

Political & Human Rights Campaigner vies for Governor **By** **Oxford Okpalefe (November 2006)**

There are many historical accounts of women warriors who often fought to defend their homes, people and country. However, although it is hard for many people today to conceive of such broad female authority, in some societies, women had the formal power to veto the decisions to go to war. Yet the present level of women participation in the present level of women participation in the decision –making and sharing of power between men and women is still unacceptably low, which calls to question the basic principles of democracy. What does it take for a woman to succeed in politics? Can women have it all? Despite the progress made in the last century, there are still few women leaders who have demonstrated similar skills that helped them break barriers and achieve success. Today and first in the history of West Africa, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf popularly nick named ‘The iron Lady’, who is an erudite politician defeated George Opong weah, a world soccer star turned politician, who was her opponent in the 2005 Liberian presidential elections; she has become the first woman president to rule in Africa. The same history is about to unfold in Nigeria as a political and human rights campaigner is about to become the first woman governor in Nigeria. She has for so many years devoted her time working for peaceful sustainable socio-economic and political progress of Nigeria. This ambassador for peace and a British –Nigerian citizen is actively aware of the need for Nigeria to progress and become a developed nation like Britain. Her desire to serve and the powered ambition to better the lots of Nigerians has made her pitch tent in her state of origin, Delta, where she is presently aspiring to become governor to fulfil the yearnings and aspirations of the down trodden masses. In this explosive interview with the publisher of Juvenis Magazine, Oxford Okpalefe, she gives reasons for aspiring and tells stories of her life encounters travelling round the world.

ALICE UKOKO

Alice Ukoko, a lawyer by profession was born in 1948 to the family of Chief Joseph I. Ukoko of Uzere in Isoko South L.G.A and late mother, Madam Christiana O.Ukoko from Eka family of Ekiugbo in Ughelli North, L.G.A, born of Delta State. She started her primary education at Ekiugbo where she was later dispatched due to an unfortunate family incident and proceeded to attend Convent School in Warri where she finished in 1960. She did not have the benefit of secondary education in Nigeria because her brother and his wife whom she lived with did not avail her the opportunity of same; reason being that as a female child, they felt that giving her the opportunity of obtaining secondary education would amount to a waste of money. They presumed she was going to be pregnant half way through the course. Her brother later promised sending her overseas to work and start a new life. At the age of 22, the opportunity came and she travelled to the United Kingdom to work and study as her brother promised. On arrival however, she realized that she had to fight to free herself from domestic chores and pursue her dreams, she succeeded and went for nurse training at Cuckfield Hospital in

West Sussex for two years. It was during her nurse training that she met her husband with whom she had her five children. She combined her marriage, child bearing and nurturing with obtaining formal education and qualifications. Through the opportunity for adult education in the UK, she attended Westminster College in South-West London where she obtained City and Guilds Certificate in Fashion Design in 1975. IN 1977, she attended Vauxhall College for further education and obtained five GCE subjects including English Language at ordinary level. Later in 1979, she obtained Economic and British Government Aspects at GCE Advanced Level. In furtherance, of her education, she also obtained a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business Studies with emphasis on Personal Management from South-West London College in 1981. In the same year, she returned to Nigeria with three children and did her youth service before joining the staff of the defunct college of Education, Abraka, now Delta State University, Abraka.

During her public service at the College of Education, she worked in different capacities including: Personal Department, Students Affairs and Academic Office. She was later appointed as the School's Public relations Officers before leaving the school in 1987. During her six years in Nigeria. She had the last two of her children and equally pursued a graduate programme becoming a Graduate Member of the Institute of Personnel Management of Nigeria. She later returned to the UK where in the support of their educational pursuit, she enrolled into Holborn Law Tutors in 1989. She embarked on a University of London Law Degree and obtained a Second Class with Honors in July, 1991. In October 1993, she decided to return to Nigeria again to attend Law school where she obtained B.L. in Law.

