

# TOWARDS PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN THE WESTERN NIGER DELTA: A CASE STUDY OF WARRI

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**Abstract:** Warri is a city in the Western Niger Delta that is plague with ethnic conflicts since the colonial period. The relationship between the three ethnic groups is usually characterized by conflicts that result to open violence. The conflict emanated from claims and counter claims over land and resources which have resulted to the destruction of lives and properties and the flight of businesses and investments. The aim of the study is to examine the steps towards peaceful coexistence among the Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw of Warri. The paper adopts the historical, phenomenological and evaluative methods. The conflict in Warri if not checked can lead to a total breakdown of law and order and the collapse of the economy. The paper contributes to the discourse by providing ways of achieving peace in Warri. The paper recommends ethnic tolerance and dialogue among the various ethnic groups in the city.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Crisis, Peace, Intergroup, Violence, Ethnic, Dispute

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## **Introduction**

Warri is located in the northwestern Niger Delta in South-south Nigeria and is the home to the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo ethnic groups. Apart from these indigenous ethnic groups, non-indigenous ethnic groups within and outside Delta State also exist in Warri like in other cities in Nigeria. They include Urhobo from further hinterland areas like Abraka and Ughelli, Isoko, Okpe, the Anioma, the Benin from neighbouring Edo State, the Hausa from the north, the Yoruba from the west and the

Igbo from the east among others. There are also expatriates who work with companies in the area. The large diversity presented by the ethnic composition, socio-economic structure, and physical characteristic of the country has had far reaching spatial consequences for the nature and spiral of protracted social conflict in Nigeria.

Warri is a plural society and is culturally and ethnically heterogeneous in composition. This plural nature poses challenges to the city. This can be seen in the ethnic differences and disputes which the people through their actions have failed to create an enabling environment for peaceful coexistence between them. The result of this failure is manifested in violence arising from contested claims to the land space and resources, disagreements over the creation of local government councils and the location of its headquarters, and disputed jurisdiction of certain traditional rulers. The continuous spate of violence and conflict in Warri has affected the city. It has devastating effects on the economy, population and society. The conflicts have weakened intergroup relations. Conflict and violence in Warri also led to deep political anger among the groups which has affected peaceful coexistence in the city. The conflict in Warri led to population displacement which has devastating effect on the economy of the city. There was a general state of insecurity which chased away local and foreign investment from the city's economy that further deepened the economic woe. Peace is therefore a prerequisite for the socio- economic development of Warri because no society can develop in a state of violence.

### **Tradition of Origin**

**The Ijaw:** The Ijaw inhabit an environment that is predominantly covered by the mangrove swamps. They reside among the Itsekiri in Warri. Oral accounts claim that long time ago communities of migrants Ijaw dwelt on the waterfront by the side of an area called Ogbe-Ijo. The site is located at the confluence of the Agbassa creek and the Warri River. At this site the Urhobo farmers and Ijaw fishermen from the riverine country traded. Ogbe-Ijaw is bounded on the northeast by the Okere and Agbarha or Agbassa kingdom, on the southeast by Isaba kingdom, on the east by Udu kingdom, and on the south by Iduwini kingdom.<sup>14</sup>Ogbe-ijoh belongs to the OgbeIbe (group or clan) of the western Ijaw and their origin can be traced to Ewein who came from Ekeromo, the headquarters of the OperemoIbe (Ifediora, 1998) The

Operemo on their part claim or trace their origin from Oporoma in Kabowei, Ogulagha, Gbaramatu, Kubowie and Iduwinilbe, also resided among the Itsekiri in Warri (Ifediora, 1997).

The homeland of the Ijaw is completely riverine and fishing is the predominant economic activity, which is as old as their history. Fishing is done in creeks, lakes, ponds, lagoons, rivers and the open sea. Other economic activities include palm wine tapping, hunting, salt making, wood carving, palm oil production, boat building and canoe carving. From time immemorial, the Ijaw had distinguished themselves as canoe carver and boat builders, supplying most of the Western Niger Delta people with canoes. Although other groups in the Western Niger Delta were also riverine people producing canoe, the Ijaw were well known for canoe carving. The Ijaw are not self-sufficient. There are other needs for which they have to engage, in exchanges with hinterland people such as garri, yam, plantain, livestock among others. Ogbe-Ijoh, the Ijaw enclave in Warri has traditionally been the market/shopping area in Warri township, and Ogbe-Ijoh market has been a well-known landscape in Warri township. (Ayomike, 1988)

