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Accept Obi's nomination, GEJ appeals to S/East leaders

As more reactions trail his nomination

By **Richard Abu** and **Myke Uzendu**

Former President Dr Goodluck Jonathan has appealed to the leaders of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the South East zone to support the party's presidential candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar in his choice of Mr Peter Obi as his running mate, to ensure victory for PDP in next year's general elections.

The former President's appeal follows a statement issued on Saturday by leaders of the party in the zone stating that they were not properly consulted before Obi's nomination was made public.

In a statement addressed to party members which he personally signed, the

former President counselled against insisting on obtaining a zonal endorsement for a vice presidential nomination, adding that it is the prerogative of the Presidential candidate to select the candidate he believes will help him to achieve his vision and goals for the nation.

A statement issued by Mr Ikechukwu Eze, the former President's spokesman quoted

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• PDP Vice Presidential candidate nominee, Mr Peter Obi, 3rd right when he received former Minister of Aviation and PDP Chieftain, Chief Osita Chidoka, 4th right, in Abuja.

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Accept Obi's nomination, GEJ appeals to S/East leaders

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Dr Jonathan thus: "I therefore want to directly appeal to my brothers and sisters from the South East zone who are members of our party to reconsider their position and allow the presidential candidate of the PDP to select a candidate he thinks he can work with to be able to achieve the party's development goals.

Since Atiku has already nominated Mr. Peter Obi as his running mate, I am pleading with my party members from the zone to accept his choice."

Obi exemplifies fiscal discipline, good governance –*Sen Abaribe*

The Chairman of the South East Senate Caucus, Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe, has described former Governor of Anambra State, Peter Obi, as an embodiment of discipline and positive attributes in good governance.

Abaribe in a statement released in Abuja, hailed the choice of Obi as the Vice Presidential running mate to the Peoples Democratic Party presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, saying the party with this pick had ultimately rapped up their victory in the 2019 general elections.

He said: "Mr Obi's widely acknowledged good track record in infrastructural development and economic reforms as governor of Anambra State, remains an eloquent testimony of what service delivery and good governance is all about

"The ticket of the duo of former Vice President Atiku Abubakar and Mr Obi represents the finest choice available and one that reflects the high pitch push by Nigerians for total economic and political reforms.

"The present hopeless situation of fear, dispondency and hunger in the land, which is occasioned by a seemingly rudderless and clueless government requires experienced and steady hands in the saddle. Of course the Atiku/Obi ticket presents that radical choice capable of pulling the country out of her present horrendous predicament."

Abaribe, who congratulated Obi, also thanked Abubakar for being meticulous in the pick and for looking the way of one of the best from South East and Nigeria as a whole.

The lawmaker urged Nigerians to rally behind the PDP and Atiku/Obi in the march towards restoring Nigeria to the part of unity and progress again.

South easterners jubilate over Obi's nomination as Atiku's running mate

By **Our Reporter**

Some politicians in the South East of Nigeria have reacted to the choice of Mr Peter Obi as the running mate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar.

While some respondents view the choice as a move to consolidate the support base of the PDP in the zone, others see it as a hoax.

Mr Ukpai Ukairo, PDP Legal Adviser, South East Zone described the choice of Obi as perfect.

Ukairo said Obi would bring value and industry to the economy and governance of the country if the party win the election.

He said that Obi had one of the best track records of performance during his time as governor in Anambra.

The legal adviser said that the fundamentals of the PDP ticket were the tenure issue and the restructuring of the country which the candidates had subscribed to.

"It is better for us to leverage on this to restructure the country, rather than living in a Nigeria that is not working," Ukairo said.

Mr Raph Egbu, former information commissioner in Abia, said that as an experienced technocrat, Obi would bring quality leadership to bear in the governance of the country.

Egbu, who is a former chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC), said that the ticket would give the zone the needed sense of belonging in the affairs of the country.

"Atiku is an experienced politician and must have taken a look at the numbers and what would happen in the various zones during the election.

"President Muhammadu Buhari is not a new candidate and will be assessed by his performance. If Atiku can contest fairly in the North and the South West, then anything can happen," Egbu said.