Although she has spent her entire life serving people in one form or another, she believes that is the purpose for which she was created. This, she has done since 1994, following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election and the subsequent arrest and detention of the late Chief MKO Abiola, when Nigerians embarked on a struggle to return Nigeria to civil rule. Her involvement in the struggle against military/civil dictatorship and the lack of respect for the basic rights of Nigerians started with the establishment of Chief Gani Fawehinmi's "National Conscience" (NC) in 1994. In September 1994, she founded women of Nigeria International (WONI) as the National Conscience (NC) was moving "too slowly" in raising the awareness of the international community to the atrocities that was being committed against Nigerians under the military regime. She was aware that without the civilian collaborators, the military would not be able to sustain political power but she felt that by ending military rule, the behaviour of civil politicians and international community would be more favourable to Nigeria and her people. Thus by the time, members of "NADECO Abroad" arrived in the UK for refuge, she was already on ground under Women of Nigeria International, now renamed Women of Africa (WOA), a Charity registered in the UK for the welfare of Nigerians in the UK including the empowerment of women. In her campaign to end military rule in Nigeria, the release of political detainees and defences of the rights of Nigerians were her main focus. She initiated different strategies and worked round the clock appealing to the International community to assist the masses of Nigeria who were under the stranglehold of regimes and governments over which they have no control.

Becoming a registered charity in the UK meant that she could no longer use WONI now renamed WOA for political and human rights campaigns. She therefore launched 'Democratic Alliance of Women of Nigeria' at the 33rd Summit of the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now AU that took place in Harare, Zimbabwe in June 1997. As the list of political detainees grew, her anxiety and dedication to the people of Nigeria deepened. Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni eight were executed, Shehu Musa Yar'Adua died in mysterious circumstances in prison, then in August 1997, Fela died. According to her, the news of the Fela's death was conveyed to her by the Ghanaian High Commissioner to Zimbabwe during her visit to him as she was lobbying the international community there to support her course. To her, she felt "abandoned" by one man who through his music drew the attention of the world to the evil regimes/governments that held the people hostage. Most especially, she felt hopeless as without Fela's music, the masses of Nigeria may never be able to redeem themselves and their generations to come. She was highly inspired by Fela's crusade for Nigeria using music. So also, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was in prison along many others and she was desperate to end the pain her fellow Nigerians, especially the women and children who were held in place of husbands and fathers, experienced by their ordeal. The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusesegun Obasanjo sent appeals from prison to people on the outside. Most of these appeals were addressed to NADECO Abroad, but his appeals had great impact on her. In response, she intensified her effort to free fellow Nigerians from underserved detention in their own country. She campaigned tirelessly to inform the international community of the burden that military/civilian regime imposed on the people of Nigeria. She was burdened by the growing abuse of rights of Nigerians, which is why she went about distributing campaign leaflets in London buses and underground stations. To many, Nigeria is not worth dying for, but she continued devotion to the service of Nigeria and Britain but has also around the world. For instance, Rome to Lobby Late Pope John Paul II when so much attention was needed in Nigeria during the military dictatorship. In the course of her devotion to the service of her motherland, she has also met the likes of British Prime Ministers, Tony Blair. H.R.M Queen Elizabeth II of Britain, the Duke of Edinburgh just to mention a few.

In recognition of her devotion to the Nigerian community, she has been described as amongst the 100 top black people in London and had received countless number of awards one of which was from the Worshipful, the Mayor of Southwark, and Councillor Hilary Wines in 2001. In Nigeria she had also met prominent people in the likes of President Olusegun Obasanjo, Prof Akinyemi, Chief John Odigie Oyegun, Gen. Akinrinade, Rev Obada, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu (Lagos State Governor), Chief Ralph Uwechie (now Ambassador for Conflict Resolution at the Presidency, Abuja). Chief Emeka Anyaoku (former Secretary General, United Nations). Alhaji M.D. Yusufu, and many others too numerous to mention. Having served Nigeria at various levels, she now has a global vision that transcends national frontiers, the motivation and iron-will to offer a fresh infusion into our body polity. She speaks thus:

JUEVNIS: as a political and human rights campaigner who has travelled round the world, you're entering into politics. What are your political credentials?

