

## **A Time to Rebuild**

TEXT OF A SPEECH BY DR ALEX C. OTTI, OFR, ON HIS INAUGURATION AS GOVERNOR OF ABIA STATE, ON MAY 29, 2023

Protocol

1. A few moments ago, I was sworn in as the 5th democratically elected Governor of Abia, God's Own State. It is, therefore, with great delight, humility, and a high sense of duty that I address you all now for the first time in that capacity.
2. On the 22nd of March this year, when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) announced us winners in the bruising and long-drawn-out Abia gubernatorial elections, our first task was to head to church to give thanks to the Almighty God and to hand over the state to Him, knowing that anything left in His hands remains secure. He is the author and finisher, the foundation of all successful endeavours of mankind. Just like the Christian community did a few days ago, I use this solemn and formal occasion to rededicate Abia State to God Almighty.
3. In line with the foregoing, I wish to start by thanking God for the great opportunity He has given the noble but oppressed people of Abia to finally breathe again. My profound gratitude goes to all Abians, and other well-meaning citizens, young or old, rich or poor, at home or abroad, who took part in this struggle without any consideration for any anticipated personal benefit. Let me subsequently thank the executives and members of Labour Party for leading the charge to victory. I must also thank our indefatigable leader, Mr. Peter Obi CON, for his unflinching support and for redefining politics in Nigeria. Through his people-centred style of governance and his judicious management of public resources, he has shown that public office is a platform for improving society. I thank all Obidients and the overwhelming

number of Abia electorate, who not only came out en masse to campaign and vote for us, but also stood by us to challenge the petty and shameful shenanigans that stood against the mandate of the people even up until this inauguration event.

4. Finally, today is the day all well-meaning citizens of Abia, and all people of goodwill the world over have been waiting for. We therefore rejoice and we are truly glad in it. Until I'm no more, I will continue to remember the outpouring of emotion and pure joy that marked the announcement of our victory on the 22nd of March. It will continue to inspire me to serve the people of Abia and to strive to meet their high expectations of me as their Governor and Chief Servant.

5. I must thank INEC, especially those her officers, who stood firm to their conviction during the elections, to make our votes count. We must not take for granted the sacrifice that these INEC staff made for us to be here today in this capacity. Posterity will not forget those of them who put even their lives on the line to save our endangered democracy and keep alive the hallowed ritual of this form of government, which demands obeying the will of the people. These INEC officials were willing to pay even the supreme price, to ensure that the will of the people prevailed. Their remarkable show of courage and conviction should serve as a constant reminder that Freedom is a thorny crown, which one must wear with extreme alertness and lots of sacrifice. As we commence our statutory task of governance, it has now become our own obligation to show to the whole world why votes should count.

6. Let me also quickly thank all my staff, my campaign team, and volunteers, who worked tirelessly for this victory. Their unalloyed commitment to the cause and their can-do spirit, which sustained the campaign, even during the darkest and most discouraging of times and

situations, helped to make this day a reality. They refused to be intimidated by rebuffs and denials, blatant threats, and mental and physical violence. Many of them were victims of violent physical and verbal attacks. Several of them sustained injuries and some were involved in road mishaps and lost valuable assets, all in their support of this cause. Several others even lost their lives during this lengthy period of the struggle to rescue Abia State from the clutches of incompetence, wanton corruption, and unprecedented clannishness. I pray for the sweet repose of the souls of those faithful departed, and I hereby request that we continue to keep their memories alive and ensure that their labour will not be in vain. May I, therefore, ask for your permission to pay tribute to some of them who should have been here today. My best friend and brother from another mother who wanted this day to happen eight years ago, Prince Otisi Ndukwe kalu, aka Abbott, slept on October 20, 2015. Others are Mazi Nnanna Ngwu, Mr. Eze Alomefuna, Prince Dike, Dr. Mike Nwachukwu, Prince Emeka Obasi, Chief Enyi Aji, and Chief Mike Nkwoji (Mike Merchandise). May their souls continue to rest in peace.