**The Agbarha Urhobo:** The Agbarha-Ame was believed to have migrated from Agbarha-Oto. They founded and occupied their present territory as a virgin area in about the 13<sup>th</sup> Century or earlier. The township of Warri used to be farmlands belonging to the people Agbarha-Ame. Agbarha-Ame consists of seven towns namely, the Agbarha section of the present Warri Township, Igbudu, Ogonu, Edjeba, Ukpokiti, Oteghele and Okurode-Urhobo. Agbarha as a name is used both to cover all the seven towns as one unit and to refer to one of the towns. That is Otovwodo-Agbarha which they own and effectively occupy as a section of the Warri urban area (Otite, 2011). The neighbours of Agbarha include Uvwie, Udu, Itsekiri, Ogbe-Ijaw and Okere -Urhobo. According to the 1991 population census the Agbarha people had an estimation of 18000 and they were grouped under Warri South Local Government Area. The Agbarha-Urhobo have an annual festival popularly called Agbassa Juju, it is held around May/April every two years and it cut across all their settlement. The Agbassa Juju festival is celebrated in honor of a warrior Deity called Owhurie.

**The Okere-Urhobo:** Okere occupies an area near the Okere River and is bounded by the Itsekiri, the Urhobo of Uvwie and the Urhobo of Agbakra-Ame. Their founders first settled near the Okere River where their descendants are still found today. Okere is one of the distinct Urhobo social groups found in Warri Township. They are not part of another Urhobo group, but have their own separate identity. The Okere migrated from Okpara in Olomu clan. Okere has three ancestors namely Idama, Ohwotemu, and Sohworuvwe who are believed to have migrated from OkparaOlomu where their common ancestor called Okpeki had lived. The three ancestor brothers were later joined by their migrant relatives such as Itifo and Emakpo who were received and accommodated. The territory had no name when the three ancestors (Idama, Ohwotemu and Sohworuvwe) arrived, the place being a virgin area. When their relatives came from Oto-Okpara to meet their already settled brother, they found that the houses were few. Their relative then said 'Ekere Omovwina' which implied that the houses were few. The word was shortened as Ekere which was later corrupted to Okere (Otite, 2011). The three descendants of Okpeki have produced three descent groups or quarters. These descent groups or quarters are today called Olodi (named after the eldest son of Idama), Oki (named after the eldest son of Sohworuvwe) and Ighogbadu (named after the eldest son of Ohwotemu). The descendants of the founders regard themselves and manage their affairs as a corporate group. They have always been politically independent of their neighbours.

**The Itsekiri:** It is believe that the root of the Itsekiri lay's in Yoruba land because Yoruba language is the language with which the Itsekiri language is most closely related. This connection of the Itsekiri to the Yoruba origin linked them to Ugbo in Ilaje, EseOdo Local Government Area of Ondo State, and Ode in the Ijebu country of Ogun State. The cultural similarities between the Itsekiri and the Yorubas give additional weight to the conclusion that Itsekiri has a Yoruba origin (Ifediora, 2014).

However the most acceptable origin of the Itsekiri is that of the migration of Ginuwa from Benin in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. According to this origin there was an Oba who ruled over the kingdom of Benin called Oba Olua. Oba Olua has an elder son called Prince Ginuwa who was causing trouble and defiling the traditional rights of the Benin kingdom. He also wanted to remove traditional practices, and he was also hostile to the chiefs and their supports. The chiefs were not happy with character

and doings of the prince and even his father and they vowed that prince Ginuwa will not succeed his father as the next Oba of the Benin kingdom. Oba Olua been aware of the plans of the chiefs decided to secure the future of his son and plan that Ginuwa should have his own kingdom aside Benin, the Oba then through deceit asked the seventy chiefs to send their first son's with prince Ginuiwa to offer sacrifice to one of the god's the Oba build a wooden ship that was large enough to contain the prince and the sons of the seventy chiefs to a distant land where they should settle (Sagay, 1982).

Ginuwa led the chief's sons through the river to a new settlement with himself as king, the Benin have learnt of their sons disappearance sent a force to bring them back with the prince. Ginuwa also have learnt of the chiefs forces headed to the mount of the Forcados River, Ginuwa landed in Ijala and begin a settlement there; Ginuwa died in Ijala and was buried there. Ginuwa was succeeded by his first son Ijjen. Ijjen led the party from Ijala to Iwere (Warri), this settlement is known to this day as Ode-Itsekiri (Moore, 1970). The Itsekiri system of government was design on that of Benin; the Itsekiri was ruled by an Olu and the council of Oyeye. The Itsekiri economic life was determine by their physical environment, they do not have enough land for agriculture and as a result of this they depend on their rivers for fishing and manufacturing of salt which they exchange with the hinterland Urhobo for their agricultural produce.

