



ANAMBRA STATE Traditional Rulers Council



Office of the Chairman

Government House
Awka.

Our Ref:.....

Your Ref:.....

Date:.....
12 January, 2024

Hon. Tony Collins Nwabunwanne,
Commissioner for Local Government, Chieftaincy and Community Affairs,
Government of Anambra State,
Awka.

Dear Hon. Commissioner,

Notification for the Suspension of HRH Igwe Damian O. Ezeani, The Traditional Ruler of Neni

I am writing in response to your letter, Ref: MLGCCA/HC/2022/T/025/001/103, of the above caption to me dated 8th January, 2024. This response also provides a fuller context of other events relating to the suspension of H.R.H Igwe Damian O Ezeani, the traditional ruler of Neni. Your letter was hand-delivered to me at Onitsha at 6:55pm on Tuesday, 09 January, 2024. I was curious about the timing of the delivery considering that I had presided at the meeting of the Anambra State Traditional Rulers Council (ASTRC) at Awka earlier in the day, where such a letter would normally be presented to me by the ASTRC secretariat. The letter was a justification for the Government's suspension of Igwe Damian Ezeani as traditional ruler of his domain.

2. My suspicion that your letter was an after-thought was buttressed by the fact that your letter of suspension to Igwe Damian Ezeani of the same date, 8th January 2024, was already trending virally on social media for well over twenty-four hours prior to my receipt of your letter. I was embarrassingly inundated with phone calls and messages from traditional rulers and other persons seeking clarification from me as chairman of ASTRC regarding a situation to which I was not privy. Your letter to Igwe Damian Ezeani was copied to the Commissioner of Police and Director of DSS, Anambra State, but not to the chairman of the ASTRC. ***This act, amongst many others, was seen by the traditional rulers of Anambra State as a measure of the worth of the traditional institution to the present administration.***

3. You were right in your letter that the Code of Conduct for traditional rulers in Anambra State is the creation of the traditional institution. It became effective as a self-regulating code following the 2013 Annual Seminar of Anambra State Traditional Rulers where it was presented and adopted. It was subsequently published in the book, *"The Traditional Institution in a Modern Society" being the proceedings of the Anambra State Traditional Rulers Seminars held in 2011, 2013, and 2014*. The Code of Conduct was also re-issued in March 2020 under my signature as Chairman of the ASTRC. The ASTRC worked harmoniously on most occasions with previous administrations in the application of the Code, such that the ASTRC monitored compliance and recommended sanctions for non-compliance to the Government for necessary action. ***Now, it would appear that the present administration has completely appropriated the entire application of the Code of Conduct without the involvement of or reference to the ASTRC.***

4. You may recall, Hon. Commissioner, that on 04 October 2023, Mr. Governor had called to tell me in a late-night telephone conversation that the Government was considering establishing rules to govern the actions of traditional rulers. The conversation was sequel to a chieftaincy conferment ceremony by a traditional ruler that was deemed inappropriate by the Government. I promptly drew the attention of Mr. Governor to the subsisting Code of Conduct which had served previous administrations and the traditional institution well and suggested that the present administration may need to review the Code for its current efficacy. I thereafter called the same night to brief you on my conversation with Mr. Governor. I also directed that copies of the above-mentioned book be made available to you and Mr. Governor the following morning before a meeting where the matter will be discussed. Having since not received any feedback from you or Mr. Governor, I assumed that the same order with previous administrations would continue to prevail.

5. In my said conversation with Mr. Governor on 04 October, 2023, I had also reminded him of the WhatsApp message he forwarded to me on 09 November, 2022 in which graphic allegations were made against a traditional ruler of Anambra State. I further reminded Mr. Governor that he never responded to my prompt advise by WhatsApp on the options for dealing with the allegations expeditiously. I also re-sent our WhatsApp exchange on the matter to Mr. Governor, but still did not get any reaction.

