

## **Women Of Africa (WOA) On UN SEC 1325; Peace; Security And UN-Women Submission to the UN on Friday 10.6.11**

**Women Of Africa** (WOA) was created in September 1994 as Women Of Nigeria International (WONI) to engage women actively in the international campaign to end direct Military dictatorship; violence against women and other forms of abuses in Nigeria.

Our international campaign against direct military dictatorship in Nigeria through appeal letters and lobbying Heads of Governments extended to the **Roman Catholic Papal Pope John Paul the 2<sup>nd</sup>** who appealed to the then Nigerian military dictator Gen. Sani Abacha in March 1998 during His visit to Nigeria, requesting him to release political detainees in prisons across Nigeria.

In June 1997, we were present at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Summit of the then OAU (now AU) to lobby Africa's Heads of Governments seeking support for our cause to end military dictatorship and abuse of rights in Nigeria.

On 11<sup>th</sup> July 1997, WOA led a delegation to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) in London to present the case against restating Nigeria from suspension of the Commonwealth following the judicial execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and his Ogoni men by the Nigeria Military dictatorship on 15.11.1995. Our team presented the case on behalf of Nigeria's civil society.

Our tireless international campaign through dedication and determination to play an active role in re-shaping the cause of history as responsible stakeholders led to the return of Nigeria to civil rule on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1999. We are conscious of the fact that there is still so much work to be done to achieve peace and security

Extending our achievements and determination to the Niger Delta of Nigeria, WOA started work with grass roots women of the region to raise the profile of the challenge that they continue to face with their children and their environment.

Providing encouragement and international presence to grass roots women, Niger Delta women successfully alerted the international community to the brutalization that they suffered when they had the audacity to call on Shell Nigeria and Chevron-Exxon for dialogue on

8<sup>th</sup> August 2002. Although brutalized by Nigeria's security forces and hospitalized, the women stood firm to exercise their rights as major stakeholders in the Niger Delta as they refused to be silenced. WOA's Alice Ukoko was brutalized with the women thereby raising the status of the women's actions and courage both within the country and internationally.

Grass roots women of the Niger Delta continued to exercise their rights in calling on Shell and Chevron-Texaco and other oil multinational companies operating in the region to stop the environmental destruction that continues to destroy human lives and means of livelihood in the region.

Following several meetings held with Shell international in London stressing the unacceptable method of oil exploration in the Niger Delta, Shell Nigeria sat round the table with representatives of grass roots women to discuss the challenges that its operations present to the inhabitants of the region on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2003. Unfortunately, this historic meeting failed to achieve for the women the peace; justice and respect for their lives; livelihood and their environments they deserve.

Shell continued to deny liability for the brutalization of the women, insisting that the Nigerian Government should be held to account. The women requested Shell to pay hospital bills incurred following the injuries they sustained on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2002 and to compensate them being the victims of the 8.8.2002 brutalization.

In support of the work that WOA continues to do for grass roots women, Niger Delta women were adopted by Amnesty International in 2003 to receive messages of solidarity from its members worldwide. Over 5,000 Christmas cards were received through our office in London throughout December 2003 and transmitted to the women in Nigeria.

In May 2003, WOA sent a delegation to Nigeria from the UK to lead grass roots women in a peaceful protest to the Federal Government of Nigeria, to condemn the introduction of small arms into the country's political stage. The women condemn the proliferation of

small arms which were imported into the country and given to unemployed youths being used as political thugs.

Although the Inspector General of Police refused grass roots women their rights to peaceful protest by issuing the permit they attempted to apply for, Alice Ukoko was arrested on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2003 on allegation of attempting to disrupt the swearing-in ceremony of the Nigerian President Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2003.

During interrogation, Alice Ukoko continued to condemn the introduction of small arms into the Niger Delta a region with an abnormally high rate of unemployed youths and where relationship with oil multinational companies is hostile. Alice Ukoko maintained that grass roots women could not nurture their children at gun-point which the proliferation of small arms would bring to the Niger Delta.

Alice Ukoko further called to question the commitment of the country's security forces to secure lives and property in the region. The question was, how is the region being filled with small arms with what appears in the surface to be strict attention on military check-points. The head of State Security maintained that the arms including AK47s and rocky propelling grenades were coming through the waterways. Alice Ukoko was not convinced and she told her interrogators so. Alice Ukoko was later released without charge.

