***Inaugural Address as Governor of Anambra State***

***Government House, Agu-Awka, Awka***

***Anambra State: 17th March, 2022***

***Charles Chukwuma Soludo, CFR***

***GOVERNOR, ANAMBRA STATE***

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**PROTOCOL**

Umunne m Ndi Anambra,

I applied for this job; my party, (the All Progressives Grand Alliance, APGA) shortlisted me, and you—umunne m Ndi Anambra--- interviewed and employed me as your chief servant, with Dr. Onyekachukwu Gilbert Ibezim as my deputy. God ordained this moment and we are grateful to Him and to you all for the privilege to serve you. Dr. Ibezim and I will work hard every day to make you proud. I ask millions of Ndi Anambra all over the world who have prayed for today to simply say a one minute prayer to commit this journey and Anambra State unto the hands of the Almighty God. Anambra will win.

Before I go further, let’s pay special tributes to hundreds of thousands of our friends and supporters who worked tirelessly to see us to this moment. It is not possible to list all of you here. I remember with deep sense of grief the three gallant police officers ----Inspector Murtala Saudi, Sgt Mudassir Ahmed, and Sgt Samuel Ishaya--- who lost their lives to the Unknown Gunmen who attacked us at a meeting with the youths in my village last year. We pledge to continue to take care of their families.

Let me particularly thank my friend and outgoing governor of Anambra, HE (Sir) Willie Maduaburochukwu Obiano, for being an honourable gentleman and leader. On Sunday, 20th November, 2016, I accepted your proposal for gentlemen’s understanding and partnership. I kept my part in 2017 and even after five years, you still kept yours in 2021. I always emphasize this point because it is rare these days to find people who keep their word in politics, and we will never take your support for granted. You are indeed a great leader. Thanks for believing in me. We will work hard to make you and Ndi Anambra proud.

To our indefatigable national Chairman, Ozonkpu (Dr) Victor Ike Oye, your visit of 27th August 2016 and unwavering support remain historical. I will continue to thank all our party members especially the members of the Board of Trustees (BOT), National Executive Committee ( NEC), State, LG and Ward Excos, Campaign Committees at all levels, etc, for the massive support.

I am grateful to all the stakeholders of the Anambra Project---the clergy and the church, traditional rulers, Association of Anambra Town Unions (ASATU), labour, market, trade and professional unions, youth and women organizations, non-indigenes associations, businessmen and captains of industry, the Diaspora community, persons with disabilities, etc. We thank especially the 41 self-funding support groups who propelled this movement. Our donors and the goodwill of other Nigerian stakeholders made a significant difference.

Thanks immensely to the 150 star-studded Transition Committee chaired by our own Dr (Mrs) Oby Ezekwesili.  Let me once again put on record our debt of gratitude to the federal institutions—the judiciary, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and security agencies for insisting on a transparent and credible electoral system. Eternal gratitude goes to President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, and The Presidency for remaining democrats.

In particular, I thank my wife, Nonye Frances Soludo, and children: Ozonna, Ifeatu, Chinua, Ekene, Oduko and Zikora for their love and sacrifices. Despite your deep reservations, you still allowed and supported me to step out in the service of our people. As I repeatedly promised, I will work hard every day never to disappoint you. My 90-year old father is watching this live, while my late beloved mother, Mgbafor, is smiling in her grave.

Today is my first day at work. I just reported for duty and will work for at least eight hours. We had more than a month since the election to celebrate our historic victory. Now is the time to work, and there is no minute or kobo to waste in fanfare. In a few minutes, I will announce some of the principal officers of the administration, and commence with serious meetings of the Anambra State Security Council, followed by a meeting with the permanent secretaries, a meeting on Okpoko, and with my Strategy, Execution and Evaluation (SEE) team.

Within the next one week, the list of commissioners will be laid before the House of Assembly. Tomorrow, we will head to Okpoko in Ogbaru Local Government Area and parts of Onitsha and Idemili as we signpost our commitment to fundamental urban regeneration, beginning with the greater Onitsha metropolis.