Meanwhile, the Special Adviser to the President on Justice Reform Sector, Mrs Juliet Ibekaku-Nwagwu says the Atiku/Obi ticket is not a threat to Buhari in the zone and beyond.

Ibekaku-Nwagwu said that the current administration had performed well in all areas of the economy in spite of the challenges it faced.

She said that the South East remained a stronghold for the APC considering the unprecedented upgrade of infrastructure by the Buhari administration.

The presidential aide said that party faithful in the zone would mobilise effective support for the president come 2019.

Mr Osita Okechukwu, another chieftain of the APC, said that though the choice of Obi was a great one but the zone needed to know that 'all that glitters is not gold'.

Okechukwu, who is the Director General of Voice of Nigeria, said that the Atiku/Obi ticket was basically driven by a promise to restructure the country as well as to do one term in office.

He said that Nigerians needed not to fall to the restructuring sentiments, adding "even the zone that the PDP presidential candidate hails from is opposed to restructuring. So how will he achieve it?

"Even the commitment to serve for one term is not tenable and we still believe that the interest of the South East is better served in APC," he said.

Okechukwu urged electorates from the zone not to be carried away by the antics of the opposition, adding that South East would have a grip of the presidency in 2023 under the APC. (NAN)



● Rivers State Governor, Nyesom Ezenwo Wike (m), his wife, Justice Eberechi Suzzette Nyesom-Wike (3rd r), PDP National Chairman, Prince Uche Secondus (-2nd R), Deputy Governor Ipalibo Harry Banigo (3rd L), Former Rivers State Governor, Sir Celestine Omehia (2nd R), Speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly, Ikuinyi-Owaji Ibani (l) and Special Adviser on Religious Matters to the Rivers State Governor, Bishop Winston Iwo cutting the cake during the One Year Anniversary Thanksgiving Service for the Government House Chapel of Everlasting Grace in Port Harcourt, yesterday.

Atiku 2019: Your antics will be counter-productive S/East group tells Peter Obi's detractors

Following reports of alleged opposition to the emergence of former governor of Anambra State, Peter Obi as the running mate to Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, a pan-Igbo sociopolitical pressure group, the South East Revival Group (SERG) described the purported move by some leaders in the region as "selfish and counterproductive".

Condemning the reported move in strong terms, the group's national coordinator, Chief Willy Ezugwu noted "not one leader, who is on ground and in touch with the ordinary people in his or her domain in the South East region, can move against the choice of our own son."

The SERG said: "Incidentally, the south east region falls into the category of those who will never vote for the continuation of hunger and hatred for the people of Nigeria.

"Even if Alhaji Atiku Abubakar didn't pick his running mate from the south east, none of our true sons and daughters will vote to return the current federal government to power next year as the so-called leaders are trying to make the country believe.

"Since the inception of democracy in Nigeria after our independence 58 years ago, the Atiku Abubakar/Peter Obi combination is the best joint presidential ticket ever.

"The ticket is a combination of competence and intelligence, which has been presented to the Nigerian people, majority of whom are victims of hunger, job loss, herdsmen attacks, none respect of court rulings, lopsided military operations, families and friends of people who have been receiving unjust retirement in the last three and half years, and many others.

"All the arrowheads of the sinister opposition should know that their selfish antics will be counterproductive and may cause some of them a reelection.

"Nigerians are not ready to go back to the days of appointment of puppets into political offices as we are shocked that the opinion of one or two interested individuals have suddenly become the opinion of the entire leaders in the south east?

"We aware that a few selfish politicians are not comfortable with having these accomplished entrepreneurs and political leaders because they know that both Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi are rare Nigerians with independent minds. These are two outstanding Nigerians who became rich before being elected into political office.

"For us, it was expected that the Atiku/Obi unique and rare combination will shock a few following the statement their choice already made across the country.

"We, therefore, advise the so-called Igbo leaders to sort themselves out with whoever they have issues with and join the moving train to avoid shocking consequences at the ballot in 2019 as the south east region will decide their fate", the SERG warned.

