Words cannot express my emotions and gratitude during the annual Biafra War Memorial and Veterans Day in Canada organized by the **Igbo Canadian Community Association (ICCA)**, in Toronto, Canada to remember and honor Biafra Veterans who sacrificed so much to gallantly defend and protect our people against all odds against the combined military might of Nigeria, Britain, Soviet Union and Arab-Muslim world during the bloody Nigeria-Biafra War during which 3 million Igbo people perished.

Those close to me know that I have refused many offers, opportunities, titles, positions and recognitions that are not consistent with my principles or social justice. I have to seriously consider the source, meaning and principles involved before I accept or appreciate any offers, titles, positions and recognition. For example, the so-called Nigerian National Honors ("Merit Awards"), which celebrates mediocrity, looting, corruption, injustice, oppression, egotism and selfishness is totally unacceptable to me. If offered the position of President or Minister in Nigeria, I would refuse it because of Nigeria's injustice against Igbo people, Niger Delta, women and youth.

My role is to fight for justice and freedom for the oppressed. As a True Igbo, I have refused chieftaincy titles and possible "eze" ("king") position because Igbo people are fundamentally democratic freedom loving republicans unlike the other Nigerians with either monarchy or feudal systems. Igbo people had leaders who sacrificed and protected the community collective interests instead of the self-serving and self-aggrandizing "kings" and "chiefs". Igbo enwe eze (Igbo have no King) is right, unique and progressive. Today, look at the mess in Igboland with so many "chiefs" and "kings" but no selfless leaders to meet the needs of the people. I consider myself an Igbo and Black leader (service above self, making a difference, and standing for something, etc.)
Here are some of my emotions and thoughts on my Biafra and war experience (1966-1970) during the Biafra War Memorial Day:

Although I have received many honors and awards, the honor given to my fellow Biafra Veterans and I by ICCA is one of the most significant and meaningful. Biafra and the Nigeria-Biafra war is the defining moment of my life as an Igbo. Joining the Biafra military to defend my people without pay as well as being prepared to die doing so and surviving against all odds was supernatural. It far exceeds being a President, minister, billionaire or anything else. Laying down ones life for ones people is the highest (Bible).

Being recognized and honored by the Igbo Community, as "War Heroes" is very special to me. How I wished that my late parents (Alfred Njoku Eberendu and Nzenalu Florence Njoku) were alive to witness their son being honored. I owe a lot to my late parents because they could have prevented me from joining the military but when I reminded them that they taught me and my siblings certain principles, and I also asked them the blunt question: "whose son will die?", they blessed me and hoped that I would survive in the military. I sneak out without telling my parents and siblings to voluntarily join the Biafra military. In fact, I had to beg and tell the military that I was 18 years instead of my real age.

My sole reason for joining the Biafra Military was to defend my people against possible genocide and extermination. I cannot stand injustice and could not stand by while our women were being raped and our people slaughtered and exterminated. We had a genuine fear and belief based on history and bitter experience that Nigeria like Nazi Germany wanted to implement Hitler's Final Solution for the "Jewish Problem" to the "Igbo Problem" whom Nigeria regarded as the Jews of Africa.

The 1966 waves of terrorism and massacres of Easterners (mainly Igbo) in Nigeria, Nigeria reneging on the January 1967 Aburi Accords leading to the May 30, 1967 declaration of the Republic of Biafra, the total blockade of Biafra and the Nigerian war of aggression against Biafra were enough to reinforce this genuine fear and belief. I could not believe the audacity of Nigerians invading Biafra after they rejected us and drove Easterners (mainly Igbo) out of Nigeria. I want Nigerians and the world to understand this point.

In the Biafra Air force (BAF), after special training in air defense, I was deployed to the strategic Uli Airport at the most dangerous location. Biafra was totally blockaded by Nigeria. Uli airport was the only lifeline for Biafra and the main target of Nigeria during the war. We were daily bombed and attacked indiscriminately during the day and night by Russian supplied and Egyptian
piloted MiG fighters and Iluyushin bombers. The Nigeria "Intruder" (My Air Defense Unit called it "Lagos Bobo") hovered and bombed Uli nightly to prevent relief planes from landing. My first encounter with Nigeria MiG fighter planes after air defense training almost proved fatal. I escaped death on several occasions. I vividly remember and thank the famous "Johnny" (a white BAF officer) who was a constant source of assurance, advice and instructions. I remember the day Von Rosen (the Swede) and other BAF pilots landed the Biafra Babies (Minicons) at Uli Airport. I remember and thank the dare devil civilian Relief Pilots and other Joint Church Aid (JCA) workers defying Nigerian nightly bombardments to bring in life-saving humanitarian assistance to starving Biafra. I remember malnourished, starved and kwashiorkor Biafra children and women being airlifted from Uli Airport to Gabon. I remember the scattered human parts and stench of death after Nigerian air raids.

