

Dedication

Governor Chief Mwalimu Nwafejoku Okolie Uwadibie (1952—2005)



Doris Railey Kieh

It is with heavy heart that I write this tribute to our beloved brother, “The Governor,” as he was affectionately called. He passed on twelve years ago, wow, I can’t believe it!

I first met the Governor in Jacksonville, Florida in 1995; and he was kind to me. This was the Founding Conference of the ASRF; and you can imagine how I felt among so many scholars. Actually, it was a delight. In attendance also were Brothers John Mbaku, Pita Agbese, Julius Ihonvbere, Ike Udogu, A. B Assensoh and George Kieh, among others.

My most famous remembrance of the Brother Governor was when we meet in Costa Rica at the Conference. Brother Governor Uwadibie was the life of the conference, along with Brother Abdul Karim Bangura. The members of ASRF met for lunch and dinner, and most of us ordered whole fish and rice; and so did Brother Governor. He was humorous and so much fun to be around. He was bigger than life itself—tall, astute and upright. He had that presence, and his social skills were excellent. I was so sad to hear of his death. I last saw him at the conference in Shreveport, LA. I have missed his presence at these meetings, and he will forever be remembered as one of our greatest scholars, brothers and friends.

Rest on Governor. May God Bless you and keep your family safe and well!

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

John 14:27

John Mukum Mbaku

The recent passing of Chief (Professor) Nwafejoku Okolie Uwadibie (July 2, 2005) is a terrible thing and a great loss to us all, especially those of us who worked closely with him and came to recognize his unwavering and consummate support for the improvement of the quality of life for Africans at home and abroad. Chief Uwadibie, who was born in Issele-Uku, Delta State, Nigeria, was a teacher, mentor, philosopher, politician, administrator, Olympian, nationalist and, most of all, a loving human being who cared very much about those less fortunate than him. You see, Chief Uwadibie was Dean of Academic Affairs, Palm Beach Community College, Boca Raton, Florida, a position that provided him with prestige and all the trappings of the good life in America. He, however, never forgot the fact that back in Africa, life for most people is hard and tedious and that the majority of Africans are poor and suffer from high levels of material deprivation. Hence, Chief Uwadibie devoted an extraordinary amount of his spare time to raising money for poverty alleviation projects in Africa. In fact, he died in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, while speaking at a function to raise money for relief in Africa.

As an accomplished athlete, Chief Uwadibie represented his native Nigeria in the 1976 Olympics in Montreal and shortly afterwards came to the United States to study. He holds BA and MA degrees in Economics from the University of Colorado in Boulder and the PhD in Public Administration from the University of Denver. Chief Uwadibie was an accomplished intellectual. In addition to publishing several papers in internationally recognized professional journals, he also authored chapters in many edited volumes and wrote a highly acclaimed book on economic development in Nigeria, titled *Decentralization and Economic Development in Nigeria*. Unlike many intellectuals who studied, researched and published about Africa as a way to enhance their professional standing, as well as improve their earnings potential, Chief Uwadibie took a deep personal interest in fellow Africans, their struggles with poverty and deprivation, as well as their efforts to improve their living conditions, participate more effectively in the international economy and in global affairs, and live together peacefully. He returned to Africa frequently to conduct research. However, on many of these trips, he met not only with the elites but also with ordinary people and came to appreciate not only the enormous development problems that the continent faced (and continues to face) but also the extraordinary contributions that the continent and its peoples have made and continue to make to the world we live in. In fact, Chief Uwadibie was so impressed with the work that ordinary Nigerians and Ghanaians were doing to improve governance in their respective countries that he decided to run for Governor of the Delta State. Although he did not win, he told me that it was the most fulfilling experience of his life. Through the campaign for governor he came to appreciate the enormous challenges that Nigerians and other Africans face as they struggle to establish more effective systems of governance for the new century.

Chief Uwadibie was one of the earliest advocates of an end to military rule in his native Nigeria. He believed very strongly in a return to traditional African governance structures, which were people-centered, had respect for the individual, and emphasized integrity and moral living. Professor Uwadibie's many colleagues and other scholars who have worked closely with him in the African Studies and Research Forum and in the Association of Third World Studies will tell you that he had an extraordinary optimism about Africa and its prospects for greatness. He believed in Africa and Africans and worked tirelessly to help the continent reach its potential and emerge as a global leader.

Chief Uwadibie's interest in and affinity for Africa and its peoples are reflected in his many professional publications, the lectures that he delivered at many professional conferences, various public addresses, and the fundraisers that he participated in, as he worked tirelessly to promote Africa and its interests in the United States and other parts of the world.

I knew Chief Uwadibie as a strong supporter of both the African Studies and Research Forum and the Association of Third World Studies. He never missed any annual conference and was always the first to volunteer his services. In fact, when the African Studies and Research Forum decided to raise money to assist Liberian refugees in Ghana, the first donation came from Chief Uwadibie. Throughout the three-year period, during which time we collected money for the refugees, he made several substantial donations. This was his way: he saw the need and he lent a hand!

Chief Uwadibie was a kind and very considerate individual and often lamented loudly about the conditions of the poor in Africa. He loved his family very much and leaves behind his wife and partner of many years, Princess Chinyere Ozioma, two sons, Ashiedu Uwadibie and Osemeke Uwadibie, a baby due anytime soon, and lots of brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, friends, and colleagues.

Throughout his life, Chief Uwadibie worked very hard to improve living conditions for fellow citizens in his native Nigeria. It is safe to say that Chief Uwadibie is among a select group of Africans in the Diaspora whose activities have had a significant impact on many of the positive changes that are taking place in the continent today. He was a true friend of Nigeria and Africa, a man of principle who sought throughout his life to help those less fortunate than himself, and an individual who genuinely believed that he could make a difference. He did! And may his soul rest in peace.