

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF WARM COMMUNITY GREAT
BRITAIN AND IRELAND (WCI) 26/08/2009; DR. A. M. LORI**

Dear sons and daughters of Iwerre land,

As I write this speech, joy and sorrow is flowing intermittently through my heart and blood vessels. So it is with a mixture of elated and downward moods that I speak to you. Yet the message in my mind seems clear and imprinted as I greet you all in the name of our ancestors and those of our brethren in Diaspora and particularly those in Great Britain and Ireland.

It was at this time last year that I first returned to Iwerre land from Great Britain as the President of WCUI to grant the first scholarships to the children of the fallen Warri heroes of peace during the recent crisis (1997-2003). It was a momentous occasion then and joy flowed from the mouth of despair before our own very eyes.

For the interest of those who were not present then, the activities of that day were encapsulated or summed up by what a four year old receiver of our scholarship said when asked why he came to the ceremony that day. He said "I came because I was told that my father has sent me some gifts". He was further asked whether he would see his father that day to which he was silent. That speech invoked a "rain of tears" from the hearts and eyes of the Itsekiris present as similarly one of the national newspapers wrote that covered the event. "The rest is history as this young man's dad passed over whilst he was still in the mother's womb during the disturbance of the Warn crisis.

The second recognized outshoot of that Remembrance Day Celebration was a deep feeling of release from our deep seated pains, during and after. Most of the cloudy and waterlogged eyes now seemed clearing and cleared. A miracle of wholeness was happening in our mist. Again, one of the youth survivors of the crisis stood to give a vote of thanks on behalf of the youths. He said, "I thought the Itsekiris forgot our

contributions during the Warr Crisis". But the celebration including the granting of medals and scholarship for children of the fallen heroes has convinced and reassured me, that I would not remain silent or be a non-participator should another crisis occur, although I do not pray for another crisis.

Since my departure back to Britain, there has been a proliferation of other Itsekiri bodies granting scholarships. That is as it should be and we thank the Almighty God for granting the continuity of this desire to help our fellow less privileged Itsekiris. On our side in United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, there has been a grand swell towards our ideas of scholarship whose time has come. So this year we return to do the same but with little additions.

As I was planning my journey to Nigeria a friend of mine asked why I did not consider including the money for my journey plus my expenses to the scholarship fund and sending all directly to the children through a third party? He felt this would add more room for scholarships. But what is worth doing is worth doing well. The WCI prefers personal contact with the receivees. They must know in their bones that we would come to see them now and again and not just dumping the money. It is our desire to connect with these children and their mother's that coagulates our efforts and makes sure that the fountain of water of hope does not dry out for the children.

The second question or suggestion my friend asked me was why the need for another Remembrance Day Celebration? Our neighbours might translate our Remembrance Day Celebration as unhelpful or provocative. But the answer is, "lest we forget". A nation that forgets its history is destined to repeat it". So says one of our sages in our present times.

It is for this reason the first and second world wars are being remembered by the United

Nations and western world. This is the reason why the D-day landings, the victims of the Holocaust have been imprinted in the calendars of the world. Hence, by this peaceful remembrance the perpetrators of these unnecessary wars and carnage would be helped to remember the pain and suffering they left in their footpath of destruction. They would perhaps realize that their actions have not brought the desired gains they had hoped for.

The Itsekiris on the other hand would also see that a broken heart can still sing. That the "Pentecostal wind" can still blow into our hearts and enable us rise from dismay and despair and walk into victory and a new world of enlightenment. Hence what we are doing brings total healing to all involved in this tsunami of our lives.

This year the WCI has brought printed t-shirts to scholarship receivees. These are in red and white colours which put together represent our Itsekiri National flag. On the white t-shirt centre is an insignia or the drawing of an arrow pierced heart or a broken heart. This picture represents what the Itsekiri man, woman or child felt when our homes were razed down by our neighbours. Yet, because the heart as many wise ones say is the only organ in the human body which still blesses although wounded or broken; we forgive them and still pray and work for peace within and outside our boundaries. What sort of humans have we become that we that we should continue to destroy human life and property because of difference of ethnicity or speaking of different language or other social preferences, but ours..? What hellish example and narrow future are we leaving behind for our children to see and copy?

We have also brought some wrapper or cloth for these bereaved mothers of the crisis. They have been left to do singularly what most couples usually do with difficulties. We like to remind the mothers that strictly speaking, their children have not been left orphans because God in Heaven is our real father. We in WCI would want to step into their

fathers' role, although a poor second by comparison. We like to be used as an instrument of God to diminish, dry and stop their tears for the pain and sorrow of the past. We sincerely and wholeheartedly thank the mothers for their focus and steadfastness in looking after their children.

At all times in human history, the entry of women into battle has always ended positively and decisively on the side of peace. Surely and sincerely, no woman wants to send their grown up children to the battle front and be killed after nine months of pregnancy with the attendant pain of labour and delivery. The cause of war as a failure of perception is therefore anathema to the life aspirations of women. Hence we stand on the side of women because they have no desire or appetite to win war for the sake of superficial and hollow victory.

Since we started the scholarship scheme last year, we have come to the inescapable conclusion that granting of scholarship alone is not enough. We have wondered now and again why war seems to have entrenched its roots in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. We like others who are seeking for peace and progress in our tunes have lowered the drawbridge of life, crossed to the opposite bank of the river. Like "Pogo", we have seen and met the enemy and "he" is us.

