

Inaugural Address by Charles Soludo as Governor of Anambra State, Government House, Agu-Awka, Awka Anambra State

PROTOCOL

Umunne m Ndi Anambra, I applied for this job; my party, (the All Progressives Grand Alliance, APGA) shortlisted me, and you—umunne m Ndi Anambra— interviewed and employed me as your chief servant, with Dr. Onyekachukwu Gilbert Ibezim as my deputy.

God ordained this moment and we are grateful to Him and to you all for the privilege to serve you. Dr. Ibezim and I will work hard every day to make you proud. I ask millions of Ndi Anambra all over the world who have prayed for today to simply say a one minute prayer to commit this journey and Anambra State unto the hands of the Almighty God. Anambra will win.

Before I go further, let's pay special tributes to hundreds of thousands of our friends and supporters who worked tirelessly to see us to this moment. It is not possible to list all of you here. I remember with deep sense of grief the three gallant police officers —-Inspector Murtala Saudi, Sgt Mudassir Ahmed, and Sgt Samuel Ishaya— who lost their lives to the Unknown Gunmen who attacked us at a meeting with the youths in my village last year.

We pledge to continue to take care of their families. Let me particularly thank my friend and outgoing governor of Anambra, HE (Sir) Willie Maduaburochukwu Obiano, for being an honourable gentleman and leader. On Sunday, 20th November, 2016, I accepted your proposal for gentlemen's understanding and partnership.

I kept my part in 2017 and even after five years, you still kept yours in 2021. I always emphasize this point because it is rare these days to find people who keep their word in politics, and we will never take your support for granted. You are indeed a great leader. Thanks for believing in me. We will work hard to make you and Ndi Anambra proud.

To our indefatigable national Chairman, Ozonkpu (Dr) Victor Ike Oye, your visit of 27th August 2016 and unwavering support remain historical. I will continue to thank all our party members especially the members of the Board of Trustees (BOT), National Executive Committee (NEC), State, LG and Ward Excocs, Campaign Committees at all levels, etc, for the massive support.

I am grateful to all the stakeholders of the Anambra Project—the clergy and the church, traditional rulers, Association of Anambra Town Unions (ASATU), labour, market, trade and professional unions, youth and women organizations, non-indigenes associations, businessmen and captains of industry, the Diaspora community, persons with disabilities, etc. We thank especially the 41 self-funding support groups who propelled this movement. Our donors and the goodwill of other Nigerian stakeholders made a significant difference.

Thanks immensely to the 150 star-studded Transition Committee chaired by our own Dr (Mrs) Oby Ezekwesili.

Let me once again put on record our debt of gratitude to the federal institutions—the judiciary, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and security agencies for insisting on a transparent and credible electoral system. Eternal gratitude goes to President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, and The Presidency for remaining democrats. In particular, I thank my wife, Nonye Frances Soludo, and children: Ozonna, Ifeatu, Chinua, Ekene, Oduko and Zikora for their love and sacrifices. Despite your deep reservations, you still allowed and supported me to step out in the service of our people.

As I repeatedly promised, I will work hard every day never to disappoint you. My 90-year old father is watching this live, while my late beloved mother, Mgbafor, is smiling in her grave.

Today is my first day at work. I just reported for duty and will work for at least eight hours. We had more than a month since the election to celebrate our historic victory. Now is the time to work, and there is no minute or kobo to waste in fanfare. In a few minutes, I will announce some of the principal officers of the administration, and commence with serious meetings of the Anambra State Security Council, followed by a meeting with the permanent secretaries, a meeting on Okpoko, and with my Strategy, Execution and Evaluation (SEE) team.

Within the next one week, the list of commissioners will be laid before the House of Assembly. Tomorrow, we will head to Okpoko in Ogbaru Local Government Area and parts of Onitsha and Idemili as we signpost our commitment to fundamental urban regeneration, beginning with the greater Onitsha metropolis.

