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Strategies for Achieving the Goals of Urhobo Unity Summit

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Strategies may formally be defined as the methods or plans that a group or organization employs in order to achieve its desired goals at the end of its projects. Such a definition of strategies is generally more hopeful than what emerges as the consequences of the organization's projects. This is so because there may be unintended consequences, which may flow from the projects that a group pursues. Some such unintended consequences may be weightier than the group's planned goals. It is therefore probably wise to characterize strategies in terms of the outcomes of the group's projects. Seen in these terms, strategies may be regarded as plans for achieving the goals of a group and for controlling the outcomes of its projects.

The outcomes of projects may be good or bad in terms of the values and expectations of the group. Therefore, efficient strategies of an organization seek to minimize the poor outcomes of its projects while they strive to maximize the projects' good outcomes. *Good strategic thinking, therefore, involves some anticipation of the possible outcomes of projects coupled with the invention of devices that aim to hold down to a minimum possible bad outcomes while promoting those devices that will probably allow good outcomes to flourish.* We will adopt this approach to strategic thinking in weighing the outcomes of the projects that Urhobo Unity Summit of 2009 has decided to embark upon.

Projects of Urhobo Unity Summit, 2009

When all the speeches will have been made, the main vehicle for moving forward the agenda of the 2009 Urhobo Unity Summit will be its projects. As envisaged in the address by Olorogun Felix Ibru, President-General of Urhobo Progress Union, there are two principal projects that will emerge from this Summit: (a) a campaign for an Urhobo State as a unit of the Nigerian federation and (b) an Urhobo University that will serve as an academic centre of excellence. I will examine strategies that will enable us to realize the best possible outcomes from these projects.

I. Urhobo State

In terms of modern political history of Nigeria, Urhobos should be familiar with the processes and procedures for the creation of states. That is so because we have been fully involved in previous campaigns for the creation of states, the outcomes of which have been of mixed blessings for our people.

Before national independence in 1960, the people of Benin and Delta Provinces agitated for separation from the Western Region. Shortly after independence in the early 1960s, Urhobos and Benins spearheaded the campaign for the creation of Midwest Region from the Yoruba-dominated Western Region. The Urhobo People gained a symbolic but important victory when an Urhoboman became the Governor of the new Midwest Region in 1964, yielding the headquarters to Benin City. But they lost a major constitutional principle when the Urhobo indigenous owners of Warri City were barred by the Midwest Constitution from standing for elections in their own communities. Happily, this bad outcome was thrown out with the Civil War. Urhobo indigenes of Warri City did regain their constitutional rights after the Civil War. Over time, the outcomes of the Midwest Region for Urhobos became less than satisfying, leading to an Urhobo agitation for the creation of Delta State.

The campaign for the creation of Delta State, starting in the 1980s, was championed principally by Urhobo leaders along with the Isoko. The Delta State was created in August 1991 with a bang of disappointment. In one of the most egregious instances of abuse of discretionary power during military rule, General Ibrahim Babaginda made Asaba, perched in the far northeastern corner of the new Delta State, its capital. It was a bad outcome that was apparently over-ridden by Urhobo ascendancy to power in the new state, supplying its first two civilian Governors. Although later

Urhobo leadership appeared to have embraced Asaba with its luxuries as the state's legitimate headquarters, underlying Urhobo sentiments do resent this embarrassing piece of avarice and yearn for a proper state of their own with their own headquarters. Advocating for an Urhobo State is partially, at least, a consequence of this underlying resentment arising from an arbitrary and unsatisfactory decision on the location of the headquarters of Delta State.

The renewed campaign for a state, this time a fresh one for the Urhobo People, should gain several lessons from the previous experiences. At the very least, those previous experiences of campaigns for state creation should help us to anticipate unhealthy outcomes that could worsen our circumstances in Urhoboland following the creation of an Urhobo State. We should not assume that all outcomes of the creation of an Urhobo State will be beneficial. That is why we should work hard and plan well for the new State.

Committee on the Case for an Urhobo State

In view of experiences of such past campaigns, a well-crafted case for an Urhobo State is essential in planning for the new campaign. A Committee, which will work mostly behind the scenes, should articulate a case that the Urhobo people as well as other Nigerians will find appealing and convincing. Making such a case may not be as easy as making a case for the creation of Delta State which had previous colonial boundaries and delineation as Delta Province. But it can be made attractive, especially on grounds of a quest for a development zone.