As I stand here, I feel the weight of history. I stand on the foundation laid especially by our elected predecessors— Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe GCFR, PC, Dr Michael.I. Okpara, Chief Jim Nwobodo, Chief Christian C. Onoh, Dr Chukwuemeka Ezeife, Dr Chinwoke Mbadinuju, Dr Chris Ngige, OON, Mr Peter Obi, CON, and yes, our own Chief (Sir) Willie M. Obiano. You all did your best and well for our people, and I salute you all.

As I wear the APGA muffler on my neck, I feel the weight of Africa’s historic progressives like the Great Zik of Africa, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, GCFR, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Dr M.I. Okpara, Malam Aminu Kano, Chief Joseph Tarka, Malam Balarabe Musa, Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, etc. Not to talk of the millions of living African progressives, who still dream of Renascent Africa. We will never let them down.

The All Progressives Grand Alliance ( (initially set up as the United Progressives Grand Alliance UPGA) is a nostalgic rebirth of the grand alliance of progressives in the First Republic comprising  Azikiwe’s NCNC, Awolowo’s AG, Joseph Tarka’s United Middle Belt Congress, Aminu Kano’s Northern Elements Progressive Union NEPU, etc. As the first true progressive party in Nigeria since 1999, our ideology is a combination of Zik’s neo welfarism, Awolowo’s scientific socialism, and Aminu Kano’s democratic humanism, to form what we see as the Pan African market progressivism.

It is a Pan Africanist ideology that integrates the social democratic values with the principles of competitive markets. Anambra under our watch will mirror this ideology, and we believe that this should be Nigeria’s compass to the future. We will seek active collaboration and cooperation with the Federal Government, our neighbouring and other states as well as the international community to provide our state truly people-centred governance. We will consolidate the progress made under our predecessors to continue Anambra’s upward trajectory.

Today, I stand up for the millions of Ndi Anambra for whom this mandate means everything. The hopes and expectations rise up to the heavens. Understandably, all of us wish that I could perform miracles - by waving my hands and all our problems will be solved. I hear you. I feel your pulse. For your sake I keep awake at night, sometimes having palpitations about not letting you down. Well, since God is the Miracle Worker, I will look up to Him in prayer and faith as we all start the work ahead of us. I see and feel all the humungous challenges. I know the lean financial base of the state. I know the limitations imposed upon a subnational state such as Anambra by the peculiar structure of our federation. *But here’s my promise: I will give it my all. I will work very hard every day, with you, to make Anambra proud. Every kobo of your tax money will be deployed to provide you maximum value.*

People ask me why we are not celebrating today as it has become customary. My response is that we all—party members, supporters, family and friends-- celebrated in thanksgiving and prayers after you decided to employ me last November 6 and 9. But today, my first day at work, is not a day for celebration. First, there is no venue that can contain the tens of thousands of Ndi Anambra and friends all over the world who would wish to join us on this historic occasion. Second, the State cannot afford any such expensive ceremonies. Third, and as a matter of personal philosophy and as a true progressive, I do not subscribe to using the paltry tax collected from the women selling pepper on the roadside or the okada/keke drivers on a fleeting fanfare and banquet.

I insisted that this event must not cost the government of Anambra one kobo. I would rather use such resources to lay the foundation stone for a public hospital at Okpoko or elsewhere or empower our security agents to fight criminality. Today, I come with a sober heart, conscious of the enormity of responsibilities on our shoulders and the challenges ahead.