As I stand here, I feel the weight of history. I stand on the foundation laid especially by our elected predecessors— Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe GCFR, PC, Dr Michael.I. Okpara, Chief Jim Nwobodo, Chief Christian C. Onoh, Dr Chukwuemeka Ezeife, Dr Chinwoke Mbadinuju, Dr Chris Ngige, OON, Mr Peter Obi, CON, and yes, our own Chief (Sir) Willie M. Obiano. You all did your best and well for our people, and I salute you all. As I wear the APGA muffler on my neck, I feel the weight of Africa’s historic progressives like the Great Zik of Africa, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, GCFR, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Dr M.I. Okpara, Malam Aminu Kano, Chief Joseph Tarka, Malam Balarabe Musa, Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, etc. Not to talk of the millions of living African progressives, who still dream of Renascent Africa. We will never let them down.

The All Progressives Grand Alliance (initially set up as the United Progressives Grand Alliance UPGA) is a nostalgic rebirth of the grand alliance of progressives in the First Republic comprising Azikiwe’s NCNC, Awolowo’s AG, Joseph Tarka’s United Middle Belt Congress, Aminu Kano’s Northern Elements Progressive Union NEPU, etc.

As the first true progressive party in Nigeria since 1999, our ideology is a combination of Zik’s neo welfarism, Awolowo’s scientific socialism, and Aminu Kano’s democratic humanism, to form what we see as the Pan African market progressivism. It is a Pan Africanist ideology that integrates the social democratic values with the principles of competitive markets.

Anambra under our watch will mirror this ideology, and we believe that this should be Nigeria’s compass to the future. We will seek active collaboration and cooperation with the Federal Government, our neighbouring and other states as well as the international community to provide our state truly people-centred governance. We will consolidate the progress made under our predecessors to continue Anambra’s upward trajectory.

Today, I stand up for the millions of Ndi Anambra for whom this mandate means everything. The hopes and expectations rise up to the heavens. Understandably, all of us wish that I could perform miracles – by waving my hands and all our problems will be solved. I hear you. I feel your pulse. For your sake I keep awake at night, sometimes having palpitations about not letting you down. Well, since God is the Miracle Worker, I will look up to Him in prayer and faith as we all start the work ahead of us. I see and feel all the humungous challenges.

I know the lean financial base of the state. I know the limitations imposed upon a subnational state such as Anambra by the peculiar structure of our federation. But here's my promise: I will give it my all. I will work very hard every day, with you, to make Anambra proud. Every kobo of your tax money will be deployed to provide you maximum value. People ask me why we are not celebrating today as it has become customary. My response is that we all—party members, supporters, family and friends—celebrated in thanksgiving and prayers after you decided to employ me last November 6 and 9.

But today, my first day at work, is not a day for celebration. First, there is no venue that can contain the tens of thousands of Ndi Anambra and friends all over the world who would wish to join us on this historic occasion. Second, the State cannot afford any such expensive ceremonies. Third, and as a matter of personal philosophy and as a true progressive, I do not subscribe to using the paltry tax collected from the women selling pepper on the roadside or the okada/keke drivers on a fleeting fanfare and banquet. I insisted that this event must not cost the government of Anambra one kobo.

I would rather use such resources to lay the foundation stone for a public hospital at Okpoko or elsewhere or empower our security agents to fight criminality.

Today, I come with a sober heart, conscious of the enormity of responsibilities on our shoulders and the challenges ahead. Yes, there will be a time to celebrate. We will celebrate when: security of life and property is guaranteed and law and order restored; every child of schooling age is in school; every school child is receiving the 21st century education for the digital age; everyone, especially children and women can access quality healthcare; the cost of doing business is down to near zero; our roads are tarred and we have an efficient transportation system with no one having to wait in traffic for more than a few minutes; we have access to 24 hour electricity; our streets are clean and green; our cities, communities and markets are planned and cleaned; the many millions of Charlie Nwamgbafors and the vulnerable persons are lifted up to realize their God given potential; all our pensioners receive their gratuities;; workers are paid their leave allowances and contractors are paid; our youth can get jobs and business opportunities; the youth in Okpoko 'Zone 9' become global serial entrepreneurs; poverty is near zero and income levels rising...etc.

Yes, I will not celebrate, and certainly not with the taxpayers' money. Umunnem Ndi Anambra! I come to this job prepared to serve you. For 12 years since 2009 when I first indicated interest to serve you, I persevered through the turbulent politics and here we are. Once again, I present to you the Soludo Solution—our contract with the people which we intend to vigorously implement subject to resource availability.

