

SYNOPTIC NARRATIVE OF A LEGENDARY ENTREPRENEUR AT 90

PROTOCOLS:

“Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men”.

Proverb 22:29 KJV

Distinguished guests,

I am overwhelmed by emotions on being honoured to give this speech in celebration of one so big an inspiration for me and many growing up that I can hardly contain myself. Chief Dr. Sir. Gabriel Igbinedon the Esama of Benin is many things, indeed very many great things. Many of these I would try to mention in the **SYNOPTIC** eulogy of the man because it would not be possible in the course of a **SYNOPTIC** speech to tell all about a man who indeed has become an elephant about whose body nothing can exhaustively be told from any singular particular perspective.

The Esama as he is globally known is of gargantuan dimensions in his persona. To contemplate this man is to try to conceive of a great entity, a task that is much more than most can embark upon for the vast reaches of all his sides of greatness. And it is a much harder task to tell it in a brief talk like this one.

First, let me show my deep appreciation to the Chancellor, Pro chancellor, and the governing Council, the Vice Chancellor, the Senate and the whole of the academic Community of this great Institution of learning for accepting me a humble lawyer and mentee of the celebrant to come and do this duty to you all on account of the Esama's nonagerian anniversary celebration. Asking me to undertake this task is like asking a wide-eyed son of a great man to speak about his outsized father and hero whose whole reach and conceptual girth is as wide as the circumference of the world.

The Esama is indeed a great man of limitless and unfathomable girth. He is what you would call or refer to as a "big man" anywhere he treads his feet on. The goodness with which his being is enwrapped, which his compassion and goodwill has wrought into others' consciousnesses has been hailed by many great people of great renown. Therefore Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III the Alafin of Oyo who was a foremost traditional ruler in Nigeria on conferring the Esama with a very high title in the Oyo realm, referred to him glowingly in the following manner:

“The Esama, by his display of philanthropy and goodwill to mankind, whether in his birth place, in the eastern, western, or across the seas, has today graduated to the Esama of the world”

That perceptively, is the phenomenon that is **Chief Sir. Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion**, the Esama of Benin including many great things that have been ascribed to him. Others have written tones on the man in his life and works taking as inspiration for their wordings, Esama's trailblazing travels of his life that do not bear any cares for the undaunting but indeed the daunting paths. He is totally unafraid of any difficulties and does not succumb to them if they stand in the way of his objectives. For bravery and fearlessness, the Esama is overdosed where ordinary men would want to tread cautiously. To recount the story of the Esama, one must realize that indeed he grew and became one of the mightiest trees in the forest that once sprouted as a small shoot. Whose currency is marked by the shelter, succor and protection he affords and provisions to others that mighty tree that he has become is the iroko that is always at the center of the forest under which all things that matter happen (Cite a Bini parable of the Iroko tree that is never lesser than any other tree in the forest.)

HIS BEGINNINGS:

Esama's beginnings are firmly wedged in Okada, a town in the western gates of the core Benin area that Benin lore lays as having been planted by Ewuare 1 (Ogidigan) around **1429**. AD For many reasons, the Esama's persona mirrors all the mystique that bear the strength of the place. OSB Omogegie, Phd, a Benin historian of note

that had authored volumes on Benin history, tells of Okada as an enigmatic place the story of which is the rich fare of Benin lore, philosophies and spirituality relating to many of her great Obas and personages whose transformational reigns and heroic acts progressed the great Benin Kingdom to becoming an imperial political-military and economic presence straddling the body of water in the Gulf of Guinea that Benin donated its name to as the Bight of Benin. The Bight of Benin has the modern-day countries of Nigeria, Ghana, Benin and Togo in its precinct as basin countries which fact in itself mirrored the Southern and Westward reaches of the Imperial Benin which accounts for edoid peoples and ethnicities fanning as far west on the West African coast to include the Ga people of modern-day Accra. On this transformation, the great monarch of Benin progressed from a mere Oba into an emperor with the befitting imperial majestic address and appellation of “Uku Akpolokpolo” the great throne.

While this Synopsis of the Esama on his 90th is definitely not the place to tell their stories, the transformational lives or epiphanies of great Benin personages like Oba Ewuare n’Ogidigan 1⁽¹⁴⁴⁰⁾, who in 1429 planted the seed as a wandering fugitive prince running away from his enemies at that time that didn’t want him as King in Benin; Oba Esigie⁽¹⁵⁰⁴⁾, Oba Ozuere⁽¹⁷¹²⁾, Oba Akenzua 1⁽¹⁷¹³⁾, Oba Osemwende⁽¹⁸¹⁶⁾, the story of Great Benin and these great personages including many others unlisted would not be complete without tidbits relating or ascribed to them in relation to

Okada. Indeed, Okada, the Esama's place of nativity is a place of deep significances where strength and wonders are not rare. In this wise we should not forget the fabled diviner Aiguokhian a.k.a Azagbaghedi whose fearsome reputations troubled Oba Esigie and his warrior mystic mother Queen Idia so much, he had to be relocated to Benin where he could be closely watched in order for him not to use his mystical powers against the Oba in those heady times of wars with Esigie's rival brother Aruaran and the Oliha who backed the Igala failed invasion of Benin early in Oba Esigie's reign that resulted in the Benin/Idah war of 1516. Thus, Esama it suits, sprouted from a deep well of immense significances of power and spirituality that richly enwraps the greatness that has unfurled all through his life. That is the Okada from which he sprouted.