7. The Deputy Governor, Engr Ikechukwu Emetu, and I, together with our team, are fully ready to bequeath to our successors a far better Abia State than the one we have inherited today. To achieve this, we began by setting up task forces charged with the responsibility of drawing up a vision and a road map for the development of Abia State. Since late March, when our victory was announced, we have kept busy these dedicated teams comprising some of the most gifted and trained individuals, working day and night, to ensure that even in the face of overwhelming odds and hostility, this administration will have a smooth take-off. They are the members of the Transition Council, the Inauguration Committee, and the Handover Committee. Many of them are with us here today and I thank them for their hard work and sacrifices.

8. I must not forget the sacrifices made by members of my immediate and extended families, who stood firmly by me all these years and gave me all the support and sustenance needed to survive this gruelling electioneering campaign that lasted the better part of eight years. I must thank particularly my dear wife, Priscilla, who has remained my untiring pillar of support and who has pledged to continue to be my inner strength as we embark on this new journey and my children alike. I owe them debts that will be difficult to repay in one lifetime.

9. Despite the initial assurances from the other side that the endless season of antagonistic and predatory politics was finally over, we have been the target of the most vicious and pernicious attacks through vile propaganda and the unconscionable abuse of judicial processes. We are here today, simply because many individuals of conviction and courage were resolute in standing on the side of truth, equity, and justice. I doff my hat for them.

10. I must pause at this juncture, to extend our hand of fellowship and comradeship to all Abians, especially our brothers and sisters in other opposition political parties, who contested with us in the 18th of March 2023 elections. The truth is that we are all winners and there is no loser. The primary motive behind our aspirations to contest at one level or the other, even though we might have boarded different political vehicles, was to raise the bar of governance in Abia State and to improve the living standard of our people. These aspirations, more than anything else, were equally my driving force to aspire three times to govern Abia. I, therefore, make bold to say that those are the ideals that we shall pursue diligently and without bitterness or rancour. Everyone of goodwill is therefore enjoined to come on board as we seek a common purpose to actualise our long-held positive desires for our people. We must now, more than ever before, come together to pull Abia State out of her current sorry state and quagmire. I must also

state that our state has never been this divided along ethnic lines. I, therefore, call on the political elites who have been fanning these fault lines to stop and give peace a chance. After all, we are one and the same people.

11. As we savour this moment, we do so with mixed emotions. We are full of happiness, but we also have some anxiety. We approach this moment with relief that it has finally come, but we are fully aware that it is the beginning of a long and demanding journey. We rejoice in the birth of a new and glorious era, yet we cannot easily forget the years of waste and missed opportunities arising from self-seeking, prebendal and profligate governance. In all of this, we draw inspiration from the wise words of King Solomon of antiquity. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we are reminded that there is a time for everything. We, as Abia citizens, have had our time of tribulations and pains, of darkness and doubts. To the glory of God, this is now a time for us to wipe our tears. It is the time for rebuilding, not just the state's physical infrastructure and fiscal buffers that are in a sorry state of decay. It is the time to rebuild our individual and collective values. It is now the time to take back our society.

12. My major responsibility will be to ensure that the citizens and residents of Abia State, who have finally been freed from their bondage, will continue to breathe freely, and go about their daily pursuit of good quality life. It will be my duty to bring them out of pitch darkness into the bright sunlight that they deserve. It will be my duty to show them that there is more to life than the poverty, hunger, ignorance, disease, insecurity, and pot holes that, all these years, have become their daily realities. It will be my duty to continue to remind them that they are the offspring of those who once created the fastest growing economy in the world. It is my duty to let them realise that they were once the world's largest makers of some key products on which the world's economy depended. It is my responsibility to let them know that

their institutions of learning had in the past produced some of the greatest minds in the world of arts, science and technology, mathematics, banking and finance, politics, law, history and philosophy. It is my duty to let them know that we have in us all the qualities that are necessary to recreate the glorious past that they dream about.

13. I have abiding faith in our ability to conquer the challenges of decades of poor-quality governance; the decades of stunted growth and development; the decades of deprivation, injustice and loss of self-dignity, the decades of hopelessness, anguish, and pain. After all, we are the children of those who were at the forefront of the successful quest for independence for Nigeria and indeed Africa. We come from the wombs of the heroic women, who defied the guns, bullets and batons of the colonialists in 1929 to secure freedom for themselves. We are the offspring of those who more than half a century ago, accomplished technological feats and discoveries. Without doubt we have greatness in us and it is up to all of us to awaken the giants in us. My pledge to you today is that I will lead that charge to restore our society to greatness.

