June 12,2012 it was the anniversary of that day, 19 years ago, when Bashorun M .K.O. Abiola, business mogul, publisher, philanthropist extraordinaire and politician, won the freest vote ever in Nigeria’s political history. Just like it was in most state of the federation on that day, June 12, 1993, when Nigerian began to clash the cymbals and clink glasses, as the results were rolling in and the Abeokuta-born politician was coasting to victory, there was grand celebration in Osogbo, the capital of the state of Osun, Tuesday as the state government flung open its gates to mark the day.

Even heavens joing in the celebration, as it rained virtually all day. Despite the downpour, however, the four venues scheduled for the anniversary burst at their seams with people who defied the inclement weather to partake in the activities. The governor, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola, showed leadership as he took part in all the activities at the different venue.

Among activities lined up for the celebration were a public lecture held at the Local Government Commission Hall at the Government Secretariat, delivered by frontline democracy activist and erstwhile NADECO chieftain, Chief Ayo Opadokun. The celebration hit a crescendo with the special screening of Fere-Bi-Ekun (the story of a callous and notorious brigand) written by legendary actor and playwright Adsebayo Falet.

In the lecture titled: Regionalism and Federalism, Anacea to Nigeria’s Under Development, the gust lecture tracked Nigeria’s journey to democracy a mission laced with political booby traps and landmines, and lamented the prevailing prohibitive cost of governance, and called for ‘a national restructuring”

“We need to restructure Nigeria in order to set up developmental strategies that meet global standards,” Opadokun said. “In Federalism, each level of government will hire and fire her employees. The decision of a Central Government must not be foisted on either the state or the local government council. Incomes are dissimilar and priorities can neither be uniform nor unified”.

In his keynote address, Aregbesola paid glowing tribute to icons of Nigeria’s democracy, both living and dead, for their unrelenting agitation for participatory democracy. But he stressed that the battle to consolidate on the gains so far made, via insistence non responsible and accountable governance, must continue till all vestiges of backwardness have been uprooted.

The governor who was obviously elated at the people’s enthusiasm during this year’s celebration, declared that henceforth, June 12 of every year shall be observed as MKO Abiola Day for Democracy. He told the Speaker of the State’s House of Assembly, who was also present at the occasion that an executive bill that would turn the pronouncement into law was on its way to the House. He seized the moment to comment on the agitation of workers for the full implementation of the new minimum wage policy, revealing the revenue profile of the State of Osun to the capacity audience. Aregbesola, who spoke extempore for over one hour, holding his listeners spellbound throughout the period, also commented on some of his administration’s giant strides, calling for the understanding of the workers who seem bent on drawing the battle line on the minimum wage issue.

Below are excerpts from Ogbeni Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola’s though-provoking speech.

**Pains of Being Black and Miserable**

(After paying tribute to Chief Ayo Opadokun, the late Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, the late Chief Gani Fawehinmi and other icons of Nigeria’s democracy, he begins…) There are various types of humans on earth. You have the Whites, the Pink, the Yellow, you have the Red. You have the Mulatos, those who are not really Black nor White. You have the Black ones like us. The truth is that today in the world, the most backward, most underdeveloped, most despised; most rubbished, most miserable people on earth are us (Blacks). That, in itself, is a cause of concern by whoever is Black.

God has made it possible for me to move round the world. The only parts of the world I have not visited are Australia and New Zealand. I have been to all parts of the world by the Almighty grace of God. I found out that in all parts of the world, any place you find the Blacks in the worst. In all parts of the world, regardless of the state of development of those parts, where Blacks are predominant it usually the worst. I went to London, where the Blacks are there is the worst. I went to America, it was worse. The Blacks were in places where you have the worst conditions. Blacks live in all sorts of conditions over there.

I passed through a street in Washington, one day, and I was looking at their buildings; and I saw people were Blacks! I thought that would be the end of my shock, so, I went further inside America to see how they organise their Bus Rapid Transit, BRT. We wanted to bring it to Lagos, so, we had to go there to look at how it was organised.