In our previous campaigns for state creation, the matter of state capital was left out of public consideration, on the murky understanding that it was too touchy a subject to be broached in public. The result was that powerful individuals sought to influence the choice of the capital, creating an appearance of disunity and confusion among the Urhobo people. It has been

mentioned that one reason why we lost the case for the capital of Delta State was on the grounds of such disunity. My suggestion is that this *Committee on the Case for an Urhobo State* should take up the matter of state capital along with its other duties. The final published case for an Urhobo State should include an Urhobo preference for a capital. Whatever disputes that arise on the matter of the location of the state's capital should be taken up and settled by this Committee.

This Committee should also have the responsibility of consulting with our ethnic neighbours so that our intentions are properly understood by them. This is particularly important in the case of the Isoko. We need close consultation with the Isoko people. While we should not be dissuaded from any campaign for an Urhobo State, the wishes of the Isoko people should be factored into our calculations and into the scope of the case that we make for a state.

Urhobo Lands and Boundaries Committee

There were few areas of Nigeria during colonial times that experienced as many boundary disputes and even claims on important cities and regions as Urhoboland. Our ancestors and predecessors fought hard to preserve Urhobo lands and territories. They are their legacy to us. As we seek an Urhobo State, we should make sure that we fold into the State all territories that belong to the Urhobo People. We should make sure that we do not, out of any acts of carelessness or lack of patriotism, leave behind any areas that our predecessors had won in court for the Urhobo people.

For this purpose, I recommend an *Urhobo Lands and Boundaries Committee*, mostly made up of lawyers, geographers, surveyors, and historians who can document Urhobo possessions of their lands. This Committee should prepare a map of Urhobo lands that we seek to include in Urhobo State.

Prospects of Good Governance and Possibility of Bad Governance

We have a lot more to learn about the political history of state creation and administration of states than the campaign for them. We have experienced the outcomes of two created states in terms of their benefits as well as their ills for our people. The examples of the benefits and the ills of the creation of Midwest Region will provide good lessons to reflect upon as we contemplate on embarking on a renewed exercise. Doing so will help us to navigate our collective fortunes away from avoidable pitfalls.

The benefits that flowed from the creation of Midwest Region (later Bendel State) for the Urhobo people are remarkable. The new state revived Benin City. Although Urhobos did not own Benin City, their investment in its growth and development was beneficial to individual Urhobos. More remarkably, Urhobos enjoyed the type of official positions that they never experienced before then: Governor, Chief Justice of the State; Permanent Secretaries; key ministerial appointments, etc. Nor can it be denied that development came to Urhoboland through the creation and existence of Bendel State. Just consider the benefit of Udu Bridge which Governor Ogbemudia built to link Warri with Udu.

On the other hand, following the creation of the Midwest Region, Urhobos experienced unexpected political hardships that nearly destroyed their key institutions. Urhobo Progress Union was imperiled. There was a brazen attempt to marginalize the Union and to subordinate it to the control of a man who saw himself as the new Dore Numa of the Western Niger Delta. The ruling party, National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), gave the authority to Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh to pick, in effect, delegates and candidates from Urhobo constituencies – an issue that was handled in UPU circles in previous times. The Midwest Constitution forbade indigenous Urhobos in Warri Division to stand for elective office to the House of

Assembly – thereby disenfranchising them in their own native homeland. Violence was introduced into Urhobo politics, leading to electoral malpractices that in effect denied Urhobos the right of their votes. The defection of a vital and patriotic fraction of Urhobo leadership to the insurgent Midwest Democratic Front (MDF) created disunity and confusion in Urhobo leadership, sowing the seeds of acrimony and chaos in Urhoboland.

The above contrasts between the benefits and ills of the creation of Midwest Region (later, Bendel State) for Urhobos should serve as a cautionary tale as we embark on the campaign for an Urhobo State. Perhaps with a little more planning and a little more forethought, we might overcome any major pitfalls that lie ahead of us in a new experiment of an Urhobo State. We may ask: from our experiences of the past, what probable bad outcomes must we guard against in a new Urhobo State? Permit me to list the following probable ill-consequences:

Control of Urhobo Progress Union. When Urhobo political affairs were ruled by the Action Group from far-away Ibadan, the UPU was assertive and buoyant. The threat to its existence began as the seat of government moved closer home. As that seat moved to Delta State, the line between Government and the Union became much thinner. One fears that with the creation of an Urhobo State, there could be an existential threat to Urhobo Progress Union.

There are some in Urhobo leadership who canvass that the best way of reaping benefits from the Government of the State or even the Federal Government is through the UPU. Then there are State officials who believe that it is important to control the affairs of the UPU as an aspect of the governance of the State – even as Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh clearly attempted in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In these circumstances, the Urhobo People, who own the Union, should spell out the proper boundaries between the State Government and the UPU. Otherwise, it will become too late after the creation of an Urhobo

State. The temptation to absorb the UPU into the State Government will be overwhelming in an Urhobo State. If care is not taken, that could lead to the destruction of the one institution that holds all Urhobos together.

