

**Message from Timah Agwenjang II (The Fon of Anong)**

**MEDA USA Convention**

**Washington DC 29<sup>th</sup> July, 2006**

Mr. President, The Secretary and the general Executive of MEDA USA, His Royal Highnesses, The Fon of Amboh, The Fon of Oshie, The Fon of Menka, distinguished guest, and ladies and gentlemen:

I appreciate your president and Secretary for having extended an invitation to me to be here. I will assure you that my first lecture will be brief. It is a delight, and I'm particularly honored to be a part of this tenth anniversary convention. May I seize the moment to thank your unflinching resolve to come this far in search of solutions to our common destiny? We have congregated in a town noted for knowledge, in a city noted for great ideas, strength and unity when the need calls for. We inwardly stand here in need of all these three, for we meet in an era of change and endless challenges. Even though we remain hopeful, fear continues to be part of what the future will bring to each an every one of us. The greater our knowledge increases, the greater our ignorance decreases against our common problems.

One of our greatest fears of this modern time should not only gravitate around the war on terror and hunger...but more so, on the devastating scourge of HIV/AIDS. Its impact on our lives is surmountable. And in the heart of this epidemic, Africa often and vividly comes to every one's mind. This ultimately reminds us of the loved ones we have lost as a result of the disease... from family members, close friends, and acquaintances. This killer disease has wiped out hundreds and thousands in Cameroon. The North West province bears the brunt of it all: and Moghamo is at ground zero of all that reflects this global agony. It is our greatest challenge, because of the damage it has laid upon us. It is a damage that will for years to come continue

to take a toll on our effectiveness as a people. Looking around this hall, there is no single one of us who has not been directly or indirectly affected by this common enemy.

HIV/AIDS is not longer the deadly disease it used to be by western concepts. But, by any given contrast, it is a deadly disease in Cameroon and many developing countries at this particular time: because, a hand full of sufferers do fall short of life prolonging treatment regiments. It is deadly compounded in the sense that, our people still lack the resources to adequately sustain themselves with any conditions associated with the disease. First, they need money, they need an adequate supply of retro-viral cocktails to fight and maintain the body's immune system on a constant basis. They lack the education and, they need solid communication tools to henceforth tackle other impulses associated with the virus. They need an on-going awareness campaign initiative that reaches every segment of our society.

In order for us to compromise the fight, it is pertinent that our agenda and investment should consist of an education criteria and an increased campaign awareness initiative. It is critically important that we urge and encourage a change of attitude towards some of our traditional beliefs Through the involvement and the participation of our fondoms, local secondary and high schools initiatives in what I call "Message Driven Reminders" aimed to remind youths of the dangers of risky behaviors associated with poor personal life-styles choices. Health experts and those associated with this organization can craft behavior change mechanisms directed towards teen sex attitudes, and other life-styles reinforced by local schools and faith-based organizations. Encouraging our churches and its leaders to preach the message as part of their sermon on the pulpit critically would be important. However, making known to those sexually active that condoms usage is still the best means and strategy in preventing any form of sexually transmitted diseases STDs especially HIV virus. To be completely STD free abstention remains the key component that radically frees

one's soul from the carnage. However, these are only clinical approaches from a public health stand point. The answer to this problem not only lies in the hands of you and I, but more on the part of a commitment of resources and superb action that reflect our cultural environment.

As I eluded earlier, these are changing times. Change can be a difficult process, and every process requires adaptation and assimilation. Change breeds fear, it creates doubts in people minds and uncertainty. And on the other side of it all, change also affords us the recourse to discover new experiences. In the midst of it all these dimensions, we must stand still consistently.

In order for our unity to be strengthened, there has to be a dire need for us to be tolerant of each other's views, criticisms and opinions. Let us agree to disagree with one another, even when we take opposite sides on issues that reflect our diverse view points.

Learning to accept criticisms and opposing views is a direct way to seek truth on any platform. But, criticisms directed at each other far from positive and constructive in nature are damaging. Constructive criticism enables individuals and communities with a common agenda find solutions to their destiny. Let us fend out grudges, avoid dissonance, bad feelings and finger pointing, rather embrace civility in our interactions.

We live in a democratic society that has taught us if not how governments are governed, but how systems function for the good of all. This is an organization born out of idealism and human conscience aimed at helping destitute communities in an environment where resources are limited. The practical character of any government depends often on a variety of aspects critical of which are fairness, accountability and common ground. I am of the conviction that MEDA USA is governed under those democratic principles.

Accusations are often the anti-thesis to our brother and sister-hood; they encourage admonition and create divisiveness amongst people.

Let me tell you of a folk tale to get the point across. I do not know how many of you know of the story between the turtle and his brother-in-law. The turtle owned a large yam farm and one day, the brother-in-law felt hungry but had no food to eat so he thought it wise to go by his in-law's farm and pull one yam from the ground to roast and eat. While on his way home after eating the yam, he eventually collided with the turtle. Upon questioning, the brother-in-law admitted to the turtle that, he had harvested a yam from his farm. The turtle being a shrewd character he is, and out of anger and rage, he started beating his brother in-law. He beat him the whole day- from morning when locals were going to the farm until dusk on their return.

