

**Speech by the Governor of Eastern  
Nigeria to the New (Fourth) Eastern  
House of Assembly 1957**



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# Speech

by

*His Excellency the Governor of  
the Eastern Region of Nigeria*

*Sir Robert de S. Stapledon, K.C.M.G., C.B.E.*

to the

*New (Fourth) Eastern House of Assembly  
on Friday 22 March 1957*

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His Excellency the Governor

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NEW (FOURTH) EASTERN HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY



**SPEECH by His Excellency the Governor of the Eastern Region of Nigeria,  
Sir Robert de S. Stapledon, K.C.M.G., C.B.E., to the New (Fourth)  
Eastern House of Assembly on Friday, 22nd March, 1957.**

MR SPEAKER AND HONOURABLE MEMBERS,

The occasion is perhaps one of unusual parliamentary significance. A General Election was held seven days ago, with the result that the former Government has been returned to power. Within the past two days there has taken place the appointment of the Premier and of Executive Council, the appointment of yourself, Mr Speaker, and the swearing-in of all Honourable Members.

The occasion is also of personal significance to those of you who are in this Honourable House for the first time; likewise for myself who address it for the first time.

The first duty of my Government will be to place before the House the budget for the coming financial year.

In the original approved budget of three years ago revenue and expenditure stood at just over £5 million each with a surplus of £100,000. Three years later, in the draft estimates now before the House, the corresponding figures are £14 million and £300,000. Over the last three years the revenue has thus increased nearly three-fold. Some of this increase in revenue has been due to improvements in the yield of those sources of revenue controlled by the Federal Government and subject to statutory allocation. But much of it has been due to the deliberate policy of my Government of developing existing and opening up new sources of revenue within the field of the Regional Government's authority. The revenue from motor licensing has been increased. New sources of revenue have been found in the produce purchase tax, the cattle tax, the purchase tax and, most important, the income tax. Thus the increase in the scope and cost of the social services provided by my Government has been matched by the development of new and appropriate sources of revenue, under legislation so framed that the additional charges fall on those who are best placed to bear them.

The Budget has therefore been based on a firm foundation of previous financial development. Nevertheless, I have no doubt that, as you address your minds to the detailed study of this Budget, you will come ever more clearly to comprehend the problems of apportioning the finance available amongst the many and varied demands which are piled upon it by the aspirations of those you represent. I trust that as your comprehension of these problems grows so will grow too your determination to cooperate with my Government in their solution. In particular, I invoke your collaboration in one important and fundamental respect. It has been the aim of my Ministers to ensure that, taking into account also the benefit to the Region of Federal services, a proper balance is struck between on the one hand expenditure on social services and amenities, and on the other hand expenditure on those economic services from which an early return in increased productivity and consequently in indirect revenue can be expected. If such a balance is not maintained then—and this is equally true of any country—there must come sooner rather than later the day when the overgrowth of social services must be cut back or taxation increased to provide for its cost.

This is not the occasion for a detailed account of all the varied activities of my Government, but within the responsibility of each Ministry there are important matters to which I will draw Honourable Members' attention.

In the field of primary production, which is the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture, agriculture remains the mainstay of the Region's economy.

The production of palm produce has been well maintained despite a slight fall in producer prices designed to bring them more into line with world markets and to conserve the reserves of the Eastern Regional Marketing Board. The Department of Agriculture is assisting farmers to plant improved seed bred at the West African Institute for Oil Palm Research. In the year 1955-56 70,000 seedlings were distributed to farmers, in 1956-57 about 150,000, and over 300,000 have been produced for the 1957 planting season.

To diversify the economy of the Region more emphasis has been placed on the production of lesser export crops such as benniseed, soya beans and cocoa. Production of cocoa in the last three seasons has increased from under a thousand tons to over 1,500 tons and planting is estimated to have extended from 23,000 acres in 1954 to 34,000 acres in 1956. Three thousand pods of the new high yielding Amazon types of cocoa are being imported annually by air from Ghana for the raising of seedlings for sale to farmers. Fifty acres of this material has been planted by the Department of Agriculture for the Region's future seed supply.