ALICE UKOKO: I would not at this point declare myself as a politician because the politics I know in the UK, in which the British invited me to be part of, is not the same in Nigeria. Some people say that they are ‘seasoned politician’ and they have been in politics for so long, yet, Nigeria is still struggling. To me, a seasoned politician is one who has participated in the development and the well-being of a nation. So if we look at Nigeria and use these credentials to judge the so called ‘seasoned politician’ then we do not have it all. What I have is the politics of change. I believe that I have those ideas and can represent very well because I represent the masses of country.

JUVENIS: Drawing inferences from your experiences, what outstanding contributions can you say you’ve made to your country?

ALICE UKOKO: As a world campaigner, I have raised the problem of my country to the international standard. I am a speaker for the Amnesty International and I am more or less a person you would describe as a human rights defender because I have been defending the rights of my people. In the UK I set up Women of Nigeria International (WONI), which on the 28th of October 2003, was renamed Women of Africa (WOA) with the mission of integrating the African community to reduce isolation, poverty, cultural misunderstanding and many more. I have on this platform for 12 years coupled with my legal profession been in support of the Nigerian Community and defended Nigerians in the UK. This is what I do everyday of my life. My services are free. Nobody pays me. When anything goes wrong in Nigeria, the International media calls me to speak always. Because of these frequent media talk, I do in the UK, The International media has now become synonymous with the Nigerian civil society in the UK. I also won the Nigerian Achievement Award in the UK. I also won the Nigerian Award in UK in 2003. I am the person called ‘the Mother’ especially by Nigerians in the UK. So basically, I’ve done so much and have so much yet to give.

JUVENIS: You will quite agree that there are ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. What have been your participations in peace initiatives, either at state or federal level?

ALICE UKOKO: I believe very much in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. But at the same time, the problems of Delta State and Niger Delta have continued to occupy my mind. I am an ambassador for peace that has worked and campaigned for the Niger Delta. For instance, when Late Ken Saro Wiwa was in prison that was when I became very much troubled by problem of the Niger Delta. And I’ve since that time engaged in open dialogue with multi-nationals operating in the Niger Delta: like the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) of Nigeria in 1994 when the Ogoni crisis started. I opened dialogue with them and because of my involvement, the problem did not escalate. On the 8th of August 2003 when some Niger Delta women were protesting in front of Chevron and SPDC gates, I met with them and calmed the situation in spite of the terror unleashed on them by SPDC. As a result of the incident that led to my discussion with the international community and SPDC international, which was also backed by Women International League for Peace and Freedom, Amnesty International League for Peace and Freedom., Amnesty International Human Rights Watch and many others. I was able to get SPDC for the first time to meet with grass root women in Warri on the 23rd of

March 2003 after 46 years of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta. When you talk about ethnic rivalry, I do not believe that there is ethnic tension and clashes amongst us. What I believe is that there are some mischievous individuals that are using ethnic nationalities to trigger off conflicts so that when the conflicts begin, they use it as a platform to amass wealth and recognition for themselves. In the UK, I am always invited for discussions with the BBC current affairs on the issues of the Niger Delta; like when Asari Dokunbo mounted his own and others. But at the same time, what I want the international community to know that there are many Ken Saro Wiwa's in the Niger Delta and why? Because we create the wealth, yet there is unrest and poverty. The Nigerian constitution stipulates that the wealth of the nation must be enjoyed by every Nigerian equally. But people in the area where the wealth is created are being deprived of their constitutional rights. So that in case the issue will continue. Until there is peace in the Niger Delta there is not going to be peace in Nigeria. That is not to say I do not want peace because I am an ambassador of peace and therefore my push is let there be justice, equity and fair play in the Niger Delta. I believe that if we have good governance in Delta State being the producer of over 30% of Niger's wealth, then we will begin to address some of these issues. I do not believe that the people of Niger Delta are having a fair share; I am not an advocate of resource control at this point.

