

TEXT OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE PRESIDENT OF BEROM EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (BECO) DA ERICSON E. FOM ON WEDNESDAY 8TH FEBRUARY, 2017 AT THE BECO NATIONAL SECRETARIAT OFF RAYFIELD ROAD, BUKURU

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this press conference.

Let me begin by wishing our President, Muhammadu Buhari a quick recovery and an early return to the country to face the daunting challenges of Nation building. Our economy has been in a recession and all hands must be on deck to return it to the path of recovery. I must also congratulate him for the efforts of our Armed forces at defeating the Boko Haram and taking over the dreaded Sambisa forest from the terrorists.

The challenge posed by the crises in Southern Kaduna, and most recently in Miango/Vwang are bad signals that require our collective efforts to nib in the bud before they escalate into dangerous dimensions. We appeal for calm on all sides of the divide and ask that all eschew bitterness and embrace one another in love for peace to reign. Let me use this opportunity to commiserate with those who lost their loved ones in all of these crises. The Berom Nation shares in your grief and pray GOD to grant the souls of the faithful departed repose and their families the fortitude to bear the irreparable loss. May this not happen again in our Country and state.

PREAMBLE...

The Berom Educational and Cultural Organization (BECO) wishes to note with great delight the peace leading to the congenial celebration of the Christmas, running into the New Year, free movement and absence of violent eruptions in and around Jos city and indeed Plateau State. We owe God profound thanks for the regime of relative peace now being enjoyed by our people and also for sparing us the harrowing experience of bomb blasts, bloodletting, pandemonium, chaos and complete dislocation of social life that had nearly become a recurring decimal over the years since 2001. BECO is also appreciative of the immense sacrifices and investments by a wide range of stakeholders in the peace and security architecture of the State as currently being piloted by the Governor of Plateau State, His Excellency Rt Hon. Simon Bako Lalong. Traditional institutions and security agents also deserve our commendation for working tirelessly to ensure that citizens enjoy the peace to lead their lives without threats of terror or any form of molestation and intimidation by enemies of peace and progress.

Similarly, the restraint of the youth, communities, ethnic nationalities and indeed the citizenry is a crucial part of this achievement of peace and tranquility. BECO wishes to also joyfully felicitate with the Izere nation over the recent coronation of Agwom Izere Rev. (Dr.) Isaac Azi Wakili. We count this as a huge achievement for the Izere nation after so many years of being without a paramount ruler.

We believe that the current regime of relative peace in the state must have been a motivation for this achievement. Relative peace however does not completely erase contending issues, disagreements and

even disputes. In our view, it only affords the people, the conducive atmosphere and opportunity for dialogue on pre-existing or arising matters.

Several peace processes undertaken in Jos and indeed, Plateau State have taught us the advantages of choosing dialogue as a means of resolving disputes. These processes have also clearly outlined the inevitability and indispensability of our heterogeneous communal existence as well as the need for collaboration and co-operation in order to deliberately create avenues of win-win scenarios for all. In all these, the benefits of peace cannot be compared with the costs of war.

It is given this background, that the Berom nation strongly believes that issues such as inter community boundary squabbles, disagreement over place names, land ownership, traditional rulership, chieftaincy matters, divergent perspectives over historical accounts, marginalization, injustices and sundry other issues of governance can all be pursued, discussed and resolved through non violent means.

Unfortunately, warmongers and conflict merchants amongst us may never imbibe these values because they will be out of business if we all live in peace and resist violence. Our duty as leaders and stakeholders is therefore, not limited to containing, managing or resisting violence when it occurs but more fundamentally to expose and engage every conflict generating issue or tendency before it escalates to dangerous proportions that may consume innocent lives and property.

In this light, BECO has resolved in the interest of peace and harmonious co-existence to blow the whistle and unequivocally draw the attention of Mr. Governor, all security agencies, our royal fathers, elders and indeed peace loving Nigerians to advise and possibly prevail on the Izere nation to exercise restraint and tread very cautiously on some volatile issues currently brewing and which have the potential and capacity of destroying trust and breaching the relative peace being enjoyed in the State.

For us, these issues include:

The unfortunate misuse of the Coronation ceremony of the Agwom Izere.

