



A PEOPLE AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL CHOICES:

ENGINEERING THE
IDOMA RENAISSANCE

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

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AT

IDOMA CENTENARY PLUS CELEBRATION



**Idoma
Centenary
Plus+**
Remember our Centenary, Envision our Future

"A People and Their Professional Choices: Engineering the Idoma Renaissance

**Keynote Address by
Arc. Sonny S.T. Echono, PhD, OON, FNIA
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Idoma Centenary Plus Celebrations

The Mirror and the Map

His Royal Majesty, Agabaidu Elaigwu Odogbo John, the Och'Idoma Paramount Ruler of the Idoma Nation and Chairman of the Idoma Area Traditional Council; Distinguished Members of the Traditional Council; Leadership of Ochetoha K'Idoma and all affiliate organisations; Honourable Members of the Legislature; Captains of Industry and Commerce; Distinguished Members of the Academy; our Lords, spiritual and temporal; Officers of the Armed Forces and Security Services both serving and retired; Sons and daughters of Idoma at home and across the diaspora; Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen. It is customary on an occasion such as this to open with gratitude, proceed to celebration, and close with exhortation. I plan to follow that architecture, but not in that exact order. I ask for your indulgence.

"We have been in this administrative entity for one hundred years. The question before this gathering is not how we got here. It is why, after one hundred years, 'here' is yet further away."

A centenary is not merely a moment for congratulation. It is a forensic occasion. It demands that we look not just backwards with pride, but inward with rigour,

and forward with courage and optimism. The catalogue of individual achievement that defines our first hundred years is, by any honest measure, remarkable. We will celebrate it fully in this lecture. But we must equally confess that it has not yet translated into the collective prosperity, political clout, and economic sovereignty that a people of our intellect, discipline, and warrior heritage deserve.

There are two kinds of people in this room today. Some of us are either spent or expiring, and have made the choices examined in this lecture. But there are others who represent our future, and will live with the consequences of the choices this gathering makes before it disperses. Both groups carry obligations. Both deserve our attention and a shared acceptance of our reality.

My thesis is this: the professional choices of the Idoma elite across eight decades have been honourable in intent and individually distinguished in execution. But they have been structurally narrow, collectively uncoordinated, and strategically insufficient for the demands of Nigeria's political economy. Unless we deliberately reengineer the aspirational architecture of the next generation, we risk handing them the same inheritance we received: outstanding individuals serving a nation that does not adequately serve them in return. This lecture will not dwell on victimhood. We are not victims, not even in Benue State that has constrained our bloom. We are a people of purpose. But purpose without strategy is energy without direction. Today, we choose direction.

The Historical Record: The Age of the Prestige Professions

To understand where we are, we must first understand what shaped the Professional Funnel through which Idoma talent has flowed for three generations.

1940–1960: The Colonial Inheritance: Education, Commerce, and the Pioneers

The first generation of modern Idoma elites were forged at the intersection of colonial bureaucracy and missionary education. From the Methodist primary schools in Igumale and Otukpo to the post-primary school at Uzoakoli emerged a remarkable cohort: P.U. Onazi, Thomas George, S.A. Ifere, Alfred Abah, Edwin

Ogbu, Ogbu Ogbole, Oga Okwoche, men who became the vanguard of Idoma professional life. In 1954, Edwin Ogbu became the first of this cohort to earn a university degree in Benue State. In 1958, Dr Mairiga Ede qualified as a medical doctor from the University of Glasgow and in 1960, Chief Morgan Ujor Ogbole made history as the first lawyer from Benue State and, remarkably, only the second from the entire Northern Nigeria to qualify as a legal practitioner. These were not small achievements. In a colonial system expressly designed to produce clerks, the Idoma produced leaders. At the heels of the men were also a few women who before independence had acquired levels of education for them to engage in the Colonial service. Women like Susan Adoba completed their secondary school education in the early 1950's, Enikpe Atta was the first trained nurse and in later years established the first maternity clinic in Otukpo, and Rosemary Oganyi who studied fashion design in Kent, UK in 1964, became one of the earliest Idoma women to do so.