JUEVNIS: Entering into politics that is generally conceptualized as a man's game in Nigeria, how will you be able to maintain a grip in that environment?

ALICE UKOKO: Politics is the science of deciding how the resources of a nation are spent to the welfare of the nation is spent to the welfare of the nation, in order to create wealth and meet the needs and aspirations of the people of a nation. That is what politics is to me. I have worked, protected and represented the voice of Nigerian woman. Now is the time that I want to take the position of the Nigerian mother. I am saying that if I am the wife i.e. the nation builder that is making sure my children are alright, if I'm the one that is the maximum victim of the violence that this political clash has unleashed on our people, if I'm the agent that is speaking the people's voice, then the best thing that can ever happen is to say look, I as a woman. I'm not just a mother but also a campaigner. If I'm the oppressed and trying to cry out on the ills that are befalling our people since I work at the International level. I am the one who knows and feels the pains of Nigerians inside Nigeria and Nigerians outside Nigeria. Then I should be the one who should be able to come in here and say look let us quench the fire. If you will not speak the word, then you must address the source of the burning fire in Nigeria.

JUEVNIS: Judging from your experience, do you think the country has treated our women very well?

ALICE UKOKO: Nigeria has progressively disregarded women and I will tell you why we've had a greater ratio of men in Nigerian politics. In other words, the ratio of men in decision making progress of how the welfare, education, health amenities, electricity of this country are addressed is progressively disregarding the women. Not only are they disregarding the women, they are actually treating the woman as a play thing. The

Nigerian man now sees the Nigerian woman as a good for nothing but sex. For me, believe that unless we begin to address the imbalance, God is going to be angry with us. For instance, we saw that Abubakar Rimi's wife was slaughtered like a ram and late Kudirat was shot point blank. I mean these are some issues we face. If you look at the number of ministers today, how many of them are women? Despite the fact that women are performing, the men still continue to find e problem, realizing that as another, given the opportunity is going to help out to overcome the problem that we're in now. If we do not recognize that Nigeria is in problem, then that means that we're actually a danger to Africa and the world at large. If Nigeria continues in this path where women are being slaughtered, sexually abused, disregarded and disrespected, then God's anger will come down. We're not even talking about the cultures that do not allow women to acquire formal education. We now look and say the woman is not doing g enough, but the man can still see that is the woman who goes to the market and farm to bring food that she'll put on the table for him. He's not even asking where the food is coming from . Yet we don't regard the woman. For instance, I witnessed a funeral in Warri where the deceased (a woman) was married off at the tender age of 11. The man married an 11 year old girl and began to make her bare children. At the age of 35, which was January 2006 when she died, she had given birth to 7 children of her own added to the3 her husband had from a previous marriage, making it total of 10 children she catered for. But the sad story was that when she was alive, the man was hardly at home. He was always travelling to do business upon which he sends money home occasionally, no attention, allowing this woman to struggle with the 10 children all alone. The only time she speaks to her husband was through phone calls seldomly. So all she had was a 'mobile-phone-husband' she talks with. One day while she was walking on the street, some hoodlums snatched her mobile phone and ran off. After the phone had been snatched and out of the frustration of not having her husband around, she decided that she's had enough; since the mobile phone was the only link between her and the husband. As a result of the unbearable life in matrimony of a distant husband, she went out and bought a can of shaving powder, mixed it in a glass of water, drank it and she died- a height of frustration. It is not only her case I know of. This is the pressure and treatment women get from men. If a man can disrespect a woman. Then he can equally disrespect his mother. I am not a Muslim but I know that in Islam if you disrespect your mother, you are not going to go higher in life. I think the Christians believe likewise. The woman is the mother of a nation. If you can turn your back and abuse your mother then obviously you have a problem. We are going to need a re-orientation of our people. We do not condemn our men; I am not feminist but a humanist.

