

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF
URHOB0 BRIDGE UK Ltd, SHADRACK OKPAKO (Evang):
During the URHOB0 AWARENESS DAY 2011: 22 October 2011.**

Dear Honourable Dignitaries and Participants, you are all welcome.

Your Excellencies, Oloroguns, Chiefs, Presidents/Chairs and Representatives of various Unions, Clubs and Associations; Professors, Doctors, All Professionals; All invited Special Guests; All Youth Clubs and Associations; All Guests, Friends and Well wishers, Ladies and Gentlemen...

INTRODUCTION OF URHOB0 BRIDGE UK Ltd:

Urhobo Bridge was founded in 2007 by a group of Urhobos living here in London UK. It is a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee registered with the Companies House. Urhobo Bridge was formed in response to our perception of the problems and challenges hindering the advancement of the Urhobos generally here in the UK, back at home and worldwide. Our motto is: **'Funnel of ideas for a better Urhobo.'**

Going by our name, we aim to "Bridge" or link Urhobo persons and groups with each other to bring about unity and peaceful co-existence among the Urhobos as a people. We aim to "Bridge" or link the past with the present and future generations of Urhobos by way of visiting history to learn from what happened in the past to plan for now and in the future for the progress and development of Urhobo people and Urhoboland. Our approach to achieving togetherness is holistic. We are working in collaboration and co-operation with the elders, "Ekpako" the women folk "Eghweya", the elites "Ighene" and by extension of our activities to the younger generations "Ituemo". We aim to engage in relevant commercial activities as permitted by our Articles of Association. And we wish to work with families and young people on various issues including entrepreneurship and mentoring for the overall development of Urhobo people in the UK and in the Diaspora.

Our "Bridging" ideology is NOT that of a merger whereby each component loses its identity, but that of partnership or collaboration with one another; linking one to the other for good communication and interaction. Gap in communication leads to misunderstanding and schisms and we aim to bridge such gaps that cause schisms and chaos as much as possible. We believe that this is only possible with the support and cooperation of all stakeholders of Urhobo nation. All the Urhobo people right from the eldest man or woman to the youths and children need to get actively involved in the building of a formidable and successful Urhobo nation. Urhobo Bridge is therefore, just a catalyst to sensitise and encourage the people to get into action and not remain docile.

Our Perceived Ideas:

1. We perceived that **there are certain fundamental issues that hinder Urhobo's progress and development** despite all our struggles and aspirations for success. We perceived that the actualisation of these aspirations will only happen if we go down to the root cause of our problems and solve these problems from there up.
2. We perceived that Urhobo which is the fifth largest group (tribe) in Nigeria is not much known outside Nigeria and especially here in the UK. **For instance, whenever we introduce ourselves to a non-Nigerian that we are Urhobo from Nigeria, the first question they ask is, "are you Yoruba?"** And when you continue to emphasise that you are Urhobo, they still go on to ask, "are you Ibo?" It may be frustrating and embarrassing to continue to explain that you are an Urhobo. So there is need to let the public know about us and be aware of the existence of Urhobo as a People. To begin with, every Urhobo man, woman and child should be proud of being an Urhobo and show this at least, with the wearing of Urhobo wrapper and in speaking Urhobo language as much as possible.
3. In addition to this, we perceived that **the present generation of Urhobos, especially our children born here in the UK (or elsewhere outside Urhoboland) cannot speak the Urhobo language.** We see this as a challenge. We are deeply concerned about this and we are working in collaboration with our sister Unions towards the teaching of Urhobo to our younger generations.
4. **We need to work in collaboration with our non-Urhobo neighbours to maintain good relationship at all times.** That is, to work collaboratively with the Isokos, Ijaws, Itsekiris, Ibos, Ukuanis and Edos who are our surrounding neighbours in Delta State.
5. **Urhobos as a people are very versatile, resourceful, enterprising, hardworking and loving.** Yet one major problem hinders our emancipation and progress. This is the problem of disunity among us.

Every average Urhobo person talks about the importance of unity among one another. Unity is sought between two friends, within a family, among the people of a village or town, between communities, a state or even one nation and another. It is used in many Urhobo expressions, idioms and adages; like: "Eguṣṣṣ me yovwi", "Ekwumagbe", "Urhobo Ọvuoṣo", "Ohwohwo vwoma ch'ohwo irosu vwo vitaso", etc. Yet, what we see is quite the opposite - Disunity or "disunion". It is therefore, imperative for us to now look critically into "Disunity" first before we talk about Unity. Disunity occurs whenever there is any situation that brings about separation or parting or sunder between two people or discord among the people of a community or a nation. So we need to seriously address issues that cause disunity among Urhobos to enable us achieve the direly sought after "unity".