I remember Biafra scientists and engineers (RAP) inventing everything from refining oil to Ogbunigwe to experimenting with missile technology. I remember the Biafra Spirit of self-sacrifice and excellence. On the negative side, I remember the Igbo Efulefu (cowards, fools, traitors, greedy pigs) or Saboteurs (Sabo) who betrayed Biafra and the struggle because of greed and self-interest. I remember how the UN, OAU and other governments abandoned Biafrans with the exception of a few countries. It is a shame that neither the Nigeria government nor any of the Igbo state governments or Igbo power/political elite and business tycoons deem it fit and humane to help the disabled Biafra Veterans at Oji River.

The end of the war in January 1970 was anti-climatic. I remember the night the Biafra Head of State, General Emeka Ojukwu and other Biafra top government officials left Uli Airport for Ivory Coast. I remember the constant shelling of Uli from Awomamma and the intensified air bombardment of Uli Airport. I remember and honor a BAF friend of mine who was perhaps the last BAF person killed at Uli Airport. I remember the last relief plane to leave Uli Airport. I remember how I cried when we had to dismantle our anti-aircraft gun before the arrival of Nigerian forces at Uli Airport.

It was very sad. I remember the broadcast by the then acting Biafra Head of State, General Philip Effiong, announcing the end of hostilities and asking Biafra forces to stop fighting. We trekked for days from Uli to Orlu to Ogbaku where I spent a few days. I was detained and ill treated by Nigerian soldiers in futile attempts to force me to admit that I was a Biafra military officer. I stubbornly refused and only God saved me from being shot. My last escape after detention was at Owerri. I saw bloated dead bodies that were shot by Nigerian forces especially at Holy Ghost College Owerri. I saw Igbo girls and women being "captured' by Nigerian soldiers for their sexual pleasures.
I was one of the last people to return to my village after the war. Before I could trek to my village, someone spread a wicked rumor that Nigerian forces captured and shot me at Uli Airport for the vital role we played for Biafra. My parents and siblings were so despondent but hoped that I had escaped with the last plane to Gabon. When I eventually reached my village, my dad saw me and fainted while shouting that he has seen my ghost until I reassured him that it was I and not my ghost. My mom was speechless while my siblings were ecstatic. Till today, I still have flashbacks about the war. One cannot forget.

Was the Biafra defense against Nigerian aggression worth it? The answer is absolutely YES. We had a choice to either be slaughtered like defenseless lambs in genocide, or, to defend ourselves and survive despite heavy losses and suffering. We chose defending our survival and ourselves. Remember that we fought a war of self-defense and survival while Nigeria fought for territorial integrity (actually oil). Some Igbo people forget that had we not bravely defended ourselves, Nigerian forces would have been emboldened to wipe us out.

But our spirited defense with literally bare hands got the attention of Nigeria and the world to restrain Nigeria. Orwell said it all: "From the point of view of survival, it is better to fight and be defeated than to surrender without fighting". The enemy respects you if you put up a fight than if you cowardly beg and surrender without fighting. The Igbo race and nation survived, thanks to our gallant Biafra Veterans and Heroes. The present oppression and injustice against Igbo people in Nigeria and the shameless betrayal by Igbo Efulefu is only temporary like Jews in Egypt. The Almighty God assures me that Igbo people will rise again even if it is not during my lifetime. I pray that there be a solution to Nigeria tragedy. No more bloodshed and injustice.

I am prepared to accept a Transformed Nigeria based on Aburi principles or any option other than the status quo, which is deadly for my people and other oppressed groups. As I am writing this article today, the Canadian government is apologizing to the Native peoples for trying to destroy them in the misguided policy of solving the "Indian problem" as well as establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to heal the wounds of injustice against aboriginal peoples in Canada. Nigeria must do the same. No more denials or playing the ostrich game or politics. To reverse the curse on Nigeria, the must be truth and reconciliation with Igbo people, Niger Delta, women and youth who are oppressed and wasted. Let truth, justice, freedom, peace and prosperity rein.

I thank ICCA for this annual Biafra War Memorial event in Canada to honor my fellow Biafra Veterans and I, especially those who died during the Nigeria-
Biafra War. **Lest they forget.**

Peace to all.

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