Of his ancestry, history has it that the Esama sprang from the loins of the descendants of the fabled Okundia, who was the Odionwere of Okada in 1712 when Akenzua 1 fled Benin to Okada for refuge away from his brother and rival for the throne Ozuere who had the backing of the Odde, Oba Ewuakpe's (1700-1712) Iyase and generalissimo of Benin armed forces. On Okundia as the Odionwere and leader of the Okada Community, fell the lot to cater for the then embattled crown Prince while there. Okundia's son Okunbo who following his pedigree became Odionwere in Okada forty years after his father, was reputed to be a gallant warrior in Oba Akengbuda's armed forces in which he saw action in the many places the Oba's

forces waged war for the empire in its northern and eastern sectors. He eventually returned to Okada when it was his turn to be the Odionwere and leader of the Community. However, his many journeys as a warrior in the service of his Oba took him to many places within the empire which included Ujiabhoi in Uwessian in present day Esan Central Local Government Area of Edo State.

Here he settled for a bit as he also did in Ubulu Ukwu (in today's Aniocha South LGA, Delta State) while prosecuting Oba Akengbuda's police action under Agboghidi of Ugo against a rebellious duke of the place who in a rash of madness killed Adesuwa the daughter of Ezomo Ekeneza and the betroth of Oba Akengbuda who had rebuffed his love advances. He also later had a sojourn in Ugo n'Iyekorhionmwon as part of the police action that brought the Emokpaogbe Agboghidi n'Ohen Ugo, the hero of Ubulu Ukwu turned rebel to heel. He had and left Children in some of the places where he journeyed.

Igbinova his first son was left at Ubulu Ukwu; Igbinedion his second son was left at Ujiabhoi in Uwessian near Irrua; and his third son Igbinevbo_was left at Ugo n'Iyekorhionmwan. None of these Children lived in Okada. For they all remained in their places of nativity. However, Oviawe a grandson of Okunbo through Igbinedion his second son retracing his roots, removed himself from Ujiabhoi in Esan land to Okada in 1920. The Okunbo and Okunda spirits and auras of leadership were abundantly ingrained in his persona as could be seen from the

commanding roles he undertook in his new Community. He became a leading figure in the Community when Okada in 1920 decided to move itself from its old location to its present place in order to be closer to the new Benin Lagos road that had been built for purpose of development. It was Oviawe that led that movement. Thus the beginnings of today's Okada had the indelible imprint of the Igbinedions on it as they also had on the old remembering, that Esama's great grandfather(Okundia) and grandfather (Okunbo) were past Odionwere of the Community.

On the west of Okada is the historical town of Usen, a place of great spiritual significance and ritual importance in the Benin realm. The settlement was much earlier *in situ* before Ewuare n'Ogidigan 1 planted the seed of Okada circa 1429 as a wandering fugitive prince. However, these two settlements had become intertwined and grown closer over the ages with mixed marriages and other anthropological and sociological mutualisms. Indeed it is said cryptically that the times of adversity in Okada, is when the Ihaza of Usen goes there, maybe for reasons of propitiation_on account of whatever the mischief or challenging event is. When then it was time for Oviawe who at that time had become known as Josiah Agharriagbon Oviawe Igbinedion to take a wife, he just strolled a bit to the next town of Usen and married Okunzee a dame of great beauty from one of the most prominent families of the town, the Ihaza family. Thus a new family was started with Okunzee as wife, three girls and two boys. But along the line,

adversities repeatedly plagued Josiah Agharriagbon's home and by 1944, all but one of the five Children had died leaving only Gabriel Osawaru, who God had spared such grim fate and instead anointed him for great things in a long blessed prosperous life. Gabriel Osawaru had to carry on in spite of all that sadness and grief which mercilessly continued in the form of his father Oviawe Agharriagbon's death in later in 1949 with his mother Okunozee's passing in 1959.

