

Full Text of the Coronation Speech delivered by Ogiame Atuwatse III – The Olu of Warri on August 21st, 2021

In the name of the most High God, we warmly welcome you all to this distinctly notable day in the annals of our rich heritage and noble ancestry as proud inheritors of the unique essence that has come to define our Iwere Kingdom.

We would like to especially welcome His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari, who is here represented by the Deputy Senate President. We recognise the distinguished presence of the Governor of Kebbi State, the representative of the Governor of Delta State and other traditional rulers present.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, before proceeding any further, we would like to thank Almighty God for the life and glorious reign of our predecessor, and most illustrious uncle, His Majesty, Ogiame Ikenwoli. In the course of his relatively brief reign, he was whole-heartedly committed to the cause of the sustained peace, growth and development of Iwere Kingdom. His place of pride is definitely assured in the pantheon of Itsekiri monarchs and in the hearts and minds of all Itsekiri sons and daughters. May he continue to rest with the Lord.

Fellow Itsekiri, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we are confident that our ancestors are at this moment, smiling down on us filled with pride and joy as they see us ready and braced for the journey towards repositioning our dear Iwere Kingdom within the prevailing reality of today's Nigeria and the world at large.

It is our prayer that, in the end, we will be true worthy inheritors of their great sacrifice and faith in a strong, progressive united Iwere Kingdom.

We must express our profound gratitude to the proud Itsekiri sons and daughters who stood up to be counted when it appeared that the foundation of our collective patrimony was under threat. While it is not expedient to mention them all on this occasion, Chief Johnson, Chief Gabriel Awala, Chief Brown Mene, Chief Roland Oritsejafor, Chief C. D. Ikomi, Chief Edwin Olley, Chief Robinson Ariyo and Chief Eugene Ikomi need to be specially recognized. Modokpe gidigbo.

Interestingly, just before this very precious kairos moment in time which has brought us to where we are today, that age long tendency that has always sought to distort and abort our greatness, wanted to rear its ugly head in an attempt to truncate our glory and restoration to our original God given identity.

Our kingdom has experienced an unfortunate interregnum in our history that lasted for 88 years. But because the Almighty God had reserved the importance that Itsekiri would be, to the formation and greatness of what would be a successful Nigeria, a force beyond all human reckoning and comprehension, did the impossible, and brought back this exalted throne and with it, a King, Olu Ginuwa II, to be witness to the beginning of the process of what would be an independent Nigeria.

This time however, God did not just intervene to truncate any disruptive plots, He ensured that the Itsekiri nation stood united, and all of Nigeria rallied behind Itsekiri to ensure that there was no division.

We aver before you all today that we are not and were never offended at any point in time during the process that culminated in this day that has seen me ascend to the throne of my fathers.

This is, in every ramification, a very special day; one that had been predestined and divinely ordained by the Most High God. He, and He alone could have determined that three months after our Idaniken began in May, our coronation will take place today, the only Saturday in this year 2021 that occurs as the 21st day of the month!

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, this unique August day is truly a day of the Almighty God's divine visitation to Iwere Kingdom! It is not just a divine visitation, it heralds a divine habitation!

There is no part of this that has been of my own doing, it was and remains God's divine project. And as a result, the mischief that some had intended, God has used it for good. Our Yoruba brothers have an expression: when the palace of the King burns down, it is because a more beautiful one wants to be erected in its place. The taboo that was done by the desecration of our most prized Crown Jewels,

made a way for a more beautiful one, fashioned by our own royal person, while staying true to the inspiration of the one that came from Portugal way back in the 17th Century.

Before then, however, Olu Ginuwa I brought a coral beaded crown from the source in Benin, and that crown adorned the heads of the first 6 Olus. Olu Atuwatse I brought a pair of silver crowns that would adorn the heads of the next 14 Olus. By the special grace of God, we have the privilege to introduce a new pair of gold and silver crowns, to the already rich and beautiful history of the attire of the Olu of Warri. And as the progression of our crowns is symbolic for all to see, from coral, to silver, and now to gold, so shall there be a spiritual, physical, social and economic manifestation of the progress of our kingdom and our people.

