

**PRESS RELEASE**

June 13, 2016

**ROYALTY RETURNS TO ESSEX  
FREEHOLDERS WELCOME HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY OONI ADEYEYE ENITAN  
BABATUNDE OGUNWUSI, OJAJA, II**



Freeholder Britnee N. Timberlake (center), Freeholder Cynthia D. Toro (front right), Freeholder Leby C. Jones (rear center right) and Freeholder Wayne L. Richardson (rear center left) greet His Imperial Majesty Oba Adeyeye Enitan Babatunde Ogunwusi, the Ooni of Ife (King of Ife) and his Queen from Nigeria along with a host of other ruling kings and royal families to the majestic Essex County Historic Courthouse Complex PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON

(Newark, NJ) – It may have taken almost 300 years, but in grand style Royalty returned to Essex County. Essex County officials lead by Freeholder President Britnee Timberlake welcomed His Imperial Majesty Oba Adeyeye Enitan Babatunde Ogunwusi, the Ooni of Ife (King of Ife) and his Queen from Nigeria along with a host of other ruling kings and royal families to the majestic Essex County Historic Courthouse Complex on Friday, June 10, 2016, amid fanfare befitting his status. Ooni Oba Adeyeye Enitan Babatunde Ogunwusi is on a month-long United States tour including a swing through the Northeast with stops in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Newark, New Jersey, and the United Nations in New York City, New York.

The event was delayed several hours due to the king traveling with over 80 people in his entourage but that did not deter hundreds of onlookers, including a good deal of Nigerians who have made Essex County their home, from waiting in the sun for the Ooni's arrival. Included in the Program were U.S. Congressman Donald Payne, Jr., from the 10<sup>th</sup> District, New Jersey Assemblywoman Speaker Emeritus Sheila Oliver from the 34<sup>th</sup> district, and representatives from County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo's Office. The County Executive, who co-sponsored the reception with the Board of Freeholders, was forced to leave because of a scheduling conflict due to the delay of the event, but sent greetings and well wishes

on behalf of the county. Freeholder President Britnee N. Timberlake, along with Freeholder Patricia Sebold, Freeholder Wayne Richardson, Freeholder Lebby Jones and Freeholder Cynthia Toro, greeted the royal entourage.

Freeholder President Timberlake noted that a number of other planned stops, including one at Essex County College, had to be cancelled, but she extended an invitation for those officials to join the County sponsored event. Speaker Oliver in a moving oration, reminded the crowd that Essex County has the largest population of Nigerians in the State of New Jersey, while Congressman Payne, Jr., spoke about the history of African-Americans and their connection with Africa. A moment was taken to honor the Late Congressman Donald Payne, Sr., who was often referred to as “Mr. Africa” because of his humanitarian work on behalf of struggling African Nations. Likewise, Freeholder President Timberlake, who recently returned from a goodwill visit to Ghana, West Africa, noted that Essex County is behind Congressman Payne, Jr., as he continues to raise awareness from the floors of Congress about the need to eradicate the terrorist group Boko Haram. She also spoke about the economic growth that the Ooni is bringing to Nigeria, as well as his many social and economic progressive programs that will bring change and development to Nigeria. "The Ooni of Ife is a humanitarian seeking to unite all African leaders for the common good of the continent. This occasion was a beautiful celebration of cultural awareness and an awesome display of kings and queens that people of the diaspora derive from", said President Timberlake.

His Imperial Majesty Ooni Adeyeye Enitan Babatunde Ogunwusi, Ojaja II, was born into the Giesi Ruling House, Ojaja Royal Compound of Agbedegbede in Ile-Ife and was crowned the 51st Ooni of Ife on December 7, 2015. Before his emergence as the Ooni, he was an astute entrepreneur, driven by turning “impossibilities to possibilities”. His power of imagination has set him apart, revolutionizing the approach to creativity and innovation. The region has realized monumental achievements since his ascension to the throne and he has worked hard on improving the infrastructure and accessibility to resources for his people. His academic achievements and professional memberships include, but are not limited to the following: Doctor of Public Administration, Honoris Causa, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN); Higher National Diploma in Accountancy; Member, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN); Member, Institute of Directors (IoD) of Nigeria; and Member, Global Real Estate Institute. The Ooni is a great achiever, administrator, and the father of the Yoruba Nation.

Reflecting on this historical event, Freeholder Patricia Sebold shared, “It was a true honor to have His Imperial Majesty Oba Adeyeye Enitan Babatunde take his important time to visit Essex County. We must recognize all people from everywhere with great tribute, especially a King, to help all people work together for a better world.” She further thanked President Timberlake for helping to create such a wonderful event. Likewise, Freeholder Cynthia Toro added, “Essex County is rich in race diversity, I always look forward to welcoming leaders of other nations whose life-long work has embodied equality, justice and peace and it was a great pleasure having Ooni Adeyeye Ogunwusi of Ife as our guest.” While Freeholder Lebby Jones stated, “I am happy to celebrate his Imperial Majesty coming to Essex County and join my colleagues in welcoming him and his leadership.”

The Ooni spoke about the millions of Africans who were abducted and forced into slavery during the Middle Passage, including hundreds of thousands from Nigeria where one of the first slave ports was established. His Imperial Majesty noted, rather than give up or give in; Africans who were enslaved endured and were responsible for building a great deal of the United States and other parts of the world. At one point he noted that the sun and the moon were both showing in the sky in perfect alignment over the event and remarked that it was a sign that the heavens were looking down with favor on what he called a “truly magnificent reception”. Freeholder President Timberlake was invited to accompany his Imperial Majesty to the United Nations in New York City.

Historically speaking, the last reported monarch to visit Newark and Essex County was in 1970 and 1971, when the Netherlands Crown Princess Beatrix and her husband Prince Klaus paid two visits to Newark, as noted by the late Newark Historian Charles Cummings. Essex County is one of the original four counties established in 1683 by the provincial government and gets its Name from the Kingdom of Essex (the Kingdom of Saxons) in England, ruled by Saxons monarchs for Generations.

This monumental event included, Princess Joy Olagbegi-apampa who served as the emcee, a special drum presentation by Oluwadamilare Omoboriowo, and opening and closing prayers by Pastor Dr. Toyin Olaoye and Pastor Ayani, respectively. The program began with the singing of “*The Star-Spangled Banner*” by Kathy Brown and the Nigerian National Anthem by Oluwafikayo Ojo. At the conclusion of the program, the Ooni and his Queen were escorted to a tour of the freeholder’s chambers while the entourage and guests took part in light refreshments.

**For Additional Information:**  
**Debra A. Marvel, Deputy Clerk**  
**Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders**  
**973-621-6539 (phone) 973-621-5696 (fax)**  
**[dmarvel@freeholders.essexcountynj.org](mailto:dmarvel@freeholders.essexcountynj.org)**