The problem of increasing the output of foodstuffs, including food and vegetables, is receiving constant attention. While the use of fertilisers is low compared with needs it is being adopted in some areas and investigations now proceeding may result in better and cheaper fertilisers.

The inland swamp rice industry which in 1954 produced a peak of 30,000 tons of paddy was adversely affected by the weather in 1956, but is expected to recover.

In Calabar and Brass further areas have been cleared of mangrove under Colonial Development and Welfare Schemes and satisfactory crops grown. For the first time heavy machinery has been successfully used in clearing mangrove.

Over 10,000 packets of vegetable seeds have been distributed by the Market Garden at Enugu.

Efforts to control with chemicals the serious pest of yam beetle in Onitsha and Ogoni are promising success.

To improve services to farmers in the Niger Delta and Owerri areas new stations are being established at Oloibiri and Nekede with Colonial Development and Welfare Funds.

A small soil conservation service, part of the new Colonial Development and Welfare scheme, has been started in the Onitsha and Owerri Provinces.

The need for efficient research organisation in backing up extension work has not been overlooked. Colonial Development and Welfare funds are being invested in improving laboratory and other facilities at Umudike Farm, Umuahia. Two specialist officers working there are chiefly engaged in fulfilling the minimum requirements of the Region for the introduction and breeding of plants.

On the training side, the new School of Agriculture at Umudike, which was built with Colonial Development and Welfare funds, is essentially a school for teaching Departmental officers and its first Principal is a Nigerian. An approach to satisfy the need of farmers in the field has been made by the opening of a practical residential farm at Achi. As an extension of this concept a scheme for sending teaching teams to the villages shows much promise of success.

Thanks to the foresight of those who designed the early scholarship schemes, the senior staff of the Department of Agriculture is now at full strength. Within the cadre of thirty-one senior officers twenty-two, or seventy per cent, are Nigerians. No expatriate officers have been recruited since 1954. The junior grades are also full.



In the sphere of animal husbandry the Ezambo veterinary investigation centre has already demonstrated that in that area it is possible to maintain one cow on three and a half acres and it may be that further experiments will further reduce this figure. The Veterinary Department is now dealing with field inoculations at the rate of some 30,000 a month and in the coming year will make a start on the development plan for the Department as contained in Sessional Paper No. 4.

While maintaining its work of regeneration and rehabilitation, the Forestry Department has played an active part in initiating the organised economic exploitation of the reserves. Agreements have been entered into with three timber firms and there are signs of increasing commercial interest in the potentialities of the Region's hitherto unexploited forests.

The Fisheries Department continues to be handicapped by shortage of senior staff. On the coast the introduction of a Ghana-type canoe gives promise of success and plans for the development of sea fishing on a larger scale have been formulated. In the hinterland there has been an increase in fish-ponds and an extensive fish farm has now been established at Umunna in the Okigwi Division.

This Ministry, which also includes within its portfolio the Departments of Land and Survey, has paid increasing attention to the development of Crown land for commercial, industrial and residential use. Important developments have already taken place in Abakaliki, Orlu and Ikot Ekpene. Already the Department's revenue has increased since 1954 from £51,000 to an estimated £75,000.

The Survey Department, notwithstanding recruitment difficulties, has maintained its output.

The fields of trade and secondary industry, formerly the separate responsibilities of the Ministries of Trade and Industries, have now been merged under one Minister of Commerce with responsibility for industrial development, trade, co-operative societies and produce inspection.

Efforts continue to be made to recruit experienced officers for the Department of Industrial Development, and meanwhile the available staff is engaged on a survey of the Region's industrial potentialities. This survey is revealing which finished products now imported might economically be manufactured in the Region and plans are on foot for the establishment of a sheet metal factory, a plastic factory, a nut and bolt factory and a packaging materials factory.