### **Growth of Warri since the Colonial Era**

The term Warri is not the name of a tribe or clan. The name was used to describe an administrative unit by the British Colonial Administration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the Warri Division. Since the beginning of colonial rule in 1900, Warri became the seat of government. In May 1906 the Southern Protectorate of Nigeria was amalgamated with the Colony of Lagos and both placed under one administration. The whole country was divided into three province of Western, Eastern and Central Province, and Warri then became the headquarters of the Central Province. In 1914, the whole country was further divided politically and the Central Province was renamed Warri Province. In 1952, the name was again changed to Delta Province as a result of a riot in the province (Omoneukanrin, 1960). By 1960, Warri was still the provincial headquarters of the Delta Province under the defunct Western Regional

Administration. With the creation of the Midwestern State in 1963, the status of Warri changed and it became a divisional administrative centre, a lower political order. On the introduction of the new local government law in 1975, Warri became mainly the headquarters of the Warri Local Government Council. The 1952 population census gave Warri population as 19,526 and in 1963 it was 55,256. By the 1991 population census it had a population of 217,504, making it the largest urban centre in Delta State. Due to natural increase and continuous settlement and migration, the population of the city reached 311,970 according to the national population census figures for 2006.

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, Warri has been experiencing impressive growth both in size and importance, particularly because of its location in the heart of Nigeria's oil region. The oil economy and the associated industries have combined to give Warri a dynamic lease of life. The rise of Warri in the oil industry is closely associated with the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970). With the outbreak of the war, it became impossible for the exploitation of crude oil in Eastern states and consequently, the centre for intensive petroleum activities shifted to Bendel State. By 1968, Bendel State produced 48.4 per cent of all Nigerian crude oil, but by 1969, the contribution from the state had risen to 73.8 per cent. Immediately after the civil war, in 1971, Bendel state was still the leading producer, 60 per cent of the national output. Being the major town in the oil producing area of Bendel State, Warri naturally emerged as the main oil business centre in the country (Sada, 1984).

After the end of the civil war in 1970, the petroleum industry became the main focus of economic activity in Warri. The Shell BP Development Company and the Gulf Oil Company had been the leading operators before 1970 in the sector until the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and other multinational and indigenous firms came to Warri in different time. In 1971 Shell BP opened its new office complex in Warri, indicating it had decided to make its stay in Warri a permanent one by maintaining a full operational division with all attendant facilities and materials. The Gulf Oil Company found Warri's proximity to the Atlantic shores a good location for her offshore operations. By December 1972, there were 23 companies in Warri that were either directly involved in the process of oil exploitation or were providing services for the oil industry.

Due to the concentration of oil deposits within and around Warri, the territory became prominent, hosting one of the country's refineries. The Warri Refinery was commissioned in 1978 as a subsidiary of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and its commissioning was important for the growth of the town. It is also because of its strategic location, that Warri became the regional headquarter of the Niger Delta oil fields. In the 1970s and 1980s, Warri was popularly known as 'Oil City' because of its role and contribution in Nigeria as a major urban center of the oil producing Niger Delta. As at today Warri is one of the major centres of Nigeria's oil industry. It is also the fastest growing urban area in Delta State, although is not the capital of the State. Warri is to Delta State what Lagos is to Nigeria. Just as Lagos was the former capital of Nigeria, so was Warri the former headquarters of the Old Delta Province. Lagos, since the creation of Abuja as the new capital city of Nigeria ceased to be the political capital of Nigeria, has still retained its significance as the country's main commercial and industrial centre. Likewise Warri, since the creation of Delta State in 1992, has ceased to be the political capital of Delta State, but has retained its position as the commercial centre and the main industrial heartbeat of the state (Imobighe, 2002).

