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Friday, June 9, 2023

Rt. Hon. Mudashiru Obasa
Speaker, Lagos State House of Assembly
Alausa, Ikeja.

Dear Mr. Speaker,

RE: YOUR OPENING ADDRESS AT 10TH ASSEMBLY OF LAGOS STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

I noted with concern, multiple recent press reports of statements credited to you in your opening address at the 10th Assembly of the Lagos State House of Assembly, indicating the emphasis of your legislative agenda. You are quoted as saying: "There would be laws and resolutions in the area of economy and commerce, property and titles, and we will reverse all that is reversible to protect the interest of indigenes".

While first noting that it is the House, and not the Speaker, that ultimately has the prerogative to set its own agenda, I would quickly caution as follows:

1. The House must always be very mindful to operate within the provisions of the Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), in particular, Section 42 , which protects all Nigerian Citizens from being subjected to inferior rights and privileges on the basis of place of origin. Laws intended as affirmative action, for groups that are deemed to be underprivileged will be null and void if they discriminate against other groups in a manner that violates the Nigerian constitution.

2. Your choice of emphasis in your opening speech, especially after the polarized and divisive electoral process we have just gone through, is unfortunate, but is also telling and speaks volumes.

3. The Lagos State House of Assembly represents the entire electorate and the people of Lagos whether considered indigenous or not. The House should be equally concerned with all forms of discrimination against particular groups within the state, making appropriate laws accordingly and seeing that they are enforced. For example, the widespread reports of discrimination suffered by certain groups during the conduct of the recently concluded elections should equally be a matter of great concern to the House and should reflect in its agenda.

4. You must be well aware that the economic and commercial strength of Lagos today is, in large measure, as a result of its long and rich history of welcoming settlers and investors who are valuable contributors to our society. Some of the largest businesses in Lagos that are providing livelihoods

for Lagosians today and generating taxes and other sources of funding for government were founded by those who would be considered non-indigenes. Examples abound from some of our largest banks and investment houses, to commerce, to industry including, notably, the recently commissioned Dangote refinery.

The Lagos Free Zone and the associated Lekki deep sea port were promoted by Tolaram. This is a Singaporean company, that was originally founded in Indonesia in 1948 by a family of Indian origin, before relocating and being welcomed by Singapore in 1975. There is a family of Lebanese origin, whose thriving hospitality business here in Lagos is now being successfully operated by their fifth generation employing hundreds of taxpayers. They have been here for more than 170 years. This is the way of the modern world, and we, in Lagos, have leveraged this strength for centuries.

Even the founding of the then Lagos Stock Exchange (now NGX), the first in West Africa, reflects our diverse and cosmopolitan history. It is on record that the four individuals who subscribed to its Memorandum of Association (in addition to the 3 institutional subscribers), in 1960, included the late Sir Odumegwu Ojukwu and Alhaji Shehu Bukar. The two others were Theophilus Adebayo Doherty (my uncle), and Akintola Williams. We must also not forget the countless number of small businesses owned and operated by hardworking non-indigenes, providing livelihoods for probably millions of residents of Lagos. These are among the people responsible for those lofty IGR figures that LASG so proudly touts. What message does your opening statement send to them?

Mr Speaker, in my opinion, the statements attributed to you were ill-advised, unnecessary and demonstrate either questionable judgment or questionable intentions. They strike an arrogant, discordant, jarring and divisive tone that is at odds with the times, the prevailing mood and the Modern Mega City we are trying to build. I pray it is not indicative of what we should expect from the 10th Assembly under your leadership or from this Administration more broadly.

The constitutional, legal and human rights and interests of all Nigerians resident in Lagos State, must be protected equally, including those of the earliest known settlers on the territory that now lies within its boundaries, who should, in addition, be accorded their due recognition and respect.

In closing Mr Speaker, my further advice to you, admittedly unsolicited, is that Lagosians of all socio-economic strata and ethnic origin are more interested in a progressive agenda that eliminates the existing widespread poverty, that creates prosperity and that improves lives. And that is what they deserve.

Yours faithfully



Funso Doherty