

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS PRESENTED AT THE SECOND EDITION OF THE IKOT EKPENE  
CULTURAL FESTIVAL by KINGSLEY AKPABIO (Prof).**

**On the 29<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2016**

PROTOCOLS.

“Our Culture, Our Assets, Our future”. This is the theme of our festival for this year.

**Who are we?**

Who are the Ikot Ekpene People? In an attempt to address these questions the following responses, true responses were obtained.

1. The Ikot Ekpene people were better known for their crafts and craftsmanship.
2. The Ikot Ekpene people were well organized, social and protective of one another.
3. We were well known for our hard work and determination.
4. We were known for our honesty, intelligence, openness and forthrightness.
5. We were known as very united and aggressive people. Aggressive for positive things.
6. We were known for humility, hospitality to strangers and visitors.
7. We were very well known for our dexterity in the use of the Machete. The use of the machete for farm-work and when it was necessary for the defense of self against oppression.

This list cannot be exhausted in this keynote address.

These, together with all other factors in this discuss, make up the Culture of our people, the Ikot Ekpene People.

**What is Culture?**

This is one of the few words that have been greatly mis-defined in the world today. The term is broadly defined as the social heritage of a group of people, an organized community or a society. It is the pattern of responses discovered, developed or invented by a people during the group's history of handling problems which arise from interactions among its members and between them and their environment. Culture is the way of life of a people, including their behaviors, beliefs, values, arts, symbols they accept without questioning that are sent down generations. E. B. Tylor, a renowned anthropologist, defined Culture as a complex whole which include morals, laws, customs and many other factors of life.

Some elements of culture relevant to our discuss are;

**Symbols-**

This is anything that makes a meaning to the people and is well understood by the people. Mode of dressing, design of tops (shirts), head gears, symbol of machete, tribal marks etc. Do

we have such identification symbols? Yes we do but we don't value these, even during ceremonies like this.

### **Our Language-**

Language is a complex symbol system adopted by a people as means of communication. The uniqueness of the Annang Language and indeed the Ikot Ekpene variant of this language create a special response feeling when anyone listens to it. Many of us do not want to utter a word of the dialect in public. I wonder how many of us still remember the wise sayings of our people or even the meaning and applications. The communication effects, the cognition expressions, expression of sensations and expression of values are embedded in the very rich Ikot Ekpene Language. Uko oworen, ndoko ideen, Uyai amaidem, edem ikopo ibanga, just a few to mention.

### **OUR BELIEFS AND BELIEF SYSTEM-**

These will be a set of harmless, neutral or harmful tangible and non-tangible but accepted matters within the communities. These will cover spirits, ghosts, supernatural powers, ancestral values, taboos, consequences as well as rewards to generations. Such belief helped to shape the times and the future of our people. These beliefs helped to police the people and the communities better than the modern government police of today. The spirits behind these beliefs were straight, just and never received 'Bribe'.

### **VALUES-**

Values are thought of as culturally accepted standards for moral behavior. Our cultural values had strict implications of justice, fairness, proper public behavior, gender roles, respect for family and elders and penalties for criminality and misbehaviors imbedded in it. It was unusual act for a young not to greet an elderly person anywhere. Elders were valued and obeyed at any moment. Then the syndrome "do you feed me did not arise"

### **NORMS-**

Norms are generally categorized into four areas; folkways, mores, taboos and laws. Our folkways, though not written down, covers general public behaviors of adults, the attitude of the youth and the young in the presence of elders, bodily exposure of our maidens (indecent exposure), violent behavior of our young men, disobedience of community injunctions, acts of deceit and fraudulent practices.

### **MORES-**

These refer to moral standards of a people. Violation of mores usually attracts moral consequences. We had serious rules against vices, social maligns, and mishaviors. Social rules surrounding such things as adultery, bribery, intimidation, stealing, killing and deceit were usually prescribed by mores. Such acts when detected usually draw sanctions ranging from loss of rights, social status and stiffer punishments.

## TABOOS-

While Mores demanded for trials, taboos in our culture were absolutely no go area. Cannibalism and incest were social taboos in Ikot Ekpene.

## LAWS-

From time to time laws were made in the interest of the people to stem acts that would bring shame to the people. Violating such laws and many of the norms attracted arrest and arraignment before the council of knowledgeable and upright Elders. Proper sanctions and punishments were prescribed and were enforced with justice.

## THE TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES AND THEIR SYMBOLS OF AUTHORITIES.

This is where our focus has been derailed. The cultural societies that made us a people included but not limited to Ekpo cultural society, Obon cultural society, Utaa, ekoong, esee, abire or Abre, assian uboikpa. Assian akanawaan, etc. The fasted developing societies in the world today have situated their growth on the culture of their people. Their language, their strengths in craft and indigenous technologies and development of native intelligence have propelled them to the height they are today.

