

INAUGURAL SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY, GOVERNOR CELESTINE OMEHIA KSM ON TUESDAY, 29TH MAY, 2007.

1. With gratitude to God, I humbly take the stand today to address the good people of Rivers State as your Executive Governor in the new era of our political history. This ceremony therefore is indeed a unique and significant one. It brings us to an important milestone in our historic journey in democratic experiment in the State and indeed the nation; as we mark the first time in our socio-political history, a full cycle of civilian to civilian transition. By this event, we are now reassured that Nigerian democracy is taking its root.

It is indeed a journey of a new beginning; the renewal of hope to give a new life to our collective dream of a new Rivers State.

2. We are therefore celebrating a renewed Rivers State with a new generation of managers and political leadership. This renewal is anchored on 8 years of quality performance that clearly marks a renaissance in the history of governance in Rivers State. It is therefore only fitting and proper that I pause at this point, to pay special tribute to the architect of our Rivers renaissance, my mentor and our leader Dr. Peter Odili.

3. Your Excellency Sir, we salute your clarity of vision, foresight, uncommon courage, intellectual capacity and passionate commitment which has elevated Rivers State to an enviable position of

leadership among the comity of States in our nation. By the grace of God, you have, through the sheer force of your personal character, charisma, purposeful leadership and even fashion style, brought a new consciousness to the concept of Riversness. Today, the Rivers man and woman have shed the mental toga of minority status and assumed a new sense of identity which is respected everywhere in Nigeria. Your administration has laid a solid foundation for investments in infrastructure, health, education, economic empowerment as well as moral and ethical re-orientation.

4. The trail blazing achievements of the Rivers State Independent Power Programme (IPP) which has been widely acknowledged as a model, the various mega road construction projects including those linking the riverine areas of our State, free healthcare for the most vulnerable segment of our population and robust initiatives in all tiers of education amongst others, are indelible testimonies of your understanding service to our people. It is not my intention to attempt the very difficult task of cataloguing the many landmark achievements of your stewardship and unparalleled generosity to Rivers people and indeed all Nigerians, since they speak eloquently for themselves. The truth is that the achievements of your administration bequeath to us a legacy of class and confidence. This generation and indeed future generations of Rivers people, owe you and the wonderful men and women who served with you, a huge debt of

gratitude, which we can only repay by sustaining and improving upon the transformation agenda you have set.

5. As we humbly receive the baton of service from you today, we are both challenged and inspired by the impressive legacy we have inherited on which we intend to anchor our commitment to the service of Rivers State. "To whom much is given, much is expected." This is especially true for us since we have had the privilege of enjoying your tutelage for the past eight (8) years. Governance, particularly in a multiplex society like ours is not an easy task. We are however reassured that the benefit of your tutelage and continuing wise counsel will make our task a lot easier. May I also pay special tribute to your dear wife, Her Excellency, Justice Mary Odili, our mother in the truest sense of the word, for her support and invaluable contributions to this Rivers Renaissance. I equally salute His Excellency, Sir Gabriel Toby and his wife as well as all the wonderful men and women who worked in various capacities in the Odili administration to give us the privilege of the platform we stand on today. May God bless you all. We are standing on this platform therefore to ring the bell of hope and new dreams. Let this bell ring all over the State and indeed the whole nation as we begin this collective journey to a new dawn in Rivers State. Today, we stand on the threshold of new possibilities and fresh opportunities; with all citizens, residents and visitors alike as stakeholders. This enterprise can only prosper

according to the faith and commitment of us, the stakeholders. I need not say that Government alone cannot create the State of our dream. We are each a "spoke" in the wheel of this renewal and must therefore play our part in the process. We must not be afraid to embrace change but ride on its powerful crest to alter the structure of our society for the general good of our people.

7. As we celebrate this renewal and generational change, we must bear in mind what it means to be a Riversman or woman. Being "Rivers" is to celebrate excellence in all that we do. It is to believe that nothing but the best is for us. It is to accommodate both our brothers, sisters and neighbours alike. It is to believe that we can achieve the best at all times. It is never to say "never" in the attainment of the highest level of proficiency in all that we do.

8. To our youths; the wind of change is here. Embrace it. Might is not right. This is a knowledge driven era and not one driven by physical might. More can be achieved by employing wisdom, knowledge, skill and dialogue than brute force. No society develops where anarchy and lawlessness reign supreme. Such society is driven more and more into the abyss of poverty. Our youths must not be the instrument through which poverty is perpetuated in our people. No culture, nation or a people grows and endures without opening its windows to positive external influences and relationships. Ours cannot be an exception. Respect for elders, acceptance, protection and interaction with

neighbours from other cultures are core values of our inheritance. We are not descendants of kidnappers and hijackers. Rivers youths are heirs of more noble heritage and that is the legacy that we must bequeath to our children. I therefore challenge our people, especially the youths, to this clarion call to peace, dialogue and service; service to ourselves, our people, and our nation.