The indigenous people of Warri were mainly agricultural people in the precolonial and colonial times. The Urhobo communities of Agbassa and Okere were predominantly agricultural communities farming crops such as cassava, plantain among others. The Itskiri and Ijaw were predominantly fisher folks though the Itsekiri were also noticeable traders. Today urbanization has taken over the farm activities and farming as an occupation is now practiced by the few who still do so in outlying districts. It is important to point that traditional occupations of farming and fishing have since been abandoned for wage earning employment opportunities especially in the petroleum and petro-allied industries. Indigenous economic system have largely fall apart or been swallowed up by myriad of activities in an increasingly important and fast developing town that Warri has become (Iferiora, 1997). Warri is basically an industrial town, and the petroleum industry is the main industry, including the iron and steel industry. The largest section of the population are either directly employed in the oil industry or in the servicing firms and in other petro-allied industries and business. Apart from the petroleum industry, there are other strategic industries within the hinterland of Warri. One of such industries is

the steel industry. The steel industry is known as Delta Steel Company (DSC) located in Ovwian-Aladja. It was commissioned in 1982 and is described as Africa's most modern steel complex. The steel industry is another large employer of labour which though is outside the actual periphery of the town, nevertheless contributed greatly to the growth of the town. The commissioning and operation of DSC was important to the growth of Warri in a way relating to the impact of the arrival of the oil companies to the town in the late sixties. Shipping and other maritime businesses, trading, government and other agencies are other employers of labour.

The city is an oil hub in South-south Nigeria with an annex of the Delta State Government House. Presently Warri shares boundaries with Ughelli, Okpe, Sapele, Uvwie and Udu Local Government Area. However, most of these places notably Okpe, Udu, and Uvwie have been integrated to the larger cosmopolitan Warri. That is to say, that the infrastructural development in Warri expanded to these local government areas in recent years, with various roads networks linking these places. Each of these areas has its own administrative structure. Osubi in Okpe Local Government, houses an airport that serves the city of Warri. Effurun serves as the gateway and economic nerve of the city. Warri city is the residence to four monarchs namely the Olu of Warri (Itsekiri), Orosuen (Ovie) of Okere-Urhobo Kingdom (Urhobo), the Ovie of Agbarha Kingdom (Urhobo), and the Pere of Ogbe-Kingdom (Ijaw). The people of Warri are predominantly Christians with a mixture of African traditional religion like in most part of southern Nigeria. Warri city is known nationwide for its unique Pidgin English. The city is nicknamed *Waffi* city or *Waffi* town.

### **Ethnic Conflicts in Warri**

Warri is a city that is known for ethnic conflicts. The conflict grew from the struggle for group legitimacy and entitlements among the three ethnic groups. Each of the ethnic groups claimed to be the owner of Warri. The claim over the ownership of Warri by the three ethnic groups of Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw, is a matter of a long standing historical controversy. The ethnic groups claimed to be the first to settle in Warri and tried to support their claims with historical data. They tried to interpret historical data to buttress their justification of claim over the ownership of Warri, as each group refers to the other as settlers. The ethnic conflict in Warri was also caused by British colonial policy. At the time of the advent of British colonial rule,

the Itsekiri were more united as a people and more aware of their common interests and problems than were their Urhobo and Ijaw neighbours. The Itsekiri had a centralized political system under the Olu. This was absent among the Urhobo and Ijaw ethnic groups. As a result of this the British gave the Itsekiri preferential treatment based on the ease of dealing with people with a history of unified submission to a central authority. The Urhobo hated the Itsekiri for the preferential treatment which they received during the colonial era. Also, the British colonialists recognized the interdependence and ethnic diversity in Nigeria, but they disrupted it and agglomerated them into one political unit. Colonialism forcibly incorporated people with different histories, cultures and socio-political organization into one country, and there was the attempt by the colonial authorities to govern each group or territory separately well into the colonial period (Usman, 2008). Colonialism incorporated segments of the pre-colonial power elites and transformed them into components of land agents for the colonial regime both in the political and commercial sectors of the society. It was the British who subdivided the land into regions, provinces, divisions, districts and sub-districts. During the colonial period, the British created the Warri Province for administrative purposes and it included the three ethnic groups of Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo. But the province was dominated by the Itsekiri, and this resulted to reactions of the two other ethnic groups (Imobighe, 2002).