Yes, there will be a time to celebrate. We will celebrate when: security of life and property is guaranteed and law and order restored; every child of schooling age is in school; every school child is receiving the 21st century education for the digital age; everyone, especially children and womencan access quality healthcare; the cost of doing business is down to near zero; our roads are tarred and we have an efficient transportation system with no one having to wait in traffic for more than a few minutes; we have access to 24 hour electricity; our streets are clean and green; our cities, communities and markets are planned and cleaned; the many millions of Charlie Nwamgbafors and the vulnerable persons are lifted up to realize their God given potential; all our pensioners receive their gratuities;, workers are paid their leave allowances and contractors are paid; our youth can get jobs and business opportunities; the youth in Okpoko ‘Zone 9’ become global serial entrepreneurs; poverty is near zero and income levels rising…etc. Yes, I will not celebrate, and certainly not with the tax payers’ money.

Umunne m Ndi Anambra!

I come to this job prepared to serve you. For 12 years since 2009 when I first indicated interest to serve you, I persevered through the turbulent politics and here we are. Once again, I present to you the Soludo Solution—our contract with the people which we intend to vigorously implement subject to resource availability.

Our contract with Anambra people derives from three seminal documents: (a) “Anambra Vision 2070—a 50-Year Development Plan” which I chaired the drafting; (b) “The Soludo Solution: A People’s Manifesto for a Greater Anambra”; and (c) “The Transition Committee (Combined) Report”—which built upon the first two.

In sum, this is an agenda for an itinerant tribe in search of a livable and prosperous homeland. Driven by the philosophy of One Anambra, One People, One Agenda, our goal is to build Anambra into a livable and prosperous smart megacity. We aim to transit beyond petroleum into the digital world of the 4th Industrial Revolution, and envision Anambra as an industrial, technology, and leisure/entertainment hub of West Africa.

Our detailed Plan rests on five key pillars: law and order (homeland peace and security); economic transformation as Nigeria’s next axis of industrial-tech and leisure; competitive and progressive social agenda (education, health, youth, women and vulnerable groups); Governance, rule of law and a rebirth of our value system; and aggressively tackling our existential threat posed by the environment—towards a clean, green, planned and sustainable cities, communities, and markets. For me, this agenda is also personal: I am here to build a society where I would be proud to live in after leaving office.

Ndi be anyi, what we propose is that we collectively build a new social and economic order that guarantees and defends economic freedom and reward of private enterpriseto secure our future such that any child born in Anambra will have little incentive to rush elsewhere in search of opportunities and anyone persecuted anywhere in the world can return to a happy and prosperous homeland. Such a new order will, of necessity, entail a massive disruptive change and creative destruction, with short-term pains but guaranteed long-term benefits. As a humane and progressive government, we shall strive to deliver the difficult change with a human face.

As we transit into a non-oil economy, our strategy is a small open economy framework embedded in 21st Century imperative of Everything Technology: we seek to bring the world to Anambra and take Anambra to the world especially in the context of the African continental free trade area (AfCFTA). Our “Made in Anambra” and “Anambra Standards” agenda underpin this strategy. If you can produce it in Anambra, I will be your chief marketing officer, provided that your standard meets the “Anambra standard”—which is excellence. The Anambra State Government will only patronize Made in Anambra products and services unless such goods or services are not currently made in Anambra, then made in Nigeria, Africa, etc, in that sequence. When you see me in Innoson vehicles or in my Akwete dress with a pair of shoes made in Ogbunike/Nkwelle Ezunaka and Onitsha, we are making a statement.

Today, the light refreshment to be served after this brief event is abacha from Umunze, ukwa from Isuofia, Anambra rice with ofe akwu, nkwu enu from Awgbu, ngwo from Awa and Oba, and malt and bottled water from Onitsha.

As part of our “made in Anambra”, cultural renaissance and healthy living agenda, when you come to the Governor’s Lodge or attend any state government’s function, be sure to be served only “Made in Anambra”. We want to go back to where M.I. Okpara stopped with the palm revolution and plant millions of palm trees. In some years, we will seek not only to export palm produce but also fresh palm wine from Anambra State.

We will seek active collaboration with the federal government not only to export manufactured and agricultural products, but also services (especially tech, leisure/entertainment, and skills/talents as we seek an educational system whose products are productive at home and exportable). Anambra’s greatest resource is our human capital, and we shall grow and mine this resource to its maximum, leveraging on technology.

