



A LOYAL ADDRESS OF WELCOME

presented to

HIS EXCELLENCY

MAJOR-GEN YAKUBU GOWON

*Head of the Federal Military Government, Commander-in-Chief
of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*

AT A CIVIC RECEPTION

by

HIS EXCELLENCY MR UKPABI ASIKA

Administrator of the East Central State of Nigeria

2.00 P.M. MONDAY 25 JANUARY 1971

A LOYAL ADDRESS OF WELCOME

A Loyal Address of Welcome presented to His Excellency Major-General Yakubu Gowon, Head of the Federal Military Government, Commander-in-Chief of the Nigeria Armed Forces, on the occasion of a Civic Reception to mark the start of His Excellency's State Visit to the East Central State of Nigeria by His Excellency, the Administrator, Mr Ukpabi Asika, on behalf of the Government and People of East Central State, 25th January, 1971.

Your Excellency, The Inspector-General of Police and Honourable Commissioners, The G.O.C. 1 Infantry Division, Chiefs and Elders, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I rise on behalf of the entire people of the East Central State, on behalf of the Government of the East Central State, and on my own behalf, to welcome our most honoured guest, to pay a grateful tribute to a great man, His Excellency Major-General Yakubu Gowon, Head of the Federal Military Government, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and to present our most loyal address to our Head of State. This day should mark a watershed in the history of this nation. All will feel who are present, and all who are absent but who are interested in our proceedings of today will feel, that this is not an ordinary occasion. It is not an ordinary occasion which brings Your Excellency and we all present here together—you as our most welcome and most honoured guest, we as your most eager, delighted and joyful hosts. It is not an ordinary occasion because we all know all that have gone before. We are, Sir, even as observers, participants and

makers of history and there is an exhilaration in that realization. Not all of human history invite celebration, and some do more than others. But I am satisfied that there could hardly be in the history of man many occasions such as this when some actors on a limited stage, when a people in a particular nation, by their performance stand out for a moment as the conscience of mankind. Over the last four years we have acted out our history, like fish in a glass bowl, before an audience of the world, an audience which followed the play of our tragedy with more or less understanding or sympathy but which has now seen our tragedy transformed into a celebration. This occasion is, maybe, the consumation. Your Excellency, in greeting you on this occasion, we salute you simply but we believe significantly as a man among men, as a human being.

It is only a year since the war of national unity ended. Our State, Your Excellency, was the theatre of this war. It was the heartland of our tribulations. The East Central State was conceived in crises and the midwife was violence and it was only with the abatement of that violence that we were delivered almost one year ago today. It is not necessary to retell once more the long, anguished and oft-told tale about the many problems and crises which culminated in the fratricidal warfare. It is sufficient to note that our recent history was not wholly unexpected, because there was no way in which we as a people could avoid our inherited fate as a post-colonial society. It is, I believe, a truism of the contemporary African situation that as a result of various mutations all New States in Africa are undergoing rapid social changes, which changes in their very nature entail violence. It was therefore to be expected that Nigeria, by far the most populous, most heterogeneous and most complex of all African countries, was bound to experience a proportionate challenge of change and of the burden of pain and suffering and violence. It is important, I think, to insist on this basic fact since there is a tendency for social man, confronted with

the pressing urgency and immediacy of issues, to lose perspective and to lose a hold on reality. No doubt, in our case, as in any other human occurrence that is in a sense inevitable, it is always possible to find the villains of the piece, and maybe even to seek to attach responsibility to individuals and to groups for the pattern of events. Yet while I believe that the role and responsibility of individuals in history cannot be reduced to mere epiphenomena it is none the less true that if men make history they do so in a pre-determined way, in pre-determined circumstances and in a pre-determined world that is outside of them. It probably requires a certain innocence of mind to believe in the conspiracy theory of history, but it certainly requires a definite largeness of vision and of the heart and of the mind not to appear even in the tempest of events to believe in that theory and to be able to maintain a transcendent understanding even in the flux of things. This quality of vision and of understanding is something seldom found in statesmen and office holders. When found, it is wonderful to behold. It is the judgement of our people here, Your Excellency, that you have in bearing the burden and the glory of your office manifested this quality and that this is the source of the general amnesty which you proclaimed at the end of the war. An amnesty is an act of oblivion. It does not seek to judge, it does not accuse, it does not acquit; it ignores. And in ignoring it accepts that our aberrations no less than our virtues are also human. Your Excellency, it is not possible for me to state in so many words the sense of community and of communion generated between the people of this State and all other Nigerians by your brave and wise magnanimity in proclaiming the general amnesty. Nor is it possible for me to convey in words the love, affection, admiration and appreciation felt by all the people of this State for the man who authored our charter for being and thus granted to us a new lease of life. The end of the war was greeted with joy, hope and fear.

