

# **OPENING SPEECH DELIVERED**

**BY**

**AMB. DR. KEMA CHIKWE**

**AT THE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE AND  
OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP  
INSTITUTE (WLI)**

**AT THE  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION  
AUDITORIUM ABUJA,  
ON THURSDAY, JUNE 28, 2018**

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Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the launch of the Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) which for me is a dream come true. It is not only a realization of a goal but also translating ideas into initiatives for ethical leadership of African Women and in particular reference to Nigerian women.

The WLI elevates the dialogues, debates, workshops, conferences on women liberation, empowerment and mainstreaming as well as the Non-governmental organization (NGO) efforts to the level of institutionalization of many years of women activism.

Personal experiences acquired by students of the institute will give them an insight and proffer solutions to the peculiarities of women leadership.

So far in Africa, and in particular reference to Nigeria, no University offers a degree or diploma in Women/Gender Studies which would have essentially helped to neutralize

the perception of African Societies about women. At the best Women/Gender Studies are subsumed under social sciences. The Diploma earned at WLI will go a long way to introducing a new strategy for overcoming the contemporary challenges of women Leadership posed by discrimination of any form and thereby acclaiming the assertion of Sheryl Sandburg that " in future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders".

Leaders are in demand at every level and in all sectors of development, yet only last year in Nigeria the Bill on women could not pass at the National Assembly. The passage of this wholesome bill is a challenge to not only Nigerian Women, but also the society at large, who must be united in action and consistent and persistent in creating more effective strategies to give women, who constitute more than 50% of Nigerian population, their rightful place in leadership. There is yet a window to pass that bill especially when the Deputy Senate President of Nigeria, Senator Ike Ekweremadu himself, in addressing women in Parliament recently, lamented that Nigeria ranks 168th position in parliament in the global index of Women Development, and had referred to it as abysmal global

ranking in Women representation in governance, especially in parliaments.

Senator Ekweremadu highlighted that conversely the East African nation of Rwanda, ironically and also other African nations such as South Africa, Mozambique, Ethiopia and neighboring Senegal are among the top 20”.

Over the years, from the 1970s, and as a much younger woman, I have been engaged in projecting and promoting the gender optimal pathway to a level of impacting the society on the platform of Women organizations, including the National Council of Women Societies, Business and professional Women, Women in Nigeria, Soroptionist, rural-based organizations and a few others and I have served on their executive committees. I am patron to some other women local and international organizations and specially Women in Logistics and Transport (WILAT) and WISTA. I have established my own Non-Governmental Organization, Women and New Orientation for values Initiatives (WANO). My tenure as the National Women Leader of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), during which I consistently attended the CSW at the UN in New York, attended conferences in the Gambia, South Africa and some other Countries, and also attended

a Diploma course for African Women Leaders in China in 2012, exposed me to experiences that I believe should be harnessed and shared to the benefit of other women, especially the upcoming leaders. The outcome of all these experiences and exposure are the establishment of the Women Leadership Institute. Some Women have been able to break barriers in leadership without passing through formal institutions but these institutions are necessary because they create standards and form organized framework for achieving greater impact. We are aiming at producing a critical mass of Leaders who are women. It is the society that benefits from the contributions women make in development.

According to Oprah Winfrey, "everybody has a calling. Dreams. The key to realizing a dream is to focus not on success but on significance - and then even the small steps and little victories along your path will take on greater meaning."

The WLI has designed a curriculum that prepares women for leadership in three categories recognizing the quote of Chimamanda Adichie, who stated that "The problem with

gender is it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing who we are”.

The first category of students at WLI are the working class professional and educated businesses women. From this class of women you hear “feminism”. Feminism is defined as the advocates of Women’s rights on the ground of the equality of sexes. Here is a case study of a fictitious Joan who is aspiring to become the Managing Director of a Bank where she already serves as a branch manager. She is competing with nine other managers who are male.

In Nigeria, for instance, it is a serious challenge. She will have to decode conspiracy theories and intimidation by her competitors aimed to weaken her. WLI makes available strategies and skills for leadership orientation that will match with the looming intimidation of those competitors. Joan also has to be assertive and be able to exhibit her superior knowledge of the job and organizational skill and focused temperament. Women always go the extra mile to excel.