Safeguarding the Institution of Ovie. The institution of Ovie was a creation of Urhobo culture and is probably important in defining who we are. In recent years, many leaders of thought in Urhobo affairs and indeed the silent Urhobo majority have expressed fears that political parties, politicians, and indeed the Government have used the holders of the offices of Ovie in ways that threaten the integrity of the institution. The office of Ovie is expensive to maintain. It probably needs payment of stable stipends from the Government. But that in no way means that the Ovie are required to serve the political interests of those who exercise political power. Good governance in an Urhobo State should mean that this unique Urhobo institution is treated with some dignity.

Protecting the Right of Vote among the Urhobo People. Nelson Mandela spent more than twenty-five years in South African jail because he was fighting for his people to gain the right to vote. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Urhobo People were able to express, through free elections, their dissatisfaction with the hostile policies of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Action Group party towards them. Sadly, in recent years, that right of Urhobo men and women to vote their free will has been threatened by our own Urhobo politicians. Those politicians may be unaware of the gravity of their actions. But it is a practice that must not be allowed to be carried over into an Urhobo state. If denying the masses of the Urhobo people the right to vote becomes routine in an Urhobo state, chaos and pathology will settle into our affairs with disastrous consequences. Perhaps we should state this matter much more firmly: If Nelson Mandela is regarded as an archetypal patriot because he suffered in order to win the right of vote for his people in South Africa, then we must state that those who deprive their own Urhobo people of the right to vote are smeared in the eyes of their own people with a lack of patriotism, to say the least. It is our patriotic duty to ensure

that such unpatriotic malpractices are not carried forward into an Urhobo State.

Committee on Good Governance in an Urhobo State

The above three issues -- concerning Urhobo Progress Union, the institution of Ovie, and protection of the right to vote among the Urhobo people -- belong to the realm of good governance. We should assume that those who are elected to govern will do so on behalf of the Urhobo People. To ensure that this will in fact be so, or at least that the Urhobo People and those whom they elect will be constantly reminded of this principle, we recommend a *Committee on Good Governance in an Urhobo State*. That Committee should draw up rules of governance that the Urhobo People should be aware of before they elect their leaders. Those rules should include protection for the existence of the UPU, the institution of Ovie, and the right of vote for the Urhobo People.

Summary

We have recommended three distinct Committees to handle different aspects of an Urhobo campaign for a state of their own. These Committees are as follows:

(a) ***Committee on the Case for an Urhobo State***

(b) ***Urhobo Lands and Boundaries Committee***

(c) ***Committee on Good Governance in an Urhobo State***

We further recommend that the President-General of Urhobo Progress Union, in consultation with the Organizing Committee of Urhobo Unity Summit, draw up the terms of reference of these Committees and then select the men and women who will serve in them. Some consideration should be given to the idea of giving the last two of these Committees a standing status.

II. Urhobo University

Nigerian universities face a major crisis in our times. It is clearly the case that the culture of disciplined learning is more or less broken in our universities. While some of the newer private universities offer some hope of improvement, the overall prospects of university education in Nigeria are dismal – at least in comparison with standards in other countries of Nigeria's grade. It is therefore a difficult time to begin a new university enterprise. An Urhobo University will certainly call for more deliberate planning and forethought than what would have been required only a few years ago.

In current terms, there are four types of universities in the Nigerian academic system:

Federal Government of Nigeria's Universities. Beginning with the University of Ibadan from colonial times, the system of Federal Government's universities has expanded dangerously and now seems to aim at building a unit for every state, including the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja.

State Universities. Most of the states in Southern Nigeria have built their own universities. Many of these have campuses in various zones of their states.

Private For-Profit Universities. A good number of businessmen and former Heads of State as well as former Governors of States have built what appear to be private for-profit universities, mostly in southern Nigeria. In other words, these universities are established as business -- probably quasi-business -- enterprises from which their owners will make financial gains.

Private Not-For-Profit Universities. Some Christian denominations have established what appear to be not-for-profit universities about which their owners do not act as investors who must derive financial benefits from their investments. The financial gains that flow into these universities' coffers are retained for their further development.

The future of the Federal and State Universities are uncertain for three reasons: (a) Their fortunes are tied to the whims and vagrancies of Governmental affairs and party politics, which have become increasingly chaotic and corrupt in recent years. (b) The academic calendars of these institutions have been frequently disrupted by strikes of teaching and research personnel. (c) Most of these institutions are over-extended in the numbers of faculties and departments that they establish, especially given the poor library and equipment facilities in their possession.