In May 1952, crisis emanated in Warri from an action of the government of the former Western Nigeria, when it decided to change the title of the Itsekiri King from Olu of Itsekiri to Olu of Warri. The change was effected at the request of the Itsekiri over the objection of the Urhobo. The Urhobo in particular felt that the title Olu of Warri would give the universal impression that the Olu is the paramount ruler or chief of the Warri Province, and this would legitimize the Itsekiri claim of the ownership of the area. The change of the title involved the Olu of Itsekiri ruling over all the people of Warri as if they were all Itsekiri. The change created animosity and mutual distrust between members of the Itsekiri and Urhobo ethnic groups. Violent crisis erupted in Warri among the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw, but especially with the Urhobo and Itsekiri in 1993. The crisis was as a result of Itsekiri carnival procession to celebrate the Olu's coronation anniversary. The annual procession of a carnival through major streets in Warri to mark the coronation anniversary of the Olu started

with the ascension of Atuwase II to the Itsekiri throne on May 2, 1987 (Edevbie, 2006). The Itsekiri saw the occasion as a means and opportunity to display and showcase their colourful cultural heritage. However this provoked the Urhobo. The Urhobo believed that the procession was not intended to display Itsekiri culture but to emphasize their claim over the ownership of Warri. This led to violence, which left several people dead and injured and properties destroyed. Open conflict also broke out in 1997 as a result of local government controversy. In October 1996, 186 local government areas were created nationwide, and an additional local government was created in Warri. The Delta State Military Administrator Col. D. J. Dung announced the creation of Warri Southwest Local Government Area with Ogbe-Ijoh, an Ijawtown as the headquarters. The Ijaw were very happy with the development. However, the federal government later relocated the Warri Southwest local government headquarters from Ogbe-Ijoh to Ogidigben, an Itsekiri settlement. The Ijaw felt disappointed and marginalized. They believed that the Itsekiri had persuaded the military government to alter earlier plans that placed the headquarters at Ogbe-Ijoh. The Ijaw reacted violently and the Urhobo, due to their grievance against the Itsekiri gave tacit support to the Ijaw and this helped to broaden the scope of the conflict. The conflict led to unprecedented destruction of lives and properties. In February 2003, conflict started from disagreement at a People's Democratic Party (PDP) primaries which took place at the Warri Township Stadium. The conflict erupted over the delineation of electoral wards. The Urhobo were not happy with the structure of wards for the election and they left the venue of the election. They attacked the Itsekiri areas, burning houses and vandalizing properties. This action of the Urhobo took the Itsekiri unaware. At night however; the Itsekiri launched a revenge attack. The conflict led to the destruction of lives and properties and left so many persons displaced

Warri enjoyed some years of peace but in contemporary time conflict have continued to unfold leaving the city in a state of mutual distrust among the three ethnic groups. The Warri crises affected inter-ethnic harmony. That is, it led to unfriendly relationship among the three ethnic groups of Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo who had interacted with each other peacefully in the region for centuries. There was general distrust and increase in the resentment among members of the different ethnic groups over the ownership of Warri and its resources especially crude oil.

Crisis in Warri over the years have affected the development of the area. Since the inception of open crisis, only few investments came into the region because businesses need a stable socio-political environment to thrive. Inter-ethnic tension and violence undermined the much needed stability. All over the world, armed conflicts have always resulted, sometimes, to massive movement of whole populations and even businesses from the conflict zones. The crisis in Warri affected internal investments, as many oil and servicing companies moved their headquarters and relocated to more peaceful areas or states such as Port Harcourt and Akwa-Ibom. Many of the companies only maintained skeletal services in Warri. Such companies include Tidex, Lamnalco, United Geo-Physical Surveys and Dowell-Schlumberger. The Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) also moved more of their departments to Port Harcourt. The relocation was not limited to big businesses alone. Small private business also relocated to other nearby towns such as Agbarho, Ughelli and Sapele because of the conflict and the imposition of curfew.

### **Achieving peace in Warri**

Warri is a hotbed for ethnic disputes and for peace to be achieve, certain measures should be put in place to stop the tide of ethnic conflict in the city. Endemic and long lasting social conflict is destructive and should be prevented if possible and contained once it erupt. Dialogue among the three ethnic group is necessary. If a ceasefire agreement could be reached in Gaza between Israel and their neighbours, in a war literally dating back to Biblical times, there is no reason why something similar cannot be achieved among the disputed parties in Warri. Dialogue is not a sign of weakness; it is a mark of wisdom. It reflects the courage to listen, the humility to learn and the strength to forgive. The three ethnic groups should embrace ethnic tolerance and pursue peace. There should be mass empowerment of the populace especially the youth who are usually at the fore front of conflict. There should be equitable economic opportunities for the youth of the three ethnic groups of Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw to arrest economic hardship. Once hunger, starvation and poverty are arrested, aggression, and antagonism would be reasonably brought under control. The people would then be more receptive to harmonious and peaceful coexistence, socio-political stability and development. Without empowering the youths and initiating them into various legitimate economic endeavor, it will be difficult to achieve peace in Warri. No investor would want to

