

## **Emulating the Iroko of Ondo**

*Duro Meseko, The Nation*

It is not in my character to sing praises of people even when they barely deserve it. There must be something worth talking about in an individual or a government for me to put pen on paper. As a journalist turned politician, I have had cause over the years to agonize over my seeming inability to join the growing team of informed writers in the country- a personal shame.

However, with the quiet revolution going on in Ondo State a.k.a Sunshine State, led by the quintessential chief executive, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko popularly called Iroko by his people; I decided to bail out of my temporary despondency by putting pen on paper.

Governor Mimiko true to the meaning of his nickname "Iroko" has succeeded within an astonishingly short span of two years in turning Ondo state into a model of development worthy of emulation by most of our lazy and greedy governors spread across the landscape. The once sleepy state has now become a bubbly work centre where things are now working. The citizenry of the sunshine state are now basking in the euphoria of a new dawn. A new dawn being ably propelled by this God fearing and unassuming chief servant.

I have personally taken a keen interest in the giant strides of the administration of Governor Mimiko since he assumed office two years ago but none compared to the speed with which his government in synergy with a private health concern, Mecure Health, packaged, built and commissioned the Gani Fawehinmi Health Diagnostic centre in Ondo State in just nine months. When he promised to build the centre in memory of the late human rights activist last year, no one thought much of the promise since empty promises by State's chief executives have become a pastime. However, the centre which is reputed to be the first of its kind in Nigeria is now ready for use by not only citizens of the state but Nigerians as a whole .With a capacity to perform over 2300 investigations and also with the latest technologies in health management like Magnetic Resonance Imaging(MRI), Computerized Topographic Scan (CT Scan ), mamography and digital x-ray among others , the state of the art facility commissioned on February 22 would sure go into records as a major achievement of the Iroko administration.

The Gani Fawehinmi Diagnostic Centre is not the only novel step taken by Iroko especially in the health sector. The project is actually coming after the Mother and Child Hospital, another novel health initiative commissioned by Mimiko's government last year. What does this portend? Especially at this very critical time in our country's socio-political and economic evolution where essential sectors like education and health have been criminally neglected by successive administrations? Iroko's quiet revolution in the health sector should not be underplayed by any rational mind rather it should be emulated not only by his colleagues in other states but by the federal government. Imagine lives that could have been saved if all states of the federation had similar diagnostic centres. Imagine the enormous resources that would even accrue to the coffers of the various governments visionary enough to build such centres. Who does not know

the amount of foreign exchange being wasted by rich Nigerians in foreign hospitals with similar facilities.

The problem with us is lack of will and gross sense of insensitivity to the basic needs of the governed in this country. Iroko has been able to prove within a short time that being a governor is not all about amazing filthy lucre but about service to the people. He has proved it over and over again.

He has even complemented his ambitious health projects with the provision of 85 basic health centres across the state all in just two years! And to encourage the health workers to put in their best, Ondo State health workers were the first in the South West zone of the country to enjoy the new medical salary scale.

Iroko has not only revolutionized the health sector, he has touched every other sector in the state. Pensioners in the state are not owed a dime. Abiye project is on course, *kaddi igbeayo* project is a huge success, several roads and water projects dot the state .The Olympic size swimming pool project that has long been abandoned has been completed by Iroko and commissioned. Thousands of jobless youths in the state have now been gainfully employed. Thanks to the great Iroko.

Beyond physical achievements, one particular virtue in Iroko that others would do well to emulate is his godliness. Iroko puts God first in all his affairs. He never missed a church service nor the regular monthly Holy Ghost interdenominational service organized by his church The Redeemed Christian Church of God.

Iroko is an epitome of what a good leader should be, he has proved and personified beyond doubt what the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo stood for. We should all pray for Iroko even as he begins another two-year journey to the end of his first tenure. We need the likes of Iroko at the apex of leadership in this country. We should pray for more "Irokos" to emerge all over the states. I am excited!

- *Meseko, a journalist, was a member of the House of Representatives.*