Any people who have dropped their culture to imbibe or take up another culture are bound to loss their identity, and become cultural slaves. They will clear their history and will seize to be a known people. The Ikot Ekpene people were known internationally for their raffia products, carvings, sculptures and assorted wood tables and cane chairs. The little market at the Aba Road-Ito Road junction was the place that one was sure to see a white man every day, shopping for souvenirs. We had hoped that the raffia business would grow into one big national industry and that road junction would become a huge international market, spotting weaving machine, carving tools and durable cane structures that would be exported to Europe and the Americas. These would have been our heritage. This heritage is dead and perhaps awaiting burial.

To some people, in fact to most of us, Culture only refers to the masquerades (Ekpo), the fetish practices of non-Christian worshipers and the majority of those who dwell in traditional ways of sacrifices. We can see that our entire environment, including what we eat and our method of communication are a major influence on our culture. Let me ask how many of us have seen the highly medicinal and nutritious *Colocynthis africana*, **NDISE**. The list of our cultural foods that have ceased to exist in our menu, is so long I would not attempt to mention. Most of our cultural Societies were instituted to function as authorities, community police, avenues for correcting societal ills and lower arm of the central governance. It was not possible to visit a home of a BIG MAN and not see a wooden mask of different shapes, colours and sizes as well as other carvings decorating the living room. The carvings were fitted with lamps use used as lamp holders.

It was a beauty to behold a woman adorned her body with dye during ceremonies, a nursing mother covered with a mixture of white clay and cam wood and a women sharing white clear in market announcing the arrival a new body. Where are these cultures today? When I think of the type foods that we were fed with, in our youthful years, I feel really unhappy that my children don't even know they were.

The history of a people is entirely the story of their cultural development. Thus People in their development are constantly building on their culture. If we must progress we must pay attention to our history, our culture, our heritage. Culture therefore is the foundation of a people's history and must be respected. Many Peoples around the world have developed because they valued and stuck to their Cultures, their heritage and their roots. The Chinese have stuck to their cultures and have developed in the arena of traditional medicine to the point of exporting these herbs to us in capsules. Some of those herbs existed in our farms, bushes and forests and gardens, but unfortunately these gardens, farms, bushes and forests are no more. We have sold them out, cleared and destroyed them in the quest for borrowed cultures. The culture of the Ikot Ekpene people is strong, meaningful and valuable. The truth remains that there are aspects of our culture that could have been evil, bad and deadly, but that was okay for those times. Those can be cleaned, expunged and modified to suit the times of today rather than bulldoze them completely out of existence. The Jews have a culture which has given them their history.

## **OUR FUTURE**

Where is our future? This question should urgently make us turn to the organizers of this Cultural revival and say to them "Well-done and thank you". Last year about the same time, when the maiden outing of this celebration was held in this same venue, many people thought so little about it. But by the conclusion of the programme, the President of Ikot Ekpene Peoples Assembly (IKPA), Uko (Engr) U. T. Essien, whose brainchild this programme is, received kudos from several quarters. As of truth I was personally consulted by many persons to give them a clue to how they can hold similar festivals in their homes. They agreed that Ikot Ekpene people had challenged them. Uko Engr. I salute you for not giving up on Ikot Ekpene. Your dream to create an international market in Ikot Ekpene will surely succeed. Amen.

Our culture is our future. If we jettison our Culture we will certainly be wiping our history and so as a People have no future. There can only be a future if there is no past. To have a future we must go back to our roots, our history and pick up those things, those characters, those attribute that stood us out, orchestrate them, refined and reform them and also market them. I am expecting to be asked how will we market 'ekpo'? Simple. Adopt their music. The several disco music played today have their instrumentation inspired by or from traditional dances. I am sure that a sekem music based on the traditional rhythm of ekpo masquerade will sale more than Jackson's "I am Bad". Even as we have allowed the Etighi dance to die in our system, it has

become an international dance being consciously developed outside our shores. Unfortunately when it returns to us it won't be our product again.

We can market our Culture through Ecotourism. There are lots of potentials, human and material, in Ikot Ekpene. There are lots of opportunities for business in Ikot Ekpene. Its location is beautiful, strategic and our people have not lost their hospitality yet. It is for such reasons that Ikot Ekpene was made the First Local government in Nigeria. What a heritage that we lost.

We still have a future, but the light is dimming by the moment. Our youths are now known to engage in very negative activities. Our elders are using the youths negatively. Ikot Ekpene is now known as a field of gangsters, robbers and cult groups. The state of insecurity is disturbing. The state of electricity supply to the town is poor and embarrassing. Heaps of refuse are growing everywhere and competing with some found in neighboring towns. This is not our attribute and definitely not our heritage. For many years Ikot Ekpene was classed as the most peaceful town and the cleanest. This is our heritage, our asset and should translate into our future.

When we talk about the future, it is in the reflection of the environment and the people. What future are we leaving behind as elders? Think about this. What future are we building for ourselves as youths? Are we going to build a stock of bad people, a platform from where gangster, thieves, killers, thugs, robbers are recruited. Think about this. This is not our culture and should not be allowed to rob us of our golden future.

Let me once again thank our fathers for building a notable culture for us. I thank this present generation of good people of Ikot Ekpene for not allowing our light to extinguish. I thank all the supporters of this programme and belief you have picked something that will make us take a right turn to the future, the right future of Ikot Ekpene people.

Merry Christmas and very bright New Year to you.

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