Beyond the emerging educational elite, a growing number of Idoma sons and daughters ventured into the world in search of economic opportunities. What began as colonial conscripted labour to work the minefields of the Jos Plateau, and in the absence of any cash crops or mineral deposits in commercial quantities in the division, had by the 1940's metamorphosed into a veritable opportunity for many young, undereducated people from the region. The phenomenon of migrant labour, or "Kurmi" as it was colloquially described, to the Cocoa plantations of south-west Nigeria, south-east Nigeria, and offshore to Fernando Po (aka Panya) in search of economic opportunities, became a major trend among our people. The conscription of West Africans to fight in the Second World War on behalf of Britain also saw nearly 200 persons from the division enlisted. Their prowess in battle against the Japanese in Burma at Abalti, Myohaung, and Arakan is well documented in the literature of the Second World War. Upon their return from Burma, these Idoma veterans created a unique social identity that laid the foundations for another generation of Idoma to enlist in the Nigerian Armed Forces by 1960.

But the story of this era is not only about scholarship, military and government service. It is also, and this is what this centenary must reclaim for our collective memory, the story of commerce. Before the civil service became the primary vehicle of Idoma ambition, some traders and transporters built real enterprises with their bare hands and sheer will. In 1949, J. Ochogu paid fifteen pounds in tax to the Idoma Division, a notable sum in that era, recorded by the colonial government because he owned two lorries and operated as a produce trader. He was not waiting for a government appointment. He was building a business. In subsequent years, the likes of Chief D.E. Enenche, Chief Ewoyi Agada, whose transport enterprise operated under the name "More Days, More Hope," Chief Ogbodo, whose enterprise bore the arresting motto "Nothing is New," Chief Obande Obeya, Ogwiji Ikongbeh, Ode Atta, and Adakole Adama were the commercial foundation of the Idoma enterprise. They were freight movers, produce merchants, transport operators and commercial farmers. They understood, before the era of formal business education, that wealth is created in motion, in the movement of goods and people across the land.

Our men were not alone in the world of business. Indeed, our women distinguished themselves in this regard. By 1950, Alache Lydia was recorded by the colonial government as the richest Idoma woman. She did not hold a title or occupy a political office, but built wealth by trade, and the colonial administration, not exactly given to celebrating African women entrepreneurs, had no choice but to record it. Madam Omateyi was the first Idoma woman to build a storey building in Otukpo, a physical monument to what Idoma women could achieve when they directed their energy into enterprise. Hajia Hauwa Zakari extended commercial networks across the region, and Madame Mammy Maria Ochefu founded the celebrated informal commercial hubs known as Mammy Markets across Nigeria's military and paramilitary settlements, creating economic ecosystems that served hundreds of thousands of Nigerians. We note that these women were not exceptions. They were a tradition. A tradition of Idoma women who refused to let the boundaries drawn by others define the limits of what was possible for them.

1960–1976: The Soldier-Scholar Era and the Bureaucratic Titans

At independence in 1960, the Idoma nation was at the forefront of regional and political development. Otukpo town had public power supply, running water and one of the largest rice mills in northern Nigeria. Two Idoma sons, Abutu Obekpa and JC Obande, held senior political appointments in the Independence government as ministers. The establishment of new secondary schools opened up educational opportunities for Idoma boys and girls. The post-Civil War years accelerated a pattern already in formation. Confronted with the geo-political pressures of the Middle Belt, the Idoma identified two professions as the primary vehicles for national visibility and community protection: the military and paramilitary, and the federal and State civil service. In both arenas, the Idoma nation performed extraordinarily.

