**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IJAW NATIONAL CONGRESS**

The Ijaw National Congress was formed in 1991.

* To work for Ijaw unity and promote national (Ijaw) consciousness.
* To create a forum for all Ijaw people to meet to discuss the plight of the Ijaw man in Nigeria.
* To familiarize the Ijaw people with the problems of the various Ijaw zones.
* To adopt a co-ordinated, centralized and united approach to finding solutions to Ijaw problems.

**IJAW UNITY**

Before 1991, many Ijaw groups had been formed in many parts of Nigeria essentially to draw attention of Governments to the plight of the Ijaw and protest the extant state of affairs in Ijaw land, especially among the youths who were eager for a change in the status quo at whatever cost in sweat and blood! Unfortunately however, these earlier Ijaw interest/ pressure groups were unable to nurture the required central organization (for all the Ijaws) to effectively promote National (Ijaw) unity, cohesiveness and consciousness essential for our survival as a people. Furthermore, again because of the lack of a central body, they were also ineffective in confronting the marginal political/economic conditions of the Ijaws in the Nigerian Federation. It was in response to the appalling conditions occasioned, in part, by the absence of a central unifying Ijaw organization that our three distinguished Ijaw fathers/leaders; Chief (Dr.) H.J.R. Dappa-Biriye, Chief George A. Weikezi and Chief F.H. E. Brisibe, all of blessed memory, met with other compatriots at the 29 Calcutta Crescent, Apapa, residence of Chief Weikezi under the auspices of the Ijaw People’s Union (Lagos) on 25th , 29th and 30th of October 1991. The series of meetings was meant to fashion out a way for the Ijaw to grid their loins to face the challenges of endocolonialism that the Nigerian Federation now practiced.

The outcome of these deliberations (and studies this group came out with) was their conclusion that the Ijaw nation needed a think tank, an organ that would be the collective brain-box of the nation. The Think-Tank, in practical terms was perceived as an institutional equivalent of the “Godfather” personified in the president of the organization who “must never sleep”, who must be alive and awake at all times to know, discover, proffer and provide solutions for all Ijaw individuals, groups, clans and national problems, whatever and however these may be and whenever and wherever they may exist. It could be noted here that INC today, especially it’s NEC, as portrayed vide its 1996 Constitution is a close approximation of the vision of 1990!.

The immediate outcome of the Calcutta Crescent meetings of the 25th, 29th, and 30th of October 1991 was the decision to convoke the All-Ijaw National Convention which held at Patani on the 23rd of November 1991.

**FIRST IJAW NATIONAL CONVENTION (PATANI ’91)**

The Patani Convention (1981) was organized jointly by the Delta State Izon Consultative Committee (Warri) and the Ijaw People’s Union (Lagos) and was hosted by HRH, Major L. M. Erebulu (Rtd), Aduwo II, the Pere of Kabowei Kingdom, under the chairmanship of Chief F.H. E. Brisibe. Powerful and inspirational speeches and paper presentations were made by Chief (Dr.) Dappa-Biriye, Chief George Weikezi, Rev. (Dr.) C. A. Dime, Justice J. A. P. Oki, Tony Engrube, Morris Ekiye, Prof. P. S. Akponwei and P. Z. Aginighan among others.\

The two major resolutions of the convention, as reflected in it’s communique were:

1. a) The demand made on the Federal Military Government to create homogenous Ijaw States and Local Government Areas in the Ijaw country; in the firm conviction that the Ijaw question was more political than economic and could only be solved by situating political power in Ijawland so that the Ijaw could solve these problems by themselves; and
2. b) The constitution of a committee (later to be known as the Ijaw National Co-ordinating Committee, (INCC) which was mandated to “examine various issues raised which affect collected Ijaw interests in the Nigerian federation” and to be the eye of the Ijaw in the affairs of the nation.

These have since set an enduring agenda for the Ijaw people.