But the fear soon dissolved and yielded place to confidence, acceptance and trust, as a result of the benign policy of Your Excellency's Government as summarized by the concept and practice of general amnesty.

It is not possible, Your Excellency, to programme the end of a war. War is destruction and its processes vary in form, content and scope. Our war, a modern technological warfare in the circumstances of a technologically primitive maintenance economy and traditional society, has been truly devastating. But while it is not possible to programme the end of any war, it ought to be possible for man to determine his reactions to the situation created by the end of a war, and the civility of a Government and of a people can well be measured by such determinations. Your Excellency, the end of our war saw this State in immeasurably tragic and sorry circumstances. As a result of the curtain of hunger which Emeka Ojukwu had drawn over the people of this State they emerged from the war hungry, emaciated and starved. There was no commerce or industry. Markets and shops were empty and factories were broken and abandoned. The offices were gutted and looted and gaping. There was little agriculture and no husbandry. There were no schools, no literature, no culture. There were few hospitals but no drugs and too much disease. And there were no mails, no telephones, no trains, no light and no water. The bridges had been blown, the roads had been dug up. Few cars remained to ply the roads. And tragedy of tragedies: many, too many in the sectors we call our disaster areas were without homes. The homes had been destroyed and where once the children played, the women cooked and the men caroused, the bush rabbit, the wild lizard and the snake now presided. Such, Your Excellency, were the circumstances into which the great majority of our people emerged with the end of the war, penniless in a literal sense because overnight the illegal

currency introduced by Ojukwu had become a non-viable tender or medium of exchange. And they emerged to face a Government whose treasury had been totally emptied by the former secessionist regime.

Your Excellency, to have survived the above circumstances is tribute enough, but to have begun to flourish out of these circumstances is an achievement magnificent and not easily to be surpassed. It is to the credit of this country and indeed a vindication of its claims to unity and solidarity and greatness that today, only one year after, the Governments and peoples of this Federation, having rallied together under your inspirational leadership, have effected these changes and recorded this achievement. The story of the past twelve months is a story of the four Rs—of Relief, of Rehabilitation, of Reconciliation and of Reintegration. I will not dwell, Your Excellency, on this story. I will not expatiate on it. Our present circumstances measured against our past is a sufficient testimony. Our people remember with gratitude your personal efforts, your personal concern to ensure that my Government had enough money to begin and to continue: to grant advances, to pay salaries and to meet the bills of our many obligations. We remember with gratitude the major contribution of the Federal Government to relief in food and materials to the needy and to the State; the speedy restoration of law and order; the progressive reabsorption of public servants in the Federal Public Service and in Corporations; the payment of the £20 *ex-gratia* award placed in the hands of the ordinary citizens of this State; and the rapid transition from our state of civil war to the security of peace. We acknowledge also other assistance and fraternal gestures that have come to the people of this State in the form of payments of rents accrued on property, the return of abandoned property, the offer of jobs, of gifts to institutions and of personal succour by many State Governments and by millions

of ordinary citizens to their brothers in need. Our special gratitude in this regard goes to all the patriotic people of the Federation and especially to the Governments of Kano, North-Central, Kwara, Benue-Plateau, North-Eastern, North-Western, South-Eastern, the Mid-Western and other States. I should like also, as one who has seen the Head of State in the day, late into the evening, through the night and into the morning, to bear public witness. I have seen him at all these times struggling with the most awful complexities of our situation, the most demanding and irresolvable issues, and doing so because he cared, trying to understand what is right and trying to make other men see it; and above all, caring, working, praying and hoping for the people of this State and of this country which he has made greater already and which he will make greater still. If there have been any disappointments they are due not to General Gowon but rather to other extraneous factors and red tapism. Time and again I have heard the General say things of startling insight and take positions of great moral stature and great political courage, but these are sometimes delayed or frustrated by the factors mentioned above.