We will soon inaugurate the Anambra Innovation and Technology Advisory Council to drive the emergence of the digital tribe and mainstreaming technology and innovation across all aspects of our lives, our International Investment Council, our Global Friends of Anambra in Development,as well as the Council on the Ease of Doing Business.

We will conduct local government elections. No doubt, the uniform local government system as the third federating unit is one of the contested features of our federalism. But we must make the best of a bad system, by unleashing the potential of governance at the lower levels. Over the next two years, we shall review/amend the relevant legislations, reform and strengthen the system for efficiency, restructure/strengthen the Anambra’s Independent Electoral Commission, and conduct local government elections. We will collaborate and coordinate actively with LGAs to ensure synergy and complementarities. Let the revolution get to the grassroots.

We shall reinvigorate and mainstream the public-community-private partnership (PCPP) – as a veritable framework for service delivery and development. We will develop pragmatic frameworks for private sector and communities to: adopt schools, build roads/infrastructure, manage government assets, receive and manage development matching grants; participate in sanitation and securing law and order, etc. There is a subtle but powerful revolution underway, raising the bar on our age-old community development model.

Yes, every community embarks upon community development. Besides the well-known Nnewi model, some communities such as Neni and Adazi Ani are showing new examples. At Neni, an individual has tarred 18 kilometres of road (together with others at 24 kilometres in the community) and they are now refurbishing and empowering public schools in their community; an individual in Adazi Ani has done 13 kilometres and wants to surpass the Neni record. The Government will provide a framework to incentivize and unleash the momentum of this new phenomenon at the village/community levels.

Our government is committed to promoting the expeditious dispensation of justice especially the prompt resolution of commercial disputes. We shall collaborate with the Chief Judge and his colleagues to significantly improve the physical and technological infrastructure of the courts, and hopefully also implement some structural reforms to fast-track the path to justice and make Anambra the number one in the speedy dispensation of justice and ease of doing business.

Part of our future is in our past. We will mainstream our values of hard work, integrity, compassion, and sanctity of life. The fringe but destructive minority which embodies the “get rich quick by all means” philosophy, cultism, drug addiction, blood-letting criminality, kidnapping, etc do not represent us, and cannot define us. As a new social order and “everything technology” philosophy take life, many unproductive systems will give way. There will be new and better ways of managing our parks and markets, different and better ways of collecting government revenue, managing waste, and general service delivery to citizens.

The land registry will be digitized; we shall leverage technology to ensure a responsive and accountable public service together with our initiative for an ID Card for every Anambra person wherever he/she may be; and a code of conduct for political appointees to mainstream servant leadership by example.

We must rid Onitsha and all our roads and markets of revenue touts and make shopping in Anambra a pleasurable experience. Today, I will sign an executive order to suspend all revenue contracts operating in the parks, markets and roads until we put in place a new system within the next four weeks. Consequently as from tomorrow, 18th March, 2022, if anyone asks you to pay CASH to him as revenue to the government in the parks, markets and roads, such a person must be a thief. Market unions must also stop harassing customers.

We shall embark upon massive training and social re-engineering to wean people off the old unproductive ways. As a humane government, we shall endeavor to offer alternative opportunities to the revenue touts. Over the next two years, many will complain that “it is not the way we do it”, but we can’t repeat the same thing and expect a different result. During the coming months, we shall embark upon bold but difficult reforms and these reforms may be unpopular especially among those benefitting from the existing order. For sure, the revenue and park mafia that rake in billions of government revenue into their private pockets won’t be happy. But we commit to doing the right things. And we plead for your understanding, patience and cooperation. By His grace, Anambra will win!