The tragic reality in the Niger Delta today is that killings; kidnapping and general crime rate has rocketed using AK47s.

WOA continued to work with grass roots women of the Niger Delta to dissuade them from further peaceful protests and agitations against Shell, Chevron-Texaco for fear of them coming to harm given the experience of the 8.8.2002.

Amongst the strategies that WOA adopts to influence change; empower women's leadership is meeting and lobbying key personalities in policy decision making in the country.

It was during a meeting with the Chief of Defense Staff in Abuja Nigeria in 2003 that a telephone call was put through to ask Army Chief to dispatch soldiers to a Delta State community. The information he got was that women of IRRI in Isoko South Local

Government Area of Delta State were protesting against the operations of Oil Company in their community. The Chief of Defense Staff was being asked to send soldiers to disperse the women who had been in the bush and in the Nude for over two weeks.

The Chief of Defense Staff looked at us and asked the caller if he was being requested to send soldiers to kill naked women!!

There is no doubt that the presence of WOA at the time of the call prevented the tragedy that would have befallen the Irri community had we not been present at the time the request for soldiers. The Chief of Defense Staff later narrated the problem to us and we left Abuja to be with the Irri-Isoko women.

Militarization of Nigeria and other African countries is a major challenge for women and their families and WOA is convinced that the inability of civil society to elect their leaders and to hold them accountable is basically due to this phenomenon. WOA campaigns and lobby to end the misery, death and violence being used against women as added weapons of wars to which civil society is not a part. The creation of the African Women Commission (AWCOM) would bring to an end the hopelessness that Africa's civil society feel towards the abuses and the many ills in their Continent.

### **Continuing Search for Justice; Peace & Environmental Protection in the Niger Delta**

Although WOA's policy is to enable women across the Continent to bring about the change that the whole of Africa needs, the Niger Delta of Nigeria continue to feature in our work given that a significant numbers of mothers are losing their sons to the undeclared war in the region.

As the natural resources of the Niger Delta are plundered against the will of the people; to the detriment of the region and security of lives, severe military tactics is employed by the multinational companies and Nigeria's security forces in this case, the Joint Task. Political and social engineering continue to miss-inform the world to the reality of the situation on the ground. Meanwhile, the women and their families continue to cry for effective support. African women need support. Their situation is dire.

The employment of military force to subdue the people, firstly grass roots women as on 8.8.2002 and youth groups including the MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) continues to lead to horrific outcomes for grass roots women of the region. This in turn leads to increased call on WOA to support and inform the world of the hopelessness and helplessness of Africa's women.

In the quest to end the many tragedies that continuously befall women, WOA campaigns to raise international awareness around the Niger Delta as well as engage in lobbying on behalf of grass roots women.

Alice Ukoko is a constant speaker at different international conferences across the world to share with the people of the world who need to know, the nightmare of being a mother in the Niger Delta as in other parts of the African Continent.

On January 22, 2009, Alice Ukoko seized on an opportunity to inform Dutch Banks in the Netherlands of the destruction of the environment of the women of the Niger Delta and their part in this, being major shareholders in Shell.

For the first time, the very high profile participants had the opportunity to call Shell to answer for its adverse activities in the Niger Delta through Shell's top officer who Alice persuaded to attend the event. In particular, Shell was requested to tell the participants when gas flaring would be stopped in the region and when overhead pipes bearing inflammable substances would be modernized and replaced with safer modes of transportation of such highly inflammable liquids that constantly lead to death in the Niger Delta.

In response, Shell informed the Dutch Bankers that it would modernize if the resources are available, this angered participants even more, as they are aware that the profit margin increases year on year although Shell continues to maintain that loses are being incurred due to their allegation of saboteurs in the region.

Driven by the need to contribute to securing peace in the Niger Delta, Alice Ukoko traveled to Abuja – Nigeria to meet with the Minister for Niger Delta Affairs and Shell Nigeria to discuss the

contribution that WOA can make towards securing peace in the region (UNSCR 1325) given our trust worthiness with the grass roots women and youths in the region.

On 9<sup>th</sup> February 2009 Alice Ukoko led representatives of grass roots women and youths to meet with the Honorable Minister in Abuja as above to discuss the need for lasting peace in the Niger Delta and the capacity of WOA to mediate the process. The Honorable Minister was impressed with the high quality of the presentation but failed to provide the opportunity needed for WOA to achieve PEACE and security in the Niger Delta.