We went to Colombia. Colombia is the first country that introduced bus metro. So, we went to look at it. We spent a week in their capital, Bogota. After we had concluded our mission, as usual, I wanted to understand that city very well. So, I chose to visit their main street market. When I entered the market, it was so fine and everywhere was neatly arranged. Then, I asked myself “Could this be (the only) market of this people?” I moved around and saw that everything was fine. It was so beautiful. It was covered with a translucent roof. It was so beautifully covered that when you are inside, it’s so bright you won’t know when night falls. But something in me kept telling me to move on, move. The thing kept telling me that no, this is not how a market should be (at least from the point of view of somebody coming from Nigeria). So I kept on going while my other colleagues were looking for what to buy.

All of a sudden, I just ran into a place, a section of the market that was the exact opposite of what I had seen. It was as if something just transported me from that market in Bogota to Mushin Market in Lagos, until that time, there was no indication that a single Black man was in Bogota. Up till that time, I hadn’t seen a single Black man. So, when I go to that shabby and dirty section of the market, who were those that I saw? Black! Squatting because there was nowhere (decent enough) to sit. Everywhere, you see badly processed mangoes, bad vegetables, and many other rotten things. There was open sewage running, and they were shocked as well! They thought I was Black and yet, better dressed, with better gait. They started beaming at me. I was so shocked that it took me to glimpse back. I couldn’t understand how a people who had left us over 200 years ago must be living exactly as we are living here, without any contact with us. Wiserable. Poor. Dirty. Unkempt Unhappy. Wretched!.

That was the day I asked myself that as a Black man, something must be done to change this terrible image of ourselves. I told myself that something must be done to change this terrible image of ourselves. I told myself something must be done to change this horrible image of us. (Roaring applause.) And I want to believe that it is that passion that has driven several people, from Lumumba, to Nkrumah, to Steve Biko, to all those who have fought (for the emancipation of Blacks and Africans)… and even to Abiola, Egbon (my brother) Opadokun, to Awolowo, to Beko, to Falana, to Gani Fawehinmi, to all of us, who feel that there is nothing innately there making us this miserable. I want us to know that if there is any nation on earth that God has created, either through human efforts or whatever, to remove this stigma from the Blacks, that nation that has the historic responsibility to take the Black out of this miserable path, we are (points to the crowd and changes to the Yoruba language)… Awa yi i ni o. Meaning: that nationality is the Yoruba (Another roaring applause).

Why do I say so? Simple. We are the singularly largest ethnic nationality of the Black stock anywhere in the world. With our custom, with our culture, with our background and values, we must put ourselves together to liberate our race. Those who challenge me should go and do their own study and come back to me if I’m wrong, we are the largest ethnic stock here. We are the ones with culture and custom, developed over centuries that could mobilise us to shake off this horrible image. If there is any focus of my administration, it’s to make sure we begin that process, even if we cannot conclude it. And we must begin and try to conclude it.

**Why Abiola Watered the Seed of Democracy With His Blood**

Today (June 12, 2012), to me, therefore, is not just a day for simply sober reflection. No, it’s more than that. It is a day to ask ourselves, why should a man with the wealth of Abiola, with his international connection, end the way he did? Why should he abandon everything he had acquired-his business empire, his vast international network-to end up in jail and die lin jail? If Abiola were to negotiate his freedom, had the clout.if Abiola were to negotitate his freedom, he had enough money. If Abiola were to negotiate his freedom , he had enough connection, because if you dont know, useveni told some people that but for Abiola, he would never have been able to take over the government of Uganda.And it was not only Museveni, there were several other African leader that, indeed, owed their sucess and victory to him. So with his connections and link, we must ask ourselves:why should he do what he did to himself, knowing the repercussion? He did so because he found out later that it does not really matter what you have, that if the blacks are way they are today, you amount to nothing. And indeed, you amount to nothing.