The position of one Ada Emmanuel Ajik as the Adagwom Jos Izere Chieftom on second class status.

The claim of one Ama Atang as the District Head of Kabong.

The claim of one Kaze Nyam as Adagwom Dong (District Head) in Jos North LGA and;

The claim of one Peter Nyam as Acting District Head of Jishe, (Tudun Wada).

Afizere-Berom relations: What we know.....

Ethnic relations between the Afizere and their Berom neighbours have spanned several centuries with similar experiences during the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial periods. The ethnic groups are both Middle Belt minorities that are economically and politically marginalized within the socio-political and economic configuration of Nigeria. This immediately places a demand on our community leaders to work assiduously together in order to create more bonds of unity and friendship amongst our people so that the collective struggle of minority groups within the Nigerian federation can receive a boost to

effectively harness and utilize economic and political opportunities for the benefit of our people. Already, the Afizere and Berom enjoy a wide range of inter communal relationships including inter-ethnic marriages, kinship ties, common linguistic expressions, person and place names.

It is in recognition of our shared values and common destiny that the Berom nation through its past and present leaders have strongly supported struggles aimed at the unification, cultural and religious liberation and political empowerment of the Afizere people, as was amply demonstrated during the state creation exercise of 1967, Local Government re-organization (1976) and subsequent creations under Chief Solomon Daushep Lar (of blessed memory) and General Ibrahim Babangida regimes. This of course, is in addition to the establishment of the Izere Chiefdom which today is graded as first class in status. It is therefore appalling and very painful to the Berom who are presently witnessing frantic attempts at historical misrepresentation of facts by present and upcoming generations of the Izere nation who are either ignorant, deliberately malicious or agents of disharmony and conflict generation. By some of these reckless actions and destruction of incontrovertible historical facts, the Izere nation is forcing a new version of history on the Berom and dragging our communities into an unnecessary and avoidable conflict. For the avoidance of doubt, let us consider in some detail, the five issues earlier raised.

The issue of misuse of the Coronation ceremony of Agwom Izere...

We are lost in wonder why the citation of an incoming Agwom Izere would be used to launch attacks and cast aspersions on a past Governor whose administration of the State for eight years with several landmark achievements, is unfortunately referred to as “inglorious.” During an occasion as important as the coronation of the Agwom Izere, Rev. (Dr.) Isaac Azi Wakili, where the Governor of the State, the Chairman, Plateau State Council of Chiefs and Emirs and indeed, several other dignitaries and guests from within and outside the state were present, we cannot imagine that a statement such as the one below was loudly expressed, published and circulated: “..for his sense of justice and inclusiveness resulting to the restoration of the paramount chieftaincy stool of Jos Jarawa chiefdom in Jos North L.G.A unjustly, illegally abolished by the inglorious immediate past administration of the State (Jonah Jang) ...”(Emphasis mine)

Were attacks such as the one above, a strategy for winning more favours from the government of the day and or more friends for the Izere chiefdom? In our view, this was not only most unfortunate but completely unnecessary as the facts of Izere Chiefdom clearly speak for themselves.

The issue of Adagwom Jos Izere (Second Class)...

Since 1927 when districts were first created by the colonialists and restructured in 1935, the Afizere have never had a district in what is today Jos North Local Government Area. In fact, most of the Afizere settlements were hamlets and village areas in GWONG District. It was only in 2004 that Chief Joshua Chibi Dariye, the then Governor of Plateau State decided to create the stool of Adagwom Jos Izere and immediately placed it on second class status. However, the then subsisting reality for the Afizere in Jos North LGA, was that they only had village heads who were under Ujah Anaguta in Gwong District. It was this unconventional and very sudden upliftment of a village head to the status of a second class chief