On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2009, Alice Ukoko met with representative of Shell Nigeria in Lagos to discuss the prospect of peace in the region and the role that WOA is capable of playing in the process. The argument by Shell is that it is the responsibility of the Nigerian Government to take on peace initiatives as being proposed. The military killings continue unabated under the cover of darkness; the mothers of the Niger Delta continue to bury their children whilst the world stands by unaware.

The above is a small window into some of challenges that women face in their attempts to be part of the peace process according to the provisions of UNSCR 1325 to secure their children and make their experience count as members of the human race. African women need the recognition and support of the UN and the international community to make their contributions towards a safer world count.

Within the UK where WOA is based the impact of the lack of security in Africa trails most families. Efforts to ensure that African families are better integrated into the UK society constitute a significant part of the services that the organization provides.

Single mothers in distress due to homelessness; immigration status; in immigration detention centers; victims of domestic violence all access our services.

International trafficking is of major concern as WOA provide support to victims including women over 60 years of age.

In 2002, WOA became aware of the case of an African woman who had been in captivity for 27 years. She was separated from her two daughters and trafficked away from home under the pretext of marriage. WOA's search for her family in Africa failed to yield the required result.

Africans in the Diaspora from our experience come with the many challenges that the delay in the Continent's recovery poses. Through our services we are able to provide the support that they need to better integrate into wide society.

In 2005/6, WOA was approached with allegations of possible ritual killings and risks the killing of children in Motherless babies' home in Abuja in desperation Alice Ukoko sought the assistance of the Head of the protection officer of the UNICEF. The response was that they work with the Government. WOA was therefore not able to access the support that was so urgently needed to save Africa's children.

**WOA experience** therefore has shown that it is not possible to protect Africa's children without working with the women (mothers) of Africa. In other words, to achieve the desired outcome, there is an urgent need to work with the community stakeholders (women in their own rights)

### **WOA's Campaign Against Female Circumcision**

WOA's quest to inform and empower both Africans and the rest of the world led to our campaign against female circumcision popularly called Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in 2000.

Female Circumcision continues to be one of the worse practice of abuse rooted in Africa's history and yet not quite understood by the millions working in the field. The impact of female circumcision far outweighs those being cited by most campaigners in the field.

It was with great frustration and urgency that WOA's Alice Ukoko who is a victim of the age old practice told her story to draw attention to the real impact of female circumcision in the drama titled: **The African Maiden** which came to stage in the UK in 2000.

The African Maiden put on theatre stage the practice which also enables the culture to answer back as a way of connecting the actual

ritual to the community that needs to know so as to fully understand the life-long impact of female circumcision. For the first time the African community was able to connect the practice to some of the challenges that they face in their personal lives.

The African Maiden, which was featured in a Channel4 television program in the UK in November 2000 contributed to the UK Female Circumcision Act 2003

Unfortunately due to the lack of financial support WOA could not continue to run this ground breaking health educational project. And still campaigns against FGM continue to rage without allowing African women to deal with this challenge which is rightly their responsibility to STOP. Until the culture is allowed to deal with this, it would not be possible to bring this practice to an end.

There is therefore an urgent need for the UN and the UN-Women to act positively by listening!!

In 2006/7, WOA's Alice Ukoko with the wealth of experience in the challenges that African women face, decided to join the race for political authority in her home land. She went to Nigeria to contest the governorship of Delta State in order to give voice to the women and in particular to show that it is possible for Nigeria to rise above corruption and the failure of governments to effectively recognize the wishes of citizens.

In the cause of this active political encounter, WOA became engaged through Alice Ukoko with the UNIFEM in Abuja – Nigeria that organized and delivered conferences to bring together female political hopefuls to discuss best practice and challenges.

Most women candidates shared the frustrations that became like a gold thread running through the desire of most women wishing to aspire to political office in Nigeria. Many women complained about the harsh treatment that they experienced from the male political class; the deceit and the insincerity of some political officials. All of which successfully blocked women from becoming actively engaged in the political life of the country.

Most importantly, the women expected financial support from UNDP who administered the vast resources that was made available to support women by the international community that contributed into a fund that was termed "donor basket" through UNIFEM Abuja.