14. During my campaigns, I visited every part of our state and dutifully explained to the electorate my plans on how we can rebuild our state. I presented my credentials and made bold to say that I was going to help you reverse our individual and collective failures. My biggest source of reassurance was that wherever I visited throughout the 17 local governments of our dear State, I saw on the faces of our people a high sense of expectation, a burning desire for change, and the fierce determination to do whatever it rightly takes to succeed. I discovered that despite all these years of rape and brutalisation of their psyche, majority of our people remained resolute and unbroken in spirit. Bad roads, potholes, power blackouts, kidnapers, extortionists, had not snuffed out their

entrepreneurial and creative spirits. They kept hope alive and continued to pursue their daily tasks in their inexorable quest to be part of a sane and decent society. They have indeed been waiting for this day, which has finally arrived.

15. I thank you for your overwhelming mandate; for your faith and trust in us and our ability and willingness to be your Chief Servant. Today, I stand before you, my good people of Abia State, to declare once again, boldly, that in line with my campaign theme, you should 'Weep No More, Help is Here'. My task is to dry your tears and help you to rediscover who you are and lead you back to the pathway of sustainable growth, development, and prosperity.

16. We must therefore all get ready to have a clean break from our past. We pride ourselves as 'God's Own State'. We have our faith in God and we believe that there is a time for everything. For all citizens and residents of God's Own State, this is a time to rebuild. We are fortunate that destiny has placed before our own generation the onerous but historic task of replacing what the flying and creeping locusts, masquerading as leaders, may have consumed these past years. Our earnest desire is to turn our electoral victory into an instrument for improved fortunes of all well-meaning people.

17. As we get ready to cross our River Jordan into the Canaan land that God has graciously placed before us, let us not be under any illusion that the worst is over. In fact, in winning the election, we have merely won a preliminary battle, albeit a very crucial one. Nevertheless, the war has just begun, and we have put our hands on the plough. There is no turning back until we achieve our collective dreams and aspirations. From the events of the last few months since after our victory, there are clear indications that there will be constant distractions from those who pray that Abia State should go back to Egypt. Some of them have been active of late, throwing

all manner of spanners in our wheel to derail our train of progress and development. They would prefer to be rulers in the kingdom of hell and darkness than to serve with heavenly angels. But I have news for them. Someone should go and tell them that we have decisively broken free from our bondage. We are finally heading to our Promised Land, and we have resolved that we will no longer serve Pharaoh!

18. We are in the cusp of an emerging new world order. In the past few years, there have been momentous events that have changed the trajectory of the world and have thus given us the opportunity to reposition our society and our economy. The devastating effects of Covid-19, global economic recession, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA), climate change and the invidious Russia-Ukraine war, have all contributed to changing the future of the world. The global supply chain is undergoing a massive paradigm shift. Abia State's potential to be a more significant player in this emerging world order should be of interest to all of us. In the interconnected world, we can occupy a crucial niche in the disrupted global supply chain. We can quickly position ourselves as the alternative production and service hub for both the West and Asia. We have the raw materials, the fertile lands and more importantly the energetic, creative, and trainable manpower to dominate important sectors of the global economy. Textiles, leatherworks, information technology, entertainment, and agriculture are just some of these areas, where we can easily make great strides, provided we are able to quickly repair our infrastructure and boost our business environment. We must be part of this global and globalising community that is brought together by technology, climate change, and supply chain dynamics. We must tap into the various opportunities that the modern world offers us.



19. As we embark on this adventure today, we have two clear choices before us. We can, like Lot's wife, choose to look back at our Sodom and seek to return to the allure of quick fixes, incompetence, and mediocrity. We can also, like Abraham, look forward to the Promised Land. Nevertheless, as we look forward, we must take along with us, the weak and the vulnerable in our society. It is the extent to which we cater to their needs and actualise their potential that we will be able to build a great and prosperous society. The foundation of Abia State can only be strong, when Abia citizens in all the 17 local government areas of the state, who labour every day, partake in eating of the fruit of the land.