6 None the less, the great and generous assistance which we have received, complemented and supplemented by our own efforts, have brought us to our present hopeful and happier circumstances. We the people of this State accepted the challenges of our war-imposed circumstances and have applied ourselves with determination and enlightened awareness to the problems of the four Rs. And thus it is that today we are able to celebrate and we are able to reaffirm that the work of relief, the work of reconciliation and the work of reintegration have been largely accomplished. We have made and achieved great success in the work of rehabilitation. The most debilitating handicap of our inherited circumstances—the very low volume and velocity of currency in circulation within

this State—has been almost overcome. And thus it is that commercial transactions are flowing. However, further progress of the effort in rehabilitation is still handicapped by the continuing serious shortage of private and public investment capital. We have as a people and as a Government made strenuous efforts at savings in order to raise some of the capital needed for our reconstruction phase of the rehabilitation programme. What we have always needed, what we continue to need, is the injection of a large sum of money in capital investments towards the reconstruction and redevelopment of the State's infra-structure, and our industrial and agricultural productivity. It was for this reason, Your Excellency, that in the discussions and consultations that preceded it, my Government supported the policy which you graciously approved and proclaimed that a shortfall grant of about £10 million be made available to us in lieu of a currency exchange exercise. We still await the release of this money to us. We would urge, Your Excellency, that our share of this money be now released to us since the benefits which we hope to derive from the Four-Year Development Plan are largely predicated on the initial or simultaneous realization of the investment of the currency exchange shortfall grant of a little under £10 million. The truth, Your Excellency, is that the economy of this State has been very badly damaged and disorganized. Firstly as a result of the national upheavals in 1966 the economy suffered excessive strains and structural dislocations following the repatriation of well over one million people. Further dislocation and devastation have been promoted by the fact of civil war which fact was uniquely complicated by the mass movement of total populations hither and thither in the course of the war. With the end of the war, there has been some outward movement of persons, out of the State, fostered by the civilized and correct policies adopted by the State Governments of the Federation. But it is

obvious, however, in view of all that has gone before in our recent history, that such outward movement can never equal the pattern or the scale of migration which was established over two generations, before the upheavals in 1966. Thus we recognize that our programme in economic planning, which is for us largely reconstruction, is not a patch-work aiming at some improvement of the performance of the existing economic and social system, but rather it is a change in its very foundations, a re-orientation of the energies and activities of the society. For example, given the reality of considerably limited outward migration, given the reality that the great energies of the people of this State are concentrated in the field of commerce, and given the reality that over the last four years the people of the State have been permanently dislocated from the intercalary position which they had hitherto occupied as traders and middlemen in the great trading emporiums of Kano, Jos, Port Harcourt and Lagos, we recognize the necessity to build large-scale market facilities at Onitsha, Enugu and Aba in order to meet the new needs of our people. Your Excellency, we have made the necessary proposals for economic rehabilitation and reconstruction of our State in our plans for the expenditure of the promised short-fall grant for currency exchange and in our Four-Year Development Plan. It is our expectation that while the successful achievement of our goals in these plans would not totally eliminate the enormous handicaps of the war battered economy, it would to a great extent relieve the State of its great unemployment problems, reduce our present helpless dependence on the Federal Government and create the preconditions for a stable, contented and thriving society.

Your Excellency, the experience of war was for us in this State a total experience. It not merely destroyed our economy, it also damaged the social circumstances of our lives, and thus

has imposed on us an equal necessity not merely for economic planning but for social planning. Quite clearly, the two major areas in which such planning is possible and necessary are in the field of education and in the field of government and administration. We have therefore begun a veritable revolution in both spheres. I have promulgated a Public Education Edict which by taking over directly the responsibility for education within the State yields to the Government the opportunity to control standards, practices and orientation throughout the school system. The goal of our educational policy is a rational and functionally integrated system equipped and oriented towards the production of good Nigerian citizens, towards the realization of the true ideals of a united country; a system in which our young ones will be freed from the prejudices and exclusiveness of the parochial past and which will open to them new horizons, new vistas and new commitments. In the field of government we have developed a new system of divisional administration and local government. Our basic effort lies in giving full emphasis to the idea of "local" in the expression "local government", to utilize institutions which are of local growth and thus to infuse from the bottom into our entire structure of government the normative sanctions and the dynamism of the local-clan-town patriotisms which are so much an aspect of the lives of the people of this society. Your Excellency, our war of national unification has produced a revolution; the next step is good laws, good orders, good institutions, in order to give stability to that revolution.

