

His Excellency, Mr Ifeanyi Okowa

Executive Governor of Delta State

The Executive Governor's Office

Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria

Sir,

2016 Xmas Season: Ensuring Free Flow Of Traffic And Decongestion Of The Ailing Niger Bridge From Its Asaba End

(Intersociety, Onitsha Nigeria, 15th of December 2016)-The leadership of **International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law (Intersociety)**, write Your Excellency concerning the subject matter underlined above.

As Your Excellency is aware, the existing Onitsha Niger Bridge; a major boundary demarcation between Delta and Anambra States, is steadily aging, having clocked 51 years this 2016. The Bridge was built in 1965 with its civil war damages repaired in 70s. In industrial or construction technology, when a building or a structure is constructed, its next stage is "sick building syndrome"; requiring round-the-clock maintenance and management to avoid collapse or industrial havoc.

As Your Excellency may be aware, the Southeast and most parts of the South-south, including Your Excellency's Delta State, had since the inception of the administration of Retired Major Gen Muhammadu Buhari in late May 2015 been designated as "a police and militarized zone"; with thousands of Police, Army and Navy personnel flooded in all strategic locations in the two zones.

Though the authorities of the Nigerian Army, the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Navy claim to be providing security and protection of lives and properties, but evidence on the ground shows the contrary; mounting of roadblocks for collection of illicit and lucrative tolls from motorists and other road users; resulting in high traffic gridlock and other social hardships.

As if these were not enough, the Nigerian Army recently launched "Operation Python Dance" in the Southeast Zone and Delta State by extension, to further strangulate the areas and obstruct the smooth movement of the citizens particularly those coming back to their ancestral communities to mark the 2016 Xmas. These have led to near total blockage of the two entry points of the ailing Bridge at its Onitsha and Asaba feet; thereby putting the Bridge in great danger.

The thoughtless action of the Nigerian Army consequently led to fierce public outcries and advocacy voices from the Southeast Coalition of Human Rights Organizations coordinated by this Organization; forcing the Army to retreat and dismantle its military drums from the centres of the foot-road of the ailing Niger Bridge at its Onitsha end.

As Your Excellency is aware, the ailing Niger Bridge direly needs round-the-clock decongestion and very minimal vehicular weight and loads, from the Asaba Old Tollgate to the foot of the Bridge, and from the Bridge proper to its Onitsha foot terminating at Onitsha Upper Iweka. That is to say that there shall be steady free flow of traffic from the Asaba Old Tollgate to the Bridge itself, down to Onitsha Upper Iweka particularly this 2016 Xmas season.

In the course of our recent advocacy visit to the Asaba end of the ailing Bridge, covering Old Asaba Tollgate to the Asaba foot of the Bridge, we found that there are still road obstructions in about four locations, capable of creating artificial traffic jams and blockage of the Bridge from its Asaba end in this Xmas period.

For instance, there are personnel of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police Force at Asaba end of the Old Tollgate; stationed at the centres of the double lanes of the Road, causing obstructions and gridlock. At Oko Junction, there are personnel of the Regular or General Duty branch of the Nigeria Police Force; engaging in silly and flimsy checking of vehicular papers and wares with intents to extort; and at the foot of the Asaba end of the Niger Bridge, there is a military roadblock, causing a snail pace movement of vehicles, wares and other road users.

It is recalled Your Excellency that we had on 5th of December 2016, written the five Executive Governors of the Southeast Zone and the Deputy President of the Senate for the purpose of congregating and aggregating with a firm voice and position to get the Southeast Zone totally demilitarized as well as ensuring a hitch free Xmas season for the people of the Zone particularly those returning from outside the Zone and Delta State.

Consequently, we call on Your Excellency to mobilize the Delta State Joint Security and Road Emergency outfits for the purpose of decongesting the areas under reference. No unit of the referenced outfits particularly all units of the Delta State Police Command and the Delta State Sector Command of the FRSC should be allowed to mount roadblocks or station their personnel at the centres of the Onitsha- Asaba-Benin Expressway.

All the units of Your Excellency's Joint Security Taskforce should be made to join in decongesting the areas under mention and ensure free movement of vehicles and citizens in this Xmas. Your Excellency should, importantly, get the authorities of the Nigerian Army to get their personnel to retreat from the centre of the Asaba end of the foot of the ailing Niger Bridge. Any military drum mounted at the centre of the Road must also be removed. A tent, if not already exist, should be set up for them by the corner of the Road, from where they can watch over vehicular and human movements in this Xmas period.

Yours in the Service to Humanity,

Emeka Umeagbalasi, Board Chairman

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