But Anambra State is a subnational entity, within the context of Nigeria’s unitary-federalism. The speed of its progress is in part dependent upon both the threats and opportunities inherent in such a system. The ongoing Constitutional amendment at the National Assembly is welcome, albeit that some of the proposals merely tinker at the margins and attempting to do more of the same. The subnational states need to be unleashed. For too long, Nigeria has tried a top-down strategy; now is the time to try the bottom-up approach, and that’s part of my motivation. While we debate how far and how fast the devolution and reconfigurations will go, the world is not waiting. As the world transits away from oil into cleaner energy sources and a world of 4th Industrial Revolution, Nigeria needs a fundamentally different rule-book to survive and compete. We will seek to optimize the limited headroom allowed by the current peculiar structure to give our people a new life.

Umunne m Ndi Anambra,

Besides the environment, a fundamental existential threat to our state and indeed Igboland is that of peace building and law and order. We can’t build this homeland by turning the sword against each other. Ndi Anambra love their homeland but the recent upsurge in criminality poses a great threat. My heart bleeds to see and hear about our youth dying in senseless circumstances. Every criminal gang—kidnappers, wicked murderers, arsonists, rapists, thieves--- all now claim to be freedom fighters. Criminality cannot be sugarcoated. This must stop.

All the stakeholders must now review both the narrative and the action plan. For starters, I endorse the recent statement (March 7, 2022) by the Joint Body of South East Council of Traditional Rulers and Bishops/Archbishops on Peace and Conflict Resolution, requesting for a tripartite discussion between them, The Presidency, and South East governors to deal with the conflicts in the South East especially in relation to Nnamdi Kanu and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN). There is no conflict that dialogue, in good faith, cannot resolve. Our government is determined to urgently restore peace and security in Anambra, and we will seek the active cooperation and collaboration of all stakeholders.

To IPOB/ESN, the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), as well as the disparate armed groups in the forests, it is time to interrogate both the purpose and means of your campaign. To the politicians playing politics with the insecurity, you are riding a tiger. The current trajectory is a road to desolation. Let us get around the table and talk. Let the elite in the closet come out, and let’s debate our future and forge a consensus. The conspiracy of silence by the elite and some community leaders must end. If you see something, say or do something! Securing Igboland and Nigeria must be our collective responsibility. Let those in the forests come out, surrender their guns and let’s work together to rehabilitate and empower you to contribute positively to the peace and prosperity of our homeland

A significant part of our state economyis powered by artisans, keke drivers, vulcanizers, hairdressers, cart pushers, petty traders, bricklayers, women frying akara, and all those who depend upon daily toil and sweat to feed their families. Every day, there is a “sit at home”, these poor masses lose an estimated N19.6 billion in Anambra alone.  Due to the protracted breakdown of law and order, businesses are relocating outside Igboland, with growing unemployment, and traders who used to come to shop in Onitsha, Aba etc are going elsewhere. Who is losing? By forcing our children—the future of Igboland—to stay at home instead of being in school, while even the critically sick people (including pregnant women) cannot go to hospital, we harm our future .

I hereby challenge any of the disparate groups that claims that it is not part of the senseless killings and kidnappings to step out and show leadership by joining hands with us to DO something about it. If you love our homeland, there is no place for bloodshed. Our Lord Jesus Christ admonished in Matthew 26: 52: “put your sword back in its sheath, for all who live by the sword will die by the sword”. In the traditional religion, the land places a curse upon those who spill the blood of the innocent.

For me, this issue is personal and emotional. My mother died during the civil war; our last born, Chukwuemeka died during the war; my father bore a bullet inside him for years; my elder brother – at 16, was in the ‘Boys Company’. At 8, I became the “man of the house”, with all the men at the war front. My uncles, cousins, etc, died during the war. This is 2022, and there are certainly far better ways to protest than shedding the blood of the innocent or resorting to criminality.

That is why I call on all of us today to join hands with me to execute the real agenda—a livable and prosperous homeland of opportunities and jobs for our youth while maximizing the benefits of a united Nigeria/Africa. With Ohanaeze’s estimate that some 11.6 million Igbos live in the North and over 7 million in Lagos state and over 70% of our non-land assets scattered all over Nigeria and the world, we need Nigeria and Nigeria needs us. We need Africa and the world and they need us.