It was a frustrating and stressful time for the majority of the women, WOA's Alice Ukoko inclusive. In particular, some of the women shared with Alice Ukoko their bitter experiences from party men. One woman lamented the fact that after spending all her money meeting the financial demands being placed on her by some party men, when it came to the primaries, the actual date, venue and time of the event were hidden from her.

Another woman showed us the machete cut across her head sustained during a fight within the party.

WOA became acutely aware of the challenges that women face in trying to get into the political stage and the hopelessness of UNIFEM staff as increasingly women were turning to them to provide some of the funds that they need to print publicity materials.

African women need financial support in becoming actively engaged in Africa's politics; as civil society and economically if the target of 2015, set for the achievement of the UN MDGs.

A significant number of women were replaced with men folks by the political parties without their consent and with impunity. Alice Ukoko was told in Feb. 2007 that she has been replaced with a man who had been standing on the side with bags of money. All efforts to make the party change its mind failed.

In another case, the female candidate was replaced without informing her, when she found out, she began to plead that the male figure that has taken her place should please come and let them discuss, he failed to take her calls quoted as saying that he does not have time for women.

**The above stories and experiences would be similar for women across Africa.**

## **By 2020**

Haven been so actively engaged in the peace; security; conflict resolution; women and mothers' empowerment, political aspirations of women amongst others WOA can say categorically that to achieve sustainable global progress by 2020, there is an urgent need to raise the profile of African women to international level in order to effectively empower them to work towards the reform of Africa. With improved status, most forms of violence against women would be eliminated.

In view of the extensive experience that WOA has gained as stated above, the following would represent our vision by the 2020:-

Our initiative is pioneering and tall, in a world where so much trust is invested in what is not so challenging.

Our vision is to empower African women to collectively contribute to Africa's reform; improve their status to eliminate violence and wars against women

Our Objective is to lobby and campaign to raise the profile of African women for international recognition to enable them engage actively in their own rights as citizens of the world better placed to tell their own story instead of what is being said about them.

We are convinced that it is ill conceived for African women to continue to stay silently in the victim construct which has been created for them by well meaning others; which effectively amounts to continuing negative imaging of Africa.

### WOA's aim:

To convene an African women's convention in an African country to enable representatives of women from grass roots level in particular, to deliberate on the challenges that they face (See UN Millennium Development Goals precisely) We are in discussion with African governments amongst others to this effect.

### **Expected outcome:**

1. To welcome back to the Motherland descendants of Africans carried into slavery about 500 years ago (although this is to be

- symbolic, but all those drawn to any African country and wishing to return, are to seek nationalization of that country.
2. To create and launch African Women Commission (AWCOM) to represent a constituted combined voices of Africa's civil society; to combine progressive individual efforts towards raising the status of women; to end most forms of abuse and wars against women and to reform Africa to 21<sup>st</sup> Century standards and beyond.

Being the constituted second arm of Africa's society (Eg. Government and Civil society), the AWCOM with its international HQ in New York aims through international recognition, would become a third party in international Treaties such as UN MDGs amongst others; become a constituted monitoring agency so to speak for the delivery of national; regional and international obligations.

WOA recognizes that this is a huge task but we are convinced that women before us have made their contributions as their era permitted them and as such we know that we will never stand alone.

We put our hands "UP" that we need to better package what we are trying to achieve for it to speak better to all those that have the capacity to support our work in particular UN-Women.

The work that WOA is doing will create an effective platform for every African woman who continues to achieve through their individual efforts to combine efforts towards achieving Africa's reform and the elimination of violence against women.

Women Of Africa anxiously need the UN Agencies to endorse the women's own agenda for meeting their needs and achieving sustainable global peace; respect for the rights of every human being irrespective of origin, race and gender by the year 2020

By endorsing this initiative being proposed by African women themselves, the UN systems would have an achievable vision and outcome in place of decades of failed initiatives.

Apart from the UNSCR 1325 (2000); the Beijing Platform for Action; The Maputo protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of women in Africa; The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); The UNSCR 1820; 1888; 1889 and 1960 are yet to deliver the designated outcomes. Meanwhile the problems intensify

The African Union's African Women Decade Road Map 2010 to 2020, raises the question of why it is necessary to create a decade for women? It is the responsibility of governments to protect and discharge its responsibilities to citizens equally. African women are citizens and equal stakeholders in their Continent irrespective of gender.