On his mother Okunozee's death. Osawaru was launched into the world on his own. He craved education because even though it was not yet of general accessible acquisition, he craved it and attended School to the highest that Okada could offer which at the time was standard three. The overwhelming awe in which the colonizer was held with his powerful hold and control over the local institutions including the Oba powers that used to own and control power in the realm yielded a thirst in the insightful, to acquire the key to the source of that power - education. It was conceived as the tool by which a local can be enabled to acquiring privileges, opportunities and powers that would at least give a pretense of being like the colonizer

After exhausting what Okada could offer him which was standard 3, he found his way to Benin City which was no easy task at the time for the now short journey was not short at all at that time. The logistical implications for the trip was a serious challenge as the transport means necessary for the trip were quite scarce and

beyond reach for a young lad that had no penny to his name. But the can-do spirit, that character that is the DNA of Okada whose earth birth and infused life into him and whose waters bathed him, got him a full primary school education in Benin under the fabled. Rev. Usuanlele in 1947.

While at the Benin Baptist School, his leadership qualities that were apparent but latent while in Okada, came to the fore in a formal appointment as head boy at the School. He was appointed the School “monitor” which in those days meant head boy or girl (If in a girl’s School). By this appointment, he acquired privileges which in the main exempted him from all sorts of manual labor and chores in the School. Back in the day, pupils in primary schools were expected as good Children to cater for the School’s and headmasters’ needs. Chores like cutting the lawns, trimming the hedges, fetching firewood, drawing water from the stream and keeping the school clean fell on the pupils. In those days when there were scarce social amenities, pupils could be asked to go to the streams to fetch water for the Schools purposes or cut wood or brushes for the teachers’ needs. Once he became the School monitor, he became exempted from these menial stuff in deference to that status by which he provided leadership to the other pupils, thus making the work of the teachers and the headmaster easier. It is an offshoot of this first recognition and “appointment” which is the harbinger of his coming greatness that earned him the sobriquet “**EXEMPTION**”, a name that he bore far into the seventies which

only his contemporaries now still call him. That Exemption became a house hold name in Benin and the larger Nigeria is a testament of the figure that the Esama had begun from his early years, cut in stone with flourishes and panache.

That the Esama today is a foremost educationist offering some of the best educational fare to our tomorrow's leaders is no surprise to those who know his story. The hardship he put himself through to eke out the means to acquire an education for himself is the story of a determined lad that was empty of pocket but huge on ambition and determination to acquire the golden fleece which the insightful of those times saw as the key to upliftment, the key to acquiring great power and influence, of being employed in the colonial civil service and achieving the top dream of owning and driving an automobile.

For some tidbits, western formal education was creeping into Benin in the first decade of the 20th century when Government School Benin City was established. According to an eye witness account of Rev. E. E. Oluoba the first indigenous priest at St. Matthews Church (Anglican Communion) Sokponba Road Benin, Government Primary School was established on 8th April 1901 barely four years after the invasion of Benin by the British in 1897. A girls School was set up in 1903 but it failed for cultural reasons that western education at that time which was struggling to have traction with the men folk was perceived as a total waste for girls who should be preparing for marriage and Children not long after puberty. Hear

Rev. Emmanuel Egiebor Ohuoba (1885-1950) directly from his eye witness account.

“I attended the first Government Primary School that was established by the British Government on April 18th, 1901. The School was then at Idunmwun Ogiefafa near Mess G. O. Edohen’s and S. O. Obaseki’s house. The headmaster there was Mr. J. T. Okai. The first European Superintendent of Education who taught us Arithmetic was Mr. Cummins. We were tying wrapper to the School in those days. About fifteen of us started the School, prominent among us were Chief Ranger N. O. Edosomwan, Mr. H. O. Ihamah and Mr. J. O. Obahiagbon. A girl’s School was also established by the Government in the year 1903 but it did not last because of lack of attendance.”

From its humble beginnings western education in Benin remained of humble access in spite of the valiant efforts of Oba Eweka II (1914-33) and Oba Akenzua (1933-79) to hasten its spread. The colonials were actually seeking to train facilitating manpower for their establishments e.g. translators, bookkeepers, clerks colonial police and prison warders etc. Of the recognizable names in Rev. E. E. Ohuoba’s eye witness account, one can glean that many of those who went to school at the time were the offsprings of Benin nobles who had the dreams of them becoming like the European. Obahiagbon (Ogbebor n’Usen), Ihama (Ihama n’Ihogbe), Edosomwan (Oba Ovonramwe’s Edosomwan n’Iwebo, the father of

Osunde Edosomwan that became Eweka II's Ayobahan and N.O Edosomwan the Chief forest Ranger).

The young Gabriel Igbinedion did not have this kind of cover and had to do it all by himself, believing in his destiny that it was all in him and his faith to become a great one. Nothing was too onerous in terms of tasks or menial labor, to be undertaken to see him through School. He thus completed his Primary School and proceeded to Lagos to attend grammar School at the famous Eko Boys High School. Painfully for him the young Gabriel had to abort his formal education midway when the total lack of support made him seek a living in the outside world.

