



## *Onitsha Traditional Council*

P.O.Box 1, Ime -Obi, Onitsha

Thursday, 18 June, 2020.

### **Proclamation On Traditional Festivals In Onicha Ado N'Idu As A Consequence Of the Corona Virus Pandemic (No. 3).**

The Obi-in-Council has been thinking ahead regarding our forthcoming annual festivals in the context of the Corona Virus (Covid-19) pandemic currently ravaging the world, including Nigeria and Anambra State. Official reports as at Monday, 15 June show that Onitsha North and South LGAs had 19 out of 65 infections and 4 out of 9 deaths in Anambra State, respectively.

Based on current projections, the virus is unlikely to be brought under control, and the country fully opened up, before the end August and into September. Even at that, the adverse consequences for the economic and social lives of the country, including a full-blown economic recession, Government's inability to meet obligations, business shut-downs, and job losses, etc, will most likely prevail well into the next year, and possibly beyond. These developments will naturally have serious impact on our own community life in Onitsha.

Thus, after due consideration, the Obi-in-Council has concluded that it would be prudent to mark our festivals this year at very modest levels in keeping with the general mood of the country. Therefore, the festivals will be devoid of their usual pomp and pageantry. The intent of the decision is that we as a community should modestly fulfill our annual traditional and ritual obligations whilst complying fully with the extant laws and regulations, particularly, the Covid-19 safety and hygiene protocols. These including regular hand wash, use of face masks, physical distancing, and avoiding crowds of more than thirty persons.

Consequently, I, Nnaemeka A. Achebe, CFR, mni, by virtue of the authority vested in me as the monarch of Onicha Ado N'Idu, hereby make this Proclamation regarding all our traditional festivals in the kingdom for the forthcoming cycle as follows:



1. The period ahead is very troubling for our community, as for the rest of the world. Therefore, relying on our ancient customs and traditions, we must realize that our present circumstances demand, not revelry or merry-making, but constant and solemn supplication through our ancestors and guardian spirits to Almighty God for His mercy and protection against the real danger that we face as individuals and a community.
2. All festivals should be observed with quiet dignity by Ndichie, Ndi Diokpa, Agbalanze, and every householder/head of family in strict compliance with Covid-19 protocols for safety and hygiene, and other laws and regulations of the State and country. Specifically, while this Proclamation is in force:
  - Other than marking the beginning and end of the solemn period of *Inyedo Ukwu na Nlo Eze Onicha*, no canon shots should be fired in the kingdom under any circumstance.
  - **The display of masquerades of any sort is strictly prohibited anywhere or under any circumstance within the kingdom.**
3. **Ajachi (29 June, 2020)** – is the first on our annual ceremonial cycle, and occurs at the peak of the famine (*ugani*) period when every householder/family head makes offerings and prayers to his guiding spirit to intercede with the Almighty God to grant him a bumper harvest in the months ahead.
  - Agbogidi will mark Ajachi with his Umunna only. Ndichie, Ndi Diokpa, Agbalanze, and all householders/family heads are enjoined to do the same, provided that the number attending does not exceed thirty.
4. **Umatu (16 August – 01 September, 2020)** - is the thanksgiving to God on the first harvest of the year, namely maize. It marks the end of *ugani* and the beginning of the season of plenty.
  - Only Ndichie, principal Diokpas, and one representative each of the constituent groups will be invited to *Umatu Eze Onicha*, provided that the number attending will not exceed thirty.



- Egwu Ota Eze will play only on the morning of *Umatu Eze Onicha* to herald the start of Umatu season; there will be no dancing. Egwu Ota Ndi Ichie Ume will not play during their Umatu observance.

5. **Owuwa Ji (29 September – 26 October 2020)** – is the celebration of the new yam harvest at the peak of bounteous harvest.

- There should be no canon shots or masquerade displays in any village or kindred unit.
- The initiation of adolescent boys into the masquerade society (*iba na mmuo*) will not hold, but *Orokwute* will arrange for this to take place at subsequent opportunities when the lockdown is fully lifted.
- The same persons invited for *Umatu Eze Onicha* will attend *Ikelebeji*.

6. **Ofala (11 October 2020)** – the following protocol will hold:

- Agbogidi will perform the full rites of *Inyedo Ukwu na Nlo* preparatory to Ofala. Canon shots will be fired only to mark the beginning and end of the solemn rite.
- Umu Ubulu N'ikem will perform their duties of *Igbapu Afa Obodo*.
- There will be no *Ogbalido*, and the accompanying display by the Egbenu Oba Society will not take place.
- Only Agbogidi and Ndichie will perform the necessary Ofala routines in the morning in the presence of invited principal Diokpas and representatives of constituent groups within the 30 persons limit. The traditional afternoon ceremonies will not take place.
- *Azu Ofala* will not be observed.

7. **Ifejioku (January 2021)** – is the last major festival on our annual traditional ceremonial cycle, and marks the end of the harvest period and the beginning of the preparation for the next farming season. It should be marked in the same constrained manner as the other feasts.

8. Whilst this Proclamation is specific and explicit on our major festivals above, it is stressed that the same compliance to quiet observance under the provisions of the Covid-19 protocols and laws and directives of the State and the Federal Governments will prevail for all our other feasts.



9. For emphasis, it is repeated that the display of masquerades of any sort is strictly prohibited anywhere or under any circumstance within the domain whilst this Proclamation is in force. Therefore, all indigenes are urged to be vigilant and promptly report to appropriate authorities any infringements, particularly by masquerades of non-Onitsha origin.
10. Ndichie and Ndi Diokpa will be jointly responsible for the strict adherence to this Proclamation in their respective villages and kindred groups, whilst Ogbo So Achi Ani and the Vigilante Service will be responsible for surveillance and enforcement. Any violators will be appropriately sanctioned by Obi-in-Council and also brought to the attention of law enforcement authorities.
11. Finally, I call on every indigene to voluntarily comply with this Proclamation. Restrictive as it may appear, it is made for our well-being and survival against a very aggressive virus that has resulted in over 440,000 deaths around the world, including Nigeria, Anambra State and Onitsha metropolis. By observing the necessary protocols, we would be taking personal responsibility to protect our own lives and those of others within the community. I count on all of us to do so.
12. This Proclamation will take effect from Ika Ajachi on Sunday, 21 June, 2020 and will remain in place until revoked by me.

**#Ndu ka lfe nine. #Nduka.**

**His Majesty,  
Nnaemeka A. Achebe, CFR, mni,  
Obi of Onitsha.**