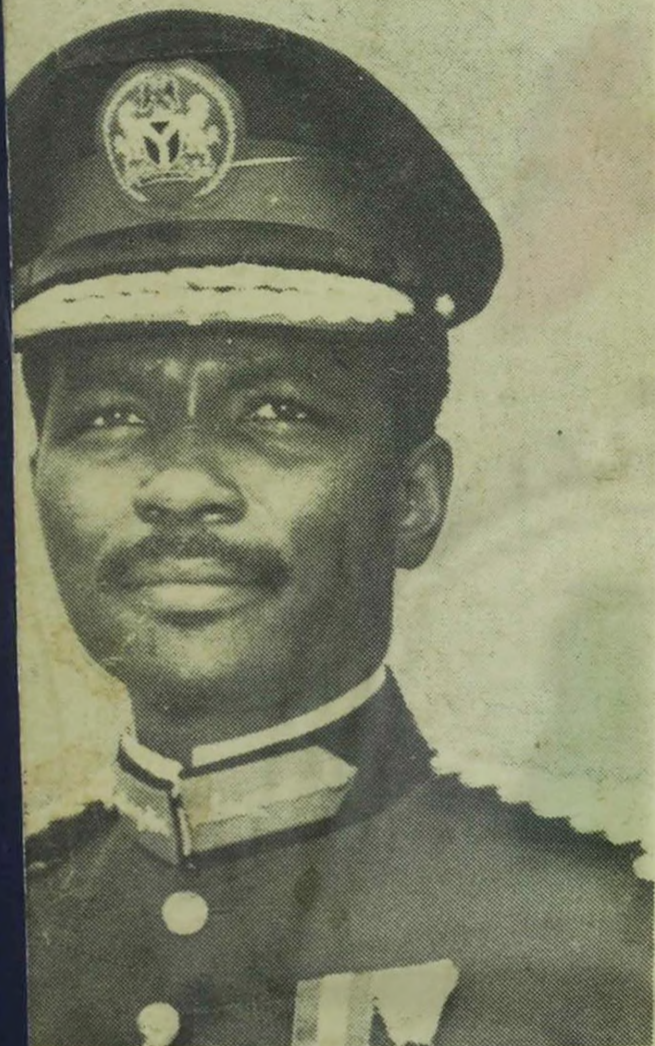


WINNING THE PEACE



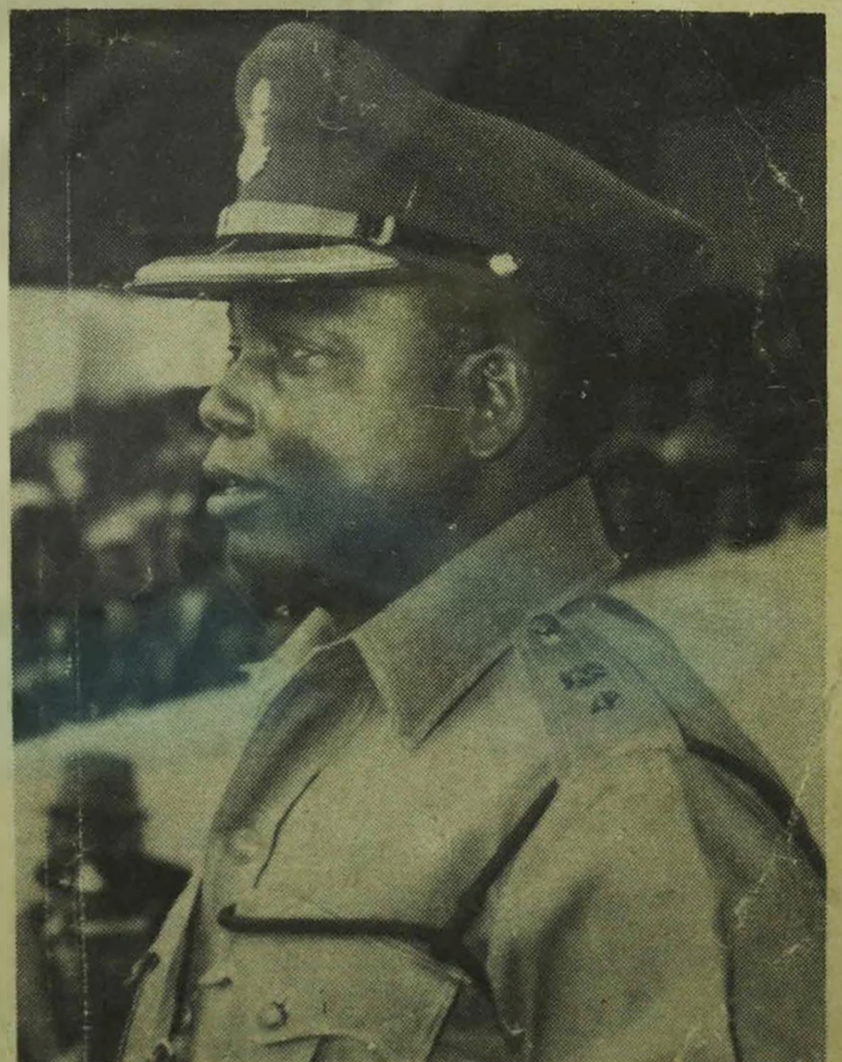
*General Yakubu Gowon
Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces*