The young Gabriel had the ambition of being a lawyer at a time when lawyers of Bini descent were still few compared to those of the Yoruba or the Igbo, not minding that by 1949 Benin first lawyer Samuel Osarogie Ighodaro was called to the English bar at the Grays Inn who became the Iyase of Benin in 1982.

One must be minded that in spite of these setbacks, Gabriel Igbinedion, took to life with zeal, confidence, faith and aplomb and made sweet Omelette from his broken eggs. For a man to whom life had never given any breaks, he created and seized his own breaks himself with both hands and worked hard with all his wits to get ahead. He first started work as a teacher and contributed his bit to the furtherance of the adult education policy under the Benin Native Council. Not satisfied, the active youth then became a police man. Stories of Gabriel Igbinedion as a crack crime

busting detective are the stuff of fables. Thereafter his undeniable shinning outward qualities as one that gets things done landed him his next calling as a Salesman. Just to pause a bit, Chief Sir. Doctor Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion has turned out to be a lifelong Salesman for the good life and good living. He sold his good living as the gold standard for life and it was with focus and panache all wrapped in his living that he indeed marketed to people and establishments that mattered in his growth. The class he exudes, the effortless flamboyance and the substantive force of his personality are qualities and factors that Schools of Salesmanship and marketing ought to Study for their impartation to their students. A good salesman and marketer must exude the qualities of the wares he is marketing. No one would see the Esama and resist his wares.

Few would pass on anything that the Esama would market and history has borne this out abundantly. There are no surprises therefore that it is as a Salesman marketer that he first sold himself, his wares and his philosophies to the world as exemption, the exceptional man who that makes things happen. It is no surprises therefore that his wares became household items, goods and services not just in Nigeria but also in Africa, Europe and the Caribbean.

His services as a marketer started with A. G Leventis who poached him from the police force for his undeniable force of Character that gets things done. Were Mario puzo the famous author that created powerful characters in his many best sellers

to cast the Esama in any of his books or movies, he would refer to him as “**a force of nature**” with comparable force with the elements. The transition from being a marketer in the strict sense to becoming the mega entrepreneur that the Esama eventually became straddling continents started with his stint at A. G. Leventis. What he lacked in full formal education, he made up with his gargantuan native intelligence from then on he forged ahead to become a leader in economic terms and a pioneering entrepreneur in his Nigerian and African homeland and beyond. Let it not be missed in this story that the Esama as Exemption expanded the market share of the Mercedes brand in the Midwest area by his sheer marketing genius while at AG Leventis. His gumption in business has been likened by the authors of The Living Legends, Sir. (Dr) Chief Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion under the University of Ibadan biographies project (Victor Osaro Edo, Rasheed Olaniyi, Paul Ndukwe and Monsuru Muritala) to the frontiers pushing pioneering works in commerce of African great Men like King JaJa of Opobo and Nana of Itsekiri the erstwhile governor of Benin River. That comparison, even given the differing times and millieus is not a small one or a joke. To be compared to these personages whose commercial prowess that successfully ranged them in almost parity with the all-powerful British government and its trading phalanges in the late 19th century is a clear compliment to Esama’s huge standing as an entrepreneur. These were men who gave the British so much competition, they had to be forcefully removed and

put away far across the Oceans from their homes. In order to save to British commerce on the West African Coast in the late 19th and early 20th Century.

His apparent strategy aside formal education which was self-tooling with the acquisition of the sort of cognition that a vast well of native intelligence and a balanced emotional intelligence can provide. The Esama became by dint of self-training, self-acquired cognition, and experience a man of immense savvy. He did not become such a towering presence in boardrooms and fora of commercial transactions and negotiations by just being a good looking Adonis, which everyone recognizes him as for he is indeed a man that thoroughly studies, and totally imbibes his subjects and masters them. Prof. Eghosa Osaghae, an academic of note and one time Vice Chancellor of the Igbinedion University Okada once said of him, the following words explaining how the Esama approached the hiring of a building architect for the design of a library at the Igbinedion University Okada

“When we were going to build a library (at Igbinedion University, Okada), we called architects. He said to the first architect which school did you attend? She said she attended a university, and he said no! Tell us your school of architecture, when she did not answer, Chief Igbinedion started mentioning the best Schools of architecture in the world. He also asked them, what they know about library architecture in the 2^{1st} century? None of them could say anything. He now said to them that the straight walls

serves as sound breaking for the libraries. He is a very humble man ready to learn. He is a man with an extraordinary gift”.