The villagers were worried about what was going on because of the out burst of cries from the pain of the beating. It was so disturbing to the entire village that it became much of a concern as to why all the harsh beating. Stealing was one of the worst crimes in the village. The villagers even though felt stealing was wrong, the grudge held by the turtle went on for too long a time. Rather for the villagers to sympathize with the turtle, they instead held it against him for beating his brother-in-law for so long a time.

The story goes to remind us that, we must attune, learn to forgive and reconcile when hearts are disturbed, and when minds faltered against one another. Sometimes, the very thing you hold onto against your fellow man can become the very thing that destroys your soul.

I do solemnly believe that, there is an agenda that can uplift our unity to make us grow stronger than before. Be reminded that you are sons and daughters of the great and mighty house of TAD-KHON. It was a house that gave birth to great people whose traditions and cultures impacted many places in the North West, South West even the Western Provinces. Our names say it all. Do not break down the house of

Nyambod, Tembie-Kah and many more forefathers of the land. I remember the first convention that was held in this town ten years ago, (even though I was not present); I am reminded of the fact that, it was a full house: a house that brought families from all corners of Moghamo, our division and beyond. It was in a spirit of brother and sisterhood driven towards one purpose. (One would have thought by now that, we would have become a strong development force in Cameroon today). We so willingly did so to record history so that someday our legacy will not be forgotten. I am convinced that, that momentum is still there, and will thrive for greater heights in time to come. But the one thing that must keep us on that path is for us not to lose momentum towards our overall goal: This must be a goal not far from development, unity and cultural enrichment.

Our people are far behind, Moghamo is far behind. Our schools are in need, health facilities need upgrading, computers and other technical equipment are needed for our boys and girls to adequately and successfully compete with their counterparts in the global community. Our young boys and girls need to be educated, because education remains the key basic ingredient to their future and our future. MEDA USA is the only voice for our people at this critical and difficult times in Cameroon's history.

I have always heard some of our people say that Moghamo is a sleeping giant. I am at this moment telling that giant to get up giant, get up... and walk else you will gain too much weight for lying down too long. Do not allow yourself to be beaten up by a snake or eaten by a lion.

There are no human obstacles or adversities that can not be overcome by any group of people, when their optimism and resources are directed towards a common course. History has taught us many at times and will continue to do so in reminding us that, there is no force greater than the determination of human will that works

collectively. We the sons and daughters of Moghamo on our collective but moral obligation and love of our origin embarked on this mission. We must not quit.

It is with a clear conscience that I call upon you at this time, to not deviate from that course. We must do it and keep doing it for as long as we all shall live. We have to do this not because we have to be rewarded in a sense, but more so because, it is mundane, it is a responsibility and above all it's the right thing for the right reasons.

At this critical time in our history, we must live and rise above our personal ambitions and focus on the larger picture, a picture of Unity and Progress.

With emphasis on our youths, I am an avid believer of the fact that, how you start up in life ultimately determines how you will finish. Life is a race; he who is quick to get off the starting line is he who crosses the finish line first. I have a word of advise to our young boys and girls born in the Diaspora or have migrated to some where out of the country. (In Cameroon the young men and women I often encountered lament to me that, they wish the opportunities their counterparts have in the United States were available to them in Cameroon. True it is so... please take advantage of what you have at your disposal and utilized those avenues for your own future. Therefore, here is my advice to the youths present amongst us today. Learn to be penny or nickel thrifty... because "a penny saved is a penny earned" as the old adage seems to convey. Do not tell me you are going to claim social security at some point in your life when you retire. How much that income will take to adequately provide for your daily needs upon retirement is a critical point in question. When you are on social security be reminded that your income is fixed, any increase is not usually sufficient to compliment any existing standard of living. What would happen if you fall sick of a catastrophic illness? There is no job too little for each an every one of you to start some sort of savings or money market account. Let's say at the age of 16 years, given the present interest rate on a monthly savings of about \$25.00 per month, that child or individual would be more than 1.6 million dollars richer at the age of 36

to 40 years old when the interest on such savings is compounded with roll over. This sum of money could significantly make a difference in one's life and families, thus significantly contribute to our development and solidarity in terms of our earning power.

The power and magnitude of volunteerism goes way beyond any imagination in any environment. Volunteerism empowers communities, strengthens people, unites cultures and creates understandings. I urge and challenge each and every one of you not to think of yourselves and your immediate families, but more importantly your communities and those that have less ties to you. America has so abundantly rewarded us or in other words has been kind to many of us. In giving we are rewarded along the way, and our lives become fuller and much richer. I am a testimony of that conviction.

