



The Olu of Warri
Atúwàtse III

STATEMENT BY HIS ROYAL MAJESTY ÒGÍAMÈ ATÚWÀTSE III CFR, THE OLU OF WARRI

DELIVERED ON SATURDAY, 7TH SEPTEMBER 2024

We thank God for all that He is doing for Itsekiri.

We thank Him for the favor He is causing us to have with the government of the day.

We thank Him for the symbolic victory of the bridge connecting us to our ancestral capital, Ode Itsekiri.

This isn't just meant to make transportation to and from Ode Itsekiri easy, it's also a clarion call to signify the return of Itsekiri to its roots, and to the things that made us great in the first place.

It is also a symbolic directive, for our people to start returning back to their various homes, especially in the riverine areas.

First of all, we cannot keep living in the trauma of the aftermath of the crisis, that drove our people out of their various villages all over the riverine.

I know Itsekiri aren't mainly farmers, but there's a saying that goes, if a farmer keeps looking at the sky, waiting for perfect weather, he will never plant the seed in his hand, he will continue to be engaged in analysis paralysis.

The same for Itsekiri, there will never be perfect conditions for returning back to the riverine areas in our original numbers. The government will not come and develop it for us. Our ancestors, who didn't wait for the government and built up what they could in the first instance, are not going to come back and develop it for us. Our neighbors who are encroaching, are not going to develop it for us.

We can no longer hide behind "laziness". We can no longer hide behind "we are too civilized and don't like stress".

It is time to face things squarely, identify the situation for what it is, come and be united, and be motivated by the strength of human will and determination.

Even God, the Creator of man, in Genesis, knew that, if men come together in unity of purpose and determination, there is NOTHING that they cannot achieve. Which was why He interrupted their building of the Tower of Babel.

Itsekiri, no more excuses. God has given us the land. And now, Ògíamè is charging us to come together in unity and purpose and return back to our lands. No more fear, no more excuses. We are not moving to build Tower of Babel that would defy God, we are moving to build up ourselves in a way that pleases God. So, rest assured, God is on our side.

Ògíamè will take the lead and is committing to renovating/rebuilding the Ejo Hall in Bateren. After that is done, the land given to Atúwàtse II in Ajudaibo, will be developed, marking his presence in Benin River and Escravos river area respectively.

BURIALS

Everyone knows the usual Itsekiri practice for burials.

Thankfully, our burial procedure is not an expensive one.

We are encouraging the return to the practice of burying at night in our various villages. Let us bring life back to our places and stop settling for the easiest and most convenient ways that keep us in this current state of non-development.

However, it is important to reaffirm, that Ògíamè Atúwàtse II had granted a provision for those of the Christian faith to be buried accordingly. We very much reaffirm this dispensation that was so given. Their families are to be given every support and encouragement as they bring back their loved ones to be buried.

Also, those who prefer to bury during the daytime, will not be compelled to desist, no one is being forced or compelled, but we are pointing towards a general direction in which we ought to be going.

What we expect, going forward, is that unless categorically stated by the deceased before they die, all should be buried back in their home community.

Where possible, even the reception should also be held there. We should not give excuses as to why friends and families who live in big cities or other countries won't want to come. Let them see truly where home is, no matter the state of home, let them see it. And let us be proud of our home, of where our ancestors called home, of where God has given us as our home. Let us be proud to show it off to the whole world, perhaps that's the motivation that would make us to be more committed to developing our villages.

Something of significance should be done at the village, and then, if a different party or reception or thanksgiving wants to be done in the town, that is not a problem.

TEMOTSI

In the same way as burials, we want to encourage that when our children intend to marry, something symbolic must be done at the village level. Many of our children in this generation, have never been to their villages.

The modern world today, is so interconnected. Imagine the exciting adventure it would be, for our children bringing their friends from all over the world, who want to come and celebrate their marriage ceremony with them. And not bringing them to Warri, or Sapele, or Koko, but getting on a boat, and going to the riverine.

For those willing to embrace this immediately, if their father doesn't have a home standing in the village, a canopy in the family compound or idimi would suffice. We can design a brief symbolic activity to occur, at least for a start, and then they can run back to Warri, Sapele or Koko. For those not able to do this immediately, the intended couple can take a boat of palliatives, give it to the community, and inform them you are getting married. Let the couple be told the story as to how the community was affected by crisis, or maybe even the history of the community and how it was founded.