Prof. Osaghae’s words on the Esama came from close observation for before becoming the Director General of the Nigerian Institute for International Affairs (NIIA), he was the able Vice Chancellor of the Igbinedion University Okada, where he worked at the Esama’s blistering pace, helping to uphold and impart his very high standards in his world renown Igbinedion University Okada. Those same words would be confirmed as true by any professional that have ever been retained by him. He is a man who knows things. His level of cognition makes it easy for competent knowledgeable professionals to serve him. On the other hand an incompetent not well schooled professional would surely be embarrassed when he meets the Esama for he would not be a clueless and blind Client. The foregoing is the mark of a thoroughly exposed man whose life’s education is as comprehensive as a dozen Ph.Ds.

In my humble view, native intelligence with which the Esama is boundlessly endowed, is an aspect of the balanced emotional intelligence he deploys in getting the results that he desires in his enterprises.

Rick Lash tells us that a combination of the work climate that an employer creates in his business in the perceptions of the employees in their tasks, in their work environment that propel their abilities to deliver on their jobs and the purposeful

leadership provided by the employer. The aggregation of both is summed up in a skills' package called "emotional intelligence".

The Esama's emotional intelligence quotient is of liberal doses, such that his employees, partners and business associates ride on his leadership waves for bringing things to being no matter how daunting and landing them on safe shores.

The Okada spirit that has its roots in Ewuare 1's seed, that had been further brewed by Esama's forebears, Okundia and Okunbor, his great great grandfather and grandfather and all the forces and mysteries that embody the essence of these mighty forebears, is the force packaged in him to do the exploits that he has wrought in the topography of Nigeria's business geography.

His business impact on Nigeria and the Midwest area (Edo/Delta) of Nigeria is of no small measure. Not needing to reinvent any wheel, excerpts from the Esama's papers would make it clear to anyone what he did for the development of this area.

Here goes:

“The Midwest region that was handed over at creation in 1963 was a ‘huge forest’, according to premier Dennis Osudebey. Save for a few sawmills and crepe rubber processing plants, there were no other industries in spite of the enormous natural and human resources. Though the people were making money from timber, rubber and

palm oil, they invested mainly in real-estate and a few private Schools... When Brigadier S. O. Ogbemudia took over during the civil war, nothing much had been done about the parlous state of development in the State.”

Esama, on Brigadier Ogbemudia’s appeal to the indigenous business people of the state to come and invest in the improvement of the state, was one of the first to step forward. He changed the status quo of business investment and the local industrial scene of the state which had hitherto been almost exclusively foreigner dominated. On transportation which was his first intervention, he heavily displaced the foreigners by setting up Mid Motors Ltd which introduced high Calibre Hino Trucks and buses and Yamaha motorcycles that became household names in Nigeria then and now. With Esama’s introduction of fully built and filled buses, the old wooden trucks and Lorries that were used for transportation by even Armels Transport Service saw their eclipse.

Thereafter he impacted yet again by seriously denting and ending the monopolies on soft drinks and sodas that used to be dominated almost exclusively by the foreign owned Leventis group when he established Okada Dry acquiring the franchises for Canada dry sodas and its different flavours. The bottling factory was in Benin City.

The Esama next ventured into the highly complicated field of aviation setting Okada Air that resold Benin to the whole world. The brand that was started in 1981 carried an image of the Queen Idia mask on the tail fins of the planes which sign posted Benin to world. By this enterprise, the Esama added a new word to the English vocabulary. The Oxford English dictionary defines Okada as a means of transportation obviously tagging the Esama's Okada Air thus.

“a motorcycle serving as a taxi with passengers sitting behind the driver e.g. “We took two Okadas there”.

Its origin was stated in the same page as Okada Air etc. His other businesses held under the Okada group include but are not limited to:

1. Gabidon Motors ltd
2. Nedac Co ltd
3. Cable & Rods ltd
4. IBN Enterprises ltd
5. International Merchant Bank, Jamaica
6. Okunosee & Igbinedion Holdings ltd,
7. Ovia farms ltd,

8. Okada Breweries ltd
9. Swede Water ltd
10. Moncrief Oil International ltd,
11. Gabidon Steel ltd
12. Okada Fishing Co. Ltd
13. Okada WonderLand ltd
14. LaPharmachin Nigeria ltd
15. OGI Cargo Co. Ltd
16. Crown Estates Ltd
17. Crown Corks Ltd
18. United African Shipping Line Ltd
19. Nigerian Salt Factory Ltd
20. Crown Merchant Bank

And many many more.

Of the areas that the Esama has impacted with his investments having mentioned banking, Oil and gas, aviation and transportation currently, four areas come up for special mention in this Synopsis. Broadcasting, health, education, real estate. On

broadcasting the Independent Television received its broadcast license on June 26th 1993 under the holding of IBW Enterprises in the Okada group making it the first privately owned licensed Television station in Nigeria. Full transmission however began on 27th March, 1997. Thus the Esama is the pioneer of private television broadcasting in Nigeria. The ITV which is its sign name, has a sister radio Station in the same broadcast bouquet operating 92.3 Megahertz fm that was added to the group in 1998. These Stations are visible choice credible alternatives to the foreign stations in news gathering and dissemination in unbiased but thorough reportage.

