

Remarks by the Consul General of the
Federal Republic of Nigeria

Hon. Chudi Okafor

On the Occasion of AAUSA 13th
National Convention,
Oakland, CA.

Saturday, May 23-24, 2009

The Executive President ALL ARO (USA), Inc, Mazi David Iphie,

The Executive Members of AAUSA,

To the New Executive Members, I say congratulations,

Honourable Patrons here present,

Invited Guests and Friends of AAUSA,

Fellow Compatriots,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening,

It is indeed my pleasure, to be in your midst this evening and to join you as a Special Guest of Honour, at this very important Convention, holding in this beautiful city of Oakland, California.

Let me state from the outset, that when Mazi Eni Kanu, broached the idea of the possibility of my attending the Oakland leg of the Convention, to rob minds with this august assembly, I accepted without preconditions, for reasons that will be obvious as we proceed.

2. It will suffice at this stage to say, that this is a home-coming of sorts, given that I have been able to reunite with my kiths and kin under one umbrella, for a unity of purpose. Your wonderful hospitality and reception even extended to showing me some tourist attractions and areas of interest in Oakland and San Fransisco. It is, therefore, fit and proper to crave your indulgence to thank the AAUSA Executive and Mazi Eni Kanu, for inviting me for this special event. Many thanks also go to Mazi Oji Kanu.

3. A casual look at your invitation card shows that one of the primary objectives of AAUSA is to unite and promote peaceful co-existence and understanding among all people of Aro descent, and if I may add, by necessary implication, among all Nigerians. It is important to underscore this point, because AAUSA as a body, may have wittingly or unwittingly embodied one of the Fundamental Objectives in Chapter II, pages 10 – 11, of the Nigerian Constitution, under the Objective Principles of State Policy.

4. This noble objective by the AAUSA is what the Nigerian Government expects of all associations, as the cementing building blocks of the various ethnic groupings. It goes without saying that this cardinal objective is an excellent way to build golden bridges of understanding between groups and communities.

5. I also gleaned from the invitation letter that your lofty objective has given birth to a medical clinic in Aro. Today, AAUSA can also boast of routine annual medical missions, to provide succour and minister to the health needs of our less privileged ones in Nigeria. I am indeed, very proud of your efforts in extending this milk of human kindness, free of charge. It is an invaluable service which is difficult to afford in Nigeria, and cannot in any manner be equated in monetary terms. You know for a fact, that majority of our people in Nigeria will not utilize the monies sent through Western Union for medical treatment.

6. However, let me say that I am not surprised that AAUSA has been able to achieve this awesome feat. After all, are the Aros wherever they may be, arguably, not the forerunners of the authentic Igbo values of achievement, hard work, efficiency, success, and patriotism?

7. Even so, given your network of connections, huge experiences, expertise, entrepreneurial capability, industrial discipline and best practices, I also believe that what you have so ably done in Aro, by building a medical clinic, can and should also be replicated in other Aro towns, wherever they may be located, if the will is there.

8. In fact, it seems to me that by properly coordinating with the other Aro medical professionals in Nigeria, you should think out of the box and begin to figure out ways and means of providing weekly, rather than monthly medical services. This can serve as a model for other parts of Nigeria to emulate. I trust that you will

feel able to do this. It can be done. The Jews did it, the Chinese did it, and the Indians did it, and I know you can do it. Yes we can!

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. As the Guest Speaker, let me at this juncture take the liberty to dwell on a very important subject, 'Our Cultural Dilemma; with emphasis on the upbringing of our dear children', which if not checked, could derail our rich cultural heritage. This topic is better discussed here, because from my perspective, USA has more concentration of Africans, nay Nigerians, in the Diaspora, given our sheer population, compared to any other country in the world.

10. I will limit the discussion to the concept of the 'family and its role in cultural identity preservation'. It seems to me that addressing it, is a credible way our children in the Diaspora can better adapt to the realities of the society, in which they have unwittingly found themselves. It is a love - and - hate topic, for

both parents and children. Even so, the solution is not to avoid its discussion, lest our offsprings finally forget their roots.

11. As it is, parenting has become a huge challenge in the United States today. Neither the schools or churches will undertake this role for you. This is because the children are greatly influenced by the peer group, television, internet and the texting culture. This has to a large extent conveyed conflicting signals as to what the parents may wish to instill in the children as authentic Nigerian culture and family values.

12. After two years of my sojourn here with you, my candid view is that it is better to begin now to examine ways and means of ameliorating its negative manifestations, before it is too late.

My fellow compatriots, the plain truth is that if care is not taken, we are faced with the possibility of losing our children to the new society they found themselves. Many amongst us already face this situation, as our children do not know anything about Nigeria,

beyond their adopted country. The effect is that a Nigerian family, that desires to raise its children as Nigerians, in the ways of our parents, is often torn between two worlds: the Nigerian world of old family life and the new Western world of nuclear family, individualism, and anonymity.

13. There is no doubt that globalization, coupled with the phenomenal development and use of ICT have dealt further blow to what remains of the original African identities in the Diaspora, resulting in clash of culture and what some refer to as ‘clash of civilizations’. There were efforts by the African American leaders of thought, led by the legendary Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at cultural re-awakening in the 1960s, but it did not go far. This laudable effort only led to civil rights concessions and a sense of identity for African Americans.