While not seeking to reopen old wounds, it is pertinent to recall the fact that, following the grave injustice meted out to Olu Erejuwa II, he visited His Royal Majesty Oba Akenzua II of Benin and recounted his ordeal. In reaction, a curse was placed on the land by both of them.

It is not recorded that Olu Erejuwa II reversed the curse over the land. Neither is it recorded that Oba Akenzua II did same. Most probably, the issue was never revisited. As a firm believer in the intricate interconnectedness between the spiritual and the manifestation in the physical, it is our firm belief that the matter needs to be addressed.

Today, in our capacity as Olu, we hereby avow:

As the spiritual, cultural, political and traditional leader of this land, I, Ogiame Atuwatse III, the 21st Olu of Warri, the first son of Olu Atuwatse II, the grandson and direct descendant of Olu Erejuwa II, who was offended on this throne, I hereby reverse the curse placed over this land. In its place, I release forgiveness and healing to the Federal Government of Nigeria, whose might was used to propagate that offence, and I decree unprecedented and uncommon peace, prosperity, progress, and development upon this land. I bring down the government of heaven unto this land, and direct it to flow as a force that can neither be sabotaged, slowed nor stopped. It goes out as a strong ripple effect, emanating from this kingdom to the rest of the Niger Delta, to the rest of the Nigerian Nation, and even the African continent.

Africa has always been shaped as a gun, with Nigeria as its trigger. Today, that gun has been fired, and full restoration comes out of the barrel. This land begins to yield its riches to us, all that had been hidden hitherto, comes to the surface, and the world shall marvel as to how we have defied projected economic trends. And this time around, we shall be the ones to chart the course of our own destiny.

And now, as Itsekiri is restored to its original identity as one of blessing, we decree: *because Itsekiri is blessed, Nigeria is blessed. Because Itsekiri is blessed, Africa is blessed.*

Now that the foundation has been addressed, it is time to put out a clarion call. We therefore call upon and welcome back, all sons and daughters of Iwere Kingdom that are dispersed in the diaspora; in Nigeria, the rest of Africa and all over the world. All sons and daughters of Iwere Kingdom who identify as Itsekiri, by your father, your mother, grandmother or grandfather, we welcome you and all. Come with your capacity, your expertise, your networks, your ideas and resources, to join us in repositioning this Kingdom. We also invite, our well-wishers and admirers, who count it all joy to be identified and associated with us, either by marriage, business ties or residence.

We extend specially towards our neighbours, our Ijaw, Urhobo and Ilaje neighbours, a hand of invitation to peace and development. As it is not our desire to prosper in isolation, we desire that our neighbours prosper also. We recognise that the peace and prosperity is a shared one, built on righteousness and justice, which is the motto of this our reign, and the foundation upon which God's throne is built.

At this point, we make bold to say, that our emergence is not simply the filling of a role. We will be redefining the essence of the throne of the Olu of Warri. While we have every intention to lead as led by The Lord Himself, we implore all of us to work together, and renew our minds and our way of thinking, so that nothing, especially internally, hinders us from getting to our desired glorious destination. We should be ready to let go of the old ways that have not encouraged us to advance, and not allow sentiment to keep us bound.

To launch this new renaissance today, you would have noticed the crests that have been released. We have taken time, based on the information available, to rebrand our forebears in such a way that they define their own unique identity, reign, and destiny. As a people so proud of their royal heritage, it is our expectation that in these 20 crests we will be able to further add to the pride and richness of our historical and cultural identity.