ADDRESSED TO
CONSTITUTIONAL RULERS
PEOPLE OF
MIDWEST STATE

ABUJA CITY ON
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1970

AN ADDRESS By
COL. S. O. OGBEMUDIA


MILITARY GOVERNOR
MIDWEST STATE
NIGERIA



*Col. S. O. Ogbemudia
Military Governor, Midwest State*



WINNING THE PEACE



Being the full text of an address delivered by His Excellency, the Military Governor of Midwest State, Col. S. O. Ogbemudia to Traditional Rulers and People of the Midwest State at Benin City on Saturday, February 7, 1970, on the occasion of the launching of the Midwest Rehabilitation Fund.

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Your Royal Highnesses.

Distinguished Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure once again to welcome you all to this very important meeting. For those who did not get my card, I wish to say happy New Year to you. We are gathered here today in an atmosphere of peace — the rebellion having been crushed — to discuss what part we can and must play in the onerous problems of rehabilitation, re-settlement, reconciliation and reconstruction.

Before discussing the problems, I think that you would wish me to send our heartiest congratulations to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Head of the Federal Military Government, Major General Yakubu Gowon and the Armed Forces for a job well done in crushing the rebellion and restoring the pride of the black man.

As we pay tribute to those gallant Nigerians who laid down their lives so that we might live in peace, we must also dedicate ourselves to ensuring that the sacrifices of these gallant heroes of Nigeria shall not have been in vain.

To assess the immensity of the problem before us, it will be necessary to give a brief history of the series of events which led to the crisis that has just ended. In January, 1966, an event unprecedented in the history of this country took place. The Armed Forces took over the Government of the Federation and the unprecedented nature and lack of experience in dealing with such major event gave rise to a series of chain reactions which were exploited by Mr. Emeka Ojukwu. He exploited the charged situation created by the disturbances which took place in parts of the country from July to October, 1966, to whip up a terrible and sustained tribal animosity among the various ethnic groups in the country. To maintain this position, he asked all non-Ibo-speaking people who were resident in the former Eastern Region to leave and as a result the Midwest was faced with the problem of rehabilitating more than 15,000 displaced persons. Some of our people were unfortunately led to believe that language affinity was everything and so remained behind.

While Ojukwu was on the war-path, the rest of the country made all possible attempts in which the Midwest

played a vital role to find a reasonable solution to the problem. Unfortunately, these attempts failed because Emeka-Ojukwu backed by his foreign supporters was bent on the dismemberment of this country. Ojukwu's uncompromising attitude and his intense personal desire to carve out an empire for himself was highlighted by his call for the secession of the former Eastern Nigeria from the rest of the Federation. The crisis which Ojukwu thus precipitated led not only to a severe crisis of confidence among the people of Nigeria, but finally led to an open conflict.