CSO to Buhari: **Investigate Obono-Obla**

The Initiative for Integrity and Good Leadership (IIGL) has said that President Muhammadu Buhari should not ignore calls by Nigerians to him to set up an Investigative panel to look into allegations of certificate forgery against his special adviser on Prosecution Okoi Obono-Obla.

The group said it was worried by the deafening silence of the President on the matter despite calls from different stakeholders that Obla who is also the Chairman of Presidential Panel on Recovery of Government Property should resign his appointment.

It had warned about two weeks ago that it would begin a mass action in 30 days if Obono-Obla did not resign from Buhari's cabinet.

Speaking during a press briefing in Abuja on Sunday, National President of IIGL,

Muhammadu Aliyu, reiterated that the continuous presence of the Presidential aide in the cabinet would erode the integrity of the administration known for probity and war against corruption.

Obono-Obla has been indicted by a report of the House of Representatives for result forgery and misuse of public funds.

Aliyu said the Executive Order 6 with which the Presidency banned 50 high profile Nigerians from travelling abroad shows that the government is not relenting on its war against corruption.

He, however, said that Nigerians would only take such war serious when people like Obono-Obla who is within the cabinet is not shielded but investigated and sanctioned accordingly if found guilty.

"We urge President Muhammadu Buhari not to ignore calls by Nigerians to probe his special aide on prosecution.

His recent Executive Order 6 has shown that the President meant business with his war against corruption, but such war would be seen as to be one sided if Obono-Obla is still in the government with such indictment and not investigated and sanctioned if found guilty," Aliyu said.

On the threat of mass action issued by his group, he said the 30 days ultimatum is counting as the presidential aide has less than 15 days within which to toe the path of honour by tendering his resignation letter.

He commended former Minister of Finance, Kemi Adeosun, who according to him, bowed out after her certificate scandal.

"Yes, Adeosun deserves commendation because in this country, not many people can do what she did," he said.



Cross section of Students of JOSAD Heritage International with President, SHACO, an NGO, Amb Mark Akande (R) and Miss Opemipo Medemaku, an official of SHACO (L), at the seminar on International Day of Girl Child in Lagos, at the weekend. PHOTO: NAN

NIMASA ends waivers for oil firms, tasks IOCs on industry growth

From **Anthony Nwachukwu**, Lagos

Henceforth, no form of waivers under the Cabotage Act, particularly from oil firms' operations, will be entertained as it drags the growth of the Nigerian maritime sector and the economy at large, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) has said.

Addressing a meeting of Oil Producers Trade Sector (OPTS) in Lagos, NIMASA Director-General, Dr Dakuku Peterside, urged industry players to draw up a five-year strategic plan for the cessation of application for cabotage waiver and also pursue the utilisation of Nigeria-owned vessels for marine contracts.

Peterside, who disclosed that the agency was on the verge of ending such waivers, insisted: "Our laws forbid foreign vessels operating in our territorial waters save for compliance with the Cabotage Act.

"We also want to increase the number of Nigerians who participate in the marine aspect of your business and we are working closely with the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board (NCDMB) to have a joint categorisation of vessels operating under the Cabotage Act to ensure full implementation of the Act."

Similarly, he urged the international oil companies (IOCs) to support the agency's efforts at full implementation of the Act, as it would benefit investors in the sector the more because it would be more cost effective to engage Nigerians, according to a statement by the Head of Corporate Communications, Mr Isichei Osamgbi.

Commenting on the previous resolutions with OPTS, Peterside stressed the need for the trade section of the oil producers to fulfil their part of the agreement, assuring that NIMASA will not compromise the growth of the maritime sector, especially on enforcement of statutory regulations.

He further warned that Dr in its resolve to grow the industry, the agency would wield its regulatory powers where necessary, adding that the agency's mandate is strictly regulatory, though it prefers engaging key industry players for symbiotic benefits.

"We don't want to change our rules of engagement to a confrontational one because the mandate we have is that of the Nigerian people, to grow shipping for our economic benefits," he explained. "In this wise, we urge you to cooperate and collaborate with us where necessary so that we can have an all-inclusive maritime sector."

