

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

- A REJOINDER BY PROF. DANLADI ATU FOR AND ON BEHALF OF AFIZERE CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (ACDA) ON FRIDAY 3RD MARCH, 2017 AT IZERE ARENA, LAMINGO

Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen

Gentlemen of the Press

Let me start by expressing the sentiments of our appreciation on behalf of Izere Nation for honouring our request for this press conference. Indeed, the press has always provided a veritable platform for citizens to air their views on matters that affect their wellbeing and the nation at large. That explains why the Afizere people always take recourse to this rare privilege provided by the press to react and air their views on issues that affect them in particular or to nation building at large. This of course is in consonance with the peaceful and humane disposition of the Afizere people.

INTRODUCTION

Gentlemen of the Press, kindly transmit these sentiments of appreciation of the Afizere (Jarawa) people both within and in the Diaspora to the Gbong Gwom Jos, His Majesty, Da Jacob Gyang Buba for the show of solidarity and love during the coronation of His Royal Highness Rev. (Dr) Isaac Azi Wakili, the Agwom Izere. We have equally watched with keen admiration his Royal Majesty's mentorship to him since assumption of office as the Agwom Izere on first class status. This deep-rooted relationship between the two traditional rulers will no doubt re-enact the long standing brotherhood and fraternity between the two ethnic nationalities. For the Afizere people, it deepens our faith in His Majesty's acclaimed pursuit of justice and peaceful co-existence amongst the people of Plateau State and Nigeria at large. It is hoped that this philosophy of His Majesty will yield mutual benefit for both communities. We are looking forward to seeing more of these fraternities and liberation of smaller ethnic nationalities by the Gbong Gwom Jos Da Jacob Gyang Buba.

May we equally use this medium to congratulate the Berom Educational and Cultural Organization (BECO), Berom Elders' Council, Berom Youth Movement (BYM), and Berom Women Organization (BWO) for coming back to life after over eight years of lull and dormancy. It is our utmost desire that we shall all

join hands to promote peaceful co-existence amongst our people and reduce to the barest level all areas of conflicts and squabbles between the two ethnic groups, and indeed with other ethnic Nationalities of Plateau State.

To us the Afizere people, there is no better time than now because the state is presently blessed with a humble and servant Governor, Rt. Hon. Barrister Simon Bako Lalong, whose cardinal philosophy is the pursuit of peaceful co-existence amongst the people of Plateau State as well as objectively upholding justice and liberation of all ethnic nationalities, communities and social groups on the Plateau.

We pray fervently that his Excellency the Executive Governor of Plateau State will live long to see his dream for a better Plateau come to fruition. On our part, we shall continue to express the peaceful disposition of our people for which we are known, in addressing all areas of misunderstanding, provocation and mis-representation as they relate to the Afizere people and the state at large. Herein lies also the purpose of our press conference today.

It is in the light of the foregoing that the Afizere Cultural and Community Development Association (ACFDA) is compelled by the prevailing circumstance to set the records straight by reacting to the full text of press delivered by the President of BECO one Ericson E. Fom on Wednesday, 8th February, 2017 at the BECO National Secretariat, Bukuru on behalf of the Berom nation.

As a community, we believe that in pursuing and upholding justice and liberation of all peoples, every community must be seen to be a beneficiary of the process. That explains why the ACCDA National executive committee members sometimes last year, paid a courtesy visit to the Gbong Gwom Jos Da Gyang Buba, where we extended an olive branch for peaceful co-existence to our Berom brothers, curiously enough, BECO officials were in attendance. That is why it behoves on us as a people to not only place the issues raised by BECO in correct perspective but to equally bring out objectively the historical and social records to the fore to guide both governmental and non- governmental actors who are genuinely concerned with the task of upholding justice and liberation of all peoples as it is being witnessed today on the Plateau. We therefore make bold to address the issues raised by BECO within the following framework:

1. Re-citation at the coronation ceremony of Agwom Izere.
2. Historical exposition of the facts.
3. Justification of Jos Izere Chiefdom
4. Debunking the frivolous allegations; assertions, misrepresentations and contradictions in the BECO full press text

RE-CITATION AT THE CORONATION CEREMONY OF AGWOM IZERE

Gentlemen of the Press, the statement "... inglorious immediate past administration of the state" was directed at Da Jonah Jang, the then governor of Plateau State who during his administration, did not only deliberately place the Afizere people at a disadvantaged position by denying us our legally constituted traditional institutions in Jos-North and Jos-East Local Government Areas, but terminated appointments of our sons and daughters in government without genuine reasons. He also denied us a sense of inclusiveness by excluding us in major policy decisions of Government. As a matter of fact, Jang debased our personalities and rendered us as second class citizens of Plateau State. This explains why we referred to his administration as 'inglorious'. In any case, the statement was not targeted at the Berom people but on the administration of former governor Jang, except if the Berom are saying that it was a Berom government implementing a Berom agenda or receiving instructions from them.