The warlord's office is in our hearts and minds. The misconceptions and misperceptions of "me" and "him" and "I" and "you", "we and them" continue to plague us. Therefore, it is in the heart and mind of men that we must first erect the pillars of peace. External arrangement and rearrangements with financial peace dividends at best will only have placebo effects. The churches and other religions have been praying for better times since the beginning of the remotest past, or creation of the first Adam. But war still lingers on. What is needed therefore is a change of mind. What is needed is the

acceptance and prayer for a new world where the lion and the sheep can sit on the grass together.

Most Itsekiris and indeed Nigerians in general continue to have continuous mental and bodily aches when they think about the state of affairs in the Niger Delta. Many are consumed with fear and hopelessness because they see no end to this fracas.

The chronicity of stories and news of the mutilations' of minds and bodies in our coastal terrains sometimes makes us prefer to have been born in another area of our planet earth.

Yet this preference is not in the heart and mind of the Divine during creation as the earth is the Lord's and the fullness there of the Bible says. But there are those today, brothers and sisters who want to own everything including the creator for themselves alone. They need to own the airspace also. The Almighty God has provided sufficiently for our needs, but not our excesses or greed. There is enough to go around if we share our mutual wealth together. Hence we appeal to our neighbours who press strongly to share the resources in our environment with us to also accord us the same rights in the areas where the Itsekiri population are noticeably palpable but unrepresented in the Halls of state legislature or power.

Today democracy by numbers alone is not a bringer of peace. The quality and quantity of man's cerebration of his mental processes sometimes diminish when they stand together without questioning other ideas except that produced by their political masters.

That is why consensual thinking needs to be added as an instrument of concordance and civility.

We suggest that the Itsekiris and other small ethnic groups must recognize the effect of the flow of the stream of modernity into our coastal shores of life. The village and coastal boundaries are now being overwhelmed exclusively by the containers of

modernity and post modernity. We must work hard educationally, industrially and endeavour to plant our children and ourselves in all the theatres of progress while tightening our cultural strings or Itsekiriness to our hearts.

Nothing on this earth remains the same. The sun is behind the dark blue skies. At anytime a single ray of light is sufficient to break through the darkness and reveal or show us the overarching and the beauty of the heavens. That is why we in WCI have hope, belief and faith that our present sluggishness is only for a short time. A resurgence of prosperity is bound to happen as night follows day. The question is "are we prepared and willing to ask God to open our mental and spiritual eyes to see even now the flow of the new heavenly world into our present one. We name this year or times the Jubilee year of the Itsekiris, if we do so.

He who guarantees the freedom of his neighbour guarantees his own. We are tired of fighting chronic wars. We are tired of empty victories which like sand dunes are soon blown away. If peace is what we seek in our domains, then it's nothing short of lunacy to expect it when we are killing others around us because we hold them unjustly for our poverty or lack of progress. That is why our purpose and intention is to release the captors and captives of these wars from their physical and mental chains and prisons. Those who continue to do what they have always done but expect different results are in the mental prisons. Hence we want to remove the obscurators of perception so that oppressors and the oppressed can walk out free men again.

The sacrifices of our unsung heroes must now be brought into the front pages of our lives. Otherwise like a cloud in the sky, their contribution to the lives of the Itsekiris would just drift away. Their life's signature soon gets unremembered and therefore unappreciated. Therefore no lesson learnt about an unneeded war. Whereas the broken hearts of the wives and mothers should point to us that the way of mental and physical

violence is un-preferred and unwanted. To the wives and families closely involved, bitterness and pains is planted in their hearts and sorrow refuses to disappear. So I ask the question once again, what should we do? How do we stop the unrest? The fires of discomfort and poverty are still burning and raging uncontrolled. Most of our neighbours have the trickledown effect attitude. They feel they are in a state of stasis and poverty. Damage has been encouraged to gradually creep into their territories, because of the greed of the largest ethnic groups at the national level. Therefore, the Itsekiris are suffering from collateral discharge and damage from the colliding forces of our federal state and that of our big neighbours. We ask them to think carefully of our plight because our only sin is that we are suffering in silence. We want most of the good things they are fighting for. But we know war and retaliation would not improve chances of peace. War breeds, war.

We ask our Itsekiri leaders and other leaders of our neighbours to come forward and together seat at the table of peace and negotiation. Otherwise the numbers of scholarships, we are granting would be like a drop of water in the ocean compared to the number of lives lost in future wars. For the Itsekiris, we re-iterate the saying that a kingdom divided against it-self cannot stand. There are two streams of thought affecting our social and cultural fabric at the moment. The first stream of thought is that flowing from our youth wing with its presumed vibrancy of what is needed in our present time. The second stream is flowing from the elders with its flavour of stability and assumed rightness and knows it all of the past. It is possible that both streams of thought would need to be mixed or synthesized to enable us live satisfactorily in the present. So the divine has not given the absolution of truth to either streams of thought.

We thank all who have turned up for this year's Remembrance Day celebration.

We thank the chairman, the chiefs and elders of our Itsekiri kingdom. We hope a brighter

future and better celebration waits for us next year.

Till then, work for peace and progress and be vigilant.

God bless you all. Amen