**SECOND ALL-IJAW NATIONAL CONVENTION (AROGBO ’92)**

The second major activity of the Ijaw National Coordinating Committee was the holding of the 2nd All-Ijaw National Convention tagged “Arogbo 92” in Arogbo, Ondo State between 20th – 22nd November, 1992. Arogbo was graced by the eminent present of Chief (Dr.) Dappa-Biriye, Chief George Weikezi (the “Big Daddy”), a personal envoy of Chief Ada George, the Governor of Rivers State, HRH Pere D.M.E. Eperetun, Aagah II, and Agadagba of Arogbo-Ijaw Kingdom. The keynote paper was presented by Prof. Kimse Okoko.

This “Arogbo 92” felt that matters of the Ijaw race should not continue to be handled by a committee. The name, All-Ijaw Cultural Association, was therefore adopted instead of the Ijaw National Coordinating Committee. “Argobo 92” also raised the status of INCC to an interim National Executive Council, although unelected, with a mandate, within six months to:

1)         Prepare a draft constitution, and

2)         Organise a Delegates Conference to ratify the constitution of the Pan Ijaw national body

ALL IJAW DELEGATES CONFERENCE

In accordance with the mandate of the 2nd All-Ijaw National Convention, “Arogbo 92” an All-Ijaw National Delegates Conference was held at Kaiama on Saturday, May 15th, 1993. The name IZON (IJAW) NATIONAL CONGRESS was adopted as an umbrella organization to handle all Ijaw matters. The constitution of the body was also ratified, and the interim NEC was mandate to organize the 3rd All-Ijaw National Convention and elect National officers in accordance with the new constitution. The communique also reiterated the call for the creation of three homogenous Ijaw States name Toru-Ebe, Oil Rivers and Bayelsa.

At this point, the INC is said to have taken its current shape and was ready for action.

**FAILED ATTEMPT TO CONVOKE 3RD IJAW NATIONAL CONVENTION: ABUA ’93.**

On the advice of Chief (Dr.) Dappa-Biriye, who indeed chose the venue of the two previous convention at Patani and Arogbo, the 3rd Ijaw National Convention was slated for November 1993, at Abua of Rivers State. Arrangement had reached advanced stage before the process was aborted by state security agents who were, apparently, disconcerted with the sheer thought of a large gathering of Ijaw people at the time when General Sani Abacha had ousted the Interim National Government of Chief Ernest Shonekan.

**FULL BLOWN CARETAKER NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

A National Representative Council meeting was convened for Patani on Friday 7th January, 1994 to discuss a number of issues facing the Congress and to review the State of the Nigerian Nation. Not only had the 3rd All-Izon National Convention (Abua 93’) been aborted, issues of great national significance e.g. the constitutional conference, were staring the Ijaw nation “in the face”. Members of the council therefore felt strongly that a caretaker National Executive Council be put in place for the period between January and November, 1994 when the 3rd All-Ijaw National Convention would be held. A new full blown caretaker National Executive Council was thereafter elected thus with:

1)         Mr. J. B. Fumudoh as President

2)         Dr. Dinma Denni-Fiberesima as Vice President

3)         Chief F.J. Williams as National Secretary

**PRE-CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE / IJAW COLLOQUIUM (PCIC)**

The National Executive Council in it’s meeting held at Patani on 8th January 1994 resolved to organize a Pre-Conference Ijaw Colloquium on the proposed National Constitutional Conference. The PCIC was duly held on Tuesday, March 1st, 1994 at the Cinema Hall of Hotel Presidential, Port Harcourt and a communique was published in The Guardian of March 13th, 1994. The PCIC adopted the memorandum already submitted to the NCCC.

**INAUGURATION OF COUNCIL OF IJAW ELDERS AND CONFERENCE OF IJAW TRADITIONAL RULERS.**

By virtue of the relevant provisions of the Constitution of Congress, the first ever Council of Ijaw Elders and Conference of Ijaw Traditional Rulers were inaugurated on Tuesday March 22nd and Wednesday March 23rd 1994 respectively at the Cinema Hall of Hotel Presidential.