HISTORICAL EXPOSITION OF THE FACTS

The Afizere of Jos North LGA are known to be in direct possession of the land they now occupy for centuries because they were the first settlers in these areas as they were all virgin lands. These include: Gwash, Furaka, Nukpis, Gwafan (Lamingo), Fudawa, Kwanga "B", Katon Rikkos, Rikkos, Kubob (Gangare), Guash (Jos or the area now occupied by Nigerian Airways Office (present day Revenue House), NITEL, Ministry of Works Yard, Jos Museum, St. Theresa's Church and Boys Primary School, Bank of the North, Post Office etc. and all the surrounding farmlands stretching miles away), Gyese (Tudun Wada), Kabong, Rimado (Mado or Jos Wildlife Park) and Dong.

An interesting phenomenon with Afizere settlements in the past, and as still seen in rural areas of Jos East, is scattered homesteads, instead of nucleated villages or towns. Thus, apart from the semi nucleated settlement of Jos (Guash) and surrounding villages, there were scattered settlements which spanned from Gwash in the East across to Gyese (Tudun Wada), Kabong and Dong to the West covering all our territorial domains mentioned above. As mixed farmers, they needed such expanse of land for farming and tending their large herds of Inyak Izere "Muturu", goats and sheep.

Their immediate neighbours then were Afizere of Bauchi Province (present day Jos East) to the East, Anaguta to the North, Irigwe and Rukuba to the West, and Berom to the South. Our shared natural boundary with the Berom was the stream immediately North of Bukuru town, which runs from the East to the West. (See Map M 60 of January 1927 and its extract: Map of Jos North and Jos South LGAs showing Gwong District of Jos North LGA. The word Gwong being an Afizere derivative from "Gwung", meaning to combine, join, amalgamate or merge, because it was an amalgamation of Afizere and Anaguta village areas).

Gentlemen of the press, other areas occupied by our people then were Old Airport, Rayfield, Dadin Kowa, Anglo Jos and Gigiring, which was actually part and parcel of Gyese (Tudun Wada). As a matter of fact, records revealed that the Afizere were the beneficiaries of compensation by government at present day Old airport. It is essential to also note that as from 1927 to 1948, this last group of our settlements and farmlands were encroached upon and arrogated to Du village which was then under Foron district in Barkin Ladi L.G.A.

The following authorities and references from authenticated historical documents will elucidate more on our territorial boundaries with our immediate neighbours, the Berom and Anaguta.

(a) In a report signed on 30th June, 1914 by Mr. S.E.M. Stobart, Assistant District Officer titled: "Assessment Report on Anaguta and Jarawa Tribes of Bukuru District, Naraguta Division", Stobart stated:

"The Anaguta Tribe and that portion of the Jarawa (Afizere) which inhabits the town of Jos reside among the hills overlooking the Government Station and Hausa settlements of Naraguta and Jos respectively, which they farm in the fertile basin formed by the Delimi River. They are bounded on the East, North-East and South East by the Jarawa Tribe of Bauchi Emirate, on the North-West by the Narabunu on the South west by the Burrum (Kibyen "Berom" our emphasis) and on the west by the Rukuba Tribe".

Furthermore, under the sub-title: "Historical and Ethnological..." of the same report Stobart Further asserted that:

"The people of Jos belong to Jarawa tribe and migrated from Fobur about a century ago".... The Jos people speak the language of the Hill Jarawa but they are mixing with the Burrum (Kibyen) Tribe....".

Certainly, this was the time our neighbours, the Berom, started making incursions into our territorial land as it is obvious that we had not lived in the same domain with them prior to pacification. After pacification of Plateau Tribes, the Berom started drifting to our vast farmlands, initially, as tenants. We allowed them, principally, on the basis of good neighbourliness and peaceful inter-tribal relationship, because at that time, there was much land hunger in their territorial areas. Shockingly, after just one generation, and the demise of their parents, the children started laying claims to these farmlands to the extent that we became litigants over our land and territorial matters for two generations now as the Berom have never allowed us sleep.