On health, the Igbinedion Medical Hospital and Research Center is a national health institution catering to the advanced health needs of the state and beyond.. The center doubles as the training platform for medical students of the Igbinedion University Okada as well as a reference center for complicated treatment and procedures. This centre with high-end affiliations, with top medical practitioners, pioneered medically assisted reproductive health in this part. By this the Esama brought smiles through this facility to countless homes that craved the sounds of babies by ensuring that dreams came through. A testament of the high reputation of this institution is the great ambassadors of its products all over Nigeria and beyond her shores where they are performing creditably in hospitals and centers of postgraduate medical training. That loads of the products are reporting high

scores in U.S. British, Canadian and Australian post graduate entry qualifying exams bears out the center as an institution created on Solid rampart is another testament. The institution has become a choice medical training centre.

For real estate, the Esama's phenomenal holdings is vast and incomparable, aside the Oba of Benin. In Benin, yours truly knows no other with as much quantum as the Esama has but then, no one compares land ownership with the Oba of Benin for he is said to own all lands. The Esama's land holding in the Okada wonderland alone that serves the accommodation needs of the Igbinedion University Okada is astounding in its expanse and value. For choice properties in Benin, Lagos, Abuja, the UK, the US, South Africa and the metropolises in the Caribbean would keep any observer's mouth agape.

It is on education that the Esama has become a star in the country of Nigeria and beyond her shores. The Igbinedion phenomenon has blessed the area of education and has imprinted his name in gold on eternal Stones. He satiated his hunger for formal education that was denied him by lack of funding and support by investing heavily on the sector in order to bring the golden fleece to others, many of whom but for his business and philanthropic interventions would not have been able to get it. Igbinedion Educational Centre that houses

1. The Montessori

2. The Secondary School

3. The teacher training School are models of the best of what they are in Nigeria. I know because some of my Children and Children of my friends who have become high fliers overseas went through that system from the Montessori to the Secondary School. These are the destinations of choice for parents all over Nigeria who crave excellent primary and Secondary education for their offspring. But it is with the tertiary education sector that the Esama has stood himself out as not only an innovator but a frontier's pushing pioneer. His crusade to take tertiary educational services that would mold the next generations into positive productive Nigerians blazed onto the scene with the establishment of the Igbinedion University Okada. The earlier cited authors of The Living Legend for the record states at Page III of their biography thus:

“Igbinedion University, Okada which commenced admission of students in 1999 is the first and oldest successful private university in Nigeria with (NUC Registration) certificate 001”.

The young lad from Okada who could not fulfill his dreams of a complete formal education had by 1999 become the pioneer of private tertiary education in Nigeria at the third trimester of his nonagenarian life. This is the stuff that successful lives are made of. It cannot just be a matter of setting up a university just for its sake, but the Esama has by the fruits of his university set up a world class institution of

tertiary education with worldwide top notch affiliations. Students have been known to regularly win scholarships from this institution to Harvard, Yale, Stanford and other world-renowned schools. For records set and broken, Igbinedion University is the first and only private University in Nigeria that has been since 2006 been admitting students for medical training continuously. Others are just beginning to butt in. The IUO boasts the record of being the first private university to produce a graduate who scored a first class in the Nigeria Law School. It is a mark of Esama's handling of this institution which is an indication of the value he puts in it that he headhunts the best in its affairs. All the Vice Chancellors that have piloted its affairs and grown it to its today's dizzying height have all been top rate academics and seasoned university administrators.

Professor Ezemonye a fellow of the Academy of Sciences (FAS) who took over from Professor Eghosa Osahae the prize-winning Social Scientist is presently furthering Esama's dreams with his twenty-one point agenda that aspires to raise the delivery of quality education, staff training and the improvements of School infrastructure, increased internationalization with the acquisition of better affiliations with world-class institutions, and amongst others, making the campuses I.C.T smart places for learning and living. In short, the Esama's story with this institution is the epitome of self-realization in ways that profoundly explains his life's epiphany with the

virtues of formal education that circumstances beyond his control made him miss out on.