20. Even as we pledge to do our best to serve the State, let us all bear in mind that this adventure will only meet with success, when we all resolve to come out and contribute to it. We propose to create prosperity, happiness and security for every citizen and resident of Abia State. As we stretch our hand of service and leadership, we expect the citizen to also do its part. A bird that desires to soar on eagles' wings, must first set itself free from its cage. We therefore call on every Abia citizen or resident to participate in rebuilding the state and nursing her back to greatness and prosperity. My promise is that all who take part in baking this pie must participate in eating it. It is also my responsibility to ensure that we continue to bake bigger pies, to the glory of God and the benefit of all Abians.

21. Democracy is built on the three tiers of the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government. Establishing a harmonious relationship with the legislature and the judiciary is critical to our success as government and to the prosperity of the state. We pledge to offer the right support to the other two arms of government in our shared commitment to changing the fortunes of our people. The media, which is the watchdog of the people, will remain pivotal to our work, and I invite the traditional and new media professionals

in the State to continue to work with us for the good of the common man. Similarly, we shall work with the Ezes and traditional institutions, the churches and faith-based institutions, to build harmony and understanding in the State. We already have channels for engaging these institutions and we shall strengthen them during our tenure.

22. I must be frank to inform you that we have a very difficult and challenging road ahead of us. Abia State is starting, not from zero, but from an enormously negative position. While we were busy battling with the devastating effects of insincere and corrupt leadership, the rest of the world, and even many parts of Nigeria, would appear to have left us behind. We have a treasury that has been criminally ravaged to the extent that we have an alleged N50 billion in unpaid salaries, gratuities, and pensions. Our local and foreign debt overhang is reported to be in the region of N200 billion, in addition to other debts to contractors. We have a poorly motivated workforce, extreme youth unemployment, collapsed physical infrastructure, a terribly frail primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare delivery system. These are in addition to a broken educational system, urban waste disposal crisis and a large army of citizens, especially teachers, health workers, including medical doctors and nurses, lecturers in tertiary institutions, Local Government Authority workers and most painfully, our senior citizens, who feel blatantly betrayed by successive administrations that wilfully and unconscionably abandoned them to live in wretched sub-human conditions.

23. The so-called urban centres in the State have fallen far behind in terms of physical infrastructure, modern housing, amenities like pipe-borne water, quality road networks and some of the features one normally associates with modern cities. It will not be wrong to describe some of them as glorified villages. These places bear the semblance of urban areas in large part because of the resilience of the residents, but most importantly, because of

the extensive investments made decades ago by our revered leader, Dee Sam Mbakwe. Fixing these urban centres and bringing them at par with their contemporaries around the region and beyond would take a humongous amount of time and resources. We can only save them through massive reliance on new public-private sector investments.

24. Our educational system, which used to be the cutting edge of our growth and development, is now in shambles as our findings show that the sector had for decades, not received the kind of quality attention it deserves. As a result, there is paucity of quality teaching personnel, especially in very critical subject areas, the absence of standard laboratories for practical learning and experiments and a culture of malpractice that sets our children up for a life of mediocrity, frustration, and disappointment. I promise that in the emerging dispensation, every child of Abia State must have equal opportunity to good education. Merit will be the watchword in recruitment and award of jobs. We will also be very supportive of sports and will seek to return the State to the heydays of Dick Tiger, Jerry Enyeazu, Chidi Imo, Kanu Nwankwo, Grasshoppers and Enyimba Football Club. Our aspiration is to use it to unite the citizens, keep them healthy and provide an avenue for entertainment, good health and business pursuits.

25. We shall also be grappling with a society that had largely lost its moral compass. Over the years, we have built a society where honesty, hard work and the many excellent virtues have been cast by the wayside. These were the values that in the past were known to be ours. Today, many of our young ones are assaulted by sights of dishonest men and women acquiring extravagant material riches while the honest and hard-working ones go to them, begging for crumbs. Our children have been witnessing persons of little or no moral restraints emerging leaders in their communities, given chieftaincy titles, and celebrated, most regrettably, even by religious

leaders. Many of our young ones had taken to dishonest pursuits because the society they live in has not shown them a better way.