In the midst of this conflict, the Midwest was betrayed by a handful of Midwesterners who thought at the time that their salvation lay in supporting the rebellion. The occupation of the State by the secessionist troops lasted six agonizing weeks. When the State was eventually liberated by the Federal Troops, many of our people fled their posts and business locations for one reason or the other and were trapped behind the secessionist line. Since the end of the rebellion, many of them have come back home and have told incredible tales of discrimination against them by the very clique they thought loved them so much. Their experiences are of immense benefit to the Midwest as they now know that it is more profitable to work together in the interest of this State. The betrayal and attitude of these sons of ours at the time, which resulted in our suffering many human indignities and destruction in terms of human and material resources, will remain a blessing in disguise, for a virile State will emerge from the ruins. They have now seen the light. I know some of you will not agree but I want you to know that information available to me shows that they have learnt their lessons and in accordance with the Federal Government policy of reconciliation and re-integration, I want you to join me to welcome them with open arms. You did same in 1967 and you are invited to do so again. This is not the time to ask who is wrong or who is right but what is right for Nigeria in general and the Midwest in particular. I dream of a united State within a United Nigeria. I want you to join in the crusade to achieve this noble objective.

From the early days of the crisis until the end of the rebellion I am glad to recall the enviable role which the people of the Midwest played. Throughout the long period of crisis, the people of this State stood firmly behind the

Federal Military Government and our loyalty, steadfastness and determination never to bow to insolent might during the six weeks of rebel occupation of this State will remain a source of pride to our children. Our stand and unalloyed loyalty to the cause of One Nigeria was a source of inspiration to other Nigerians and contributed greatly to the liberation of our State by the gallant Federal troops.

After the liberation of the Midwest, we were quick to understand and showed no bitterness or recrimination towards those elements in our midst whose activities we suspected aided the rebellion as well as the invasion of our State. Rather, we harnessed all our energies towards the quick restoration of mutual understanding and confidence among all our people as well as to the repair of the damage done to our economy. For we know that it is through Unity we can achieve the desired goal. Today, we are happy that we did the right thing.

I want to remind you of the tribute which the Head of State Major-General Yakubu Gowon, once paid to you all when he said, "The Midwest has always been in the forefront in the struggle to keep Nigeria as one country. I have always insisted that if the Midwest people did not consistently advocate the principle of One Nigeria in the darkest days of 1966 there would be no Nigeria today."

I applaud the devotion of the overwhelming majority of Midwesterners to the cause of a united Nigeria, which is implicit in the tribute of the Head of State which I have just quoted. The circumstances of the period before and during the civil war were extremely trying, and I thank you all for so creditably conducting yourselves throughout.

Now that the rebellion has been crushed. I am sure our experiences in dealing with the problems of rehabilitation, reconciliation and reconstruction before the end of the war will once again be harnessed anew. Peace, we are told, has her victories no less renowned than war. Just as the war has now been won, so too must we win the peace. The task of winning the peace requires of each and everyone of us a spirit of dedication, tolerance, determination and hardwork.

The ethnic composition of our State provides ample opportunities for each and everyone of us to make positive contributions towards restoring the present course

of confidence engendered by the crisis. Since the end of hostilities, I know as a fact that a large number of Mid-westerners — Chiefs and people — have sent telegrams of congratulations to the Head of the Federal Military Government pledging their continued loyalty in the task of keeping Nigeria ONE. To be meaningful, this pledge and expression of loyalty must also be translated into practical and concrete terms. I am convinced and I am sure you all are, that the most effective way in which you and all of us can make concrete and positive contribution to the task of keeping Nigeria ONE is for all of us to be determined to play a role which will help the realisation of One Nigeria.