(b) In a similar report on the Berom, Stobart wrote inter-alia"

“Neighbouring tribes on the North are the Jarawa and Rukuba, on the East, the Jarawa and Pyem, on the South by Kaleri, Baron and Sura people and on the West the Ganawuri and Irigwe”.

In another paragraph he further disclosed that:

“The Bukuru town itself was founded about 200 years ago, partly by the people from Gabon Hill, which is situated between Ngel and Miango and was probably the first occupied site on the Plateau,...”.

By this description, “Gabon Hill” which the Berom always associate with Kabong means two different places. While Kabong is located North-East of Dong, Gabon Hill by this description is located somewhere South West of Dong. This is more so that when the Afizere migrated to Kabong, no tribe was found inhabiting the place. Secondly, if the area of Kabong had been a territory of the Berom, Stobart’s reports and those of his British compatriots would have indicated that Afizere of Jos and Anaguta were bounded by the Berom Tribe on the West and NOT the Rukuba Tribe.

(c) Thomstone E.W, Assistant District Officer in his “Reassessment Report on the Anaguta and Jarawa Tribes of Jos Division”, in 1920 wrote:

“The Jarawa (Afizere) are bounded on the North by the Anaguta, on the South by the Burrum, on the East by the Jarawa of Bauchi and on the West by the Rukuba”.

(d) Likewise, in defining the Berom territory, Pranker H.A, D.O. in File NO. SNP9 3/69/1921 under the title, “Burrum Tribe” found at the National Archives, Kaduna stated that:

“Its inhabitants are situated round Bukuru Hausa town, and South-East and South-West of it”.

(e) Similarly, other ‘documenters’ such as Harold D. Gunn in his Ethnological survey of Africa, West Africa Part VII, “ People of the Plateau Area of Northern Nigeria London International African Institute 1953, page 63, footnote (1) states inter alia:

“... the conjecture is perhaps more interesting when it is noted that the migration from Fobur, to which the foundation of Jos is attributed went as far as Chawai, according to tradition”.

Surely this statement also reinforces our assertion that our settlements spanned from present Jos town location to include Tudun Wada, Kabong, Mado and Dong, where, west of these villages we are bounded by the Rukuba and Irigwe.

(f) Anthony Dung Bingel (a Berom writer) in his book, “Jos Origins and Growth of the Town 1900 to 1972, University of Jos, Department of Geography, Publication No. 1 Nigeria, 1978 pages 2 – 3. He did not mince words when quoting from Col. Laws reported, as follows:

“... A small village called Guash, occupied by the present location of Jos. Hausa traders who arrived supposedly mispronounced Guash for Jos, and the name stuck”.

Citing Harold D. Gunn, he also stated that:

“... the original native village of Guash was founded by the Afusare people of the Jarawa tribe who are sometimes called the Afusare or Jarawan Jos”.

All these reports are consistent with our assertion that the Berom only came to settle among us after pacification and at the beginning of colonization. Prankerd’s report is even more specific and conforms to the fact that our boundary with Berom was the Bukuru stream. That is to say, the Berom were only located South West and South East of Bukuru town and not anywhere north of the town.

In a memo to the secretary, Commission of Inquiry into the disputed Land areas of Du, Gwong and Gyel dated 22nd May, 1991, Jauro Magaji the then District head of Gwong asserted that “one of the nine villages that make up Gwong District is a village called Gwafan....the village head of Gwafan as well as Zangam, Nabor have ward heads at Kabong. All the inhabitants of Kabong pay their tax through the District head of Gwong”. This statement buttresses the fact that Kabong is not part of Du. It is in the light of the above that Ada Ama Atang was remitting his tax to the then Gwong District as a ward head before the stool was elevated to a district by the Dariye administration in 2002. Dong and Gyese (Tudun Wada) also benefitted from the same exercise as shown in the Plateau state Gazette No. 4 Vol.11 of 22nd June, 2006. This gave us the legal backing to install district heads in those areas.