that surprised and amazed everyone. The creation of the said Jos Izere Chiefdom was to become separate from the Izere Chiefdom of Jos East Local Government Area. Curiously, this creation was without corresponding districts and village areas in Jos North. The immediate implication of this was to create and deepen suspicion and mistrust between the Anaguta Chiefdom and the proposed Izere Chiefdom since their sudden elevation from village area to Chiefdom on second class appeared abnormal and thoroughly politicized. Secondly, the sudden elevation was not done according to due process and in consultation with the constituted traditional authority of the Local Government area. The height of this irregularity was the fact that the elevation exercise took place three days to the end of Governor J.C Dariye's tenure. No wonder, there is no trace of any Adagwom Jos Izere in the annals of the Jos Joint Traditional Council where the Ujah Anaguta sits amongst others as a second class traditional ruler. In general, a lot of complaints were made by major stakeholders especially the traditional institution in the state on the reckless and unilateral and over politicized nature of district, village area and chiefdom creation by the Dariye administration three days to the end of his tenure. This is what ostensibly led to its abrogation by the then incoming Jonah Jang Administration in 2007. It should be abundantly clear to all that the abrogation did not single out the Izere chiefdom of Jos North as the entire state including the Berom nation was also affected.

These are some of the reasons why BECO makes bold to ask; how embarrassing was it for Governor Simon Bako Lalong and the hierarchy of the traditional institution to be confronted with the bold picture of one Emmanuel Ajik, prominently displayed in the programme booklet for the coronation of Agwom Izere, where he was named as a second class chief in Jos North Local Government area? BECO would have loved to comment further on this matter but for the fact that the Anaguta and Berom nations are already in court on this same issue, we would rather show restraint and allow the law take its course.

The Claim of Ama Atang as the District Head of Kabong...

BECO was again rudely shocked at the publication of the purported and very provocative turbaning of one Engr. Sir Goodleave Ozurumba as the 'Garkuwan Kabong' by AmaAtang who has unrepentantly been parading himself as the District Head of Kabong. Initially, it appeared laughable but upon a second thought, these acts as earlier alluded to, represent a desperate attempt to destroy historical facts, violation of Berom tradition and culture, impunity and open invitation to confrontation which in our judgment is entirely avoidable. In the first instance, Kabong remains a Village area of Du District split between Jos South and Jos North Local Government areas. Secondly, records abound that clearly show that Ama Atang and even his parents have no ancestral home and land in Kabong. In fact, he acquired the land on which his present house is built from a renowned Berom family with the transaction properly documented. How then can a tenant cheaply transform himself into a landlord? We make bold to ask: Is this a recipe for peaceful and harmonious coexistence? A more disturbing dimension about Ama Atang is the impunity with which he carries himself about. On more than two occasions, some media outfits including the Plateau Radio Television Corporation, Jos have had to disclaim his so-called position and retracted statements credited to him. Now, he has done his worst by turbaning one Engr. Sir Goodleave Ozurumba as 'Garkuwan Kabong'. It beats our imagination hollow, how can this individual be so recalcitrant, self conceited and so arrogant with no authority punishing him or even checking his excesses. His conduct begs the logical question: where does he derive his power/authority from? Who is

sponsoring and defending his acts of impunity? Are such actions not capable of generating and heightening tension among the people? Is it fair to say that the current Management Committee Chairman of Jos North LGC, Hon. Theresa Azi is aware but has chosen to look the other way because Ama Atang is her kinsman?

BECO is of the opinion that it is high time Ama Atang is called to order, prosecuted and punished accordingly for actions capable of breaching public peace.

The claim of one Kaze Nyam as Agwom Dong, (District Head) in Jos North LGA...

It has also come to the notice of BECO that an imposing gate currently announces a palace of Agwom Dong (District Head). Whether this action is sanctioned by law, due process and in consultation with the Local and State Governments, is very unlikely. It is established to date that Dong is a village area split between Du and Gyel districts in Jos South Local Government area but by the 1991 creation of Jos North Local Government area, part of Dong village area is now in Jos North Local Government area. Without prejudice to the aspirations for the creation of Dong District, (however genuine) to preempt government's authorization is to lay credence to lawlessness and acts of provocation which are capable of heightening tension and generating violence amongst the people. Furthermore, BECO has noted with dismay, allegations of un-strategic and dubious sales of government land to private individuals in Dong with the aim of creating an ethno-centric colony for Afizere people which in the same calculation, shall translate into their political dominance in that village. At this juncture, it should be said in the words of the Holy Bible, that oppression makes the righteous mad. (Eccl. 7:7)

The claim of one Peter Nyam as Acting District Head of Jishe (Tudun Wada)...