It is therefore my intention that the campaign and operations for winning the peace in this State shall be led by our natural rulers and chiefs in accordance with their traditional role as the nerve-centre of all activities in their respective areas. In this connection, the Chiefs will be required to tell their people to forget the bitterness of the past and work for a happier future for themselves, their children and for the Federation as a whole. It will also be necessary for the chiefs to summon a meeting of all their peoples in the various parts of their areas in order to make it clear to them that as a matter of national policy, there should be genuine reconciliation and mutual understanding among all Nigerians irrespective of their State of origin. In particular, stress should be laid on the fact that there should be no discrimination whatsoever against any person. Any attempt by anyone directly or indirectly to incite one person or group against any person or group will be regarded as sabotage.

In addition to this work of reconciliation, the chiefs will also be required to encourage their people to work on the land to produce more food, apart from cash crops, as one of the primary ways in which the work of rehabilitation and resettlement can be easily carried out. The Government will buy the surplus food if any.

The Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee which was set-up by this Government to deal with all matters relating to the effects of the crisis, on persons and property, has done an excellent work, in ensuring that the properties of those who fled are protected in the various towns. The Committee has discharged its onerous task very well in the face of difficulties, that I wish on behalf

of myself, the Government and people of the Midwest to pay this public tribute to them and to express Government's sincere appreciation to the Chairman and members of the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee for a job well done. I wish to point out that the creation of the Ministry of Community Development and Rehabilitation is to enable Government to cope with the additional problems of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and reconciliation, consequent on the end of the crisis. I sincerely hope and trust that the Committee will continue to work within the Ministry with the same devotion and sense of mission which has always characterised the work of the Committee.

I am also aware and I know as a fact, of the substantial assistance received in our work of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction from the National Rehabilitation Commission. Without the ready financial and material assistance and encouragement of the National Rehabilitation Commission, the efforts of the Midwest Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee would have been handicapped. I wish therefore, also, on this occasion and on your behalf to express our deep appreciation to the National Rehabilitation Commission and to hope fervently that the Commission will continue to participate actively in the work of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction in this State.

Although the Ministry of Community Development and Rehabilitation has responsibility for the overall co-ordination of all programmes for rehabilitation, resettlement, and reconstruction, it is my wish that small committees be set up at village, town, district and divisional levels to take responsibility for the work of rehabilitation, resettlement, reconciliation and reconstruction in their respective local areas. The achievement in this field will count when it comes to deciding the winning local council in the inter-local council competition.

It is my conviction that the intimate local knowledge of these small committees under the leadership of the natural rulers and chiefs will prove very useful in organising communal efforts to deal with the problems of rehabilitation, reconciliation, resettlement and reconstruction in the local areas. If these local groups are carefully organised and given effective leadership, they are bound to achieve success. I am sure that if we can forge a strong sense of belonging and oneness among the people at the

local village, town and district and committee levels, the healthy effects of this will quickly seep up to the State and national level.

To ensure that the organisation suggested is properly understood and implemented, I have decided that myself and my commissioners will undertake a tour of all the administrative divisions of the State. Each Commissioner will tour a division and any other I direct him to tour. He will be accompanied by members of the Advisory Committee set up in each Division. I myself, accompanied by the Advisory Committee, will tour some of the divisions.