JUEVNIS: Do you see yourself as an advocate of women emancipation?

ALICE UKOKO: what we have today is not a gender issue but that our men are having problem in understanding the role of women in nation building. If we are home and nation builders and we are ignoring what we are bringing in. then we are obviously making a mistake. We need to stabilize. This is not about women emancipation but about raising the standard of everybody. I do not believe that the men are better treated. When we talk about the abuse of women, we are talking of different categories: we have the political sectors where more men are siphoning our money than the women. At least we

now see through the goodness of Mr. President that women are performing very well in political offices. So if the women are performing well why can't we bring in more women so that they can begin to play their positive role? If the men are predominantly in our politics and what they have to show is the wrath that we now face, the destruction of our social fabrics, the backwardness of Nigeria in the league of male folks to begin to understand that as God made the woman help. That is what we are saying.

JUEVNIS: Based on these, how do you see the evolution of woman president in Nigeria or even a state governor?

ALICE UKOKO: First in the history of Africa, there's now a female president in Liberia. Apart from the woman president in Liberia, what people seem to be ignoring is the fact that in 1977, during the height of the Liberian civil war, a woman, Ruth Pen was made the head of state and she said "now that I'm sitting at the helm of affairs. There's going to be a lasting peace in Liberia and peace enough to be a democratic election and government", and she lived up to it as there was peace in her reign. Subsequently, Charles Taylor was elected as President. Even in Germany now, a woman has come up. I believe that with these happenings, there's going to be a huge lift for the women folk. Not so much in their gender status as women, but in the fore that women are going to have the opportunity of restoring stability to Africa and the world at large. I'm also aware that Nigeria has never had a woman as a governorship aspirant; I'm not saying this because I'm the first woman making history in Nigeria, but that since I declared my intention, the response and support has been overwhelming. People are clamoring that it's time woman became the governor and that it's only then that we'll begin which I believe is the beginning of political change in Nigeria.

JUEVNIS: So if you were the president of Nigeria, what would you do differently considering the level of corruption, poor infrastructure, gross indiscipline and gender inequality?

ALICE UKOKO: Mr. President has to a large extent addressed some of these issues. If you talk about women participation in Nigerian politics, he has shown us that he recognizes the contributions women can make, which is why he brought in a woman as the finance minister. Okonjo Iwealla. We also see NAFDAC having Dr Dora Akinyuli as head and some other women in political positions. He has also kindly established the EFCC to look at the issue of corruption in this country. People say it's a selective practice. When you talk of anti-corruption in this country. People say it's a selective practice. When you talk of anti corruption, are you doing this because you care about corruption? The answer in my position is that we have to start from somewhere. You do not expect a sudden change. We're hoping that the next president that will come will continue from where he stopped. So even if I am the president of forward to, I want to actually address the issue of Delta State first. It's ironical to say I'm going to build Africa when my backyard is not sorted out. I cannot tell people that I'm going to be president of Nigeria when in my own State, there's corruption, poverty, youths are being killed,

there's constant conflicts, women are not respected and we're still regressive towards our children. In my State, there's no guarantee for electricity security and so on. All I can say is that whoever is to become the next president should work hard and address how we can lay a solid foundation others will come and build upon for a better Nigeria.

JUEVNIS: It's now every that you're aspiring to become the Delta State Governor come 2007 and as a result, you've flagged off the campaign for the masse, especially women to support your gubernatorial race. Can you explicatively give reasons why you want to become the Delta State governor come 2007?