Important investigations are continuing into the Region's iron ore and lignite deposits, and its ascertained sources of natural gas.

I need hardly remind the House of the long continued and extensive petrological exploration which is being carried on by the Shell-BP Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited from its base at Owerri.

The Aba textile centre can no longer meet the demands of its market and modern partly mechanised equipment has been ordered.

A new pottery factory is under construction at Enugu where automatic and mechanical methods will be installed.

The possibility of glass manufacture is being investigated.

The Department of Trade is concerned only with internal trade and with the education of traders in the advantages of forming associations and limited liability companies. There are already indigenous registered companies in the Region.

The number of registered co-operative societies has risen from 788 to over 1,000. The regional Co-operative Bank of Eastern Nigeria Limited has deposits of over £40,000 and the Eastern Nigeria Co-operative Exporters are licensed buying agents for cocoa and palm produce. Plans are under consideration for setting up a regional Co-operative Staff Training School and expanding the field staff of the Co-operative Department.

The primary function of the Produce Inspection Department is to protect the producers and enhance the reputation of the Region's produce on the world market. The quality of the Region's principal commodity, palm oil, has been very remarkably improved. The percentage of special grade oil which was twenty-five per cent in 1952 and fifty per cent in 1954 has now risen to eighty per cent. It is vital that this good work should continue and the Region's production should rapidly become 100 per cent special grade, and that the adulteration of palm oil should be altogether eliminated. Legislation to the latter effect will shortly be introduced.

I will now draw attention to the heavy responsibilities and heavy expenditures of the Ministries of Education and Health.

You will observe that the bill for education, now approaching £6 million, is some 42 per cent of the total expenditure for the year. This reflects not only popular demand but my Government's faith in the expansion of the educational system as a main road to progressive prosperity, and as such a road along which the Region shall move as rapidly and as far as financial resources permit.

The introduction of universal primary education has resulted in the primary school population of 566,000 being more than doubled to 1,300,000. The number of schools has now risen to some 6,500, of which 5,000 are owned by Voluntary Agencies and 1,500 by Local Government Councils. It remains to consolidate the system and steadily to develop it so as to provide for the increasing number of children who will henceforth complete the full primary course.

In the past three years the number of secondary schools has increased from forty-five to sixty-nine and the total number of pupils from 8,200 to some 12,500.

Except for three divisions there is now at least one secondary school in each division and the stage has been reached where priority for assistance will be given to new schools in the less fortunate areas.

Teacher training has been extended rapidly and the number of teachers in training has risen since 1954 by some 65 per cent. The number of elementary and higher elementary teacher training centres has doubled to eighty-eight and a further thirty-four will be opened this year.

In the field of technical education work will shortly begin on a new secondary technical school and new wings for two existing technical schools with Colonial Development and Welfare Funds.

Up to the end of last year my Government had awarded 622 scholarships for university training and 423 for secondary schools. Already this year there have been awarded a further 112 post-secondary and 120 secondary scholarships.

The bill for the Region's health and medical services is now estimated at £2 million, or some 14 per cent of the total expenditure for the coming year. This reflects the policy of my Government that medical services should be co-ordinated and expanded with the co-operation of Local Government Bodies, local communities, Voluntary Agencies and private practitioners so as to bring medical facilities within the reach of all.

Towards this objective much has already been done. New Hospitals have been opened at Abak, Amaigbo, Arochuku, Awgu, Calabar, Enugu and Umuahia-Ibeku a programme for the provision of rural hospitals has been initiated. One of the most encouraging developments has been the willingness of the people to contribute to these

hospitals, of which no less than thirteen are now in course of construction. Government has assumed financial responsibility for the hospitals at Abak and Awgu, and to the two Joint Hospitals at Umuahia and Amaigbo, a third is now being added at Ikoma. A Government hospital has been completed at Yenagoa and a new maternity ward added to the hospital at Arochuku. Four tuberculosis annexes and a clinic have been completed. Lastly financial assistance has been given to four private practitioners to establish hospitals in rural areas and the first of these is nearing completion.