So, we remember Abiola today to motivate us, to inspire us to the need to put in that extra effort to put the Black man on the map as part of humanity. The signs are not right. We are the onlypeople that find it difficut to coperate. Imagine, here in the state of osun,there are four locatrions in which there are celebration Abiola’s day. What inpression are we passing, when all of us can come Abiola? This would be the last time we shall have atomised celebrations of Abiola. As from next year, we shall either do it at the stadium,if it is ready, or we do it in any open grand were school children would march, where speeches would be made,where we shall rally ourselves to what we shall,henceforth, call MKO Abiola Day (thunderous ovation).

(Turning to the speaker of osun state House of Assembly....) We are sending a bill to the osun state house of Assembly to make this day MKO Abiola Day by law and it shall remain so for ever, and ever and ever.... Mr. Speaker, Sir,I repeat, a bill is coming that will make J une 12 every year MKO Abiola Day for Democracy in the State of Osun. And it’s not just about Abiola, it’s about us as a people, as a race. It’s about our destiny. It’s about what human do to receive the ancient glory of our land.

Our people built the pyramid. When I was given the mandate of AD (Alliance for Democracy) them, my (acceptance) speech then was titled: The big, Big Pyramid. If we are the children of the builders of the pyramid, which remains, today, as a major technological landmark, we cannot afford to be who we are now. No our forbearers erected the opa Oranmiyan (The Oranmiyan staff in Ile- Ife). Which is a technological feat by any standard. If you look at what it must have cost people, you would know that, indeed, we are progenies of a highly advance race. And it’s a shame that, indeed, awon omiran ti nbi rara o(meaning: giants are now giving birth to midgets).

We are midgets conpared to the deeds of our forebears.

**Osun Workers and i:**

**Facing the Facts**

Having spoken about our past, let’ talk about the resent. And hat leads us to the workers. We us an aremaking efforts here and there but the workers have given us an ultimatum. They said we must make minimum wage uniform or across board. I have no quarrel with that, but the truth is the state’s resources cannot support it. It’s not as if anybody does not want the workers to have money, but we must tell oueselves some home truth. The duty of a government is not to pay salaries; the primary duty of any government is to serve the people, with the workers. The workers are to help the government to meet the basic aspirations of the people.

Are we satisfield with the water supply to the people? My answer is no!(The crowd choruses”NO!”).I don’t know of your own. we satisfied with the road condition? My answer is no! I don’t know of your own. Are we satisfied with the general economy? My answer is no I dont know of your own. If we becauseare dissatisfied with every aspect of governance, and it’s not because we are not doing our best ....,after all before i know what allocation is taken, a section of the workers must have seen it. So, its never a secret. I know after you have known.

Looking at that income, where are we going to get extra kobo to pay anything? Already, we are working outside the allocation given to us. That is why you will never hear me talk of allocation. It’s totally not enough! How do i mean? We must rebuild schools. It’s not as if we want to do anything outlandish. No. It’s for glamour. It’s not for show. These schools were built over 50 years ago. What were they built with? They were built with mud. Our earth has a lot of iron content. Whether you like it or not, the iron content oxidises with the atmosphere. And with the oxidation, what do you see? Cracks! That is why buildings are collaosing. All the building made of mud, whether as schools or as private residence, they are all falling apart. The structures can no longer stand. They are now dangers, threats to the lives of our pupils there. It’s either we close our eyes to those threats or we do the needful. Pull them down, make them moderm so that they can serve for another 50 years.

That is why we feel we should re-modify the school environment and make them attractive. For that, to just do the least we could do, which is, build 100 new elementary or primary schools, build 50 new middle schools, build just 20 high schools, we would need N30 billion in the next 24 months. And we challenge anybody to come and pick the design and do the costing to find out whether it is padded. There is no rocket science in this. Anybody that has knowledge of quantity surveying could pick up our design and cost it to be sure whether we are just mouthing it.