The 2005 Commission for Africa by the British Government failed to achieve its aim and outcome. The campaign against poverty and the efforts of the G8 countries, all failed to lead to the reform of Africa and the elimination of violence against women.

- Migration rates continue to grow from African countries into the Western countries and thereby further weaken the capacity of Africa to reform and to recover from centuries of external interruption into Africa's normal development.
- The rate of abuse against women and girl children continues to worsen.

African women have the potential to create Africa's dream and hence deliver the outcomes that failed to materialize for the benefit of women, children and a sustainable peace and security through international instruments worldwide.

One of the aims of the African Women Commission (AWCOM) being proposed is to engage actively with the UN and UN agencies to work effectively towards the achievement of a peaceful world through the achievement of the UNMDGs and the elimination of most forms of violence against women and girl children. This initiative is pioneering and far reaching for Africa and the rest of the world.

Creating Africa's civil society voices, (the AWCOM) would enable African women to combine their expertise and individual efforts

towards reforming Africa and to engage effectively with the rest of the world including the UN; EU; AU on behalf of Africa's civil society.

Once functional, the AWCOP would dilute the negative impact of everything responsible for the sorry state of Africa: The corruption; the ineffective governance that is the root cause of Africa's negative past and that is threatening the future; the trafficking of African girl children and women.

The AWCOP would enable African women to work along side African governments; UN; UN Security Council; UN Agencies; UN Women; the EU amongst others to achieve world standard of life in terms of security; peace sustainable socio-economic and political development for Africa and Africans.

By tradition, African women define Africa's tradition and cultures and as such, with the recognition that WOA seek for women African women will be able to become actively and positively engaged in the reform of Africa the fight against HIV/Aids. The obsolete traditional practices such as female circumcision would be more effectively addressed by African women.

African women wish to appeal to the UN; the Security Council, UN-Women; the American Presidency and other agencies to support the desire of African women to be an active part of the world that they are a part of. Africa's reform is well over due and African women want to begin the process.

Although African women are aware that it is their responsibility to reform Africa and eliminate most forms of violence against them; their families and environment, they require the approval and remote support of the world to work towards Africa's recovery So Help us!

African women are anxious to work towards a Continent that progress towards the standard of life obtainable in the rest of the world; Away from negative history created by centuries of external interruptions into normal developmental process.

African women dream of a world where their governments would be committed, to ensuring peace and security of their own citizens as

part of their obligations without the need for the UN and Security Council to resort to Conventions to uphold the rights of women and children.

The Concept of the African Women Commission is available should the UN – Women require it for further information on this pioneering initiative for Africa’s reform and elimination of most forms of violence against women.

WOA would be eager to work with the UN-Women office to work towards the achievement of the African women’s Dream for Africa. By endorsing the concept, African women would be honored for the UN – Women to become co-creators of this fondermental and pioneering work to reform Africa and eliminate violence against women.

WOA recognizes that being the first of its kind, there would be skepticism and reluctance on the part of UN-Women; the UN and the Security Council to act decisively on the proposal being presented by African women. The UN; the Security Council and the UN-Women should see the need to take a chance on this proposal rather than continue on the same path that is proven with time as failing to deliver the desired outcome. A new cause to change the history of Africa and women would become the pride and achievement of this generation.

**Innovation** requires officials to act for it to birth successfully. Please adopt this proposal for Africa’s recovery as African women cannot continue to pay the price for the obvious failings. A fundamental change is needed to move Africa forward.

Women Of Africa is anxious to meet with the UN; Security Council; UN Agencies and in particular the UN-Women to work towards achieving the outcome for women worldwide and Africa in particular.

The October 2011 conference would be a good opportunity for African women to take their place in the world in their own right to share with the UN; UN Security Council under the UN- Women.

Africa needs to recover from many centuries of external interruptions in her developmental process and the women are eager to work towards Africa's recovery for sustainable peace; socio-economic and political progress to take place.

African women need the UN; UN Security Council, UN-Women and the rest of the international community to support the creation of African Women Commission to represent Africa's civil society. Women can end violence against them but they need support.

For more information about the work that we are doing to bring about change in the cause of Africa's history to end all forms of violence against women and girl children please visit our website: [www.womenofafrika.org](http://www.womenofafrika.org)

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