I know that it is customary on an occasion such as this one when we are favoured by Your Excellency's presence to provide Your Excellency with our shopping list, more especially since our hopes for the fulfilment of any of our plans rest firmly on Your Excellency's Government. If I have departed from this custom it is not because we lack a shopping list but rather because our

problems are obvious. It is obvious, for example, that Enugu Airport ought long to have been opened, should have been opened and can be opened, even now, while the plan for its reconstruction completes its stroll through the endless labyrinth of the Ministry of Transport. It will be obvious that . . ., but there is no need. Your Excellency has come; you will see; and you will better understand. None the less, there is one problem not in the nature of the items for a shopping basket which I feel it is my duty to bring formally on this occasion to the notice of Your Excellency. Perhaps the most persistent issue which will be raised by our people throughout this visit is the question of the continuing situation in which Nigerians from this State have to endure limitations in their enjoyment of their rights as free citizens in some sections of the country. Your Excellency, a wise nation, when it has once made a revolution upon its own principles and for its own ends, rests there. We have made a revolution upon the principles of our Constitution. We should not, we cannot, we ought not, we must not, we will not go back on the principles of our Constitution. Although our Republic is a Federation of States, the rights which every citizen by birth or adoption has of freedom of movement, freedom of domicile, freedom of employment and the free and full enjoyment of his property are rights which are unlimited and national in scope and which we have consecrated with the blood of our youth. We believe, Your Excellency, that it is only the Federal Government, charged with the responsibility for upholding the Constitution, that can guarantee the enjoyment of these rights and we therefore find that it is to you we turn for such a guarantee in a practical manner. On our part, we assure Your Excellency and, through you, the nation and our good neighbours, that the people of this State seek nothing more than the enjoyment of their rights; that we accept the reality of the Twelve States of the Federation; that we welcome this reality; that we affirm the equality of all

Nigerians and the equal significance of all Nigerian tribes and ethnic groups; that we do not seek to dominate anyone since we would not accept domination from anyone. The war is over, the past is dead, let us look and work towards the future. Let us, Your Excellency if I may borrow the magnificent language of Cardinal Newman, let us turn from shadows of all kinds—shadows of fear or shadows of argument and disputation, or shadows created by our imaginations and tastes. Let us attempt together and in communion to advance and to sanctify human values. We cannot go wrong here. Whatever is right, whatever is wrong in this perplexing world, we must be right in doing justly, in living mercy, in dealing humbly with our neighbours, in denying our wills, in ruling our tongues, in softening and sweetening our tempers; in learning patience, charity, forgiveness of injuries and continuance in well-doing.

Finally, Your Excellency, permit me to address you not as the Head of State, not as the Head of the Federal Military Government but as the Commander-in-Chief of the Nigeria Armed Forces. The Nigerian war was manipulated so to provoke the conscience of the world because of what it was not and what it has not been—a war of conquest, of genocide, of the victors over the vanquished. I am certain, on the other hand, that the Nigerian war will long be cherished in history as the beginning of a new civility in which a war is fought by the rules of a unilateral and self-imposed code of conduct, by principles of charity and altruism; a war in which infinitely superior forces under your command willingly endured losses and sacrifices so as to ensure victory over division, over hate, rather than merely victory over rebellion. A year ago I bore testimony as the civilian among soldiers to the immense integrity, great courage, magnificent gallantry and wonderful compassion of the Nigeria Armed Forces in the process

of our family war. Today I would like to pay tribute to the magnificent spirit of conciliation and fraternity with which the officers and men of the Nigeria Armed Forces who are here in this State have welcomed their brothers and sisters, given succour to the millions and given practical and moral encouragement to our efforts in relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The Nigeria Armed Forces amongst us and with us have been excellent representatives of Your Excellency's Government, of your intentions and of your policies. It is therefore with great joy and satisfaction that I affirm today the total loyalty and fullest confidence of Nigerian citizens in the East Central State to your person and in your Government, a loyalty and confidence so richly deserved, so graciously evoked and which because tried and tested will stand the fullness of time. Yours has been the role of a man who pulled his country from the brinks of disintegration, a man who was firm when it was necessary so to be, but who also knew when force beyond the area of persuasion was evil, a man who through personal leadership and practice has won the hearts of all those who never believed he was their friend.

Onye isi anyi na ndi na eso ya, anyi kenelu unu. Obibia unu amaka. Nna nu. Dalu nu. Unu ga anosia naa n'udo. Ndi banyi, onye na nkea onye na nkea.