Side by side with rural hospital development the programme of rural health centres, with emphasis on preventive medicine, is making progress. Particularly successful has been the campaign against yaws. In the Nsukka Division, where more than half a million people have been examined, a network of fully equipped health centres has been established with the co-operation of the Local Government and assistance from the World Health Organisation and United Nations International Children's Educational Fund. This crippling disease has now been practically wiped out in that division. Mass treatment teams are now operating in five other Divisions and a further thirty-four health centres are to be established in the coming year.

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital at Umuahia has attained provisional recognition for the training of nurses and is being considerably extended. Plans are in hand for the building of a Regional Laboratory, the expansion of the Nurses Preliminary Training School at Aba and the replacement of hospitals at Opobo, Ikot Ekpene and Degema. The hospital at Enugu is to be remodelled.

Such good progress has been made with the leprosy scheme and in the treatment of leprosy generally that the old repressive measures of segregation are no longer necessary and in the course of this Session a bill for the repealing of the Leprosy Ordinance will be laid before you.

Two mobile units have recently been added to the School Medical Service and this service will be further extended in rural areas in co-operation with private practitioners.

The volume of recurrent grants to Voluntary Agencies for medical services, and training has steadily increased. To give effect to its declared policy that Voluntary Agency nurses should be paid at rates comparable to those in the service of Government, grants are now being paid to Voluntary Agencies which, for the eighteen months ending 31st March, 1957, amount to over £75,000.

Nigerianisation of the Medical Department has increased from 45 per cent in early 1954 to 72 per cent at the 1st February, 1957.

I will deal now with the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Local Government, which were formerly one, but which are now separate.

Within the portfolio of the Minister of Internal Affairs there were hitherto the Judiciary, the Legal Department, and the Printing Department, but as there are now in the Region five judicial divisions and twelve magisterial districts, a separate Ministry of Justice has just been created. With the step already taken whereby suits involving title to land may be brought directly before the High Court, and with the coming into force of the Customary Courts Law, with its provision for appeals to the Magistrates Courts, there is likely to be considerable increase in the work of both the High Court and the Magistrates Courts.

The Legal Department has been extended to include a Senior Crown Counsel and five Crown Counsel. There has been a considerable increase in drafting work, court cases and advisory work and Crown Counsel Chambers have been established in Aba, and are being established in Port Harcourt.

Prior to 1954 most of the governmental requirements of the Region for printing were met by the Government Press in Lagos. In the past three years the staff and the equipment of the Printing Department in Enugu have been considerably augmented and its Press now carries a heavy load of work.

In the all-important field of Local Government it is the declared aim of my Government to achieve a reliable and efficient system of Local Government based on the consent of the people and suited to their needs. By April, 1956, Local Government had been introduced throughout the Region with a total of seventeen County Councils, two Municipalities, eight Urban District Councils, fifteen all-purposes District Councils and sixty-six Rural District Councils.

In the coming financial year Local Government Bodies in the Eastern Region will be responsible for the disbursement of something like half the total revenue of the Government. The introduction of universal primary education necessarily absorbs a considerable proportion of the finance available and it follows that Local Government Councils will find it necessary to order their activities with strict regard for financial economy on the basis of consolidation rather than expansion of their commitments. In order to assist Local Government Bodies in the proper handling of Regional funds, proposals are under consideration for the establishment of a Local Government Audit Service.

Vital to the Region at this stage of its development are the Ministries of Transport and Works.

With railways, ports, inland waterways and trunk "A" roads the responsibility of the Federal Government, the Regional Ministry of Transport is able to concentrate its attention on trunk "B" and feeder roads, including ferries. In the supplementary Budget for 1954-55 the amount set aside for road improvement was £35,000. In the following year the sum voted was £250,000 and the next year this figure was raised to £1,300,000 of which nearly one million pounds is contributed from the Colonial Development and Welfare fund. In addition to all this money, a million is being devoted to a special programme of road tarring.