6. Fraternity or Nationality? We Urhobos as a people should agree to the form of co-existence that is best for us. With fraternity, we see every Urhobo person as a brother or sister. That in essence confirms the saying, “Urhobo Ọvuovo” or “Emọ ejobi emọ r’Igbinae”. But the ultimate goal should be that of nationality to see Urhobo people and Urhoboland developed into an enviable place. With nationality, we uphold “URHOB0” as our nation and keep its flag flying high always. Presently, UPU is that banner/flag/symbol of Urhobo nation that every Urhobo person should look up to for unity. Hitherto, people take nepotism to be fraternity. Nepotism cannot bring about any sustainable and meaningful development.

7. Challenges to our brothers/sisters in the UK: Due to the strong link between Nigeria and UK starting from the colonial era, our brothers and sisters always come to visit or study or live in the UK. One major challenge we face in these days of “credit crunch” and economic melt-down is that of access to finance. Gone are the days when people, especially non-residents, just walk into the bank to open a bank account or request for some overdraft facility and obtain same. It is now a herculean task for everybody and a greater uphill task for non-residents (non British) to obtain financial assistance. This issue was one of the major highlights of our discussion in our 2009 “Urhobo Awareness Day” event. That led Urhobo Bridge to form the Delta Credit Union UK which my colleague shall explain in more details shortly.

8. Preserving Urhobo Cultural Heritage: In our celebration of Urhobo Awareness Day 2011 today, we chose to touch on some of our rich cultural activities and festivals that are being neglected or inadequately presented these days. We intend to create revival, bring them up to date and evaluate their importance and relevance to our present day life. There are about four topics to present today. But for the shortage of time, permit me to talk briefly only on “Urhobo traditional Marriage”. This topic is very important to us today as it gives our younger generation the opportunity to know in more depth how marriage was conducted in Urhobo land and how that kept the sanctity of marriage between the married couples in their matrimonial home. The alarming rate of separation and divorce that we hear these days among Urhobos in the UK (and in the Diaspora) is worrying and it requires educating /re-educating the people for a solution to be proffered for the abatement of this ugly situation. We hear of stories of a wife locking out her husband or calling the police to arrest her husband and all sorts of things just because of some little misunderstanding. It was not like this with our traditional marriages in those days among our forefathers. I believe our eminent personalities present here today shall do justice to their individual presentations and our panellists shall elucidate each topic for better dialogue as we go on.

The Delta Credit Union UK: In this world, every problem or challenge has a solution. It requires some diligent searching by scrupulous people to achieve the solution.

As I mentioned earlier, we identified the problems or challenges of access to finance by our people here in the UK under the prevailing circumstances. Today, after diligent searching we are here to present or offer a solution to this problem.

In considering "Access to Finance" by our people, one could easily jump to conclusion that everybody in UK knows where to go to for finance – The High Street Banks and Finance Houses. Another obvious source is borrowing from friends and families. But you will agree with me that times are hard for everyone nowadays that attempting to borrow from a friend or family leads to more frustration than expected as that friend also has a catalogue of financial needs and not in a position to help. And obtaining financial help from the Banks these days especially for those with bad/or no credit history is a Herculean task. Unfortunately, many us, fall into this category these days.

However, there are many other avenues not generally open or known to the public. So here today, we shall focus on one of such avenues as our subject of presentation: The Delta Credit Union. My colleague shall do the presentation later on.

Generation "U" Youths' Project:

This is the youths' wing of Urhobo Bridge. Its aims and objectives are mainly to provide avenue for continuity and a holistic development among the Urhobo people. We achieve this through mentoring, entrepreneurship and apprenticeship. I urge all Urhobo youths living in the UK to join this project. Today as you may observe in the programme, an eminent Urhobo dignitary in the person of Pastor Adjarho David Obaro, the World Wrapper Man, is leading a fundraising session for this youths' project. The Urhobo youths need to be properly educated in Urhobo issues, cultures and affairs. They need a serene environment to do that. We are therefore organising a Youths Camp for them to benefit from such activity/experience. Please do donate generously for this project during that session.

The Way Forward

Going back to our point number 4, as a people, we realise that we shall achieve more and do better if we live peacefully and work in collaboration with our neighbours: The Isokos, Ijaws, Itsekiris, Edos, Ndokwas/Ukuanis, Ibos/Ika Ibos, and all the people around us in the Niger Delta. We have many links and affiliations to one another. We have long history of inter-marriages and living together. So working together in collaboration instead of enmity, will be of mutual benefits to all of us.

Thank you very much for listening/reading and I believe you will enjoy the celebration of Urhobo Awareness Day 2011.

Long Live Urhobo ! Long Live Urhobo Bridge !! God bless you all.

Shadrack Okpako.