

ALO BU IKE (ENCOUNTER IS KEY)

Keynote Address of His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke, at the Town-Hall Meeting organized by J.D.P.C – CADEK with Legislators Representing the People of the Diocese on June 15, 2024 at St. Joseph Cathedral Underground Hall, Ekwulobia

PREAMBLE

I warmly welcome all of you to this event. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend in person because I travelled to attend a Conference on “Transparency and Accountability.” I regret my absence because I would have loved to hear the numerous suggestions that would be made and also to make mine in this encounter with the Distinguished Senator Ifeanyi Uba; the Honorable Members representing us at the House of Representatives – Hon. Engr. Dom Okafor and Hon. Chinwe Nnabuife and the Members of the State House of Assembly, Hon. Paul Obu, Hon. Emma Obinna Nwafor, Hon. Anayo Okpalaeke and Hon. Tony Muobike.

Alo bu Ike

I came about this theme while thinking about the relationship of the Townhall meeting and the conference I am attending. Both are meetings. I remember the joke that some people suffer from ‘*meetingitis*’ – a way of saying that they spend many hours at meetings. Online platforms have only changed the modality of such meetings. As we can see, meeting is part of life because *alo bu ike* – it is through and in meetings, through and in encounters, that ideas are generated and shared, either for good or for bad.

It is instructive that our forefathers did not say *amamihe bu ike*. Rather, they focused on *alo*. They privileged the process rather than the end product. *Amamihe* is the product of encounters, suggestions and sharing of ideas through discussions, reading, reflection, etc. But *alo* implies encounter and dialogue between *onye maobu ndi na-atu alo na onye maobu ndi a na-atunyere alo*. In the encounter, different ideas encounter, contest with and sharpen each other. Through this process, better ideas may emerge.

Good Governance through Encounter

This Townhall meeting is in the service of good governance. Politics is awfully important. As Church, we do not get involved in partisan politics but we have

huge roles to play regarding good governance. One way to do this is through the creation of the platform for the generation of ideas; and the refinement of prevalent political ideologies and practices in our locality.

One of the ideologies that must be reviewed is the tendency to blame our ancestors or evil spirits for the poverty, joblessness, and hopelessness in our community. This approach diverts attention away from the impact of politics in people's lives and welfare. A practice and value that must be encouraged is accountability. This is a key value which goes beyond the area of finance. Accountability in politics is about each and every political stakeholder playing his or her role in line with best practice. Defined this way, one sees that political accountability is not required only of political office holders but of all the people. It is a failure in accountability if the electorate allow their votes to be sold and bought. It is also the task of the electorate to demand good governance and purposeful representation from their elected leaders. The electorate must also avail their elected leaders of their best ideas and visions as well as support them with their prayers. Above all, it is the electorate's task and display of political accountability to ask tough questions to their elected officers but always with respect and with a focus on the common good. As Church in the Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia, we have provided this platform through the Justice, Development, Peace and Caritas Commission to encourage political accountability. We thank this commission and all who have helped in the organization of this event.

Commendations and Conclusion

In 1985, Sunny Okosun sang "Which Way Nigeria." In hindsight, those of us who knew the situation then, can only say that we were in paradise then and that we are now in purgatory or hell, depending on who you ask. Things are so hard. Many families can barely feed. Something needs to be done. As we thank our elected representatives for honouring our invitation, although we do not expect anything less, we challenge all to brainstorm and come up with the best ideas as well as to resolve to do all in one's power to make a positive mark. May the Lord bless all your efforts and grant you a fruitful deliberation.

✠ Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke
Bishop of Ekwulobia