Brigadier Ebije Ikwe served as Chief of Air Staff from 1967 to 1975. Jomo Idoko Adapoyi was Director of Federal Prisons, and Dr Edwin Ogbu became the first indigene of Benue State to serve as a Federal Permanent Secretary in 1966. He later served as Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. In 1969, Andrew Ichukwu Obeya, who graduated from the London School of Economics in 1959, was also promoted to the exalted position of Federal Permanent Secretary. Colonel Anthony Ochefu became the first person from Benue State to be appointed a military governor. Dr Vincent Garba Okwu and Professor Ochapa Onazi blazed the trail in academia when they began their teaching and research careers at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Professor Onazi went on to become the first Idoma academic to serve as Vice-Chancellor in 1985. In my own field of architecture, Inalegwu Ella co-founded the first architectural firm, Ella-Waziri architects, in Northern Nigeria. Wilson Enyi and John Ameh followed his trail as pioneers of the profession.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, from the above, we can see that in Idoma, military generals, top public servants, and academics emerged shortly after independence. Our people provided the human infrastructure that supported the Nigerian State from independence to the period after the civil war. And therein

lies a profound paradox. We became, in the sharpest possible terms, the "Steward Class" of Nigeria: indispensable to the State, yet economically peripheral to it. Have we mastered the machinery of the State, only to remain strangers to the machinery of wealth? That is the question this era poses to us.

The oil boom of the 1970s was the defining missed opportunity. As petrodollars flooded the federation, other elite groups were making foundational investments, building merchant banks, establishing trading houses, seizing the construction boom, and dominating the Alaba and Onitsha commercial axes. The Idoma elite, concentrated in uniform and in service, were largely absent from these moments of wealth creation. We sought to manage wealth rather than create it. When the structural adjustment years of the 1980s shattered the public sector as a reliable destination, communities that had diversified into private enterprise absorbed the shock. Sadly, we were not, in sufficient numbers, among them. More importantly, the commercial foundations/tradition of the likes of Ochogwu, Chief Enenche, Chief Agada, and others did not translate to national prominence by subsequent generations. That is the question we rarely ask. Why did those enterprises, the lorries, the produce trading, the transport routes not survive their founders?. Why was the wealth not transferred and businesses not institutionalised? Indeed, why did the next generation inherit the story, but not the enterprise?. We will return to this later.

1975–2026: The Democracy Dividend and Its Uneven Harvest

By 1976, when Benue State was created, and in 1979, when democracy returned, many opportunities were opened to our people across virtually every professional and political field. In the public service, we churned out several directors and permanent secretaries in the state and federal service. By 1999, when Abu Obe was appointed Head of the Federal Civil Service it was a sort of crowning moment to the foundations that had been laid in the 60's and early 70's by Edwin Ogbu and Andrew Obeya. In the diplomatic corps we had a formidable list of career ambassadors who shone brilliantly in the foreign service. In jurisprudence, Justice James Ogebe and Justice Ejembi Eko both served as Justices of the Supreme

Court, while late Justice Aboyi Ikongheh served in the Court of Appeal. Justice Uloko was appointed Chief Judge of Plateau State while Justice Patricia Ajuma Mahmoud became the first female and Christian Acting Chief Judge of Kano State and currently sits on the Court of Appeal. My dear brother, Chief Godwin Obla, was elevated in 2013 and was the first Senior Advocate of Nigeria from Idoma land; since then, the community has grown to 12 SANs. In medicine, Dr Enyantu Ifene is a renowned global public health specialist. At the same time, Professor John Alechenu Idoko is a former Director-General of NACA and a world-renowned authority on HIV/AIDS research. Professor Innocent Ujah became the first northerner to serve as the Director-General of the Nigeria Institute of Medical Research and as the Vice-Chancellor of the first Federal University of Health Sciences in Nigeria. Dr Isaac Egboja, a former World Health Organisation Policy Advisor, Professor Michael Umale Adikwu, a distinguished pharmacologist and winner of the Nigerian Academy of Science award, Prof. John Ibu, a celebrated physiologist and Professor Icha Inalegwu Onche, an orthopaedic surgeon and the Chief Medical Director of the National Orthopaedic Hospital, Jos, are some of the names in this area of excellence.