In all 555 miles of road are already under reconstruction or are about to be the subject of contracts to that end. The total mileage projected for reconstruction is just over 1,100 miles.

It is necessary to sound two warnings. First, costs are rising and it may not be possible to complete the projected mileage within the money now available. Second, reconstruction to higher standards brings in its train increased costs of maintenance. At present my Government maintains nearly 600 miles of road at a cost of about £120,000 per annum. Trebling the mileage and the great extension of tarred surface will more than quadruple the bill. It will also be beyond the capacities of the present staff. This trend will become apparent in 1958-59 at the latest.

My Government has already assumed complete financial responsibility for Local Government trunk "B" roads and claims to date have been paid in full.

In passing from the Ministry of Transport to the Ministry of Works, it is convenient to record that the Public Works Department, which serves both Ministries, has been extended by vigorous Nigerianisation and by the personal efforts of the Minister of Works and the Director of Public Works. At the present time only fifteen out of the fifty-four engineering posts are vacant, while of the eighty-three posts in the inspectorate all but sixteen are filled. In the last three years the number of Nigerian engineers has increased from three to eleven and of Nigerian inspectors from one to eighteen.

The Ministry of Works has responsibility for a heavy building programme, some of it on an agency basis for the Federal Government, and for programmes of urban and rural water development.

Since 1954 over £800,000 of Regional funds have been spent on buildings throughout the Region and further funds on the development of Crown land.

On urban water supplies an expenditure of over £700,000 is now visualised and may well have to be exceeded if pace is to be kept with the rapid development of the main urban centres. The current programme has been virtually completed in Onitsha and Enugu and work is well in hand at Aba and Calabar. The problems of Port Harcourt are formidable both financially and technically but the borehole wells for the new waterworks should be completed during the coming financial year and the plant and mains installed in 1958-59.

In respect of rural water supplies my Government is contributing over £400,000 to a £1½ million scheme of which the balance is provided from Colonial Development and Welfare funds. Progress with this scheme has been hampered by lack of staff, but work has begun in five divisions and the tempo will be increased as rapidly as possible.

I come last to the Ministry of Welfare which covers a wide field, touching at different points on all other Ministries.

The Community Development Centre at Awgu and Administrative Officers in the Divisions have continued to promote the vital work of community development. In the past three years thousands of new assets, from steel Bailey Bridges to small village halls have been added to the wealth of the Region, largely through unpaid voluntary labour, assisted by grants from Government for materials. It is a work of which the people can be rightly proud and which has attracted world interest. At Awgu, the Training Centre has not only continued its work of training leaders, but has also provided a service of technical advice and loans of engineering equipment.

In the field of social welfare the appointments of Youth Organiser and Sports Organiser have, in their separate spheres, produced valuable results. A sum of £43,000 has been spent on the construction of stadia and playing fields. The social welfare branch at Calabar continues to grow in importance and Government has under review the need to extend the probation service and to institute remand homes throughout the rest of the Region.

To meet the housing problem this Government has made an approach to the Colonial Development Corporation seeking their collaboration in establishing a building society to build housing estates in the big towns and to provide loans to enable persons with adequate security to build their own houses. My Government has also approved proposals for an improved scheme whereby Nigerian civil servants, both junior and senior, may obtain loans to build their own houses.

In conjunction with the Ministry of Local Government steps have been taken to require Local Government Councils to make compulsory the registration of births, marriages and deaths.

A Library Board to establish, equip, manage and maintain libraries in the Region has been set up. A Librarian has been appointed and the interest of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation has been attracted with the result that this international organisation has decided to conduct its public library pilot project in this Region.

During the last three years the minimum wage for Government daily paid labour has been increased and the great majority of daily paid workers have been appointed to the cadre of established workers of Government. Increases in wages have also taken place in privately owned industries.

There has also been built up machinery for joint consultation between Government and its employees. There are now three Whitley Councils catering for every class of

Government employee and similar machinery has been established for Local Governments and their employees. A Labour Advisory Committee, on which private employers and Trade Unions are equally represented has been set up to advise Government on all aspects of labour legislation.