ALICE UKOKO: My reasons are as follows:

- 1) To establish good governance with integrity- we want Deltans with integrity worldwide to come and modernize our political landscape.
- 2) To address accountability and transparency in government. We need people to be accountable and transparent in their public office because that's DEMOCRACY.
- 3) To address the issue of education-when the people are educated, they can't easily be fooled. For instance when you look at the political scenario, the Money politics has played a big role. If the people are educated, they cannot easily be bribed to rig elections, as rigging elections means selling your right and state.
- 4) To address the issue of child labour and abuse. The children represent our future. The idea of children hawking in the streets, will be eradicated as their education is going to be paramount. The welfare of children is going to be serious as I look forward t establishing a ministry for children.
- 5) To provide primary health: this is very important. One of the systems I intend to introduce is the GP system, where at every area in the state there will be a mobile clinic. This will be achieved by employing a lot of doctors in the state, especially those who are jobless over the years and those planning to travel to Saudi Arabia to practice for the sake of money. All medical practitioners both young and old will be employed for this service and take care of our people in different areas.
- 6) To provide constant electricity- we are having problem with electricity because we are not planning and the system is not properly financed. The little that comes as funds are embezzled due to corruption in the system. This will properly be dealt with.
- 7) To provide portable water and infrastructure for all in the state and this is very important. For instance in Warri, Enerehen and Jakpa junctions should have flyover to decongest traffic.
- 8) To proved good roads with drainage system-Warri is an oil-booming city submerged in water. If for instance there is good flood, there are good drainage systems to run off the water. This definitely have an effect on the roads as they an

effect on the loads as they will not last because erosion . if an occurrence like the Hurricane Katrina in the US happens here everybody will die because there is no escape root.

- 9) To create an enabling environment for self-development and investment-every Nigerian has aspirations to develop themselves and invest in the state if enabling environment is created. I am aware of Delians outside the State and country and foreign investors who want to invest in the state.
- 10) To create employment opportunities Nigeria is one of the countries where you see visible joblessness. The issue of joblessness youth will be properly addressed.

These and many more reasons are why I want to become governor of Delta State come 2007 because if you address the issues of the individual, you would address the issues of the state.

JUEVNIS: with this aspiration, how do you ascertain your successful winning of your party's candidature to become the flag bearer, considering your contenders and party gimmicks?

ALICE UKOKO: God gives me inspiration and he who has ordained me makes me the effect. I have been studying the contributions which the party politics are making to the lives of Nigerians. I recognize that the Nigerian constitution has not made provision for independent candidacy **that is why I joined the Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD). Hence I'm watching the political terrain carefully.**

JUEVNIS: Let's talk about Delta State. Going by the federal revenue allocation formula, it is evident that Delta State gets the highest which underscores 13% derivation. Therefore this ought to be managed justifiably. If you become the governor come 2007, how will you manage this resource equitably considering the: (a) struggle for resource control in Niger Delta as against Federal Government's position? (b) Level of infrastructure economic and educational development in the state? (c) Level of youth unemployment and restiveness in theatre? (d) Level of women empowerment in the state?

ALICE UKOKO: I know that Delta state has huge resources. When I become the governor in 2007, the sources will be used to address the problems of the state. From the little I have said, this is not going to be a responsibility for one person. Though as a chief executive of the state, it will be my responsibility to ensure that every kobo that comes in is judiciously used. Financial accountability and transparency will be paramount. Like I said earlier, I am not an advocate of resource control at this time because we need to secure and judiciously use what is coming in before we start asking for more. It is very difficult to say we want resource control and everybody will just agree to it. If we judiciously use the one coming in, then we can use that AS basis to go and negotiate for more. With poverty prevalent in Africa, I've been campaigning at the international level

for help as regards universal basic education (UBE) in Delta State as a pilot scheme to development in Africa. Basically, what will be the backbone of my administration come 2007 is what we know as the “UN Millennium Development Goal”. All the aspirations of our people are actually in line with these goals. As part of women empowerment, aside to the UN Millennium Development Goal. I have written severally to the vice chancellor of the Delta State University asking for help in the education of our women because we need more women in power. We need to bring up our youths in the proper manner. We know that there is a gender inequality in the system but, with education, we can have more women in power. By the grace of God, those who I will be working with will be experts in the various fields because no one person knows it all. So I am going to encourage people who have skills in various areas to come in and make their various contributions. On the whole, the development of Delta State will be my focus coupled with transparency, accountability, integrity and empowerment of everybody, most especially the youths, women and children. With this, they will begin to recognize that they are important in the grand scheme of things and then you will be able to do a lot.