In academia, and following the foundations laid by Ochapa Onazi, the League of Idoma Professors exceeds 300 members, and over 7 of them have served as Vice-Chancellors of Federal, State, and private universities. Three of our finest educationists, Dr Grace Ogwuche, the late Professor Jerry Agada, and Prof Ode Ojowu went on to become Ministers of State for Education and Economic Advisor to the President and served with distinction. In the media as well, Idoma men were shaping national discourse. George Ohemu was one of the earliest trained journalists from Northern Nigeria. Chief Daniel Ochima Agbese co-founded the legendary Newswatch magazine in 1984 alongside Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu, and Yakubu Mohammed, a publication that revolutionised investigative journalism in Nigeria. The late Chief David Ogaba Attah, the Ondoma K'Idoma, served as Chief Press Secretary to two Heads of State, General Sani Abacha and General Abdulsalami Abubakar, placing him at the heart of Nigeria's communication apparatus during the most consequential years of military governance. Innocent

First Cost: Political Thinness

Professional diversification and political influence are not separate matters. They are deeply connected. Communities with organised commercial interests can independently fund political mobilisation, sustain lobbying structures, and bring economic leverage to federal negotiations. A people whose elite is overwhelmingly concentrated in salaried employment has limited capacity for the sustained, self-funded political action that actually shifts resource allocation in a competitive federal system. We have practised what might be called Civil Service Politics, waiting for seniority, waiting for our turn, trusting that merit and patience will eventually be rewarded within the system. Other communities practise Entrepreneurial Politics, building coalitions, creating economic leverage, and negotiating from organised interests. We must learn a second language without abandoning the genuine virtues of the first.

Second Cost: The Generational Wealth Gap

This is the cost we speak about least, and it may be the most consequential of all. J. Ochogu owned two lorries in 1949. Chief Ewoyi Agada ran "More Days, More Hope" transport. Chief Ogbodo proclaimed that "Nothing is New." These men were building enterprises. But where are those enterprises today? Where are their institutional descendants? The logistics companies, the produce trading firms, the transport networks that should have grown from those foundations into the major commercial entities of Benue State? They are, for the most part, gone. Not because the men failed. But because the Idoma culture, like many cultures across Nigeria, has not yet mastered the art of generational business transfer. We know how to build. We have not yet systematised how to hand over. When a patriarch dies, the lorries are often sold to pay for the funeral. The business relationships he carried in his head die with him. The goodwill he spent decades accumulating is dissipated within months. The enterprise that could have become a corporation becomes a memory. This is not a moral failure. It is a structural one. We have not built the instruments; the family holding companies, the shareholder agreements, the succession plans, the mentored next generation of managers that convert individual enterprises into generational institutions. And the result is that every

generation of Idoma entrepreneurs must start again from scratch, when they should be building on the shoulders of those who came before. We need, therefore, to fund the next Idoma-led technology company or mechanised rice mill with the same energy and organisational zeal we bring to cultural carnivals. Generational wealth is not built by individuals alone. It is built by communities that collectively decide that enterprise is sacred enough to protect, transfer, and grow.

Third Cost: The Talent Export Problem

Idoma's finest lawyers, doctors, engineers, academics, and artists have disproportionately served other communities, other cities, other nations. This is not shameful, and it is, in some ways, a testament to the quality of our work. But talent export, unaccompanied by the return flow of investment, mentorship, and institution-building into the homeland, is a subsidy that Idomaland quietly pays to the rest of the world. To pose a direct question: of the distinguished Idoma professionals in Abuja, Lagos, London, and Houston, how many have an active economic stake in Benue? How many have invested in a business in Otukpo, Obi, or Okpoga? How many have endowed a scholarship, seeded a startup, or sat on the board of a homeland institution?