Our contract with Anambra people derives from three seminal documents: (a) "Anambra Vision 2070—a 50-Year Development Plan" which I chaired the drafting; (b) "The Soludo Solution: A People's Manifesto for a Greater Anambra"; and (c) "The Transition Committee (Combined) Report"—which built upon the first two. In sum, this is an agenda for an itinerant tribe in search of a livable and prosperous homeland.

Driven by the philosophy of One Anambra, One People, One Agenda, our goal is to build Anambra into a livable and prosperous smart megacity.

We aim to transit beyond petroleum into the digital world of the 4th Industrial Revolution, and envision Anambra as an industrial, technology, and leisure/entertainment hub of West Africa. Our detailed Plan rests on five key pillars: law and order (homeland peace and security); economic transformation as Nigeria's next axis of industrial-tech and leisure; competitive and progressive social agenda (education, health, youth, women and vulnerable groups); Governance, rule of law and a rebirth of our value system; and aggressively tackling our existential threat posed by the environment—towards a clean, green, planned and sustainable cities, communities, and markets.

For me, this agenda is also personal: I am here to build a society where I would be proud to live in after leaving office. Ndi be anyi, what we propose is that we collectively build a new social and economic order that guarantees and defends economic freedom and reward of private enterprise to secure our future such that any child born in Anambra will have little incentive to rush elsewhere in search of opportunities and anyone persecuted anywhere in the world can return to a happy and prosperous homeland. Such a new order will, of necessity, entail a massive disruptive change and creative destruction, with short-term pains but guaranteed long-term benefits.

As a humane and progressive government, we shall strive to deliver the difficult change with a human face. As we transit into a non-oil economy, our strategy is a small open economy framework embedded in 21st Century imperative of Everything Technology: we seek to bring the world to Anambra and take Anambra to the world especially in the context of the African continental free trade area (AfCFTA).

Our “Made in Anambra” and “Anambra Standards” agenda underpin this strategy. If you can produce it in Anambra, I will be your chief marketing officer, provided that your standard meets the “Anambra standard”—which is excellence. The Anambra State Government will only patronize Made in Anambra products and services unless such goods or services are not currently made in Anambra, then made in Nigeria, Africa, etc, in that sequence. When you see me in Innoson vehicles or in my Akwete dress with a pair of shoes made in Ogbunike/Nkwelle Ezunaka and Onitsha, we are making a statement. Today, the light refreshment to be served after this brief event is abacha from Umunze, ukwa from Isuofia, Anambra rice with ofe akwu, nkwu enu from Awgbu, ngwo from Awa and Oba, and malt and bottled water from Onitsha. As part of our “made in Anambra”, cultural renaissance and healthy living agenda, when you come to the Governor's Lodge or attend any state government's function, be sure to be served only “Made in Anambra”.

We want to go back to where M.I. Okpara stopped with the palm revolution and plant millions of palm trees. In some years, we will seek not only to export palm produce but also fresh palm wine from Anambra State. We will seek active collaboration with the federal government not only to export manufactured and agricultural products, but also services (especially tech, leisure/entertainment, and skills/talents as we seek an educational system whose products are productive at home and exportable).

Anambra's greatest resource is our human capital, and we shall grow and mine this resource to its maximum, leveraging on technology. We will soon inaugurate the Anambra Innovation and Technology Advisory Council to drive the emergence of the digital tribe and mainstreaming technology and innovation across all aspects of our lives, our International Investment Council, our Global Friends of Anambra in Development, as well as the Council on the Ease of Doing Business.

We will conduct local government elections. No doubt, the uniform local government system as the third federating unit is one of the contested features of our federalism. But we must make the best of a bad system, by unleashing the potential of governance at the lower levels. Over the next two years, we shall review/amend the relevant legislations, reform and strengthen the system. We will conduct local government elections. No doubt, the uniform local government system as the third federating unit is one of the contested features of our federalism. But we must make the best of a bad system, by unleashing the potential of governance at the lower levels. Over the next two years, we shall review/amend the relevant legislations, reform and strengthen the system for efficiency, restructure/strengthen the Anambra's Independent Electoral Commission, and conduct local government elections. We will collaborate and coordinate actively with LGAs to ensure synergy and complementarities. Let the revolution get to the grassroots. We shall reinvigorate and mainstream the public-community-private partnership (PCPP) – as a veritable framework for service delivery and development.