FAMILY & CULTURE

Chief Igbinedion's life revolves solidly on an admirable family life. The story of his life must draw from the harmony he has been able to effect on his large family. His status and standing as an African big man rhymes easily with the wide girth of his family from his heir and first Son H. E. Chief Lucky Nosakhare Igbinedion to Lady Chierry's delectable and adorable daughters, and the business guru that is Bright Ayamekhue Igbinedion and everyone else in his brood, there is an all-pervading oneness that the Esama has been able to weld together by his sheer love for them. This his love which is the stuff of many nice stories is also the power behind his seamless philanthropy. If the Esama in Lady Chierry whom in the abundance of his good fortune, he found and brought into his life in 1977 to complete it as an unmovable and irreplaceable soul mate and partner, in Lucky Nosa Igbinedion, he birthed and groomed a worthy successor to carry on his legacy that would endure with he (Lucky) working in harmony with his kin. In lucky and his uterine brood, the Usen connection is rekindled remembering that the Esama's mother was also plucked from the Ihaza yard in Usen. This shows that while Usen may not claim primacy in the Esama she cannot also be ignored. The fraternal relationship between the two (Usen and Okada) continues to recreate itself in these unions that

throw up well healed offspring. To that extent, much of the blessings that the Esama is to Okada is the same to Usen for the Okada amenities created by the Esama in their benefits are available without let to Usen. Yours truly being an Usen prince can testify to that.

Back to the Esama's synopsis, Lady cherry, his better half has in no small measure the credit for all the heights and lofty achievements that the Igbinedion Educational Center has achieved. To speak of the role of Lady cherry in the Esama's life would take another speech with her as the central subject. All that appreciates what Esama means to the world must feel or bear a debt of gratitude to Lady cherry for her harmonious complementing roles in his life and business affairs.

In H.E Lucky Nosakhare Igbinedion you find a substantive heir and leader of the next generation of the Igbinedions that is already here. Present in fulfilment of Esama's philanthropy that one is not successful until he raises a successor. Talking about the Esama's story must include his Children and family and how well he had done raising them and preparing them for leadership. It is no surprise therefore how well they have turned out in his life time. His Son Lucky Igbinedion was a two time governor of a foremost state- Edo State. He was not just a governor but he was a leader of governors. He is foremost leader presently in the National affairs of Nigeria even through he prefers to be understated as part of his humble disposition. Another Son Charles Igbinedion was an Edo State commissioner and

the Chairman Chief executive of Ovia North East local Government Area that covers this very town where we are today celebrating the Esama as its headquarters. Hon. Omosede, an amazon amongst women is of towering political standing having been a creditable member of the National Assembly and a leader of high standing in the political sphere in Nigeria and Edo State. Natasha Osawaru a granddaughter of the Esama is one of the leaders in the Edo State House of Assembly. Another Son Bright Aiyamekhre Igbinedion, is a business man of international repute with wide ranging international interests. Of course amongst them are lawyers, doctors and others of other professions of high standing. A Synopsis of Esama must of necessity include what he has been able to do with his Children that qualifies him to be properly and correctly of the mission to raise the Children of others who will come seeking upliftment and learning at his Citadels.

In the course of his life, Esama lived in celebration of his culture. Most of his businesses signpost Benin to the world deploying the Benin sword State, the ada and eben or the Queen Idia mask as telling images of the Benin Culture and Civilization. It was no surprise to many that in 1974 at the relatively young age of forty, Oba Akenzua 2 of blessed memory bestowed upon him the very high title of Esama which is the 6th in rank after the **Iyase, Esogban, Eson, Osuma Iyoba in the Eghavbo n'ore palace group**. It was no mean achievement. Not one to just acquire the title, he proceeded to do what few people ever attempt by going

through the “Iyahien” rites. The Iyahien rights is a special rite that is a much onerous Chieftaincy process that deepens the recipients further into the mysteries, powers, spirituality, functions and prestige of being a Benin Chieftain. It also invests special privileges on the holder of a Chieftaincy title in the Benin realm including the right to wear a hat over the “Ikele” rounded beads. Since the Esama title was created in 1584 by Oba Akengbuda, (1578-1606 AD) after the treaty of Otun that consensually settled the Northern Benin border with the Southern Oyo border at Otun-Ekiti, thus preventing a fraternal war between Benin and Oyo. None has worn the glory of that title as it has been worn by Chief Sir Dr Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion

He also cherished the cultures of others and has been so honoured all over the world and his highly known philanthropy has drawn all sorts of high value titles and honours to him. As earlier stated in this speech, the Alafin of Oyo, Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III, Honored the esama with one of the highest titles in the Oyo realm in recognition of his remarkable philanthropy that has made him a global icon, which he compressed into his fond name as the “Esama of the world”

Yet for this same spirit of philanthropy, others have hailed him as the **IGBINEDION OF AFRICA**. He received titles from far flung places in Langtang in Plateau, Ibadan, Oyo State, Ondo, Osun and some from outside Nigeria. The Otumfuo of Asante also honoured him. The Zulu have also honored him. The