**JOINT COMMUNIQUE OF CONFEENCE OF IJAW TRADITIONAL RULERS AND** **COUNCIL OF IJAW ELDERS.**

The Pre-Conference Ijaw Colloquium   asserted the inalienable rights of the Ijaw to all their territories, self-determination and control of all resources under the earth, the airspace and the water including the Exclusive Economic Zone. The conference and council decried the deliberate balkanization of the Ijaw and gave approval to any form of struggle for the unification of the Ijaw in Nigeria. The communique was jointly signed by HRH Jones A. Ere II, Ebenanawei of Ogboin Kingdom for Traditional Rulers, Chief (Dr.) H.J. R. Dappa-Biriye for Council of Elders and Mr. J. B. Fumudoh, President of INC.

**BOYCOTT OF NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE**

The conference of Ijaw Traditional Rulers also met the National Representative Council. A joint communique of the meeting of the Conference and Council, which was published in the The Guardian on Saturday May 21, 1994 endorsed the boycott call of the INC on the ground that a conference of the nature being proposed was incapable of addressing the fundamental issues of the Ijaw question in Nigeria.

**BONNY ‘94**

The Fumudoh led Caretaker Executive Committee also attempted to hold another 3rd Ijaw National Convention. The 1994 INC “Crisis” which surfaced just about the time before the Convention eventually led to the outright cancellation of Bonny ’94 at the instigation of the Military Administration of Rivers State in collaboration with senior Military Officers of Ijaw extraction, citing security concerns as the reasons.

**THIRD IJAW NATIONAL CONVENTION (PORT HARCOURT ’95)**

A steering committee was set up, on the resolution of the INC “Crisis” by Ijaw Traditional Rulers, Elders and Ijaw Senior Military Officers, to conduct the first democratic elections into the National Executive Council of Congress in accordance with the 1993 INC officers of congress.

1)         President                                 –                       Mr. Joshua B. Fumudoh

2)         Vice President                         –                       Dr. Dinma Denni-Fiberesima

3)         National Secretary                  –                       Chief Francis J. Williams

4)         National Assistant Secretary   –                       Mr. Erasmus U. Patrick

5)         National Treasurer                   –                       Chief M. Y. Waritimi

6)         National Publicity Secretary   –                       Mr. Eric Senibo

7)         National Asst. Pub. Sec.         –                       Mr. A. E. Esete

8)         National Organising Secretary-                       Mr. Douye Diri

9)         National Asst. Org. Sec.         –                       Mr. Godspower T. Oporomo

10)       National Financial Secretary   –                       Mr. Pius Uromi-Owu

11)       National Legal Adviser           –                       Hon. J. L. D. Dagogo

12)       National Auditor                     –                       Dr. M. P. Okonny

The J. B. Fumudoh led National Executive council remained in office till 9th September 2000. Among other things it organised.

**FIRST ALL-IJAW NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

The first Pan-Ijaw conference was held at the auditorium of the Women’s Affairs Ministry at Yenagoa on the 27th of August 1998. Following the death of General Sani Abacha, the assumption of office of the Gen. Abubakar junta, the INC convened this conference for the main purpose of bringing together Ijaw politicians to debate the need to form a single political organization based and controlled in Ijawland. It was felt an Ijaw political party would provide opportunity for the Ijaw to negotiate on equal terms with other ethnic groups to form a merger, coalition or a broadbased political party which would give ample regard to Ijaw interests. Such an Ijaw controlled political party, it was generally believed, would give meaning to and sustain our age-long desire and aspiration to stand on our own as a distinct geo-political zone and that such a political organization would provide a formidable platform for the continued articulation of Ijaw interests in Nigeria.

The major outcome of this conference was the formation of the National Solidarity Movement (NSM), an Ijaw political party. A steering committee was formed to actualize the goals of the movement.

**POSITION OF IJAWS ON LINGERING POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS**

The INC published a position paper stating that the way forward for Nigeria was to practice true federalism in which the federating units shall approximate ethnic national boundaries and in which each unit shall have political and economic autonomy with ample opportunities for putting up plans of their own for self development.

**INCUSA AND THE LAUNCHING OF IJAW NATIONAL ALLIAN OF THE AMERICAS**

The awareness generated by the activities of the INC and efforts at internationalization of the Ijaw struggle led to the establishment of INC in USA (INCUSA) and the Ijaw National Alliance of the Americas on Saturday 5th September, 1998 at 100 Capital Boulevard, Rocky Hill, Connecticut USA.