Fourth Cost: The Aspirational Ceiling

When children in Otukpo, Obi, or Orokam are asked what they want to become, what answers cluster do they give? Medical Doctor, Soldier, Immigration/Civil Defence and in recent times, Politician. These are honourable and necessary callings. But they are not the full range of what a nation needs, and they are not where economic and political power is currently concentrated in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The absence of visible Idoma entrepreneurs, technologists, and media owners from our children's daily imagination is the single most important structural problem we face. Professional aspiration is formed between the ages of ten and sixteen. What children see, they believe is possible. What they cannot see, they do not pursue. "Have we mastered the machinery of the state, only to remain strangers to the machinery of wealth?"

Idoma 2.0: The Renaissance Framework

Diagnosis without a prescription is an eloquent complaint. I propose three pillars for the deliberate reengineering of Idoma professional aspiration and collective economic strategy.

Pillar One: The 40–40–20 Career Architecture

For generations, the gravitational pull of Idoma professional choice has flowed toward government employment. We must deliberately redistribute that gravity. I propose that our community institutions, like the Traditional Council, professional associations, the diaspora, the Church, and our universities, align around a new aspirational model: **40%: Future-Proof Wealth Creation:** financial technology, agribusiness, renewable energy, manufacturing, creative exports, and digital services. Benue State sits atop one of Nigeria's most fertile agricultural belts. Our land holds significant limestone deposits in Igumale, coal deposits in Owukpa, and oil and gas potential in Apa and Agatu. We have been exporting raw materials and importing finished goods from the wealth of our own soil. That must end. Otukpo must become a production hub, not merely a transit point on someone else's economic corridor. **40%: Critical Service Professions;** medicine, law, academia, and engineering, where our track record is strong and where further strategic concentration can build real leverage. Three hundred professors and twelve Senior Advocates of Nigeria are the foundations on which we build. **20%: Public Leadership,** but only after achieving meaningful professional or commercial success first. We must end the culture of career politicians who have never built anything, managed anything, or employed anyone. Political leadership must be the capstone of professional achievement, not its substitute. We must enter a New Century of Purpose. Let us make a covenant today: that we will no longer measure our success by the grade level we reach in Abuja, but by the number of Idoma lives we empower in Otukpo, Adoka, Orokam, and beyond.

Pillar Two: Mastering Generational Business Transfer

We cannot only create wealth. We must learn to transfer it. The Idoma of the next century must build enterprises designed from their inception to outlast their founders. This means family business constitutions. Registered holding companies with clear shareholding structures. Boards that include non-family professional managers. Succession plans that are written, openly discussed, and agreed upon before they are needed, not negotiated bitterly after a patriarch is gone. It means that the lessons from what ended the enterprises of J. Ochogu's era must be deliberately taught in schools and community forums as a matter of cultural urgency. And it means that the Idoma professional community, its lawyers, accountants, and business advisers must make themselves available to Idoma small and medium enterprises not merely as service providers, but as the institutional infrastructure that helps those businesses survive generational transition. We need to fund the next Idoma-led technology unicorn or mechanised rice mill with the same zeal we bring to organising our cultural carnivals. That is not a slight on our carnivals, they are expressions of a vibrant identity. But identity without economic power is a performance. We must make enterprise as celebrated and as communally supported as culture. Afterall, carnivals should also have economic objectives, with efforts geared towards realizing their full potential.