That alone is N30 billion Now, how much does Osun earn on the average every month? Between N2.5 billion and N3 billon. Now, let us take the upper limit, N3 billion. Three times 12 is billion, it remains what? (The crowd choruses N42 billion). Today, I pay between N1.8 and N2 billion as salary. Remove the allocation we get, it’s never enough to do all the things we should do. Out of a total of N3 billion monthly allocation, we pay between N1.8 billion and N2 billion as salaries. For ease of calculation, let’s say N1.5 billion N1.5 billion times 12, how much is that? N18 billion N18 times two? N36 billion, N36 plus N30? N36 billion plus N30 billion, how much is that? For two years.

Whether you like it or not you must run government . This light you see is not free from PHCN. You pay. If there is no light, you run generator, you buy fuel. It’s not whether you like your governor to be trekking. So, the I must have security men around me 24/7. I’m also a prisoner because I connot enter my house without them. I must not lock my doors. They must accompany me to my mother. I can’t enter the toilet alone. (The hall reverberates with laughter). No, that’s how it is. What I’m saying is that you must have them follow you.

As it is with me, so it is with my deputy. So, it is with my other coterie of officials. There is a standard provision you must make. That’s what they call the cost of running government. Recurrent expenditure. As it is with me, so it with the House of Assembly. So it is with the judiciary. Let’s even assume that for all of these, we spend just N100 million every month. It’s grossly inadequate. N100 million times 12 times two. N2.4 nbillion.

I have only spoken about education Now, we must do roads-Oshogbo, three, Ilesha, three, all township roads. Then, we have Gbongan, Odeyinka, Orile-Owu, Araromi Owu, Ajegunle- N175 billion Iwo-Oshogbo, between N15 and 20 billion Easterm by pass-N17 billion. Old Garage to Kwara border –N17. 8 billion I must do Iwo to Ejigbo –about N2 billion. And several others like that. And them up them up, and let’s talk. Where is there anything to spare?.

I have not spoken about my commitiment to transport agricultural produce, from Oshogbo to Lagos, free of charge I have not spoken about transporting manufactured goods from Lagos to Oshogbo, free of charge-all in my effort to revive commerce of Oshogbo and bring money to our people. I have not spoken about the cost of feeding students in our schools. I have not talked about the uniforms to the students. I have not talked about the need to renovate our hospitals. I have not spoken about providing drugs in the hospitals. When you put all of these together, it’s either we say it does not matter what the people have, that what matters is what the people have, that what matters is what the workers have. And what is the percentage of the workers? Because of our poor economy, the percentage of what goes to the workers has a lot of impact on the economy. It’s not a good index but we must not fail to say it that because the economy has not grown, the meal that comes to the workers to eat is such that the workers see themselves as the movers and shakers of the economy. And for that reason, they are vitually blackmailig the whole of us. It’s a choice. We either want a virile space where the people will not only leave our place, but also steadily and gradually advance in their economy and in themselves, or we say it does not matter, let us all remain there.

**My Offer**

My offer to the workers is this: let us deal with those who are vulnerable, that is those who we know their pay cannot take them home. Those who are on levels one to seven, let us deal with them. That is actually the meaning of mininmum wage. Those whose pay can hardly sustain till the end of the month must be given living wages. For those whose wages can still sustain them, I have told you and I’m still twlling them let us all continously look at our allocation and perforance in revenue generation. Whenever we clearly see improvement in the revenue accruing to the state, either internally or by allocation, let’s agree that these ones should go to those who we have not serviced in our quotations for wages.

But to always think that we can converniently rob the Peter on the people to pay the Paul of the workers, it would be a tough deal. And I appeal to you, it is in oir collective, omterest to use the sacredlines of thois time to reflect on our own role in building a virle economy, in supporting the desire of our people to leave the miserable life that tey are living. If we can do all the things that we are proposing to do, one, there would be money here, Number two, that more money would translate into better pay, and thirdly; we would all proudly say “yes, we have contributed to the development of Osun State”. And I think that is the desire of all of us including the workers.

As I said when I began, the principal objective of our administration is to see how we can use this opportunity to change the image of the Black man from that of a miserable, poverty-stricken underdeveloped and totally retrograde people and developing state, people and nation and I call on you all, let’s talk to ourselves. Let’s agree to agree on that minimum agenda.