

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY SIR CHIEF (DR) EZEKIEL A. AINABE, THE OJOMO OF EKPOMA AT THE 12TH ESAN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT WORKSHOP HELD AT THE SAMUEL ADEGBOYEGA UNIVERSITY, OGWA, EDO STATE OF NIGERIA ON THE 29TH OF OCTOBER, 2016

(PROTOCOLS)

Your Excellency, the Comrade Governor Adams Oshiomhole,

Your Royal Highnesses, Chiefs,

The Vice Chancellor – My Very Good Friend, Prof. Aigbokhan,

Staffs/Student of the University,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed my pleasure to be here today in the capacity as the Chairman of this very important Workshop. It gladdens my heart to be standing in the midst of my own brothers and sisters, fellow Esan sons and daughters, who are brought together by the communal zeal and determination to improve the lot of our people through regular economic empowerment programmes like this very one which I think is highly commendable.

I want to assure you all that because of my longstanding personal commitment to the development of Esanland, I would still have been glad to be here and participate at this occasion in whatever capacity I am called upon regardless of the capacity in which I am invited because I fully agree with the declared mission of the Association which is the improvement of our homeland in whatever capacity possible.

Let me begin by saying that the reason we are gathered here today, namely, is to explore ways to ensure the continuous relevance and promotion of the Esan language is one subject that is very close to my heart. Those who are close to me will surely understand my life-long commitment to the overall development of the wellbeing of the Esan nation and its peculiarities of which I am a very proud son. I am proud of my Esan heritage and I will seize every opportunity to contribute my quota to its dignity and progress.

I believe that charity must begin at home and our home is Esanland. You can therefore see the reason for my continuous enthusiasm for the activities of the Association of Esan Professionals (AEP) over the years.

When a delegation of the Association approached me with a view to inviting me to grace this occasion in the capacity of Chairman, I made it clear to them, there and then, that I will never shy away from any assignment given to me as long as the ultimate objective is to promote the wellbeing of my people.

When they eventually unfolded to me the theme of this year's Workshop which is the popularization and preservation of the Esan Language, I became even more interested in it.

First, it is my well-considered view that everybody must have a language that is special to him or her - the mother tongue - through which his or her history, culture and worldview are linked and readily traceable.

For me, my mother tongue is the Esan Language and I use it fluently and with relish. Unfortunately, many people, especially our younger ones and sadly also, some elderly ones, cannot make that claim about the Esan language anymore as they cannot speak it! It is a tragedy.

That means there is a big problem before us. For a man or a woman not to be able to speak the language of his parents and forebears is a major drawback for his personality, pride and overall sense of belonging.

Already, there are well-documented reports that many languages have gone or are going into extinction and they may never be heard or spoken again. Gone with those languages are generations of knowledge and cultural values. That is a possibility that even our Esan language also faces if nothing is done to arrest this unfortunate trend as quickly as possible.

That is why I am very pleased about the theme of this year's Workshop. The Esan Language is a unique medium of expression but with several variants. The good thing is that no matter which variant that is spoken or written, we Esan naturally understand ourselves.

Like any other language, Esan has its peculiar alphabets, spelling style and vocabulary. My belief is that one way to preserve our language and make it more accessible and usable is by the development of sufficient linguistic tools for its teaching and dissemination and using all other modern tools of language and phonetic studies.

Luckily we are not short of experts in these fields. Today, for example, we have as our Guest Lecturer an internationally renowned linguistic expert in the person of Professor Philomena Ejele. Her expertise in these areas will, no doubt, throw a brilliant light in the direction that we should go in our collective desire to preserve and standardize the Esan Language for posterity.

I am also very glad to know that the host University, Samuel Adegboyega University, has established a Center for the Study of Esan Culture, Language and associated matters. This innovation is commendable as it shows that the university is committed to the development of its immediate environment and neighbourhood.

It is actually in furtherance of this laudable objective that it sets out to cooperate with the Association of Esan Professionals to host his Workshop as a part of a larger collaborative effort to empower our people through qualitative research and related training in Esan arts, creative skills and cultural activities.

This is no doubt, a very laudable project. I congratulate the University as a whole, the Vice-Chancellor, in particular, the Director and members of the Center. These are really good developments for which the University and the Association of Esan Professionals should be commended.

On my part, I want to assure everyone that in line with my personal philosophy regarding the development of Esanland that at every opportunity available to me, I will very much like to associate myself with the activities and operation of the Center in due course.

In conclusion, I want to say that all hands must be on deck to save our language from extinction by empowering our people to learn and make use of it as their everyday language.

I also want to say that Esan people are not that negligible in population within our geopolitics contrary to what recent statistics tended to portray. I made bold to say that many of the people that are being counted in other parts of Edo states, especially Edo south, are actually Esan nationals who have found it convenient to relocate to these places due to the necessity for economic hardship which are becoming harder within our locality because there is not much to economically engage them. I implore our leaders to take note of this my remarks or observations i.e. empowering our Esan people.

If our people are duly empowered enough economically within Esanland, they will no longer be emigrating *en mass* from home, a development that gives misleading census figures for Esan people. We need to have more economic activities that will retain the bulk of our population within our boundary.

That is why I think the economic empowerment objective of the Esan Professionals is commendable. I think the first step in that direction is to know who we are and then go further to use the language which God gave us at creation as our medium of expression and our language of business.

Once again I want to thank all of you who deemed it fit to attend and participate in this very important workshop in whatever capacity. I also want to thank the organizers who worked day and night to ensure that we achieved this success that we are all witnessing today. I must also recognize the able leadership of Barrister M. Egbadon and his team as well as every member of the Association.

I cannot end this address without thanking the University that graciously offered its facilities, its intimidating faculty and other resources towards the realization of this Workshop today.

I wish everybody a happy participation at this workshop.

Thank you all.

Sir Chief (Dr.) Ezekiel A. Ainabe,
The Ojomo of Ekpoma.