In Britain, Ijaw People’s Association (IPA) and Federated Ijaw Communities of Great Britain and Ireland (FEDICOM) picked up the mantle of the Ijaw struggle. In recognition of the efforts of the INC, the president of Congress, Mr. J.B. Fumudoh was given the responsibility of presenting the keynote address at the INAA launching in USA. The keynote address dated August 1998 use the occasion to educate the international communities on the Ijaw Question in Nigeria, highlighting who the Ijaw are, the history of their struggle for self-determination, the Ijaw question in Nigeria and the way forward in the resolution of the Question.

**MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE PRESIDENTIAL TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON** **REVIEW OF THE 1999 CONSTITUTION OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA.**

A memorandum dated January 2000 was submitted by the INC to the Presidential Technical Committee on Review of the 1999 Constitution by the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As usual, the memorandum recommended a truly Federal Structure of Governance for the country in which ethnic nationalities will form the basic units of the federation. Ten of such groups were recommended, including the Southern Federation comprising entirely of the Ijaw.

**FOURTH IJAW NATIONAL CONVENTION (YENAGOA 2000)**

The Fourth Ijaw National Convention (Yenagoa 2000) was almost marred by succession crisis. It held on the 31st of March 2000 at the Yenagoa stadium and was declared open by His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, then Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State. The Convention lecture was given by Prof. E. J. Alagoa on the theme: “The Ijaw Nation in the New Millennium”.

The elections scheduled for the next day could not hold due to a Warri High Court ex-parte debarment which, though it had been vacated, had created a non-conducive atmosphere for intra-Ijaw elections. The elections which eventually held on the 19th of September at the Yenagoa Sport Hall, produced the 2nd democratically elected national Executive Council of Congress thus:

Prof. Kimse Okoko                             –                       President

Hon. WG.CMDR P.Y. Biakpara        –                       Vice President

Dr. S.A. Bobo-Jama                            –                       National Secretary

Mr. Dan. Ekpebide                             –                       Nat. Asst. Secretary

Sir S. H. Wilson-Allison                     –                       National Treasurer

Mr. Erasmus U. Patrick                       –                       National Organising Secretary

Chief E. Senibo Princewill                  –                       National Publicity Secretary

Barr. H. S. Dickson                             –                       National Legal Advicer

Chief H.H. Krukrubo                          –                       National Financial Secretary

Com. Cletus Monie Ozeke                  –                       National Auditor

Hon. (Mrs.) Marie Ebikake                 –                       Nat. Asst. Org. Secretary

Secretariat       –           Tammy Ibibia Adiki                Computer Operator

**FIRST PAN- IJAW CONFERENCE**

The second Pan-Ijaw conference was held from 28th February 2nd March 2003 under the leadership of Prof. Kimse Okoko, President of the INC. The major achievements of the conference were the establishment of an **Ijaw National (Trust) Fund** in accordance with article 17 (b) subsection 4 of the INC Constitution and the restructuring of the standing committees of Congress. The conference also attracted various shapes of opinion especially from Ijaw intellectuals at home and in the Diaspora; engendered a strong sense of unity across the six states indigenous to the Ijaw and rooted a psychological approach to the Ijaw struggle. The Ijaw National Anthem was formally commissioned at this conference.

On September 15 2000, a new Executive Committee was sworn in following the highly acclaimed successful elections held in Yenagoa on the same day with Prof. Kimse Okoko emerging as the new president of the Ijaw National Congress (INC).

In its first term 2000 – December 2005, the Okoko led Executive successfully executed many landmark projects and programmes aimed at consolidating the gains of the previous regimes despite the externally induced crisis which engulfed the Executive Council. The attempt to comprise the lofty ideals of the Okoko led Executive anchored in part on the principles of selfless service and zero tolerance for corruption however, failed through the patriotic efforts of the then Governor of Bayelsa State Chief D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha and other well meaning senior citizens of the Ijaw Nation and the determined commitment of its leadership to stay on course regardless of these evil external / internal influences.