Yes, we have heard every genuine agitation for fairness, justice, equity and equality in the Nigerian Federation. No, we refuse to turn our homeland into a crime scene and all manners of criminality. No group has ever succeeded in any struggle in history by turning the sword against themselves.  I promise to work hard with other governors and leaders in the South East and others to take your agitations to the table of all Nigeria, and we hope to bargain for a win-win solution for all Nigeria. I will engage all parties to the breakdown of peace and order in Anambra from a point of determination to solve problems and resolve disagreements with openness, integrity, equity and justice. I will absolutely invest my political capital within our State, our South East and with the Presidency, Federal Government and its establishments as a matter of topmost priority. With good faith and hard work by all parties, I am convinced that justice, peace and order will return to Anambra and the South East within the shortest possible horizon.

Umunne m Ndi Anambra, this agenda is premised upon your irrepressible and communal spirit. It is you—the people—that will make it happen. We all love our homeland to death, and we can turn it into whatever we will that it should be. A new servant leadership and a new homeland consciousness by the people will get us there despite the huge challenges. For example, to effectively implement our ambitious agenda, we need annual investment levels of 25- 30% of state gross domestic product (GDP), that is about $2.58 – $3.09 billion. At current levels, public sector investment is less than $100 million per annum. The gap seems daunting, but we are undaunted. The internally generated revenue is barely 0.5% of state GDP.

This presents immense opportunity as well as threat in the context of a rentier culture where the social contract/trust between the citizen and the government is broken, and the people do not believe that they can get value for their taxes. We are determined to change this.

I pledge here again to devote every kobo of your tax money to work for you. This is your government. I am only your employee. I commit to a transparent, accountable, judicious, and impactful use of your tax money. My litmus test for every expenditure will be to ask two questions: a) if this is my hard earned money from work and profit, can I spend it this way? b) Is this the best way to spend the taxes and levies collected from the poor traders and okada riders? If I cannot answer Yes to both questions, then I will hesitate to do so.

On your part, we need a new chapter of active and responsive citizenship, imbued with civic responsibilities and participation. Pay your fair share of tax and sanitation and other levies and try us. I paid my 2021 tax to Anambra (over N10 million). The keke drivers pay over N90,000 per annum; the women selling pepper and hawkers who pay N200 per day average at least N50,000 per annum; etc. What about you—the shop owner/trader, lawyer, doctor, consultant, journalist, professionals, business owner, landlord, etc? You want security, good transport network without traffic, good schools and hospitals, water, clean, green and planned environment, etc. How much do you pay per month/year? Ndi Anambra outside Anambra must creatively pay their taxes in their primary residence—Anambra. With a new homeland consciousness, the estimated over 10 million Ndi Anambra outside the State can collectively turn their homeland into the new axis of prosperity.

In addition to our civic duties as responsible citizens, I call on all of us to go the extra mile in volunteering our time and treasure to create the homeland of our dream. Everybody is important in this journey and I need your help to succeed. We must all strive to die empty—to give our all, in aid of God’s creation. Each day, every Onye Anambra must ask himself or /herself: “what have I done today to make my home state livable and prosperous?” It should be part of our daily devotion. There must be a purpose why God in His infinite wisdom decided to make you Onye Anambra—and that must be to leave it better than you met it. No one is too poor to give or do something for Anambra. If not you, then who; if not now, then when?

As I close my eyes and visualize our future, I can see millions of Ndi Anambra holding hands and working hard for a glorious future; I see the skyscrapers along the banks of River Niger in Onitsha, Nnewi, Awka, Ekwulobia, etc. I see a smart megacity with millions of happy and prosperous people. I see us exporting massively to the world and the world coming to Anambra as a preferred destination to live, work, invest, learn, relax and enjoy. History beckons. Seize this moment Ndi Anambra, and together, let us make it count. Anambra: the Light of the Nation shines….!

God bless you all!