JUEVNIS: From your perspective, what do you see Delta to be in the future?

ALICE UKOKO: I see Delta State in the future as the state that will attract tourism more than what we have in the country right now. Delta State has got it all. There is oil, gas and other resources too numerous to mention. So we have the wealth and property despite the fact that we presently have poverty, suffering and destruction due to bad governance. Given the opportunity, when Delta State is reconstructed or revived for everybody to see, it will become the centre stage of Africa. My focus is to raise the standard of Delta State to international standard. I see Delta State as the ‘Kuwait of Africa’.

JUEVNIS: Let’s talk about your private life. Can you tell us about your marital life?

ALICE UKOKO: My married life was a continuation of my childhood of slavery. Unfortunately, I divorced after 20 years of physical and mental abuse. I stayed in the marriage for as long as I could to satisfy the African culture of enduring for the sake of the children. The decision to finally leave was forced on me when my husband married a second wife, thus presenting me a challenge of being one of his two wives. Divorcing him was a way of showing my children that polygamy must not be tolerated. This to me is my contribution to the modernization of a system that has outlived its usefulness. I believe in the sanctity of family life as it provides security to the children who then become the beacon of future generations. I do not believe that any woman can happily share their husbands, although I am aware that this practice still go on, but then, how secure are members of those families, most of whom are forced to share the most important and personal aspect of their lives? For instance, I remember vividly when he became unfaithful. I summoned his family and told them that if he continues, I will leave

him because I would not want my children to grow up believing that polygamy and unfaithfulness are part of normal life.

JUEVNIS: How did you know that he was unfaithful?

ALICE UKOKO: I got hold of a letter that was written to him by a girlfriend describing how well he did in bed and all that, which I told his family and equally pleaded with them to make him address the unfaithfulness and begin to bring home what he does to the people outside?

JUEVNIS: What year was this?

ALICE UKOKO: The year that Late General Sani Abacha took over power. Before he planned marrying a second wife. I pleaded with him to reconsider his decision and that if he was doing that, he was choosing between me and somebody else. He said he had paid the dowry and I said go to her and tell her I want to pay damages and that she must leave my family alone. At this time, my children were growing up and I wanted my family to come back so that when the children go their separate ways. The husband and wife will become companions. My children each wrote letters saying “Daddy please don’t do this because you will be destroying us and penalizing mummy for bringing us to the UK and giving us life. Please tell the woman to go”. But he refused to oblige. So with that I decided to give my children my commitment. With the failed marriage, I did all within my power to provide a stable family for my children. I had to devote my time to them and that demanded full attention. I stayed in the UK to support my children through the British system of education.

JUEVNIS: Presently are you remarried?

ALICE UKOKO: No!

JUEVNIS: Do you have plans of remarrying?

ALICE UKOKO: Ah... (Laughs). The point now is if I were a married woman it would have been very difficult for me to get here. But I did not get here using the Nigerian slang “bottom power”. No I have not. I have gotten here with the determination to give something back to Nigeria right now. I feel I have to do this for my people. Whether I will get married as time goes on I do not know. Though I get lonely sometimes and I feel that I want to share what I do with my husband. I cannot specifically say No, I will not marry. I also say if God wants me to remarry, he will provide the man and the man will love and care for me.

JUEVNIS: Using your experience as an example, would you say marriage is a restriction to those who want to aspire?

ALICE UKOKO: Yes, I would say that marriage actually hinders the woman's capacity to give her all. To give your all, you must put in your entire mind. I do not believe in doings haphazardly this why I said if I were a married woman, I will not have gotten here.