The great task of rehabilitation, resettlement and reconstruction to which we have dedicated ourselves cannot be fully implemented without money. As you are all aware, the only sure source of revenue to Government and Local Councils is from taxation. The flat rate goes to the Council and not to the Government. I have recently examined in detail our flat-rate tax and found that it is not impossible to reduce it. But if this is done, it will mean subsidising the Local Councils affected and the Government will be forced to shelve all our reconstruction programme at a time when we are faced with additional and great problems of reconstruction and resettlement. In carrying out these tasks, we have pledged ourselves to leave no stone unturned and carry out these projects and as such, you will agree that our determination will be practically demonstrated if the present flat-rate tax remains. I am sure you will all wish to continue to pay your flat-rate tax cheerfully and promptly until we have completed our rehabilitation, resettlement and reconstruction programmes. If it is your desire that I should reduce the flat-rate tax and stop our school re-organisation programme, road construction, resealing of defaced roads, improvement of water supply, hospital expansion programme, etc., please tell me. I will order Dumez to stop Warri-Benin_Auchi-Okene roads, MCC to stop Ovu-Ughelli road, the Ministry of Works to stop further arrangement on Evreni_Kpakiama-Patani road; T. A. Oni to stop work in Benin City; stop other Contractors working in other areas; stop West Construction from continuing with Ibillo, Koko, Obiaruku, Akwukwu Maternity Hospitals, Nigerian Water Resources to stop work, for example in Ishan — already we have paid over £500,000 debt on water and road contractor-finance programme in this division — stop B e n d e l Cons-

truction Company from continuing with work in Abraka College of Education, Medical Stores and the two bridges near Agbede; sack all the farm crusaders and retrench thousands of workers and many other projects not mentioned here. Let me state here and now that those paying flat-rate tax are not the ones who want the flat-rate tax reduced but a handful of disgruntled elements who think that they can champion a worthless cause. I shall deal with them one by one and destroy the false image they are now building. This is not a threat but I sincerely hope that the gentleman agreement which has been in force since I took office will remain and no politics will be played before the ban is lifted.

This also goes for those who are holding themselves out as leaders of the people. Rather than helping with the more immediate problems of Rehabilitation, Reconciliation and Reconstruction, they are more interested in seeking appointments with me to discuss political associations, and the creation of more States, issues which wisdom and mature common-sense dictate ought to be left until the work of Rehabilitation, Reconciliation and Reconstruction has been completed. It is an irony of fate to find that many of the persons already engaged in this talking about and seeking political alliances are those who have been absent from the Midwest during the crisis and so are unable to understand and appreciate the determination and will of the people to undertake as the first priority the work of Rehabilitation, Reconciliation and Reconstruction so that this great country, Nigeria, can remain one.

I have outlined in this address what I consider should be our approach to the great task which faces us. This task is no less difficult than that of crushing the rebellion. It is certainly more difficult. In spite of this, I am sure that with all hands on deck, and bringing to these tasks our usual determination, drive, energy and sense of mission the task will become light and success will be achieved. From our past records and achievements, in achieving harmonious living of a large number of ethnic groups, Nigeria has gained great confidence in the people of the Midwest and I am sure we shall live up to expectation.

Your Royal Highnesses, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, you will recall that during the course of this

speech. I mentioned that the success of our efforts in tackling the great task before us will depend to a large extent on the size of the financial resources at our disposal. When in 1966, we were faced with the problem of dealing with the large influx of about 15,000 displaced Midwesterners, a rehabilitation fund was launched to which all Midwesterners, I am glad to say, happily contributed. The money realised from this source assisted very greatly the work of rehabilitation and resettlement of the very large percentage of displaced Midwesterners.

It is my pleasure, therefore, this afternoon to launch another rehabilitation fund for the purpose of the greater and more arduous task before us. In launching this fund I am making a personal donation of £100. Please do not say that the Governor donated £100 so I will donate less I urge every Midwesterner to contribute generously.

The Civil Commissioners have donated 15% of their salary while civil servants donated 5% of their salary for three months to rehabilitation fund now launched. Other workers, including the Nigerian Union of Teachers, Midwest Branch, who have been in the forefront of the struggle to keep Nigeria one, have also made tangible contributions. I am happy to announce that these contributions amount to about £60,000.

I wish to thank all of you for honouring my invitation and coming to this meeting. I trust you will as soon as you return to your various areas put into practice the various methods of implementing the goal we have set ourselves. I also want you to relate your experience here today to your people at home so that they know that the foundation of Unity which all of us have the honour of re-inforcing is strong and can resist any force.

I congratulate you all on the successful end of the war and pray that God grant us wisdom to do the right thing in this hour of reconstruction.

Thanks.