26. Today, I will enter into a new social contract with Ndi Abia. While I pledge to use every attribute that God has given me to serve you, I would also demand from you some sacrifice. When a bird is released from its cage, it must flap its wings to fly and soar away to freedom. I promise to be a great conductor, but every member of this orchestra must play his or her instrument and must do so in harmony. Our social contract with the good people of Abia State is that ours shall not be a government of excuses and finger-pointing. We have taken time to review the situation and we already have a clear understanding of what is expected from government. Abians will no longer need the media to tell them what the government is doing in their communities; they will directly experience real development themselves as it occurs. After so many years in the doldrums, please let no one be in doubt that it will be very challenging at first. We must all brace up to hang in there and make the needed sacrifices. We must change our ways and we must endeavour to educate and enlighten all those around us to do the same.

27. One of the greatest challenges facing the State is ensuring that there is guaranteed security of lives and property. The worsening state of insecurity in the State will be addressed from its root. Consequential criminals slide into crime when there is no other available means of livelihood. We intend to address this group through the provision of various opportunities that I will be outlining shortly. However, I know that there are hard core criminals, who have been used by their godfathers to terrorise the citizens and keep them firmly on the saddle to continue to impoverish the state. My simple warning to them is that they must leave the state from today. I must warn all of them and their patrons that starting from today, it is no longer

business as usual. I promise you that Abia State will not be big enough to contain you and I, at the same time. I declare that I will use the full force of the law to apprehend and punish all those who are intent on threatening law and order in the State.

28. In the same light, I would like to use this medium to appeal to everyone in the state, to remain peaceful and law abiding. We appreciate everyone's right to hold and express an opinion, but you must also accord other citizens the right to do same. No one should stand in the way of the legitimate aspirations of others. Ours shall be a government of law and order. The right to freedom of movement as captured in our laws must be respected.

Importantly, there shall be only one government in Abia State and that is the one you have given us the mandate to lead. I appreciate that there is legitimate discontent amongst many sections of the State. This is one of the key areas we intend to start addressing immediately. We shall be open to sincerely engage anyone or group with reasonable grievances so as to find a satisfactory path to sustainable peace and harmony. I am a strong advocate of dialogue and the pursuit of justice through legitimate channels. We must shun destruction and all forms of violence. We are Ndigbo and our tradition is based on dialogue and consensus democracy. Our tradition forbids the spilling of blood, destruction of public or private property and hostility towards the innocent and vulnerable. We shall be guided by these age-old traditions of our people while pursuing progress and development on all fronts.

29. Having laid the foregoing foundation, it gives me pleasure to announce that within the next few days, we shall commence the payment of May 2023 salaries and pensions to all civil servants and retirees in the State. There shall be no more distinction between the so-called "core" and "non-core" civil servants. This is a disingenuous expression that was used to hide the wicked

habit of owing salaries. Whether you are a teacher in a primary or secondary institution owned by the State, a staff of the public health establishments, local government, or work in the judiciary, you shall, beginning from this May, earn your legitimate entitlements as and when due. From June 2023, all salary and pension obligations of the State would be settled by the 28th of every month. My commitment during my campaigns to pay off all outstanding salary and pension arrears remains sacrosanct. Within the next one week, I shall set up appropriate mechanisms to ensure that all legitimate employees and retirees are identified and paid their due entitlements. It is on this note that I appeal to workers, including Doctors in the state who have been on strike, to suspend same immediately and go back to work. I wish to thank the NLC for heeding the plea I made to them last week and suspending the strike from today.

30. We will rebuild our school system by making it produce better quality students that will be relevant to the needs of modern society. To address the perennial crisis of paucity and poor quality of teaching personnel in our education sector, I shall, over the next one-month, work closely with my team and relevant stakeholders to design an appropriate framework that will be used to drive the recruitment of about 5,000 new teachers for our primary and secondary schools. Priority shall be given to young graduates with requisite qualifications in education, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subject areas and to those who are also willing to serve in rural communities. It is our commitment to see that our children are given the opportunity to tap into the great systems of advantage and opportunities that come from education, no matter where they live. We shall see to it that our teachers undergo regular refresher courses to update their knowledge and teaching skills so that they will stay relevant in their chosen fields. It must also be stated that under our government, teachers shall never be shabbily treated as reportedly had been

the custom in the past. The paucity of infrastructure in our educational system shall be addressed stridently. Our children, whether in the rural or urban communities, will henceforth learn under very conducive and empowering environments. We will also support meritocracy in our educational system and ensure that special incentives are given to institutions across the state that promote excellence and have a history of producing high calibre students.