Romanian Republic appointed him a special envoy in Nigeria earning him the Majestic Address and appellation of ‘His Excellency’. It will take a special lecture to list all the titles, credits and honours that the Esama has gathered from all over the world. To attempt to list them here would be tantamount to an attempt to detain everybody here for the rest of the day. Yours truly will not on this special day detain your eminent selves with such an act. But here are some honours just to mention a few listed by Ferdinard Ekechukwu in his piece celebrating the Esama on his 85th Birthday

“He is a proud recipient of the key to the City of Holly Springs, U.S.A. and the Key to the City of Montego Bay, Jamaica. Early in 2012, he received along with four other eminent Nigerians, the Zik’s Prize for Leadership in Africa. Chief Igbinedion is an honorary Rotarian and a Five-Star Paul Harris Fellow. He has been honoured with Honorary Doctorate Degrees by not less than eight Nigerian Universities among which are; University of Benin, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Imo State University, Okigwe, University of Port-Harcourt, Rivers State, University of Calabar, Cross River State, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State and several other academic institutions and professional bodies”

The philanthropy of the Esama by him is expressed in many unmentioned ways to the needy. His Scholarships, his soup kitchens, his works and gifts to his Christian faith have also yielded the highest honors of the Church in Knighthood, special mentions and prayers. The Esama has gifted the Catholic Church even when he is no Catholic but a Baptist, a whole dioceses of St Gabriel Sapele Road Benin.

IGBINEDIONISM

Chief Sir, Dr. Gabriel Igbinedion's life has been lived by him in trends that disclose grace, compassion, faith in himself and in God; and a relentless belief in destiny. His trust in his destiny is rooted in the unshakable belief that forces outside of himself propel him forward at each turn of his life. His concern for his fellow man that makes him extend himself whenever needed, for someone else to be catered for as his brother's keeper, drawing on the precepts of love as preached by Christ to help and love one's neighbor, forms an essential part of his world view. Another essential of this philosophy is constant desire for unity in all spheres, Unity and harmony in the family and among classes and the vehicle of religion, rather than divide peoples should unite them. This is a direct exhortation to Nigeria and the larger African continent of today. Truly Chief Sir, Dr. Igbinedion's life has earned an "ism" that ought to be studied as a philosophy worthy of being imbibed by anyone that desires to acquire a positive and driven life. Thus the Esama has gifted

us all a new **ISM - IGBINEDIONISM** as a philosophy of life. Igbinedion-ism is of Metaphysical dimensions on Hegelian terms his Tabula Raza had his traits inscribed upon by the land, waters and air of his nativity Okada that engendered and breathed the spirits of his forebears from Azagbaghedi, Okundia his great great grandfather, Okunbor his grandfather and Aghariagbon his father; which progressively dialectically drawing on all his life experiences was further inscribed upon by Chief Sir, Dr. Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion into growing himself to becoming the phenomenon of the agency of hard work, wealth creation, care for others, spreading the message of unity, self-belief, and faith in God for the good of humanity and the service of God. Igbinedionism is also Heideggerian in perspective as the essence of his being is also deeply rooted in the grounds of Okada. Thus this metaphysical worldview translates in real terms to productive acts of hard work and an unquenchable and unlimited spirit for bringing things to becoming for self-improvement, wealth creation, self-love and love for others, self-belief and faith in God. This is one of the gifts in terms of conceptions and world view that this celebrant, a great man of Africa that has served us all who are inspired by his life, all of its 90 years.

ENDING

The Esama of Benin, Chief Sir, Dr. Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion, Son of Josiah Agharriagbon Igbinedion Son of Okunbo, Son of Okundia, Son of Okada and

among many other appellations, the Esama of Benin, you have lived your nonagenarian life of Ninety years in trimesters of thirty each. Your first thirty-1934 to 1964, you lived it under celestial auspices and auguries of your nativity. Within this trimester, with self-belief and an outsized determination to better yourself, you became a man that had readied himself for great big things.

In your second thirty years-1964 to 1994, you exploded yourself to the world as Exemption, the Esama of Benin, a Business mogul, a giant African, a true big man, a father to the fatherless, a husband to the widows, a man of deep faith and service to God and Man. It was a trimester of building an endearing legacy.

Now in your third thirty years of your nonagenarian life, you have consolidated yourself in all things positive, extended yourself in the service of God and humanity. You have become a real Icon for all the good that is possible in man. Indeed, you have in your third trimester gifted the world with **IGBINEDIONISM**, encompassing a philosophy of positivity, self-belief and self-improvement, wealth creation, self-love and love for others, and faith in God.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY SIR, Thanks for letting me have the honor of celebrating you in this little way. I am indeed honored. To everyone else here present, thank you for your attention.

**CHIEF Dr. Charles Uwensuyi-Edosomwan, SAN Ph.D, Hon. LL.D
(Benin) FCIArb (UK)
OBASUYI OF BENIN.**