JUSTIFICATION OF JOS IZERE CHIEFDOM

Gentlemen of the press, following the decision of the Dariye administration to create new chiefdoms and Districts in 2002 in order to liberate its people, the Afizere and Anaguta ethnic groups initially lobbied for the upgrading of Gwong district to Gwong Chiefdom. However, in order to project their ethnic identities, the two ethnic groups mutually agreed to seek for their separate chiefdoms out of the then Gwong district. It was on that basis that the Afizere people (with five Gazetted village areas in Jos-North L.G.A) sought for the creation of Jos Izere chiefdom while the Anaguta (also with five Gazetted village areas in Jos North L.G.A) sought for the creation of Anaguta chiefdom. Jos Izere chiefdom, which is presently on second class status, as shown in the Plateau state Gazette No.4 Vol.11 of 22nd June, 2006 with retrospective effect to 2002 has eleven districts namely: Jos Jarawa, Fudawa, Gwafan, Gwash, Nupis, Rikkos, Furaka, Tudun wada (Gyese), Dong and Kazumung-Kabong. It is a known fact that the rescue government of Rt. Hon. Simon Bako Lalong administration recognizes this Gazette as a legal document.

The spurious allegation by BECO that the chiefdom was created three days to the end of the Dariye administration is false as can be seen from the Gazette quoted above. In addition, the first paramount ruler of Jos Izere chiefdom was the Late Ada Innocent Bala Izang (May his soul rest in peace) who was on the throne on government salary for two years before his demise, he was succeeded in 2007 by the incumbent Adagwom Jos Izere Chiefdom, Ada Emmanuel Ajik. As a matter of fact, the Late Ada Innocent Bala Izang was enjoying his salary, allowances and all the paraphernalia of a second class chief, provided to him by the late Gbong Gwom Jos, Da Victor Pam (May his soul rest in peace) within the coffers of the Jos Joint traditional council. How then can two years suddenly be reduced to three days? We equally wonder why BECO will now say that there are no records of Jos Izere Chiefdom. This is absolutely mischievous.

DEBUNKING THE FRIVOLOUS ALLEGATIONS; ASSERTIONS, MISREPRESENTATIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BECO PRESS CONFERENCE

On Districts/Jos Izere Chiefdom of Izere people of Jos North L.G.A

It beats our imagination for BECO to recognize their Gwom Rweis all across Jos South, Riyom, Barkin Ladi and Ujah of Anaguta but do not recognize the 2nd class status of Jos Izere Chiefdom in Jos North L.G.A when all were created under the same law. Or is it a case of all animals are equal but some are more equal than others?

On having a court case with the Berom on consent judgment with the Plateau State government

We are not aware of having any court case with the Berom, or perhaps it only exists in their imagination. We therefore challenge BECO to produce any evidence of litigation between the Afizere and the Berom on the subject matter. To the best of our knowledge, since the consent judgment was entered into with the Plateau state government, only the Anaguta are presently in court challenging it, except if the Berom are now telling the world that the Anaguta went to court on their behalf or they are representing them.

On the creation of Jos Izere chiefdom without districts and villages

BECO mischievously disclosed that "... Curiously, this creation (of Jos Izere chiefdom) was without corresponding districts and village areas in Jos North". We make bold to say that Jos Izere Chiefdom was created with the full compliments of districts and villages as shown in Plateau state Gazette No.4 Vol.11 of 22nd June, 2006 pg 136-137.

On peaceful disposition of the Berom

According to BECO "...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 statement shows that the Berom do not want peace with the Afizere people as their antecedents attest to the fact that they have at one time or the other had conflicts with Mwaghavul, Ron, Aten, Irigwe, Pyem and Afizere people in Fursum district of Jos East LGA (all of whom are their neighbours). The Afizere people on the other hand are known for peaceful co-existence with their neighbours. Who then are the "war mongers and conflict merchants amongst us"? Your guess is as good as ours. Indeed, BECO were beating the war drum in their write up. This in our view is the real threat to peace on the Plateau. We are therefore, alerting the relevant security agencies to take note and monitor their activities.

On shared values and common destiny

In what way did the Berom influence the creation of Jos North LGA in favour of the Afizere during General Ibrahim Babangida's regime when it was the same community that addressed a press conference in Abuja in protest of the creation of Jos South LGA?

What was the contribution that they made in establishing the first class stool of Izere chiefdom when it was the inglorious regime of Jang that suspended the stool simply because it was a first class stool which to him the Afizere did not merit?