9. In taking over the reins of government today, we promise to consolidate and transcend the impressive legacy that we are inheriting. We anchor the promise on a commitment to provide quality service to our people. We, as your servants will remain irrevocably committed to playing our part as enunciated in our 5-point agenda, 'The SHIRE Contracts'. These contracts encapsulate what we believe in and our vision for the State.

10. Social Contract is the foundation of all modern society. Thus government's primary function is to protect its citizens from all forms of abuse: - physical, economic or social. Security of lives and property of all who reside or visit the State is our primary responsibility. Therefore, this government covenants to return normalcy to the State within the shortest time possible. Every citizen will be encouraged to pursue his other legitimate ends but we must unanimously say 'No' to brigandage and sheer criminality. We must take back our waterfronts, streets and communities from bandits. We must return Port Harcourt to the Garden City of

old where every person is welcomed regardless of tribe, colour or race. We cannot afford to degenerate to a pariah state. We hereby reach out to our youths and all aggrieved parties wherever they may be. Come, let us dialogue. My office will always be open to you for discussions.

11. We shall reorganize the way government business is done. We shall institute far reaching reforms that will reduce the cost of governance, and make government business more efficient to deliver greater service to our people. We will reduce difficulties and bureaucratic bottle-necks in transacting business with government. Transparency, due process and accountability will be deepened in our governance process. Corruption and abuse of office will not be tolerated.

12. Our people remain our greatest assets. Thus Government will place great emphasis on Human Development and improvement of the quality of life of our people. We will provide unhindered access to compulsory Universal Basic Education and enhance quality, efficiency and resourcefulness in our educational system.

13. We shall optimize technological and scientific education. We will improve and strengthen all existing health care programs of the state while also embarking on rehabilitation and expansion of existing and new health facilities. The health care management and administrative systems will be reviewed and restructured for optimal service delivery.

14. The quality of life of our people is enhanced by good Infrastructural Facilities. Our State is naturally positioned to be the major oil & gas hub in the African sub region. We must therefore seize this opportunity to the advantage of our people. To achieve this we shall continue to provide world class infrastructure not only to support the oil and gas industry but also to improve the quality of life of our people and provide employment. We are committed to changing the landscape of our State capital, Port Harcourt and all other parts of the State. There will be massive investment in Road, Housing, Water, Power, Mass Transport, Business Districts and Markets. In particular, we will collaborate with the Private Sector to achieve our infrastructural development programs.

15. We will change the face of our Rural Communities. A deliberate attempt will be made by this administration to improve rural family income. We will modernize agricultural production. We intend to create agricultural entrepreneurs and move agriculture from subsistence level. We will encourage large scale commercial farming by providing support services and reducing land acquisition processes and bottle-necks. We will train and empower farm entrepreneurs and encourage a new breed of young and educated farmers. Farming and Fishing are profitable ventures and our people must reap maximum benefits from them.

16. As the mantle of leadership is entrusted to us, we are committed to empowering our people and enhancing their capacity to attain their full potentials. We shall create and empower indigenous entrepreneurs. Government alone cannot create the jobs required by our people. However, government will help to empower entrepreneurs and create a conducive environment for businesses to thrive and create jobs. In partnership with NGOs and other stakeholders our government will create and develop young entrepreneurs and managers. We will develop a well articulated and purpose driven sustainable poverty reduction program. Our people must be partakers in the wealth creation process. As a people, we must therefore break the syndrome of expecting something for nothing. For every hard working Rivers man or Woman, I make a pledge to you; we will give you a helping hand but you must first take your destiny in your own hands.

17. My fellow Rivers People, let us stand today with courage, confidence and commitment as we begin this onerous task. Let us begin with energy, hope, faith and discipline. On my part, I will justify your faith and confidence in me by dedicating myself to the service of the State and our people. "From this joyful mountain top of celebration, we hear a call to service in the valley. We have heard the trumpet; we have changed guards, and now each in our own way and with God's help, we must answer the call".

I call on all Rivers People and those that love us and share our dreams, come on board as we set sail to a glorious future for our State and Country.

May God bless our Course.

May God bless our State.

May God bless Nigeria.