Also, as it was done for burial, Ògíamè Atúwàtse II had granted a dispensation for those of Christian faith, to conduct the traditional marriage ceremony devoid of certain aspects that may not sit well with them. We very much reaffirm this dispensation that was so given. Their families are to be given every support and encouragement as they bring back their children, friends and family to celebrate with them.

This gives the next generation, a reason to come home, and at least see their village, and know that they did something significant in their village. And hopefully in time, when their parents have fulfilled the number of their days, they come back to the village again. But hopefully, in between those two occasions, there could be reasons, or inspiration that comes, and results in the improvement and development of the village.

The truth is, you don't know who, could come, and see an inspiration and come up with a solution. So, we must have reasons to be coming home, and keeping the doors open to all our sons and daughters.

OTONONOKEREN/OTONONOBIREN DISCRIMINATION

Now more than ever, Itsekiri cannot afford to be closed minded. The clarion call that was put out on our coronation day still stands.

Those who want to identify as Itsekiri through their mother's line and have the heart and zeal to come home and develop, must be welcomed with open arms. We will not tolerate discrimination against people because they are of a woman's lineage. Not only are they welcome to bring development, they are welcome to serve in elders councils and other administrative structures at the community level.

We cannot afford to be discriminating against ourselves any longer. We need each other. We acknowledge that there have been instances where this practice has been discontinued. What we want now is for it to be no more, anywhere, anytime.

Also, as we are moving back, we must guard against short sightedness and greed. Selling of our lands to those who come with the intention of selling it to none tribes under a business arrangement that does not favor us in the long term.

Esau only cared about the now and ate the seed that should have been planted and nourished for a brighter future. We should stop eating the seeds that we ought to plant. Monies meant for development should be applied towards the development of our communities, and not shared by individuals. With long term development in view, if money must be shared, it should only be a tiny fraction, whilst the vast majority should be set aside for real development.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Due to situation or circumstances, there are those who have not been able to leave the villages. And they have suffered through the trauma and hardship. They must be commended for their bravery. However, like the story of the prodigal son, the other son who never left and stayed “loyal” to his father, was very angry and resentful when the other son who left, returned and was welcomed by the father.

Like the father in the story, who was happy that his lost son was returning home, Ògíamè is happy to welcome everyone back to their villages.

We don't want those who have been around to feel resentful, or angry towards those making efforts to return. We don't want them to feel that they're more ENTITLED to the land because they never left. Everyone's heart should be open and ready to support and accommodate each other.

That also includes making the atmosphere conducive for those returning back to the villages. No more taxing or collecting deve. As people are coming home to build, they should be fully encouraged to come and build. And as they build, their property should be PROTECTED by those who are on ground more frequently. Burglary and theft should be frowned upon. If Itsekiri is to truly grow, we must have peace of mind that our brother next door, will not betray or attack us. We must return to our traditional practice of communal caring for and support of one another.

IN CONCLUSION

We know that not everyone has the means to immediately mobilize to the village and commence development. Those who have already made burial and wedding plans are not under any immediate pressure to comply. However, as the year comes to an end, and we go into the new year, it is expected that plans will be made in this direction.

Those who are already chiefs, they are fortunate that they got their titles without any of these requirements. Those who are able to go and build, are encouraged to do so. However, going forward, those who want to be considered for chieftaincy titles, it will be required that you have a house in your village. There may be some “strategic” reasons that may bring an exemption to this, but generally, chiefs will join Ògíamè in leading by example by demonstrating a presence in their village.

Going forward, those who are required to have a home in their village, whether they are in those positions now or are seeking the blessing and support of the palace for:

- Elected officials at state and federal levels.
- Community leaders
- PIA Trustees
- Itsekiri sons and daughters that own successful companies and businesses
- Itsekiri sons and daughters in the diaspora who also have achieved success in their ventures.
- Itsekiri sons and daughters working in, but not limited to, the oil and gas industry, banking industry and other industries.
- Itsekiri civil servants that can afford to do so

For those who are young and are truly not able to afford to build a house in their village, where it can be proven that such a young person has great leadership ideas and potential for good leadership, this will be ascertained and determined by the Palace.

As we move forward in unity and purpose, may God guide our efforts to rebuild our land and strengthen our resolve. May God continue to bless and protect Itsekiri and the Warri Kingdom.



His Majesty Ògíamè Atúwátse III, CFR
The Olu of Warri