Pillar Three: The Idoma Diaspora Venture Fund and the Iponu Protocol

In 1973, under the Idoma Development Association, elites based in Lagos and Otukpo, like Ebije Ikwue, Edwin Ogbu, Jomo Adapoyi, Anthony Ochefu, Onazi Egwurube, Joe Omakwu, Morgan Ogbole, Adakole Adama, and others raised over twenty thousand pounds at the Mainland Hotel and used it to build the Idoma Community School at Akpa Otobi. That was visionary collective action. It was also, regrettably, the last time the Idoma elite mounted a coordinated large-scale investment initiative for the homeland. Today, with over four thousand Idoma professionals across Nigeria and the world, we possess incomparably greater resources. The question is whether we have the will to move from **Consumption Philanthropy**, paying school fees, hospital bills, and burial expenses, to

Investment Philanthropy: seed capital for Idoma startups, equity stakes in homeland enterprises, and endowments for educational institutions. Alongside this, we must design and deliberately nurture a unique wealth creation model similar to the commercial apprenticeship scheme in Igboland. Some have proposed "Iponu Protocol," named after our council's tradition of wisdom. Under the scheme, every Idoma person who reaches the rank of Director, General, Professor, Senior Advocate, or Chief Executive must be held, by sustained community expectation, to mentor at least five protégés in non-traditional sectors. Not mentoring on how to secure a posting, but on how to build a firm, raise capital, and compete globally. And we must look to initiatives like Learn to Earn, the New Vision Technology Institute, and eLimi, which is already training young Idoma people to plug into the global technology, gig economy, and construction skills training, as the model for what deliberate, structured preparation for the future economy looks like. These are the kinds of institutions our elite must fund, promote, and expand.

To the Torch Bearers: A Direct Word

I want to speak now to a different part of this room. I want to address those of you who are thirty five or younger who came today because someone brought you, or because something in you was curious enough to come. I want to speak to you directly, as though the elders are not listening. Even though they are, and they should be. You Are Not Starting From Zero. A hundred years of Idoma sacrifice, discipline, and achievement is already in your inheritance. The generals who kept the Nigerian State from fracturing. The jurists who built its legal architecture. The academics who filled its universities. The doctors who staffed its hospitals. The traders who moved goods across the Middle Belt before there were paved roads to do it on. Innocent Ujah Idibia created music so rooted in who we are that the world had no choice but to come to us. Bongos Ikwue, born in Otukpo in 1942, sang in our language and made a continent listen. Daniel Amokachi went to Atlanta in 1996 and came back with Olympic gold. Susan Peters has brought the Idoma name to over 250 Nollywood screens. Monica Ogah made history as the first person from the Middle Belt to win MTN Project Fame. Dan Agbese

helped build a publication that changed how Nigeria held power to account. These are not accidents. They are the fruit of a people with something to say. You have something to say. The question is: in which arena will you say it? Accordingly, every generation of Idoma youth has faced the same fundamental choice: the safe path or the generative one. In 1950, the safe path was the colonial civil service. In 1975, it was the military or the federal bureaucracy. Today, the safe path wears new names. It looks like a political appointment without having built anything. A government contract without building a company. Credentials without competence, connections without contribution. I urge you to resist this path. The Nigeria that rewarded patient service and bureaucratic seniority is being disrupted irreversibly by a digital economy that rewards boldness, originality, and the willingness to build publicly, fail forward, and try again. Do not go where there is already a path. Go where there is no Idoma path yet. Leave a trail with our name on it.

The sectors that will determine Nigeria's economic and political landscape over the next thirty years are, right now, largely empty of Idoma. Financial technology. Agricultural technology. Climate and environmental services. Media and narrative production. Arbitration and international commercial law. In biomedical research, the unique pharmacological properties of *cissus poplinea* (okoho), our indigenous soup ingredient, or *Gladiolus corm* (ukpendu) represent a research frontier that Idoma scientists at FUHSO, Moses Adasu University, and JOSTUM could pioneer. Your office can be your laptop. Your market can be the world. The distance between Otukpo and global opportunity has never been shorter than it is today. The Idoma spirit is too large for a civil service grade level. Choose an arena worthy of what you carry.

The measure of your generation is not personal success. The measure is whether your success becomes infrastructure. A firm that employs others. A network that opens doors for those who follow. A scholarship that changes what a child in Agatu believes about her future. A piece of intellectual property that carries the Idoma name into spaces it has not yet reached. And critically: build to transfer.