31. We shall address headlong, the persisting challenges in the health sector. We shall tackle the problem of poor welfare package for our health workers by creating a system of incentives that rewards them generously for their sacrifices and commitments to saving and nurturing lives.

Furthermore, we shall begin immediately to address the challenge of poor facilities in our health institutions through steady investment in the acquisition of modern medical equipment, appropriate funding, and a robust system of partnership with well-meaning development partners. We shall see to it that access to health services is improved for all classes of Abians and where necessary, we shall make important recruitments to address personnel shortages.

32. The challenge of youth unemployment in the state keeps me awake most nights because I know how industrious our youth are. I also know that when active hands and fertile minds are denied legitimate means of engagement, they resort to unsavoury activities to the detriment of all. A society that wastes the potential of its youth invariably wastes itself. It is rather unfortunate that we have not done enough to harness the energy and talent of these young ones to improve the State's output of goods and services. That sorry situation is about to change as our government shall, within the next one month, launch a N10 billion Micro, Small and Medium scale Enterprises (MSME) financing scheme, which will comprise conditional

business grants and low interest loans to support relevant enterprises. The detailed modalities for accessing these funds shall be made public soon. It is my projection that a minimum of 20,000 MSMEs shall benefit from this fund over the next two years and shall in turn generate at least 100,000 direct jobs and another 200,000 indirect employments in the State.

33. In partnership with commercial banks, local and international development agencies, venture capitalists and independent investors, we shall target MSMEs in high impact areas such as ICT, agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, fashion, leatherworks, and other areas where the state has strong comparative advantage. We shall also leverage on some of the major reforms in the power sector to provide structural support in the form of steady electricity access for these entrepreneurs. Our administration shall also make sure that the major obstacles to business success such as poor road networks, over-taxation and restricted access to local and global markets are timeously dealt with.

34. As you all know, Aba is a city that is very dear to my heart and critical to my leadership agenda. I believe that many Abians have the same attitude towards Aba. I intend to work tirelessly to restore the glory of our beloved Enyimba City. I shall, in the next one week, announce the setting up of the most suitable administrative and investment vehicles to drive the social and economic rejuvenation of Aba. My dear brothers and sisters, I can tell you one thing for sure: the glorious days of Aba will soon return. As you are already aware, I had mandated the leadership of one of the most notable construction companies in Nigeria to carry out preliminary assessment of some critical portions of Aba roads. I can assure you that we shall work with the best to fix Aba. Beyond working to retain the city's status as a leading trade destination in Nigeria and across West Africa, we shall also do whatever is necessary to see that Aba's manufacturing base is restored. Our



government shall create the necessary partnerships that will expand energy options for manufacturers including liquefied natural gas (LNG) and renewable energy sources in addition to providing strategic support to the existing investors in the energy ecosystem in the city. We shall also position Aba as an ICT innovation hub in the region, providing support where needed and making sure the young men and women who are already doing remarkable things in that sector are offered the leverage they need to succeed and grow.

35. While Aba remains most critical to our agenda, Umuahia, the state capital, shall also receive significant and necessary attention. We have developed well-thought-out policies and programmes to drive strategic infrastructural development in the city that will turn it into a model city with world class infrastructure and a favourite destination for businesses, family life and leisure. Apart from Aba and Umuahia, we shall also extend development to every other part of the State, ensuring that the frontiers of opportunities are expanded in ways that can offer our people, no matter where they live, a supportive environment for the actualisation of their dreams.

36. A healthy urban environment shall be a major priority for this government. To that effect, I am immediately declaring a state of emergency on refuse disposal and waste management in Aba and Umuahia. I am hereby directing the leadership of the state's environmental management agency, ASEPA to roll out everything at its disposal and see that all refuse heaps within these two cities are promptly evacuated. In due course, we shall announce an enduring model to address the challenges of the environment and the future of ASEPA. Meanwhile, a member of my team would soon be announced to supervise this effort.

