

INFORMATION & EMPOWERMENT FOR PEACE AND PROGRESS IN THE NIGER DELTA .

**BEING AN ADDRESS PRESENTED IN COMMEMORATION OF THE
ISAAC BORO DAY ORGANISED BY THE IJAW NATIONAL
ALLIANCE OF THE AMERICAS , INAA ,IN NEWARK , NEW
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INTRODUCTION.

It is my pleasure and great honour to be present here today as we celebrate the life , example and sacrifice of a great hero of a potentially great people the Ijaw . I say ‘potentially’ great because we have everything that makes for greatness. We have first and foremost the human resource , a creative people who despite coming out of a soul destroying physical environment come out sparkling in different areas of human endeavour at home and abroad . We have as well, the resources and often have created when needed ,the resources that have sustained centuries of Ijaw life and since the last century the Nigerian set up .Then, against the excessively repressive and often brutal weight of our condition in the Nigerian situation we have not lost our sense of self , our famed love of life and the celebration of it. For today we gather here to celebrate not death , but life.

I stand here before you all , a proud Ijaw daughter and journalist . I consider myself privileged to be here as a panelist on the program. However, before I get ahead of myself ,I must compliment Dr . Joe Ebiwari , Dawari Longjohn and the men and women of the INAA. Your contributions , your thoughtfulness in putting this program together

will not go to waste for the reason that in your own unique way , you are building on the foundation laid by a worthy Ijaw son , Jaspas Isaac Adaka Boro.

I crave your indulgence also to use the opportunity of this Observance and Awards ceremony to pay tribute to the courage of the Ijaw Youth Council, the President and members of the Ijaw People Association of the UK and Great Britain our elders, various individuals and groups of Ijaw peoples here present .

Information , Empowerment , Peace and Progress in the Niger delta.

A basic definition of information describes it as having to do with facts, data , details.

We get swamped these days in messages which proclaim our time as the age of information courtesy the internet and the huge masses of data, details and images tumbling along the great information highway. We are witnesses to the massive volume of information that flows around the world from different sources on topics. As a people we have bought into this with different groups of Ijaw people having access to the internet and putting out our perspectives on issues affecting the Ijaw nation. This is a commendable development which must be kept alive as part of creative efforts to foster the conditions for a just society to flourish.

I do not intend to waste your time theorizing on the media. I wish to focus on information as a message and medium centred around the main stream media as a potentially empowering tool in the hands of the Ijaw people for peace and progress.

We accept that we live in an information age .We buy into assertions which hold that contrary to the situation that prevailed in the past, all manner of people and groups especially minority and disadvantaged groups have an unprecedented access to the media to tell their own story. If that is the situation , is the image of the Ijaw as an aggressive, blood thirsty , primitive group of people prevalent in the mainstream media in the country and outside our shores the true representation of the Ijaw ?

Not a single person here would accept such an offensive tag either at an individual or group level . But that is the reality of our condition. The Ijaw territory and the entire Niger delta landscape is undeniably caught in violent convolutions that bounded since the early 1990's beginning with the campaigns of the Ogoni people led by Ken Saro-Wiwa under the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People , MOSOP and the brutal attempts by the Nigerian Federation to suppress this awakening . With the heightening of the struggles of the Niger delta people principally the Youths of Ijaw land to end their conditions of deprivation and consignment to third class citizens by their country men, repression acts against individuals and groups by government security operatives and agents of the oil companies have escalated in the past fifteen years . That combined with the reality of intra and inter communal conflict have contributed to a situation hostile to peaceful communities and endeavour in the region and remains the enduring images and information flowing out of the region . When Ijaw land and the rest of the Niger delta get a mention, the images conjured invariably are those of armed groups , of pirates and hostage takers . Not much mention is made of the reality of the undermining and actual destruction of our very means of existence by the activity of the oil

companies, the destruction of Ijaw futures by the killing of thousands of Ijaw youths on unarmed campaigns to end this destruction by the Nigerian system in the past fifteen years . Neither is attention given to our coastal communities threatened with extinction through coastal erosion and the rampaging grip of poverty and disease in our communities.

The mainstream media made up of the Print media which include the newspapers and magazines , the broadcast media including radio and television remain the most powerful means through which we get news of events , get informed as well as entertained .

The media is a powerful medium which has as well the critical function of providing a public sphere platform for debate on issues affecting different groups in society as well as function as agenda setter for issues considered pertinent for attention in a given situation. But the reality about the main stream media is that in order to carry out these functions in society they function as business concerns with profit as the bottom line to sustain their activities .The reality of political , ethnic and religious interests of media ownership as well place tremendous constraints on the ability of media to perform as an effective Public sphere institution operating a level play space for all issues and groups .

In our peculiar situation in Nigeria under a system acknowledged as operating a seriously flawed Federal structure, the reality of the presence of oil in Ijaw territory and the near total dependence of the entire country on this resource facilitated by brute force ,often colours news emanating from the region .This is the underlying reality behind the blanket of violence and primitivism thrown over our faces and efforts, in order to justify Ijaw crucifixion .

The unending effort of individuals and groups in the Jewish nation and Diaspora to tell the story of their people using books ,films , control of the main stream print and broadcast media and the success they have achieved accomplishing this in the last fifty years is a wake call to individuals and groups committed to telling the true Ijaw story.

Peace and progress :

Working as a journalist in the past ten years and traversing the entire Niger delta and Nigerian landscape, I have come to understand that there is usually a lot of anxiety when people speak about peace relative to the Niger delta or the Ijaw nation as the ethnic nationality that has held up the beacon longer and more steadfastly than any other group in the region. Everybody wants peace in the Niger delta . The Ijaw and all the minority ethnic nationalities want peace in the Niger delta. The different groups in the country make claims about desiring peace in the Niger delta.

It is clear however that despite the remarkable level of concern about this peace, different groups have a different interpretation of what this entails. Many privately and often in public canvass positions that indicate clearly that the reality of deprivation among millions of ordinary people in the region and protest against should not feature as an issue . It is the duty of the Ijaw people to ensure that these realities continue to feature in the mainstream print and broadcast media and elicit the attention and ameliorative action they deserve . This process of keeping the issues alive and the action to bring about their end must be driven by the Ijaw people themselves .This is the only sustainable condition under which genuine peace and prosperity can be achieved in Ijaw land , the Niger delta and ultimately the entire country.

Only by acting in this direction, could we lay any true claims to the legacy of Isaac Boro and the men who took part in the 12 day revolution .

I thank you for your attention .