Similarly, BECO is worried over the claims of one Peter Nyam as Acting District Head of Jishe (Tudun Wada). It appears to us that this claim is endorsed and sanctioned by Hon. Theresa Azi, the current Management Committee Chairman, Jos North LGC. Again, is there any legal notice to the effect that Jishe is now a district? Was such claim or appointment done in accordance with due process and in consultation with the traditional authority of the area, the Local and State Governments? Is this not a case of undue politicization of the people's tradition and culture? In such a situation, how do you guarantee the peaceful conduct of aggrieved members of the community whose history and traditional rights are being denied with reckless abandon, injustice, ethnic chauvinism and bad politics?

Our concerns...

Some of the major concerns of the Beroms over uncomplimentary and provocative actions of the Afizere in recent times include:

The deliberate misconception and misrepresentation of historical facts over land ownership, place names and traditional ruler-ship of undisputable Berom village areas such as Laramto, Kagrak (Alheri), Jishe and Dong.

The abuse of Local Government authority by past and present Afizere Chairmen of Jos North to create, recognize and support parallel positions of village and ward heads that are or favour Afizere people.

The apparent silence, inaction and insensitivity of government and security agents to call Ama Atang and others to order appear to us as an express permission and support for certain elements to cause disaffection, generate tension and disharmony in Jos North Local Government Area.

The extraction of a so called consent judgment from the High Court of justice for which the Berom and Anaguta are already in court.

Some of the actions of the Izere nation are mostly preemptive, unlawful and therefore uncomplimentary to peaceful coexistence as they only serve to fan the embers of suspicion, distrust and intolerance

CONCLUSION...

The Berom shall continue to stand by the truth and work tirelessly for peace through effective collaboration with other communities, neighbours and friends both within and outside the state, in order to achieve progress and prosperity. However, we shall vehemently resist falsehood and desperate attempts to adulterate or dilute history for selfish and parochial interests, whether personal, group or ethnic in nature. The issues raised in this Press Conference should not be viewed as minor as they have the capacity to generate avoidable chaos, disharmony and violence amongst our peoples. This is why BECO has chosen to openly address these issues and also to loudly call on Mr. Governor, our Royal, Religious and Community leaders, Elders, Stakeholders and indeed, all peace loving citizens of this great country, to use their good offices to persuade, advise or prevail on the Izere nation in order to tame their zeal of rupturing peace between themselves and their Berom neighbours. In doing this, the authorities must bear in mind that a stitch in time saves nine.

Gentlemen of the Press, BECO stands for peace and non-violence that is built on the truth, justice and good neighbourliness. This is why our message as contained in this Press Conference, is clear and direct with no room for ambiguity or misinterpretation.

Let me use this medium to appreciate the Governor of Plateau State Rt.Hon. Simon BakoLalong for the timely authorization of replacements of Be'Gwom (Chiefs) whose seats were vacant and for non-interference with the selection process. We proudly identify with his lofty programmes of developing the state and wish him every success and God's guidance. Plans are on to coronate the (6nos.) six newly selected District/Village Heads (Be'Gwom) namely:

1. Da Samuel MwadkonJok - District Head, Riyom
2. Da Paul BulusTadi - Distric Head, Heipang
3. Da John DalyopDangyang - District Head, Gashish
4. Da Justice Gabriel AdamuSha - Village Head, Kabong
5. Da YohannaGwom Jang Pam - Village Head, Nyango

6. Da Timothy B. Dalyop

- Village Head, Shonong

The annual cultural festival of Arts and culture showcasing the rich culture of the Beroms i.e Nzem Berom, will hold this year God willing. The Minister of information and culture has shown personal interest in events such as this, hence the need for all to prepare to give it the necessary media hype. I am therefore soliciting your cooperation and partnership to ensure its success. The Central planning Committee will be inaugurated very shortly.

My dear Gentlemen of the Press, BECO sincerely hopes that you shall transmit our message accordingly.

Finally, we wish to register our appreciation for your attention and kind support please.

I will be happy to take your questions

Thank you and God Bless