On his part, OPTS Executive Director, Bunmi Toyobo, said the trade section was ready to comply with all NIMASA directives, assuring that the group, which comprises all major industry players, would provide the required information for the agency to build and harmonise its data for better regulation of the sector.

Abia pipeline explosion: Death toll hits 150

From **Steve Oko**, Umuahia

The death toll in the pipeline explosion that occurred in two Abia communities early Friday morning has hit 150 according to local source.

Chairman, Traditional Rulers Council in Osisioma Local Government Area where the incident occurred, HRM Eze Ikechukwu Chiavoyinefu who announced the figure when the Senator representing Abia Central, Sen Theodore Orji visited the area for on the spot assessment described the incident as a national disaster.

He said the communities had been thrown into mourning as victims keep dying every day following severe burns they sustained.

"About 70 persons where packed in the health clinic near my palace on the first day it happened and all of them have now died. Up to 150 have so far died ", the monarch lamented.

Another monarch, HRH Eze Godswill Mgbarime of Umueze (one of the affected communities), said so many of his subjects had died as a result of injuries they sustained from the explosion.

He blamed security operatives who he alleged were busy collecting money from the villagers who were coming to scoop fuel from a ruptured pipeline instead of stopping them from gaining access to the scene.

"When the oil leakage occurred some security men arrived the place and instead of doing their job they were rather collecting N1000 from each person that came to scoop fuel there. We learnt that three of them also died when the fire started.

He thanked Sen Orji for his prompt visit and appealed to Government for urgent assistance.

Meanwhile the Divisional Police Officer in the area, Mr Obongoma Udosen said 19 corpses were recovered from one of the scenes and four in another scene.

He said some of the victims had been moved to the Abia State University Teaching Hospital Aba for medical attention.

In his narration, former member representing the constituency in the Abia State House of Assembly, Hon Ikechukwu Nwabeke, blamed the incident on negligence by the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

He said that the NNPC was duly informed by the locals that its pipelines that passed through the community were leaking yet it failed to take any action to fix it.

According to the former lawmaker, NNPC instead of repairing the leaky pipelines or pomp products through the ones that are sound, "may be erroneously pumped petrol through the faulty pipeline on that fateful day."

He debunked reports of possible vandalism saying it was a pure case of pipeline leakage.

"When the villagers discovered fuel was spilling from the leaky pipelines information was relayed to NNPC but they failed to take any action.

"Then early in the morning when a certain woman who fries 'akara' (bean cake) in the area woke to do her business but unknown to her that the whole area where her house was had been soaked with petrol

"The moment she struck match the whole building went up in flames. The fire spread to the entire neighbourhood defected by the leakage."

While the said woman died on the spot her husband reportedly died the next day at the hospital while the entire building was completely razed down.

Meanwhile the Deputy Chief Technical Officer of the Department of Petroleum Resources, DPR, Mr Sani Balas who was at the scene during the visit confirmed that there was nothing to suggest any act of vandalism.

Chairman of Vigilante group in Umuimo village of Njikoumunna community where the incident occurred said they recorded four deaths on the first day of the incident, while eight were hospitalised.

In his own account, Chairman of Osisioma LGA, Mr Benjamin Mgbeahuru expressed sadness over the refusal of NNPC to repair the leaky pipes despite receiving sufficient information about it before the explosion.

He said that he had personally gone to NNPC depot at Osisioma to notify them about the leakages but got no tangible explanations.

According to him NNPC also ignored three invitations by the Council for a meeting on how to tackle the challenge of constant pipeline leakages in the area which he regretted had affected water bore holes in the area.

He said NNPC should be held responsible for the disaster which he blamed on negligence of duty.

Responding, Senator Orji expressed grief over the incident which he said was a disaster of unimaginable magnitude.

The Senator who said he rushed home from Abuja as soon as he heard about the incident sent his condolences to families of the victims.

The former Governor expressed regret at the level of devastation recorded in the incident especially loss of human lives.

He, therefore, urged the Federal Government to quickly direct the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to send relief materials and medication to the affected communities.

The senator who donated cash to some of the victims currently receiving treatment in various hospitals in Aba and Osisioma called for immediate supply of medics to the area to avoid outbreak of diseases.