JUEVNIS: Looking at your active involvement in world campaigning and present entry into politics, how do you maintain a balance between theses and home management as a mother?

ALICE UKOKO: If you ask my children, they will tell you I am the number one mother in the world. When I was reading law at the University of London UK, I was also a full time mother. I was working to keep them up, picking them from school and all that. I was very active being the mother and father t them. Now that they have grown up, I am in a stronger position to do better than before. I have finished in my home and now unto my state and nation on the platform of women of Africa (WOA) and I will do well.

JUEVNIS: What do you enjoy doing specially?

ALICE UKOKO: I like the works that I do. I like when I get results in the things that I do. What I enjoy doing most is helping Nigerians that are in difficulty and achieving results.

JUEVNIS: Will you say for hobby, you are a workaholic?

ALICE UKOKO: Ah... (Laughs). I love music and I enjoy sitting down in the evening for my last meals and listening to news not sticking to anyone.

JUEVNIS: What is your embarrassing and worst moment?

ALICE UKOKO: It was on the 8th of August 2002 when I was thoroughly beaten up by the mobile police and the mark of the whip was on my body for three weeks. I t was embarrassing. I was knocked and covered in mud. I do not think I will ever find in that position again.

JUEVNIS: What is your philosophy of life?

ALICE UKOKO: Believe that the best life you ever lived is that which you live for people.

JUEVNIS: What do you have to say to women out there trying to find their feet?

ALICE UKOKO: One thing I have continued to encourage women is that those women who are strong should reach out to those with weak feet and help them.

So, I am saying to them that we are mothers of nation and we need to correct the wrongs that are going on by going back to the responsibilities of motherhood of the past. Womanhood is not for sale. Let us rise up and return to the morality of the past and weed our country.

JUEVNIS: What is your message for other aspirants and upcoming politicians?

ALICE UKOKO: Let us recognize that money politics must be destroyed from our state and country. We must allow other people to speak and express their democratic rights. No flaunting of wealth. If you have so much money, then build industries in the state and employ people to reduce the high level of unemployment, especially the youths, rather than giving them guns and using them for thuggery and rigging of elections.

JUEVNIS: Let us quickly add here. From our experience, the politics in Nigeria is backed by thuggery and violence. How are you going to cope?

ALICE UKOKO: I'm actually amazed and overwhelmed by the reception of the youths because I'm working with them at the moment. Most of them the money bags give guns to rig elections and use as thugs have come to realize that by doing that, they will be mortgaging their lives with the politicians, as they will be killed later with allegation as robbers and assassins. On the whole, the thug and rogue mentality is beginning to wear off.

JUEVNIS: So, what advice do you have for the Delta State youths and Nigeria youths in general?

ALICE UKOKO: It is simple. If somebody comes to give you money and guns to rig elections, tell the person to go and bring his child or children to do it or he should do it himself. If you oblige, you will be rigging in bad government, insecurity, unemployment, etc into our land. More so, the Niger Delta youths should understand that there are peaceful means to achieve justice. There is the political machinery, let us use it. Fighting the course of an individual will not help matters. In the exercise of your democratic rights, when you hold people hostage, you don't hurt them or make criminal demands. Let the agitations you make be for equity, justice and fair play in the Niger Delta and should be done in a just way.

JUEVNIS: On a final note, what do you have to say about magazine "JUEVNIS"?

ALICE UKOKO: Though this is the first time I'm seeing it, I'm quite impressed with your work. I love the column "Woman of Substance" that profiles women, keep it up. I commend the quality and your efforts so far, as you aspire for the best. Congratulations.

JUEVNIS: WE pray and hope that just as Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia defeated the opposite sex to become the first woman president in Africa, you will do same to

become the first woman governor in Nigeria. We wish you a historic victory as you compete in the race to government house 2007. Thank you for the wonderful time you had with us.

ALICE UKOKO: I'm highly honoured. Thank you very much.