and economic development for our people.

These are issues about which I am very passionate starting at the world level, at the national level and even more so at the local level. My hope is to share that passion, sense of urgency and our individual and collective responsibility toward these goals with you.

The topic of my talk is the responsibility that comes with education and how taking on that responsibility leads to unity, health and education for our people- the theme for this year's convention.

What is education? We often equate education with formal schooling and academic degrees. According to Wikipedia, education in its broadest sense is any act or expression that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. From this sentence you get the key words mind and character. Wikipedia continues: Education is the process by which society transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another. From this second sentence you get the message that education is transformational, building on collective knowledge and passing it on to the next generation. This means educated people help to transform their communities, have a history of transforming events, and leave a positive legacy for the next generation.

So we may have gone to school, indeed by some estimates Nigerians have one of the highest number of academic degrees per capita competing only with the Chinese and Indians when it comes to number of degrees. The question then is what do we have to show for it?

Today, I want to talk about the responsibilities that come with education. Implied in the definition of education is the premise that you do not have to go to school to be educated. You can educate yourself, learn from others, be a thinker and reflect that knowledge/education in your character and outlook. Our forefathers were leaders who educated themselves just as the Greeks, the Romans or the Arabs. Our forefathers educated themselves in the affairs of the day, stayed ahead of the challenges of the day. They knew how to listen, project and plan for the future. They knew when to move from under oppression to become masters of the coastal waters. They controlled the trades of the day between the European traders and other Nigerians. They crafted peace agreements with their neighbors. When the British tried to cut them out of their role as middlemen they fought what has become known as the Akassa wars or Akassa raids. When the Lander brothers were kidnapped during their exploration of the Niger, a Nembelbe man King Boy Amain rescued them from their captors. That was leadership, born of education and used for the betterment of the people not for individual glory. The moral of that story is that education and leadership should go together *pari passu* and should enhance the quality of life of the people.

Today, we have people that claim to have educational degrees but in reality are not educated. Their characters and philosophies are based on selfishness, greed and avarice. These people have failed to

plan for the future of their community and in so doing have planned for the community to fail. They fail to realize that the failure of the community is their failure. As the Vidal Sasson advertisement says, if you don't look good we don't look good. When one person from Nembe ibe looks bad we all look bad. When one part of Nembe ibe looks bad, we all look bad. Need I say more? We are all painted with the same brush. As the Igbo proverb says, when one finger brings oil, it stains the rest.

Educated people live by example. What is our example? We fail to listen; we fail to see the signs of impending collapse. We were there when Johnny did not go to school - we did not inquire as to why. We have not visited the secondary schools to talk to the students, share our experiences or convey our hope for their future or our support for their struggles. We have not considered tutoring them, yet we are home retired or otherwise unemployed. Rather, we show them the power of ill-gotten money, not the power of the mind. The young girls have no chance to dream let alone to fulfill dreams. The young boys become the thugs of tomorrow. If anything, we discount our knowledge and act as if we did not know better. Yet we complain when these children facing the contradictions of life in the village, and life in Lagos or in Abuja embark on the path of least resistance and become thugs, criminals, kidnappers and what have you. My people, we save our lives by saving the lives of others – please save our youth. Invest in them, give them what is there's the - future. Do not siphon communal money into personal accounts or build personal homes with public money.

Educated people are responsible people. Those of us in the Diaspora hide from responsibility. The truth is that because we hide does not mean the responsibility goes away; things just deteriorate until we step up. And that is where we find ourselves today. This message is in a lot of ways not for those in this hall because you are part of the proverbial choir – I hope. By your presence here you have shown that you believe the future of Nembe ibe is in your hands and mine. Let me take this opportunity to thank our guests. You remind us that if we join together we can make life better for communities one at a time by pooling our resources. I hope the Nembe people here and everywhere learn from you, that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts. When we help each other we go farther than any of us can based on our individual resources. In fact this is the bedrock principle behind American civic engagement – pooled resources. Interestingly, this is not new to the Nembe people, though we have pretended to forget. A Nembe man does not roof his house with thatch (palm fronts) by himself. The neighbors help, so that he can help them when it is their turn. This way roofing is always a day's job rather than several days.