Do not make the mistake of the generation that built without building succession into the structure of what they created. Write the shareholder agreement. Train your successor. Register the company so that it belongs to a family or a community of investors, not merely to a single lifetime. The lorries of J. Ochogu deserve to be a logistics company today. Let your equivalent of those lorries still be running in 2125. Be the first in your family to do something extraordinary. Then make certain that you are not the last. Tradition is a root, not a cage. Be rooted in Idoma. Then fly in the global clouds.

"One hundred years from now, when the Idoma people mark their bicentenary, they will read an account of this era. It will say either: *'This was the generation that received everything that came before it and built nothing of lasting consequence.'* Or it will say: *'This was the generation that finally decided what Idoma was for.'* The account is not yet written. You are writing it. Every professional choice you make, every door you open or leave closed, every young person you lift, mentor or ignore, that is the text. Choose carefully.

Conclusion: The Centenary Covenant- What This Gathering Must Decide

The first one hundred years were about surviving as a people. The next one hundred years must be about thriving as a power. A centenary lecture that produces only applause has failed its purpose. This one must produce decisions. Before this gathering disperses, I call for three specific commitments to be made from this floor: **Commitment One:** The formation tonight of an Idoma Professional Renaissance Network steering committee, with a mandate to establish active chapters in Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, and in the diaspora within twelve months, and to convene the first Idoma Professional Mentorship Summit before the end of the year. **Commitment Two:** A formal undertaking by the Centenary Plus Secretariat and the Idoma Area Traditional Council to institutionalise an annual Idoma Professional Excellence Forum in secondary schools across the homeland, bringing professionals back to speak directly to students during the critical years when aspiration is formed. **Commitment Three:** A personal mentorship pledge from every senior professional present: five names, five protégés, committed to before you leave today. Not next month. Today.

These are not grand gestures. They are first steps. And the first steps are precisely what distinguish gatherings that change things from gatherings that merely commemorate them. **To the Elders in This Room;** Your legacy is not what you accumulated. It is what you activated. The young people who leave this room today will remember whether you inspired them or merely impressed them. Your greatest contribution to the Idoma nation is not yet what you have already done. It is what you choose to do in the next five years for those who are watching you, and learning from you, whether you know it or not. **To Every Person Here;** Under the leadership of His Royal Majesty, the Och'Idoma, we stand at the threshold of a New Century of Purpose. With over 4,000 Idoma professionals across Nigeria and the world, we possess the knowledge, networks, and capacity to tackle our most significant challenges. What we must now construct is the institutional architecture that connects all of that individual excellence into collective power. Otukpo must become a destination, not a corridor. Idoma enterprise must become a tradition passed down, not just remembered. The women of the next generation must have the tools and the backing to build on what those before them began. The young men and women who are learning to code, to process cassava into global food products, to design buildings in Abuja, to install acoustic systems across the world, must feel the full weight of community behind them. We don't have to agree on everything, but this pathway will engineer the Idoma renaissance.

The first one hundred years were about surviving Nigeria. The next one hundred years must be about Idoma leading; leading Nigeria's agribusiness transformation from our own fertile soil, leading the Fourth Industrial Revolution from the banks of the Benue, and leading Africa's cultural and creative economy from a homeland that is not merely a place we come from, but a place we are actively, deliberately, and joyfully building. "Our fathers gave Nigeria its soul and its safety. It is time for this generation to give the Idoma people their wealth and their future. The era of 'Your Humble Servant' is over. The era of the Idoma Innovator begins today." Your professional choices are not just private decisions. They are civic acts designed to give meaning to our collective aspirations. They are votes for the kind of nation

the Idoma people will become. Vote wisely. Vote boldly. Vote for the future your forebears bled to make possible, and that your children and grandchildren are counting on you to deliver.

Thank You for your attention.