Mr Speaker, honourable Members, I have completed my survey of the more important aspects of my Government's domestic programme. It remains for me to direct your attention to a matter of surpassing importance; surpassing because it affects not the future of this Region alone but that of all Nigeria. I refer to the Conference which is about to be held to reach agreement on the next steps to be taken in Nigeria's constitutional development. It will take place in London in the latter part of May and if necessary continue until the end of June.

Honourable Members will recall that when the subject of self-government for Nigeria was discussed in London, about four years ago, it was decided to postpone further consideration of it until the next Constitutional Conference. The following excerpt from the official report of that Conference explains the position :—

"28. This question had been placed on the agenda at the request of the three principal political leaders attending the Conference and the Conference devoted two plenary sessions to a lengthy discussion of this matter. The Secretary of State for the Colonies informed the Conference that Her Majesty's Government were not prepared to fix a definite date for self-government for Nigeria as a whole, the more so as the Northern delegation, representing over half the population of Nigeria, was unable to depart from its policy of self-government as soon as practicable. The Conference eventually accepted a declaration of policy that in 1956 Her Majesty's Government would grant to those Regions which desired it full self-government in respect of all matters within the competence of the Regional Governments, with the proviso that there should be safeguards to ensure that the Regional Governments did not act so as to impede or prejudice the exercise by the Federal Government of the functions assigned to it now, or as amended by agreement in the future, or in any way make the continuation of federation impossible."

My Ministers have considered this question of self-government. It is their hope that it may be clarified before the Conference begins. The opinion of my Ministers is that the offer of Her Majesty's Government to grant to those Regions which desire it full self-government in respect of matters within their regional competence should be accepted by this Government: and my Ministers propose to make their views known to Her Majesty's Government after taking account of the reaction of Honourable Members to this important matter. In thus expressing their inclination to accept the offer of self-government for the Eastern Region, my Ministers wish to emphasise that they likewise desire that the Federal Government of Nigeria should be granted self-government in respect of matters within its competence. And further that their desire is for the simultaneous grant of self-government to the Federal Government and to those Regional Governments which desire it for their Regions. The hope of my Ministers is that it might be possible for the Conference, after the necessary negotiations between the Nigerian delegations and Her Majesty's Government have taken place, to fix a definite date for the granting of independence to Nigeria as a fully fledged member of the Commonwealth.

Mr Speaker, honourable Members, with the setting of the stage for the London Conference contentious rivalry must cease. By contrast there must be engendered the calm deliberation of statesmanship, with its carefully weighed evaluation of what, in the long run rather than in the short, will achieve the greatest good of the greatest number. There are many thinking people in Nigeria, and out of it, who consider that the greatest good of all the people of Nigeria, and incidentally of the world at large in so far as it is affected, will be achieved by a Nigeria firmly united through federation. One has only to look at a map of Nigeria, with its modern network of road, rail and air communications superimposed upon its ancient network of waterways, to be convinced that if the criteria

be efficiency and rate of progress, be it in trade, in industry or in governmental activity, then those thinking people are right. But whether one looks at it in terms of economics, which by their nature ultimately prevail, or in terms of politics, which by their nature are ephemeral, one must recognise that in either case it is equally true to say that in unity lies strength. In this light it is no wonder that Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, while respecting local loyalties, desires the maintenance and the progressive evolution of the Federation as a federation. Is this not, as my Ministers believe, what all in the Eastern Region also want? If the answer is yes, what can we do to translate our desire into successful achievement? Can it be other than by giving the most careful regard to the circumstances and resultant points of view of those with whom we wish to collaborate, and in that light coming to objective decisions on what is practical? These are questions which I leave in your minds. If you answer them affirmatively you will give freedom to your leaders to eschew the impractical and to pursue the practical with determined goodwill.

Mr Speaker, honourable Members, I pray that Almighty God will guide you in all your deliberations.