At this juncture, I want to speak directly to the youths of not just Iwere Kingdom, but the entire Niger Delta. We have heard the narrative several times, as to how blessed the Niger Delta is blessed in terms of resources. The truth however, we must look beyond oil and gas, and channel our energy in the right directions towards endeavours that will result in added value across the board. What we have, is our culture and our identity, and we must use this as an instrument to influence the mind of our youth for their own development, in ways that are completely devoid of partisan politics.

We will look to honour our women. We will encourage them, build them up and support them in realising their inestimable potentials. And as we do this, we will also see the multiplier effect in the collective development of our people. We will ensure that our women, both old and young, are honoured and respected, not only by word, but in actual cultural practice. We will look to actively seek the opinion and counsel of our women, and opportunities that avail themselves to the Itsekiri nation will be used to empower our women to enable them to contribute their substance to the growth and development of the Itsekiri nation. So I say to our women today: You will no longer be invisible.

I want to begin by formally honouring the two most important women in my life today. Interestingly enough, as God has ordained, one is a beautiful young lady of Edo heritage, and the other, is a gracious woman of Yoruba heritage. One addresses the past, while the other addresses the present as well as the future. But as we have come to understand, time is a river, things are intertwined. Just like the complicated fabric that is the Itsekiri nation.

By the special grace of God, I am the first Olu of Warri, in well over two centuries, whose mother is alive and well to witness him sit on the throne. In the same time span, even longer, I am the first eldest son of an Olu to ascend the

throne. None of these are taken for granted, it is the perfect will and purpose of the Almighty God to make it so.

Where we have unofficially addressed the mother of the Olu as Iy'olu, simply because she happened to be his mother, I hereby officially and formally, bestow the honour on my mother. You shall no longer be referred to as Olori Atuwatse II, but Iyiolu Atuwatse III. And blessed are you among mothers in the earth.

Inevitably, in addressing the present and the future, we cannot but consider where we are coming from. Since the arrival of Prince Ginuwa from Benin, it is not on record that any Olu has married a Bini woman, nor has any Olu been on record to have been born of a Bini woman. I distinguish between Bini and Edo, for obvious reasons. Yet again, I stand before you, as the first Olu in five centuries, to be married to a Bini woman. In many ways, it is as though today, this monarchy has come full circle.

And on this note, let me share a personal story of my recently departed father-in-law - Captain Idahosa Okunbo. He was witness to a prophetic word, and he himself, unbeknownst to him, played the role of a prophet. Raised by his grandmother in his much younger years, she would say out loud after a long tedious day, ***“the suffering is too much; in my next life, I will come back and be inside the Palace”***. On the day we paid the bride price in Benin, my father-in-law said to me as he finally placed his daughter into my hands, “I named her, Aiyivieruewinoya (roughly translated as ‘you don’t abuse precious beads’). Ivie belongs to the Palace, and I am entrusting her into your palace”. The words of his grandmother and indeed his own words, were inspired and honoured by heaven, and today, the full manifestation has come to pass.

To my beautiful, loving and supportive wife, I hereby officially and formally bestow the honour upon you. You shall no longer be referred to as Princess Ivie Emiko, but as Olori Atuwatse III. Long may we both reign.

As glorious as today is, our future is even more glorious, because we have the blessing and backing of the Almighty God. And with this backing comes boundaries. Whatever knowledge, in form of our centuries-old heritage, or whatever resource, in form of our abundant natural and mineral wealth, that God has given us, we will neither boast in nor depend on them. Rather, we will depend

on God Himself, who has given us these things. And it is in doing what God says to us, how we follow His instructions, that we will move mightily in dominion, power and authority. And upon this revelation, shall be the bedrock and cornerstone of our reign:

The earth belongs to God

This throne belongs to God

This king belongs to God

And so, we boldly declare, that the Kingdom of Warri has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And He shall reign forever and ever.

I thank you all for coming to celebrate with us this day. And wish you Godspeed as you return to your various destinations. God bless Iwere land, God bless all our neighbours, God bless Delta state, God bless Nigeria, and God bless Africa.