14. For convenience, and for purposes of this discussion, it would suffice to say that we now have three sets of Africans in the

Diaspora. First, we have the old and settled descendants of slaves, who have lost their original language and culture. Then, we have the new immigrants of the early 60s to 80s, and their children, who still have roots in Africa, but are largely unfamiliar with the nuances of the African culture. The third category, of course, are the children of the second generation of the African Diaspora, who followed the footsteps of their parents, to move, in order to attend schools abroad, and eke out a living. My children are in this bracket and may be most of you.

15. At this juncture, for the records, I need to make the point that whatever I am saying here regarding family life of Nigerians, remains a family affair, and should not be taken as a criticism of the family life in the USA. It is a question of cultural differences and we cannot wish away the fact that even if we are American citizens, we are first and foremost Nigerians or if you like, Americans of Nigerian extraction. Indeed, if African Americans can go to any length, including use of DNA to find their roots, who

are we to wish away our ancestral origin. I bet you, the Aros will be the last to think in this direction. Indeed the Chinese and the Indian Americans, who hold tenaciously to their countries of origin, culture and traditions, are no less Americans. We need not pretend otherwise.

16. The question is, how do we ensure proper parenting for these children and inculcate in them, family values of honor and integrity? How do we ensure other virtues such as, respect, caring, sharing, giving, hard work and selfless service to the community? How do we bring up the new generation of AAUSA immigrants to appreciate, that while they owe allegiance and loyalty to their adopted country, their roots which lie beyond their new homes, are equally important, and that their “real home” like the Indians, the Chinese and the Jews have succeeded in doing, must not be forgotten?

17. How do we ensure that we inculcate in them the sense that they have a country back home to be proud of, their reservations notwithstanding. No matter how one looks at it, it is a country that produced their parents and would therefore need and appreciate their contributions for sustainable development, prosperity and greatness. After all, the USA got to this level of development by inculcating in her citizens the virtues of hard work. This is even to the extent, that it is now saying ‘Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country?’ I dare say that no matter how comfortable or successful we may think we are abroad, there is no place like home, our difficulties and challenges notwithstanding.

18. As AAUSA is no doubt aware, the family as we know it is a multi-layered relationship, the nuclear family being usually a subject of a bigger unit, which we call the extended family or clan. It is a social network of relationships of lineage and kinship, which constitute a larger society making the village or town. It is a

society in which every family member is prepared to come and share the resources, hopes and aspirations and at the same time, pain and sorrows of one another. A child belongs to the extended family and not to his immediate parents alone.

19. At another level, every respectable family is desirous of protecting its good name, to ensure that no member of the family brings shame, dishonor and disrepute to the family through improper conduct. It goes without saying that transgressors are openly reprimanded and sanctioned. On a serious note, I do not know of any group that applies this sanction better than the Aros.

20. Make no mistake about it, no one in Nigeria with proper upbringing would like to soil his or her father's name. These are the core virtues and values of the Nigerian family and culture, that I urge you to defend, promote and bequeath to your children. You should please, individually and collectively do whatever you can, to avoid family breakup that is now a commonplace, even among

our people in the USA today. In life, it is normal to have challenges and difficulties. Indeed, it is impossible to avoid occasional storms, but the real test is the ability to tackle the problem and rekindle peaceful co-existence.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

21. Again, I urge you, do not be despondent to the extent of giving up your responsibility of parenting role as there is no better legacy to bequeath to our children. Otherwise, our children will be led astray and we will never be happy. Also, if you can afford it, try to take your children on home vacation once in a while, to ensure that the link with home is maintained. It costs money, but it is worth investing in. Lest I forget, I was on a trip recently with my colleagues to the North East of Georgia.

22. While there, we visited a College with a lot of international students, and there was this very bright, 17year old boy with noble

parentage, who happens to come from my State in Nigeria. Regrettably, he told me that he does not know his State, and has never been home before, and that it is the parents who are from Nigeria and not him. As far as he was concerned, he is from the Stone Mountain area of Georgia. Well, the message was clear to me. It was from that visit and from reports I receive on weekly basis from my area of coverage that I felt strongly to speak to you on this subject.

23. My brothers and Sisters, in all, my message would be that, like the Germans, the French, the Chinese, the Indians and the Jews, you should utilize the creative platform of your Conventions and Conferences, to disseminate the best of Aro culture; language, food, folklores, mode of dressing, mode of greeting and respect for age. While using this platform for social interaction, at the same time, I implore you to establish necessary network of contacts with home, in order to sustain our distinct cultural identity through the ages.

24. However, to do this successfully, you must remain united as one people with one destiny, irrespective of which village or town in Aro you come from. It seems to me that this is what AAUSA is all about, and if this is so, then you have succeeded in bequeathing monumental legacy to your children and generations yet unborn.

Of course, associations are good for the promotion of Nigerian cultures and family values, and as I indicated, they remain the cement and building blocks of a great nation. Mark our rebranding slogan: 'Nigeria; Good people, Great Nation'.

25. From what I have seen here today, I will not get tired of saying that I am proud of the shining example of Nigerian Organizations, amongst which AAUSA, has clearly distinguished itself. I urge you to keep it up.

26. Thank you for listening.