While the third category of private for-profit universities may have some future, they are largely untested and will remain so until they survive the lives of their financial owners. The strength in the Nigerian university system seems to be in the fourth category of private not-for-profit universities. And it is here that an Urhobo University should find its model.

Model of Private Not-for-Profit Universities

Most of the private not-for-profit universities in Nigeria (e.g., Babcock University) are Christian missionary enterprises that have branches in other countries. The Nigerian branch will borrow from the family of institutions established in diverse cultures and places by a single Christian denomination. That is different from a stand-alone not-for-profit institution (e.g., Harvard University, Princeton University, or University of Chicago) that is established by way of personal endowments. Such stand-alone private not-for-profit institutions rely mostly on the returns on their endowments. They only partially rely on student paid tuition. They, therefore, survive on disciplined management of their resources within the funds that flow into their strictly controlled foundations.

I am assuming that Urhobo Progress Union, as the proprietor of the envisaged Urhobo University, intends to raise funds that will be in the trust of a chartered foundation whose sole existence is devoted to the founding and managing of an Urhobo University on behalf of Urhobo Progress Union and the Urhobo People.

There will be two preliminary steps in the founding of an Urhobo University. First, there should be a charter that spells out the nature of a university institution that Urhobo Progress Union intends to build. Second, Urhobo Progress Union should establish an Urhobo University Foundation that will manage the funds that the Union raises for that purpose.

Charter for an Urhobo University

Urhobo Progress Union will build, or cause to be built on its behalf, a complex of higher institutions (that may be named Mukoro Mowoe University?), hereinafter referred to as The University.

The University shall be a centre of excellence such as will allow its students, graduates, teachers and researchers to participate at the highest level of national and international exchange of scholarship.

The University shall establish modern libraries, including digital libraries, which will hold documents on Urhobo history, culture, and language for teaching and research purposes.

Urhobo Progress Union agrees to establish Urhobo University Foundation whose responsibilities shall be to run the affairs of The University on behalf of Urhobo Progress Union and the Urhobo People.

The Urhobo University Foundation shall have the responsibility of managing the funds and other properties of The University on behalf of Urhobo Progress Union and the Urhobo People.

Urhobo University Foundation

There shall be a board of trustees (drawn from public figures, businessmen, high-profile academic and administrators) who will set the policies of the Foundation, including appointing its Executive Director, on behalf of Urhobo Progress Union.

As much as possible, there should be representatives of international bodies (such as the Carter Center, Bill Clinton Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) on the Board of Trustees.

Urhobo University Committee

I recommend that the Urhobo Unity Summit, 2009, should authorize the President-General of Urhobo Progress Union to empanel an ***Urhobo University Committee*** that will study the above issues on the matter of Urhobo University. Such a Committee should have as its terms of reference preparation of recommendations on appropriate steps that will be taken by Urhobo Progress Union to establish an Urhobo University that will serve as a centre of excellence for Urhobos and Nigerians in the 21st century.

III. Building an Enabling Environment

The preceding discussions on planning for an Urhobo State and an Urhobo University will only be meaningful if an enabling environment for their existence prevails in Urhoboland. An enabling environment consists of the presence of some degree of peace and tranquility in which productive actors can carry out their daily chores without undue hardship or, in the extreme, fear for their own lives and those of their family members.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the enabling environment for progress in Urhoboland has been poisoned by an outbreak of chronic violence. The level of violence has not only been unchecked; it has grown by leaps and bounds with the introduction of sophisticated guns by politicians and their hired thugs and with each election cycle. The consequences of this regime of violence have been devastating for Urhobo culture. Sacred funeral rites have been altered from their evening and night calendars to day-time ceremonies. Traditional evening weddings have been turned into day-time hurried ceremonies. Much of night-time business (such as evening and night University classes) has been lost to this wanton reign of violence in Urhoboland.

Moreover, violence poses threats to personal safety in Urhoboland. The evidence for this growing threat can be seen in the behaviours of people in

the huge Urhobo Diaspora. Few people visiting home from outside Urhoboland want to sleep in their own homes and in their hometowns – unless they are wealthy enough to provide private security. In England and the United States, little Urhobo kids hear horror stories of violent attacks on innocent persons and are afraid to come home to Urhoboland. Perhaps, worst of all, there is a growing trend for retired Urhobo professionals to stay away from Urhoboland, preferring instead to settle in Ibadan or Lagos or even Abuja. Urhobos are therefore deprived of the substantial contributions from these experienced men and women to the expansion of the knowledge base and economy of Urhoboland. These growing tendencies constitute a grave disabling environment that no serious people should ignore.