In the midst of an African storm I can hear the cries of orphan children, mothers and elderly men and women lamenting and yearning for your help. Where are you? Where are you? You left me behind to go search for a better life in order to rescue me in times of crisis. Looking up at the horizon, I can see you clearly. You are better off than you left. You are comfortable, and you think less of what to eat the next day and less about diseases as well. But these are daily norms I live with routinely. Now, I need you, and I call upon you and there seems to be no answer. I am dying and waiting, but my waiting may not last for too long again. The end may soon come. Please come, please come and please hurry before it is too late, cries a mother in Africa, in Cameroon and in Moghomo.

The African woman has always been behind and sometimes at the forefront of our struggles and unending quest for a better life. We must invest in our women and young girls. They are the future and they are the bright and beautiful faces of Africa. I can see them and I can see you. She projects the human condition of what the so called Mother Land represents. From dawn to dusk, she teals the soil, plant, mends

the crops to grow, feeds, cloth and even shelter the children when the heavy rains come. That child was you and I. And in the midst of all adversities she carries these duties without admonition or regrets because she has your best at heart.

It is on this note that I will like to per tribute to four very special women that impacted my life as a child growing up poor. Without these giants I would not be where I am today. First, to a woman who as a Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroon through a twist of faith gave so much to me without any reservations? She mentored, coached and instilled a sense of purpose in my life. In my heart I simply call her auntie. To my dear and humble mother who gave birth to me and untiringly supported my every move in life, and at times defended the palace when circumstances warranted. To one great and bold lady from Houston. Her enduring love and concern for my well-being propelled me to sustain while lost and alone in the desert. The last but not least is my departed aunt, Known as “Mama Anyen”. She through my absence carried out the duties of the palace more than the village could have imagined. She did so with pride and dignity. These women are equally representative of what a real Moghamo woman is all about. She is resolute, hardworking, supportive, discipline, caring, and loving even at times capable of defending her family when crisis erupts. They are not just mothers and wives; these are true leaders in their own right. You Moghamo women should walk with pride and dignity. I am for that reason proud of you. Therefore, in every pursuit that this organization intends to carry forward, the African woman, the Moghamo woman must be given her rightful place in history. Creating a special committee of MEDA USA that works directly with our young women and women’s social groups around our villages in the sub-division would be an enduring and comfortable beginning that seeks to empower.

Just as these women contributed to making my life beautiful, so can each an every one of us undertake the task of making a difference in the future of others.

There can be no effort or contribution too little to make a difference in what we want to achieve now and the future.

I am going to tell you of another folk story. This is the story of the animals and the jungle fire. Once upon a time, a great wild fire broke out in the jungle, because the forest had seen years of dry hot seasons with little or no rains at all. As all the animals got together in an effort to find ways of putting out this huge fire, there was amongst them a little tinny bird. When they gathered, confusion, chaos and uncertainty became apparent as a result of many arguments and quarrelling amongst each other. While they quarreled and bickered, this fire raged unapologetically. And in the midst of it all, there was a little animal name the Song-Bird. He had wit, foresight, wisdom and above all, the desire to help his community for the good of all. It so happened that, there was a near by lake, and each time he flew to the lake, he brought with him little tiny drops of water to sprinkle over the raging forest fire. He did this as many times as he would, with pride and joy, and on each trip to the lake he even sings a song to motivate the rest of his comrades. To the amazement of the community the fire started dying out from his relentless courage and determination. Over a period of time, the rest of the animal started rejoicing as their faces light up in unison. They started dancing and in the heat of the dance, the fire was completely put out. This is a folk tale with a deep anagogical meaning. It is a lesson for all of us to learn and emulate, and be like the little tiny song bird. Be like the four women that made so much difference in a poor child's life. Every little effort counts in contributing to great outcomes in life.

At any point in time, history will be unforgiving of us if we fail in our pursuit of a common destiny. Presently, our enlightenment and enduring knowledge has surpassed our past experiences. These have provided us with great capacities, optimism, hope and the need to discern what lies ahead. This is the time to use what we have attained in terms of our collective and intellectual capabilities and common

decency for humanity to muster greater achievements for our children, our mothers and fathers in Cameroon. Our creativity should have no bounds given the magnitude of available resources in our environment.

We live in the greatest nation on earth. It is a nation full of wisdom, knowledge, determination, courage and above all it is a nation noted for the love of hard work and reward. We have so been rewarded.

I want you to think of the importance of a simple hand shake, and what it can do to a society and the world at large. It was a simple hand shake with President John F. Kennedy in the 60s that motivated and inspired a poor child from Arkansas to become one of our great leaders of modern times. If a simple hand shake can go this far, what more of your penny and commitment to the less fortunate ones in Cameroon. I challenge you to that vision, and I am convinced that you will not fail to yield. I do believe that, if we Moghamoans stand firm as one collective bunch there can be no current strong enough to sweep us away, in the middle of a fierce storm.

It is a time to fight a disease that threatens our foundation. It is a time to be more united with one another than we have ever been before. It is a time to forge a solid front towards our development, unity and progress, and to set precedence for others to follow in the future. The question is not what do we have? But, what do we do with what we have now. This is the United States of America, and I am convinced that we have everything at our disposal, let alone what we can achieve for the good of mankind. Let us achieve it at this moment.

Thank You Very Much,

May God Bless You All.