6. On the events over the last eight days or so, you will also recall that you called me severally on Saturday, 06 January, 2024 between 15:34 and 22:31 hours without reaching me. At 08:06 hours on Sunday morning, I called you and explained the circumstances that made me unreachable on the previous day. In our long conversation, you said that you were seeking to bring to my attention a press release that you were under pressure to issue. This was in connection with traditional rulers conferring honorary chieftaincy titles in violation of the Code of Conduct for Traditional Rulers and the Government directives. You specifically mentioned two cases only, namely, Igwe Ojoto, who conferred an honorary chieftaincy title on Senator Ifeanyi Ubah on 30 December, 2023, and the self-acclaimed traditional ruler of Nawfia, who conferred honorary chieftaincy titles on forty (40) persons on 04 January, 2024. You further confirmed that the press release had been issued, which I later found to be on 04 January, 2024, that is, the day prior to your unsuccessful attempt to reach me. ***In the conversation, you categorically you did not mention, in any regard whatsoever, Igwe Neni who celebrated his Ofala on 29 December, 2023***

7. In our above conversation, I made the following points:

A. Your desire to reach me on Saturday night seemed merely to justify a fait accompli, considering that you had already issued the press release two days earlier “*under pressure*”, as you said.

B. I noted that the self-acclaimed Igwe Nawfia, whose recognition was withheld by the Government due to pending matters in court, was consequently not considered a member of the State traditional institution. His activities should therefore not be associated with the State traditional institution in any manner.

C. I distinctly pointed out that picking on the above two cases (Ojoto and Nawfia) by your office was selective and appeared to be a deliberate favoritism towards other cases which you were well aware of.

D. I reminded you that there had not been any reaction from you or Mr. Governor to our conversations of 04 October 2023 on the Code of Conduct for Traditional Rulers. You apologized for the failure to revert.

8. Fast forward to the meeting of the ASTRC on 09 January, 2024. The normal practice of the ASTRC secretariat is to immediately send electronic copies of important correspondence to me as they are received in the course of the month. On the day of the monthly meeting, a folder is presented to me with all correspondence for my attention, including the last-minute arrivals that were not forwarded electronically.

9. The folder presented to me on 09 January, 2024 included a press release and a letter to the Chairman of the Anambra State Traditional Rulers Council. Both documents were under your signature and were the same in caption, *“Directives on Conferment of Chieftaincy Titles by Traditional Rulers”*, date of 5th October, 2023, content and reference number. The twin documents raised further curiosity in me as follows.

A. A document from your office dated 05 October, 2023 for the attention of ASTRC should normally have been presented at its October monthly meeting on 10 October, 2023. Why, therefore, did three monthly meetings elapse before the above documents were presented at the 09 January 2024 monthly meeting? ***Categorically, this was the first time that either document had come to the attention of myself or the ASTRC.***

B. There is an uncanny sequence of events whereby the two documents, presumably issued on 05 October 2023, the day following my late-night discussions with you and Mr. Governor on 04 October 2023, were not delivered until the ASTRC meeting of 09 January 2024, thus contradicting your apology to me on 07 January for lack of action since 04 October 2023. ***Is it, therefore, possible that both documents were after-thoughts which were created after the suspension of Igwe Neni on 08 January, 2024 and back-dated as a cover-up and rationale for the suspension?***

10. Back to your reference letter of 08 January, 2024 to me, you stated on the first paragraph that *“a minority of traditional rulers have demonstrated a penchant for trading chieftaincy titles for money thereby bringing the traditional institution to ridicule and disrepute”*. Further, in the second paragraph, you stated that *“A vast majority of traditional rulers conduct their exalted office with dignity and integrity and stick to the Code of Conduct. . . However, a tiny few still act recklessly”*. These statements were repeated in your letter of suspension to Igwe Neni as published on the social media. The effects of both letters are:

A. You publicly visited the sins of an unrecognized self-acclaimed traditional ruler on the entire State traditional institution, to which he does not belong.

B. Without providing evidence for your sweeping statement about trading chieftaincy titles for money you also, wittingly or not, thereby indicted the entire traditional institution of the State. Your press release to a global audience put the institution into disrepute when a direct circular letter to all traditional rulers as the parties of interest would have sufficed.

C. The tone and language of your letter were, by any measure, a public riot act and pontification to the same majority of traditional rulers that you extolled as

acting with dignity and integrity. The letter lacked respect and sensitivity in addressing the traditional rulers of Anambra State who, by any standard, are held in very high esteem in the comity of the traditional institutions of Nigeria and beyond.