Some of the major successes of the Okoko led executive council include:

1. The production of an authentic Ijaw map.
2. Initiated the composition of the Ijaw National Anthem under the aegis of the late Dr. Adams Fiberesima, Dr. Gabriel Okara and Mr. David Suowari.
3. Organised the First Pan-Ijaw Conference with the theme: “The Ijaw Nation: Forging a Common Destiny” in 2003 in the Alfred Diete Spiff Civic Centre, Port Harcourt.
4. Organised the First Ijaw National Day Celebration and a World Summit with the theme: “The Ijaw Ethnic Nationality and the Nigerian State” in the multi-purpose hall, Sports Complex, Yenagoa on the 23rd – 25th February, 2005
5. The constitution for the first time of the 13 statutory committees of the INC
6. Reconstitution of the National Representative Council (NRC) with Dr. T. A. T. Allison as leader and General Cletus Emein (Rtd) as the deputy.
7. In line with its policy of strengthening our boarder areas which constitute our weakest links, an NRC meeting was held in Ibeno in Akwa Ibom in 2004 including visits to several Ijaw communities in Toru-Ibe in Edo State.
8. Staunchly supported the first struggles of the Ijaws in Warri.
9. Undertook conflict resolution interventions in several crises turn areas of the Ijaw nation etc etc.

**THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

The elections which produced the current executive council were held in Yenagoa on the 15th of January 2005. The following are its members:

Prof. Kimse Okoko                             –                       President

Chief Chris Ghomorai                         –                       Vice President

Dr. A. W. Obianime                            –                       National Secretary

Chief J. benamaisia                             –                       Asst. nat. Secretary

Navy Capt. Y.A. Ojujoh (Rtd)           –                       National Treasurer

Hon. Eva Hart                                     –                       National Financial Secretary

1. Adango Esq. – Legal Adviser

Elder Ekiyor Welson                           –                       Nat. Publicity Secretary

Theodore Ezonfade                            –                       Asst. Publicity Secretary

Nalaguo Chris Alagoa                         –                       National Auditor

Com. Ogunkoru Robinson                  –                       Organising Secretary

Mina, Ibitamuno                                 –                       Asst. Organising Sec.

Some of the major achievements of the present Exco under the leadership of Prof. Kimse Okoko in its first two years include:

1)         Organisation of the 2nd Ijaw World Summit followed by the Ijaw National Day Celebrations in Yenagoa

2)         First and second Ijaw National Traditional Wrestling Championship in Yenagoa

3)         Played a major role in the mass mobilization of all Ijaws in the census 2005 exercise which as acclaimed as a huge success

4)         For the first time, the Ijaws under the aegis of the INC was recognized as one of the major ethnic nationalities along with Afenifere (Yoruba), Ohaneze (Igbo) and Arewa (Hausa) and was accorded its rightful place by firstly meeting with Mr. President and subsequently invited as one of the four (4) major ethnic nationalities to the National Political Reform Conference.

5)         Closely allied with the above, the Ijaw language has now been recognized as one of the major languages to be taught in Nigerian secondary schools and examined at the WAEC.

6)         The initiation and the subsequent construction of the Izon House (INC Head Quarters) in Yenagoa in 2005 under Governor D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha

7)         The Ijaw History Project commenced again under Governor D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha in 2005 Chairmaned by our eminent historian Prof. E. J. Alagoa

8)         Most strategic achievement is the establishment of INC structures in all the clans of the Ijaw Nation and the inauguration of the additional chapters in the two strategic centres (Lagos and Abuja)

9)         Through its activities, the INC has now become a household word and the authentic voice of the Ijaw people both nationally and internationally

10)       The forthcoming inauguration of the North American Chapter of the INC in Houston and later for Europe in London is a clear vindication of the successful structural reforms undertaken by the INC to internationalise its struggle.

11)       The involvement again of the INC in the ongoing voters registration review exercise with the active support of the present administration under Dr. Goodluck Jonathan.

12)       The current efforts by the INC to resolve the lingering IYC crisis with a view to restructuring the organization in line with its stated objectives.

13)       It has embarked on a serial publication of its activities.

14)       It has set up a functional secretariat with the relevant IT facilities. The INC now has a face and a voice.