Combating the Reign of Violence in Nigeria

Various communities have put up their limited defences in several corners of Urhoboland against this growing peril. But they are inadequate and will probably crumble as another election season approaches. One response, especially from politicians, has been to say that such violence is not limited to Urhoboland and that it is widespread in Nigeria. That is true. But some ethnic nationalities have taken bold steps to combat violence in their areas. All of these do so in the full knowledge that the Federal Government is unable, and even unwilling, to take seriously its obligation to protect persons and property in Nigeria.

In order for Urhobo to step up and take this matter seriously as a people, a review of the different strategies to combat violence in various areas of Nigeria is in order. We do so in the hope that the Urhobo People will gain some lessons from such an exercise.

Igbo Response: Bakassi Boys. Igboland is plagued with wanton violence. The Igbo response has been for communities to employ so-called Bakassi Boys who strive to eliminate with brute force those who they deemed guilty. Because the system became politicized in

several communities and because the Bakassi Boys got into conflict with the Nigeria Police, they have not been as effective in controlling violence as was originally hoped by the communities that employed them.

Yoruba Response: Traditional Rulers and Traditional Control of Crimes. In the face of rising violence in traditional Yoruba cities and towns, Yoruba Oba and Bale have picked up their traditional mantle of providing security in their domains. A great deal of the security arrangements in Yoruba towns have been organized from their palaces where retired Nigeria Police Officers are often employed to help with the management of security in their towns. The Yoruba system relies a great deal on intelligence gathering about criminals and their families. Community response seems to have been very supportive of these arrangements. The results have been impressive. It is striking that the growth of universities in recent times has largely been in Yorubaland where there seems to be a more favourable enabling environment than elsewhere in Nigeria. Observers of the Yoruba scene suggest that the esteem for their Oba and Bale, especially for those who have been successful in providing security, has grown among the Yoruba.

Urhobo Response: Town and Clan “Presidents-General” and Provision of Security. The response to the expansion of violence in Urhoboland has been rather novel. Communities have elected public-spirited individuals, whom they brand with the lofty title of “President-General,” to help them to fight the violence that has come upon them. It is striking that the respected Ivie have not played major roles in combating the stream of violence in Urhoboland. Some of the “Presidents-General” have been quite successful in cutting down the rate of violent crimes in their areas. The result, though, is that violent criminals abandon tough areas for weaker spots in Urhoboland.

A Comprehensive Plan for Combating Violence in Urhoboland

In my own view, it would be a major achievement of this Urhobo Unity Summit if we are able to persuade Urhobo's two major institutions – namely, Urhobo Progress Union and the Ivie of Urhoboland – to pay full attention to the onrush of violence as a threshold problem that needs to be defeated. Such victory over the reign of violence in Urhoboland will allow Urhobo's two legitimate projects -- creation of an Urhobo State and building of an Urhobo University -- to succeed.

Urhobo Progress Union should expand its menu of duties to include peace and security in Urhoboland. A *Committee on Peace and Security in Urhoboland* would be appropriate and could incorporate retired Police Commissioners as *ex-officio* members.

The Council of Urhobo Ivie should similarly include peace and security in its deliberations. The Ivie should make it clear to the Urhobo People that they regard the provision of security as part of their royal responsibilities.

As much as possible each Ovie should have an Intelligence Officer who will assist the Town or Clan "President-General" and his team with security information about violent criminals in their domain.

Urhobo Progress Union should consider helping to coordinate the security work of the different Town and Clan "Presidents-General" with the aim of strengthening their common efforts of providing security in their communities.

Before the campaign for any election season begins, Urhobo Progress Union should summon the political parties and political platforms to discuss the banning of guns in the campaigns. They should be told that

Urhobo People will regard those who bring guns into campaigns in Urhoboland as unpatriotic because these guns kill Urhobo people.

Urhobo Progress Union should consider raising funds from Urhobo communities at home in Urhoboland as well as from the Urhobo Diaspora to help finance the security needs of Urhoboland. Such fund-raising should be extended to the United States and Europe.

All of these steps – and perhaps more as these are reviewed – require hard work and a lot of patience. But the pay-off could be handsome. We are in a crisis. The Urhobo People will not forget any institutions and organizations that will pay attention to this open sore of violence in Urhoboland. Urhobo People will reward with great esteem the contributions of our Royal fathers to the provision of security in Urhoboland. And the Urhobo People will forever bless Urhobo Progress Union if it helps to defeat this dangerous expansion of violence. Above all else, we need to lower the level of violence in order to run a proper Urhobo University and in order to reap good benefits from an Urhobo State.

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