Educated people help to transform their communities. What transformation have we accomplished? The Nembe ibe people are at the bottom of every achievement scale; of course we will deny it. Our generation has nothing of communal achievement to show for ourselves. In the old Ibo land, each age group has to show what it has done for the community as it transitions from children to adults to elders. Giving back is not a choice, it is a duty. In the fifties and sixties, as Nigeria was really opening up, the Nembe people were doing whatever they can to compete with the main tribes of Nigeria. They worked together to bring schools to the communities. People from clerks to senior civil servants worked together to keep abreast of the competition and provided a voice for their people. In fact, the idea to build the first secondary school, NNGS, was floated and initiated and galvanized by office clerks and store clerks, not by the university graduates of the time. I know, because my Auntie Love Alagoa was

one of them. Today we compete with ourselves not to raise the bar of achievement for the community but to raise the bar of how much ill-gotten wealth we can amass with impunity, while our children go hungry in our villages. With the increase in oil exploration, our staples: fish, plantains and coco yams are no longer sustaining because the water and soils have been polluted. People now go hungry that have never known hunger. We have to collectively find lasting solutions bringing our education to bear. What is the value of our education if we cannot see the storm clouds gathering in the sky: with hunger comes disenchantment leading to abject poverty which in turn breeds crimes, sex trades, and health calamities. Wake up; put your education to good use. Engage your chiefs, your kings in discourse. Owolo said "Nembe ibe mi wa timi gha bara." This is not how we used to be.

Again, your education comes with responsibility to help transform your community. An American saying I like is "take what you find here and make it better. " If you live by that principle you will be able to transform yourself, your community and you will be a happier person for it. We have many examples of transformational leadership to learn from. People like Chief Yekorogha, Chief Alagoa and Chief Ada Spiff and others were community leaders. They helped the king or kings of their time succeed by giving sound advice, volunteering, defending the kingdom, and never sabotaging progress. Reverence D. O. Ockiya translated the bible into the Nembe language with not much more than elementary education. My grandfather Apolos Isele gave his house, the first block house in Nembe Ibe to Mingi X, the king at the time to live in for free. Today, we (wherever we are) are all beneficiaries of the struggles of people like Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth, Booker T Washington, Martin Luther King Jr., King Boy Amain, Mingi VIII, Joseph Alagoa, Mingi X, and others who each in his or her way fought for the betterment of their community.

Our beloved Mingi X (may his soul rest in perfect peace) used to pray steadfastly, and his favorite prayer was: Dear Lord, please remember your people here in this part of the world and shine some of the light on them that you have shone on the powerful people elsewhere. Clearly he wanted progress for his people and he worked hard within his power to ensure that his people prospered and were a force to be reckoned with in the comity of nation states. You see Nembe was a nation state.

So I say to you my people, education comes with responsibility to yourself and to your community. It is time to stop shirking your responsibilities and time to step up and be counted to build Nembe Ibe to the fullness of its promise. Step up to make your community, be it in Nembe, Atlanta, Indianapolis or Chicago a better place. There is no good excuse for not stepping up to your responsibility. If you do not make enough money (and none of us does), please embark on legal means to make more money or find other ways to help and be fulfilled. Talk to people, ask questions, go to school, and emulate good examples. You should have a plan to grow your position, your finances and your world view year by year or on a two or five year plan. Make a commitment to grow your financial and other commitments to Nembe ibe year by year. You must stretch to grow. Complacency breeds decay and downfall. Your commitment to your communities is just as important as any other obligation. Do not wait until you get financially rich to give back.

There is great joy in giving back. There is a legacy to be built - ours. Make a difference, be an example unto others. Goodness like a genuine smile can be infectious. Spread the cheer starting now. No child should be left behind, definitely not the Nembe Ibe child.

To members of Nembe Ibe USA, we have embarked on a journey to help our people. This is a noble cause from which we cannot turn back. I admonish us to always take the high road and be above petty politics. We have the opportunity to help Nembe Ibe to the glory that is our heritage. The wind left our sails a long time ago, we must speed up, expend energy and financial resources to catch the wind again.

Nembe nongu wa mie nyo mungo wa mie gha.

Wa mie nyo.

I thank you all.

Francis Ginah

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