D. Your letter also stated that *“Igwe Damian Ezeani, as traditional ruler of Neni, conferred such a phantom chieftaincy title on one Senator Ifeanyi Ubah in violation of the Code of Conduct and without clearance from the Ministry.”* The ASTRC cannot yet take a view on the violation of the Code of Conduct until it receives a report from the ad-hoc committee it set up to meet with Igwe Neni. ***Nevertheless, it is very manifestly presented above that no written directives from your Ministry on conferment of chieftaincy titles existed before 08 January 2024 when Igwe Neni was suspended.***

E. Your reference to a second-term Right Honorable Distinguished Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as *“one Senator Ifeanyi Ubah”* is most disrespectful, offensive, and unbecoming of one holding a political office as Commissioner. It is noteworthy that a person can only qualify to contest elections after scaling through the highest level of security checks at the federal level. Furthermore, Distinguished Senator Ubah holds a chieftaincy title of his hometown, Nnewi, conferred on him by his monarch and Grand Patron of the Anambra State Traditional Institution, His Majesty, Igwe Kenneth O. Orizu. He is also a well-known business investor in Anambra State and a generous philanthropist.

F. Thus, assuming that Igwe Neni did not strictly comply with Code of Conduct, would the foregoing factors not be sufficiently extenuating to warrant a far less sanction on him as was meted to some other *“tiny few”* that also failed to comply? The severity of suspension and threat of withdrawal of Certificate of Recognition suggests that there may be other issues with either Igwe Neni or Distinguished Senator Ubah which are being stealthily ventilated in this circumstance.

11. In conclusion, I would like to state very clearly that your handling of this matter of conferment of honorary chieftaincy titles is the apogee of the progressive dehumanization and dismantling of the traditional institution of Anambra State by the present administration. The institution comprises of some of the finest sons of Anambra State who achieved sterling academic heights and professional/vocational attainments. At the behest of their communities, they took up the role of traditional rulers as shining examples for selflessly giving back to their communities in particular, and society at large. They are the custodians of the culture and traditions of their people and lead on peace building, security, development issues, etc. Their livelihood does not depend on selling chieftaincy

titles or the N175,000 monthly stipend from the State Government, but on their own hard-earned modest personal resources. By their office, age, attainment and standing in society, they deserve far better respect and dignity, than being publicly bullied and unfairly shamed at every opportunity by people in the State Government. The Federal and other State Governments hold the traditional institutions in high esteem. What then has gone wrong in Anambra State?

12. The current impression to the general public is that the issue of honorary chieftaincy title is on the foremost front burner for the Ndi Anambra. On the contrary, the traditional rulers would state for the umpteenth time that their key community challenges include lack of basic amenities (electricity, potable water, healthcare, good access roads, etc), youth unemployment leading to other delinquencies, security and the inability of the communities to fund their contingents of the Anambra State Vigilante Group (AVG), massive urban renewal for our sprawling cities, respectable stipends from the 5% of the statutory allocation to the Local Government Councils as is applicable in other States of the Federation, membership and structure of the ASTRC, etc. To sum up:

- A. There were no formal or written directives from your Ministry on chieftaincy titles prior to the suspension of Igwe Neni by your letter of 08 January, 2024.
- B. The Government's suspension of Igwe Neni was selective and consciously ignored other recent cases of violation of the Code of Conduct which have been brought to your attention.
- C. Your claim that traditional rulers have "*demonstrated a penchant for trading chieftaincy titles for money*" was not supported by any evidence.
- D. Distinguished Senator Ifeanyi Ubah is not an unknown entity in Anambra State or Nigeria, including to the present administration. Thus, the suspension of Igwe Neni and threat to withdraw his Certificate of Recognition for apparently violating the Code of Conduct by giving him a chieftaincy title was extreme in comparison with other recent cases.
- E. The traditional institution of Anambra State feels strongly that the present administration is progressively dehumanizing and deprecating the institution against the trend in the rest of the country where the Federal and State Governments accord dignity and respect to the institution.
- F. The traditional institution is mindful of the awesomeness of executive power and authority in our democratic dispensation but prays fervently that such power and authority, which derive from God through the governed, should be exercised with due sensitivity and humaneness over the governed.

13. Dear Hon Commissioner, I thank you for your attention and express my whole-hearted willingness to engage further with you on all the points in this letter in the hope of restoring the dignity of the traditional institution of Anambra State. Please, also, bear in mind that Mr. Governor has made two promises that remain outstanding, namely, to meet with a small number of traditional rulers on issues of concern to the traditional institution, and to address all traditional rulers once more. Kindly make these two commitments happen soon, as well as at regular intervals.

14. Finally, since your communication to the traditional rulers of the State on this matter has mainly been through press releases and interviews, it would be fair and proper that this response is also made available to the media for the purpose of balance.

For and on behalf of the Anambra State traditional rulers,

Yours sincerely,



Nnaemeka A. Achebe, CFR, mni
Obi of Onitsha
Chairman, ASTRC