invest money in an environment that is insecure like Warri over the years. Many oil giants company with huge investment have moved their headquarters from Warri to Port Harcourt.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examines avenues of achieving peace in Warri. Warri is known for tribal politics and interest which has torn the city apart resulting in ethnic conflicts and the fading dreams of the once bustling city. The Warri crisis especially since the 1990s made the city to experienced increasing numbers of residents and businesses relocating to conflict-free neighbourhood. Each successive outbreak of violence resulted in a new wave of movements. The escalating ethnic conflicts in Warri against the background of youth unrest, triggered the flight of businesses and investments from Warri. As noted earlier, the crisis made some oil companies reduce their staff strength and relocate their offices to other operational bases outside Warri. The prize of violent dispute is very expensive. Conflict prevention and early warning are very important in a society that is bedevilled with crisis. The inhabitant of Warri deserve to live happy lives in peaceful environment but this could be rather impossible and unachievable if the people and leaders fail to pay attention to conflict signs and early prevention and by so doing do not prevent conflict from escalating to violence. The ethnic groups in Warri should embrace dialogue to stop the stem of reoccurring conflicts over the years.

### **Recommendations**

The creation of separate local government for the three ethnic groups is a possible solution to the continuous ethnic conflicts in Warri. The settlement pattern of the three ethnic groups favours the creation of a separate local government. Each of the group in Warri settled in in a separate area and lived as a separate socio-cultural unit. The creation of a local government for each of the group is needed since if they cannot live together in peace under a common administrative unit.

The beckon for peace in Warri should not end in rhetoric. The beckon for peace should be translated into tangible steps that the inhabitant can trust and see. Appeal

for peace alone cannot heal the wounds among the three ethnic groups. A framework of fairness that addresses grievances at their roots is needed. There is also need for interethnic forum of the three ethnic groups. Delegates of the various ethnic group should be convened and sit at a regular interval with a rotational chairmanship within the groups.

The people and leaders must use languages that unite them rather than language that create tension. They should speak of shared prosperity and shared responsibility. The leaders of the three ethnic groups should organize inter-ethnic sport competition in Warri. Sport is one event that unites Nigerians together in spite of the country's diversity. The leaders of Warri should organize annual sport festival that involves both the young and old. It should not be football alone but a variety of sports. There should also be annual cultural festival to celebrate both differences and shared destiny. Though the three ethnic groups have their own cultural festival, there is also need for a joint cultural festival to foster peace and unity in Warri.

There should be visible infrastructural projects such as construction of feeder roads and street lighting should be executed in mixed communities. The contracts of such projects should be transparently shared among the three ethnic groups. Justice, equity and transparency should guide every decision with open record for contracts and jobs. Rights and responsibility should be balanced fairly. No group should see themselves as victorious over the other groups. The annual procession to celebrate the Olu of Warri coronation anniversary should be done with caution. This procession has been the source of conflict in Warri in recent years.

This procession is usually done annually by the Itsekiri through major roads in Warri including territories of the Ijaw and Urhobo, chanting 'Warri belongs to Itsekiri (*The Guardian*, August 2025). This act of the Itsekiri has usually led to crisis in the area. The annual procession should be done in a peaceful manner not provoke the already angry groups of the city. If possible the Itsekiri should organize their procession on their territory so as not to disturb the fragile peace which the city enjoys. There is need for the establishment of permanent mediation centre to address dispute early before they escalate into a full crisis. The centre should be staffed with skilled mediators to manage land, chieftaincy and tenancy cases before

they grow into open crisis. There should be political will by the appropriate authorities to prevent and respond to the recurring conflicts in Warri. The state and local government should know that the responsibility of intervening in conflict in Warri rest on its shoulders and failure to respond accordingly would be to the disadvantage of the government because there can be no development when there is no peace and stability. The government should lend voice to the conflict against perpetrators of such conflict.

Peace education should be integrated into every organization in the society in order to expose the people of Warri to other alternative ways of handling conflict rather than violence. Schools, religious organizations and other bodies should educate their members on alternative ways of tackling conflict apart from violence. Organization should take advantage of the social media to inform the masses about their activities in order to get many people involve and educated. The present age of social media make the more possible and stress free. Organization and peace advocates should take advantage of the social media to spread peace to the populace.

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