37. As I stated earlier, our government shall be 100% pro-business. We will give all necessary scope for the private sector to participate in the economic activities of the state. Government shall not be in competition with the private sector. It shall instead remain a facilitator and will only get involved in critical areas where the private sector cannot immediately be a significant player, or where it may not be profitable for the sector. It is my intention to create wealth for the citizens of the State and it is through genuine public private sector collaboration that such a dream will be realised.

38. To improve the State's rating in the area of 'ease of doing business' and bring Abia at par with states that have made gains in this area, I am announcing the setting up of a cabinet level position within the Governor's Office to drive our 'Ease of Doing Business' agenda. This position will be manned by a Special Adviser who has thorough understanding of best global practices on creating favourable environment for businesses to thrive. The appointee shall work closely with me to see that Abia moves from its present poor position into the Top 5 in the "Ease of Doing Business" index in Nigeria as quickly as possible.

39. I shall also appoint a Special Adviser on ICT to drive our programmes in the technology ecosystem. The appointee shall be supporting innovation, working closely with me to see that we provide critical support to technology entrepreneurs within the State, to enable them compete nationally and even globally. It shall be the priority of this office to make the state very attractive to investors and enterprises in the technology space by creating a system of incentives and structures that are superior to what you can find anywhere else in Nigeria.

40. To guarantee that our programmes and projects are successfully executed, a special Unit will also be established under my office to drive project implementation. This Unit will not only see that standards are strictly

observed, it will ensure that we get commensurate value on every Kobo spent on projects and programmes across all parts of the State. This agency shall also oversee our intervention programmes in critical sectors like agriculture, social services, job creation and robust programmes of economic empowerment of youths and women across all parts of the State. It shall be the duty of this office to see that we are faithful to our promises to you as captured in our manifesto in terms of project conception and execution.

41. We shall prioritise civil service reforms for efficiency and professionalism. We shall soon be reviewing the structure of the State's workforce to determine how we can reform it for optimal productivity. The Abia State Civil Service shall run differently under this administration. Merit shall take prominence and only those who demonstrate requisite diligence in the discharge of their duties shall remain in the service. Technology will be used to support the Civil Service in the State. We propose to use technology to enable all Abia State employees, including myself, to work from anywhere to achieve operational efficiency and enhanced productivity.

42. There shall be no room for corrupt practices and the full weight of the law shall be deployed in tackling all cases of indiscipline or any act that brings the service into disrepute. We shall be reviewing some of the most recent appointments and promotions made by the previous administration to ensure that persons recruited and promoted have the relevant qualifications and are suitably deployed. We shall in time address the challenge of ghost workers by deploying appropriate technology systems to determine those who had been genuinely employed and those who are actively stealing from the public treasury.

43. Within the next few days, I shall create the office of the Ombudsman, which will handle all public complaints. Please do not hesitate to send in all your petitions and grievances to that office for prompt and effective

response. Our decisions may not always be popular which is why we shall constantly seek your inputs and ideas. We shall establish appropriate communication channels to engage with members of the public. As Governor, I will regularly interface with you through different media channels and in town hall settings. You shall always know the truth and what the government is doing at all times to make things better for you, your family and your business.

44. Transparency, accountability, and public trust shall be at the centre of everything we do. We will run a responsible and honest government and lead by example. We will not tolerate any form of corruption or stealing of public property. Gratification and kickbacks are totally forbidden in this government. Let me state that for me, awards, honours and recognitions are not welcome until I leave office. Put differently, any awards, titles, recognitions or the like that I did not receive before now should wait until we leave office.

45. The time for the rebuilding process has begun. I have been given the task of being the driver of this train and it is leaving the station. I welcome all of you on board and I am very certain that it will be a rewarding journey for all diligent commuters. By God's grace, we shall safely and promptly arrive at our destination.

Long live Abia State, Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

I thank you all for your patience and attention and I welcome you to the New Abia.

Dr. Alex C. Otti, OFR

Executive Governor, Abia State

May 29, 2023.