Abuse of Local Government authority by past and present Afizere chairmen of Jos North

We make bold to state that all past and present Jos North local government chairmen of Izere extraction have always acted according to the dictates of their office by carrying everybody along without any form of discrimination. The facts are there for all to see. The same can however not be said of Jos North Local Government Chairmen of Berom extraction as they discriminated against Afizere people not only in terms of employment but by refusing to sign their indigene forms, they always deploy Berom people from Jos South; Riyom and Barkin Ladi LGAs to seek indigenship in Jos North. No wonder, Timothy Buba who was councilor in Jos South was imported and imposed as chairman in Jos North. Who is abusing office then? Does that also explain why one Ezekiel Kwon who is originally from Jol in Riyom L.G.A is parading himself as the district head of Tudun Wada in Jos North?

As to the status of Ada Ama Atang (Acting District Head of Kazumun Kabong), Ada Kaze Nyam (Acting District head of Dong) & Ada Peter Nyam (Acting District head of Tudun Wada)

The Plateau state Gazette No.4 Vol.11 of 22nd June, 2006 pg 137 clearly spelt out Kazumung-Kabong as a district which is under the territorial jurisdiction of Adagwom Ama Atang and he has his letter of Acting

District head from government. Thus, Adagwom Ama Atang had the powers to have appointed the Garkuwan Kabong since it is within his jurisdiction.

As to the residence of Ada Amah Atang, you may recall that he was displaced from his family house/land at UTAN when government acquired it for the purpose of a new layout, this made him to, as a matter of choice and convenience, relocate to one of his houses in Alheri (situated within Kabong his domain), which is actually located on Afizere land who are the original owners of the land. In fact, Ada Amah Atang has many houses and inherited land scattered all over Kabong. It is worthy to note that the so called "Landlord" is indeed a settler on Afizere land because the land actually belongs to Fudawa (an Afizere Clan) who are the direct and original owners of the land.

At this juncture, we may be tempted to ask the real origin of the family presently laying claim to the land; do they have any link with the Afizere of Fudawa? Was their grandfather not called Adembo? (An Afizere name). Was it not this same Adembo that migrated from another Afizere land to settle in Alheri on the land Afizere gave him? This Adembo, as attested by Izere elders was indeed an Afizere man from Fudawa where he participated actively in Afizere Cultural activities such as the popular blowing and dancing of Afizere traditional flute (Agafu) with his kinsmen from Fudawa. Sadly, after the demise of Adembo (May his soul rest in peace), his grandchildren are today falsely claiming the ownership of the land. Conversely, The Gwom Berom in Kabong is exclusively that of the Berom extraction who is answerable to Du in Jos South and not Jos North as is the case with the Afizere traditional rulers of Kabong, Dong and Gyese (Tudun Wada).

For tribal reasons, the stool of Gwom Berom in Kabong was created by the then Gbong Gwom Jos, Late Da Rwang Pam for the purpose of collecting community tax from his Berom extraction who left their villages and settled in Afizere land in Jos. This practice still persists till date, it is however unconstitutional because there is nowhere in the Nigerian constitution that allows a local government to collect taxes in another Local government. Similarly, The Plateau state Gazette No.4 Vol.11 of 22nd June, 2006 pg 137 also spelt out without ambiguity that Dong and Tudun Wada (Gyese) are districts in Jos North LGA, Ada Kaze Nyam and Ada Peter Nyam are their respective acting district heads.

Ladies and Gentlemen, historical antecedents, oral, written and even the traditional occupation of Dong, Gyese (Tudun Wada) and Kabong attest to the fact that these areas are God given to the Afizere, but the Berom still want to illegally claim them. It is also a known fact that in recognition of the indigeneship of the Afizere people, the political structure of Jos LGA between 1979 to 1983 shows that Jos Jarawa Federal electoral ward spanned from Nukpis (New JUTH), Tudun Wada (Gyese), Dong to Kabong. The political ward is synonymous with the geographical space of Jos Izere Chiefdom.

The Afizere people are aware of the trade of engaging on unnecessary controversies by the Berom, this does not add value to anyone, because it appears BECO wants to create ethnic tension by stirring the nest of melee and discord. For the information of BECO, threatening the peaceful Afizere people in order to re-write history will neither shift us from our God –given land nor remove our Government recognized traditional rulers. We should rather come together and explore ways of how to move our communities out of the present socio-economic problems confronting us. What we need is peace and not rancor.

Gentlemen of the Press, thank you for good listening.

Long live Afizere (Jarawa) Nation.

Long live Plateau State.

Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria