**ADDRESS OF HIS EXCELLENCY, SENATOR DOUYE DIRI, ON THE OCCASION OF FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF HIS ASSUMPTION OF OFFICE AS GOVERNOR OF BAYELSA STATE**

**DATE: FEBRUARY 14, 2021**

FELLOW BAYELSANS,

1. WE give thanks to Almighty God for the blessings, favour and grace He continues to bestow on us as a people. Exactly a year ago, that is, 14th February last year, in accordance with our democratic custom, I and H.E. Senator Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo, took the oath of office of Governor and Deputy, respectively, of Bayelsa State.

2. The circumstances leading up to and culminating in the miraculous verdict of the Supreme Court that placed the mandate of our people where it was really intended, are well documented and do not need to be recounted here. Suffice it to say that Scriptural truth, as succinctly expressed in Psalm 124 (here paraphrased), came to fulfilment in that remarkable event: "1. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Bayelsa say;

2. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us:

3. Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:

4 Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul:

5 Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.

6 Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.

7 Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.

8 Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

3. It has been 366 days already. How time flies! Today, not many remember that this state was sitting on a keg of gunpowder. The perpetrators of arson, savagery and bloody massacre that had claimed the lives of several innocent supporters of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) on a peaceful campaign rally in Nembe were determined to escalate their diabolical actions to areas across the state. But God intervened.

4. By the miraculous Supreme Court verdict on February 13, 2020, barely 24 hours to the inauguration of the next governor, God did not only abort an electoral heist, but also more importantly disappointed the devices of the schemers, so that their hands could not perform their enterprise.

5. So, on this first anniversary of our assumption of office, I want to acknowledge the Almighty God who sits in Heaven and rules in the affairs of men. All praise, adoration and worship are due to Him and we are careful not to share His glory with anyone.

And to all our dear citizens, I owe a debt of gratitude for the atmosphere of peace and harmony in all our communities so soon after my inauguration, and for the very evident solidarity with my administration. In the state's public service as well as the eight local government areas, there has been appreciable support, particularly in terms of implementation of the programmes of this administration. We can only demand more and more as we are yet to hit the mark envisioned in service delivery in all arms of the public sector.

6. I recall the highly commendable performance of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Information, Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital and others toward combating the scourge of COVID-19, which, as everyone knows, had reached emergency proportions worldwide soon after I assumed office as Governor. All that my administration set out to do was faithfully implemented hence the ravages of the pandemic were minimal in Bayelsa State. A world-class Bayelsa State Molecular Laboratory, Research and Diagnostic Centre was ready in Yenagoa, built entirely by this government and received full accreditation by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) on August 28, 2020.

7. The same commendable spirit was evident when we planned for procurement and distribution of palliatives to alleviate the pains and suffering of most citizens that lost their means of livelihood. The exercise was largely successful, mostly because it was devoid of political colourations.

8. Our civil service will be bestowed the esteem and regard that their role in governance deserves. Our pensioners and elderly people will be celebrated for their past and continued service to the state and assured they will not be neglected in the eventide of their lives. Appreciative of the service of our senior citizens over the years, as harsh as the economic circumstances were at the time, just as palliatives were going round, we embarked on payment of gratuities and death benefits of our citizen by allocating a minimum of N200 million monthly to that purpose. The backlog of such benefits, dating back to 2007, amount to several billions of naira. And it was (and remains) the conviction of my administration that gradually we could pay all off. I allocated an additional N500 million in January 2021, following some improvement in our revenue profile the preceding month.

9. We are continuing to put in place policies and opportunities for our energetic and growing population that wants to be a part of the emerging economic prospects. If we learnt anything from the #EndSARS protests, it must be that we have an adventurous youthful population, impatient for success. We can either see the talents, energies, sense of enterprise and innovation of the Bayelsan as an opportunity to be harnessed or a problem to be solved. That is why my administration, working in partnership with some agencies, is preparing our youth to be eligible for single digit credit facilities, so they can be empowered to be active participants in the economy of the state. Programmes for empowerment of youths, notably the DiriBoost Entrepreneurship Programme 2020, the CSS Integrated Farms Limited, with whom a memorandum of understanding (MOU) has already been signed to train young farmers that would be assisted by the state government to establish their own farms. More avenues for skills acquisition and youth empowerment are available at the ATTEC Academy here in the state capital, where an MOU has been signed and plans concluded for training of youths in batches of over a hundred every six months for skills in electrical works, solar energy solutions, welding and iron works, roofing works, carpentry and joinery as well as in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In the days ahead, all of these opportunities will be in place for our youths.

Projects

10. In the last few weeks, our mouths have been filled with laughter and our lips made lighter. We no longer recount the difficulties we face, but the benevolence of our God and the compendium of projects and programmes we are undertaking. The headwinds that my administration had faced this first year were not an excuse to abdicate the mandate of prosperity we signed on for. The state has metamorphosed into a humongous construction site. Within the period, we have mobilised contractors to resume work on the West and Central senatorial districts roads. The contract for the Yenagoa-Oporoma federal road started by my predecessor has been reviewed upwards to about N27 billion, including construction of a bridge to link the road to Oporoma in the central flank of the state. One Billion Naira has been released for the ongoing rehabilitation of 50 internal roads in the capital city as well as re-awarding of the contract for construction of Phase 2 of the Glory Drive road from the Ecumenical Centre in Igbogene to link the Amassoma road and from there to Onopa. Work is also ongoing on the Igbogene-Bayelsa Palm outer ring road project.