Some Women give up. With a WLI diploma or certificate, the performance level of Joan to excel above her colleagues will be assured.

The second category of students at WLI are women in active politics. Women all over the world have earned themselves recognition as most powerful campaigners and voters. Senator Ekweremadu in his landmark speech, expressing concern at the Women in Parliament event recently, confirmed that attitude towards women in politics has hardly changed when he highlighted that “our society wrongly believes that the role of the woman is that of a fosterer and in the kitchen. There is the wrong notion that women are not meant to lead, thus placing a glass ceiling over them. Those who vie for leadership positions are viewed as over ambitious and deviants.” What a good observation coming from the number 5 man in Nigerian government. More than ever before, that mindset needs to change, especially when the space for women is gradually being invaded by the millennial women who are digital, unlike the women of the era before them who were (and some still are described as) analogue. Women enjoy political networking and volunteer work for the progress of their political parties. Unfortunately most of these women in the field of politics hardly have sources of adequate income especially at the grassroot level. I have devised a slogan for those women which is “value for the work and

time of women.” Obtaining a diploma at WLI will prepare women for leadership and equip them to negotiate for specific roles in campaigns and elections for adequate remuneration. They deserve more structured recognition for their efforts.

Women generally need to have a grasp of the structures of politics and the processes that lead to contesting elections. As a National Woman Leader of PDP, a lady Aisha Osori was once introduced to me by my daughter Somachi as a prospective aspirant to the 2015 Federal House of Representatives elections. Like I did for other women aspirants, I outlined the process of contesting that election to her. Firstly register as a member of the party at her ward and thereafter familiarize herself with the officers of the party at the ward, local government and other levels of the party. Many young women who desire to go into politics are not familiar with the idea that politics has a heavy component of grassroots’ exposure and is non class discriminatory especially if you want to contest elections. Politics also has structures and systems. There is no short cut to it and you cannot discriminate or select the voters. Your constituency is the field in which you play politics. Ms. Aisha Osori was not happy with our discussions, so much that she

condemned the position of National Woman Leader in her book. This case study is quite significant because I am aware that there are many Aisha Osori who may have the wrong perception of how people rise to winning seats in the parliament or how the party may make recommendations for high political positions. According to Olafunke Baruwa, Former Head of the Nigerian Trust Fund, (an advocacy group seeking to boost women's Political leadership), "every party wants to put its best foot forward, and we are not sure that many are coming to put women forward". Women in politics should therefore prepare themselves to be that candidate if they want to contest elections.

The WLI offers women the opportunities for impactful political participation in order to be that candidate of the party's choice, institutionalizing Maya Angelou's saying that "for each time a women stands up for herself, without knowing it, she stands up for all women."

The third category of students at the WLI are the younger women, including fresh graduates, youth corp members, under-graduates and final year students at the secondary school.

According to Hilary Clinton “I believe that the rights of women and girls is the unfinished business of the 21st century.” Women Leadership Institute accommodates the interest of these younger women, recognizing that a succession frame-work introduces a seamless transition in women leadership and makes assessment of progress recorded more convenient. Mentorship is a major consideration in the courses offered for these young women. WLI offers opportunities to train women to succeed as leaders, in spite of any form of barriers. Profound optimism and confidence for creating women leadership as a normal course of life is the brand of the institute. As quoted earlier, in future, there will just be LEADERS, Women or Men.

Women Leadership Institute will on a regular basis introduce highly motivated leaders who are women in all aspects of national development. More than ever, Nigeria needs this initiative, a vision which will expand phenomenally. For as stated by Michelle Obama, “no country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens.

Today, as we launch WLI, we are recording a milestone. The courses will take off in September 2018 and we assure the Nigerian Public that a remarkable impact will be felt in the next few years.

It has been about two year of hard work setting up the Institute. I sincerely thank my husband Chief Nze Herbert O.N. Chikwe for his usual support in all my activities to add value to society. Without the commitment of Tony Ubani and Somachi Kachikwu the dream would not have come through now. I remain internally grateful to them. I appreciate the contributions of the staff, especially Amaka the Project Manager, Halima, Belinda and Natasha. I thank specially Member of the Governing Board and the Advisory Board. The Institute appreciates the dynamism of **McErnest** consultants who have been resourceful. Welcome to all the Speakers, special guests, service providers and participants. God bless you all.