On the eastern flank, we have awarded the contract for re-construction of the collapsed Elebele bridge in addition to the completed Imiringi bridge, which was commissioned on Friday. I similarly commissioned the commercial incinerator at the Bayelsa Medical University in Yenagoa. At the premises of the Bayelsa Broadcasting Corporation in Ekeki, work has begun on an imposing multi-storey edifice for Radio Bayelsa, Bayelsa State Television and Bayelsa State Newspaper Corporation.

11. Agriculture remains our fastest and most sustainable device to solve the employment and financial inclusiveness riddle. This government has developed a blueprint on agriculture and small and medium scale enterprises as part of efforts to empower Bayelsans to take charge of the local economy. In this regard, the state House of Assembly has given approval for the state government to secure two agricultural loans from the Central Bank of Nigeria with minimal interest rates to empower Bayelsa farmers. This is in addition to the N3 billion agricultural credit facility previously accessed from the CBN and another N8 billion being awaited. The essence of securing these loans is to empower Bayelsa farmers and not for the expense of the state government. Several states are already benefitting from the single digit CBN agricultural credit facilities.

12. Health will always enjoy top priority in the scheme of things in the state. I have commissioned the long abandoned ultra-modern Referral Hospital at Kaiama in Kolokuma-Opokuma Local Government Area. It was commenced under the Melford Okilo regime in the old Rivers State and brought to about 60% completion by my predecessor. I completed and fully equipped it. That will be a huge boost to healthcare delivery in our state. I have directed that similar referral facilities be built in all the other local government areas.

13. I have to state here that I appreciate the exceptional opportunity of being able to draw on the insight and involvement of four former Governors of our state, their Excellences, Chief Diepriye Solomon Peter Alamieyeseigha, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Chief Timipre Sylva and Senator Henry Seriake Dickson. They epitomise the expression of our collective desire to make Bayelsa State truly The Glory of All Lands.

14. Although my first year in office naturally began on a happy note, with the Supreme Court verdict, it soon became a difficult year of unprecedented proportions and I want to sincerely thank you all for your patience, prayers, wise counsel and patriotism that has helped us navigate the worst of our constraints. Yet by tagging our State as “The Glory of All Lands” we have underscored our determination to bring wealth to our people. This aligns with the Prosperity Agenda of my government and we aim to give full expression to this tag.

15. We live in a time of extraordinary change – change that is reshaping the way we live, the way we work, and especially its impact on crude oil, our primary source of earning as a state. Our dwindling purse means that not only are we eventually going to be unable to afford more and more of the essential infrastructure and social services that our people desperately require, but it will also cause economic disruptions that will strain social cohesion. It is contingent we make the right decisions and put in place policies that would shield us from economic doom. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) remain a solid vehicle to drive the economy of states. By our pragmatic decisions and actions, we have created the conducive environment to attract such partnerships. We are receiving considerable interest from several investors. The state-owned plastic company is in the process of being revived to provide jobs and create an alternative source of revenue in partnership with private investors. Other investors have also expressed interest in partnering with the state government developing Liquefied Natural Gas Plants, Modular Refinery and Power Plants as well as to develop the Swali market to a truly ultra-modern location.

16. Ultimately, the surest way to sustain our prosperity is to get all involved in the economy. We can best do this when we have an empowered and skilled population that is capable of working with their hands and using innovative technology. That is why we must expand our horizons and embrace technical and vocational schools as vital tools for our development. In this consideration, we are building technical and vocational schools across the eight local government areas of the state to equip our youth for the future.

17. We believe that the business of government is to govern. If we must generate prosperity, we must strive to advocate and bring peace to our communities. That is why we have been passionate in reconciling feuding communities and ensuring internally displaced persons returned home. I wish to thank our traditional rulers and elders for their mature stance to make the processes seamless. I want to acknowledge the kind cooperation of the people of Agudama-Epe, Akenfa, Nembe and other communities for embracing dialogue and peace.

18. The modest strides we have made thus far have been aided by the harmonious working relationship between the executive and the other arms of government. I thank them for their loyalty to the state. Be assured that this convivial relationship will be improved upon and sustained.

19. We are hopeful that in the second year of this administration, we would be able to make a comeback from the setback of the first year and put even more significant physical structures in place without neglecting to build the human capital and lives.

20. In a bid to protect the public purse I signed into law the

Public Procurement Amendment Bill within months of assumption of office to enthrone value-for-money as sacred principle of public expenditure. Also, Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Bill to guide public servants in the management of funds by strict adherence to extant financial regulations. Fiscal discipline has to be the watchword. Our philosophy of governance is to take everyone along in our activities, so, this Administration will ensure that in as many projects that direct labour would be appropriate, we create opportunities for unemployed citizens to be engaged to keep them busy and well remunerated. This approach has the added benefit of capacity building for the relevant MDAs.

21. Some had imagined that the multiplicity of adverse social and economic conditions we faced, aggravated by the avalanche of hostile and frivolous litigations intended to distract us and truncate the vision of moving the state forward, would lead to the scuttling of our ambitions. But God in His infinite mercies has turned the situation into a planting. Even as we were pulled back, we become like the arrow in the string of a skilful archer, when fully stretched and unleashed travels faster to hit its mark.

22. In conclusion, I invite Bayelsans to begin to think more of dedicated service and of excellence in their relationship with the state. Let us collectively raise the bar. Let us change our orientation about our state. The Bible in Acts 20:35 states that: "It is more blessed to give than to receive,” which teaches that there is joy in the act of giving. Bayelsa is all we have. Let us begin to think of what we can give to Bayelsa and not just what we can take. And may everything your hands find to do prosper.

Thank you all for your kind attention. God bless Bayelsa State. God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria