

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS A GLOBAL CANKERWORM:

A Report Submitted by the Women and Family Affairs Committee of the World Igbo Congress at the Recently Concluded 57th Conference of the UN Commission on the Status of Women – CSW57

UN MISSION AND PURPOSE OF THE EVENT

The Global mission of United Nations Agency for Women, the UN Women is to advocate for the rights of women and gender equality. In the past months especially since July 2012, efforts were geared toward discussions, campaigns, meetings, expert ideas and thoughts, stakeholders meetings and discussions, Regional Commitments and Outcome, NGOs participation and collaborations in seeking ways and best practices in the Elimination and Prevention of all forms of Violence against women and girls. More importantly for two weeks from March 4th –March 15 2013 at the United Nations Headquarters New York, deliberations, discussions, parallel events, negotiations were held by member states, UN and International Agencies, Civil Societies and NGOs. The climax of the entire meeting was the release of the 17 page agreed conclusion by 190 member states on Elimination and Prevention of all forms of Violence against Women and Girls on Friday March 15, 2013.

WIC PARALLEL EVENT IN THE CSW 57 CONFERENCE

Prof Anthony O. Ejiofor, the Executive Director of World Igbo Congress brought greetings from the Chair of World Igbo Congress, the Executive, the BOD/the HOD, the affiliates, friends and well-wishers. In his message at the very first Igbo forum at UN CSW57 addressed the issue of Violence against Women and Girls as a Global Cankerworm. Prof Ejiofor in reiterating on the priority theme of the CSW57 recalled on the precepts of Igbo culture with respect to women, family, girls and children and emphasized the need for collective efforts in the fight to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

In the words of action call on Elimination and Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls by Secretary General of United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki Moon at the closing session noted that “Violence against women is a heinous human rights violation, global menace, a public health threat and a moral outrage. No matter where she lives, no matter what her culture, no matter what her society, every woman and girl is entitled to live free of fear. She has the universal human right to be free from all forms of violence so as to fulfill her full potential and dreams for the future”. The Secretary General in welcoming the Agreed Conclusion indicated that the CSW 57 Session is historic and called on all the partners who came together at this historic session and others around the world to translate the agreement into concrete action to prevent and end violence against women and girls. He ended by assuring that the United Nations system is fully committed to leading this global effort.

In welcoming the agreed Conclusion, the Executive Director and Under General Secretary of UN Women Madame Michelle Bachelet indicated that the Agreed Conclusions are a testimony to the commitment of Member States to do the right thing, to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls. She further recapped that the last two weeks during the meeting in New York, and in the lead-up to this session, witnessed global engagement and mobilization, high-profile advocacy by civil society, and determined leadership by many Member States. Expectations of the world’s women and girls were extremely high for this session of the Commission.

Violence against women is a universal problem that requires, and has now received, a universal response. Violence occurs in multiple forms in all countries and settings; it harms women and their families and communities, impedes development, and costs countries billions of dollars annually in healthcare costs and lost productivity. In 2003, when the Commission took up violence against women and human rights, Member States were unable to reach agreement.

WFAC OF THE WIC

Abiding on the responsibilities bestowed on Women and Family Affairs Committee of World Igbo Congress, the Chair of the Committee, Iyom Chi Ezekwueche noted that the theme for World Igbo Congress CSW57 parallel event on Cultural Best Practices in the Elimination and Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls was chosen in line with the global mission of “Better Woman Better Family Initiative” projects on Back to Culture in achieving sustainable development for Ala Igbo. In her words” you are here because you stand for justice and fairness. You are here because you believe in a peaceful co-existence of the male and female genders. You are here because you have decided to join your voices to our voices in the fight to end all manner of violence against women and girls everywhere it exists. Every man, woman, boy and girl is related to a woman. The role of women in the development of a healthy family, community and the world is critically important. To borrow from the Baha’i faith, male and female are like the two wings of a bird, both of which need to be fully developed for that bird to lift and fly efficiently. From the bible, god created male and female in his image. As humans, we struggle with the roles each gender plays. These roles, while culturally based, do change over time. Failure to adjust to the changing times has led to inequities between the genders which in turn lead to destabilization of the family. She further gave the violence of any kind is an abomination in the eyes of God, traditional Igbo culture, and humanity and must never be tolerated.

MAJOR PARTICIPANTS AND PRESENTERS

In her Special Guest presentation, Her Excellency Dame Virgy Etiaba, the former Governor of Anambra State and the first female Governor of Nigeria emphasized on the need for the involvement of religion in eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. Her Excellency noted that religion teaches righteousness and modes behavior and informed that use of religion will educate women, men, boys and girls adequately on safety tools in eliminating all forms of violence. Her Excellency who grew up in the era when women were not heard emphasized that education, activism, and seminars have advanced humanity that woman could be allowed to important positions in our society. In her conclusion she gave the following as interventions in addition to the use of religion, educate women on safety behaviors and attitude, teach adults about safety and peace in the communities and develop mechanisms to persecute offenders.

Presenting a keynote address, Iyom Stella Anenih, former Minister for Women Affairs, Federal Republic of Nigeria affirmed that Igbo land decade of suppression on women and girls has covered all the good thoughts and potentials from women groups, umu okpu/umuada. She addressed on some existing cultural practices and noted that practices as child marriage, widowhood practices, use of older women in the community on young women should be the focal point for liberation of Igbo women and attitudinal change of women by women and for women. She called on the significant

need for women total change if we must seek cooperation from men in the Igbo community for success on Igbo cultural best practices.

While reflecting on the existing cultural Igbo best practices along with worst practices, Dr. Eleanor Ann Nwadinobi a Medical Practitioner and advocate for Women's right advised on the need for Igbo people to uphold the age old values that strengthen the community, recognize the dignity and worth of the girl child and reduce harmful traditional practices. It is necessary to provide support and acknowledge men and boys who work to eliminate violence against women and girls.

Hearing from Boys and Girls on Dialogue, Engr. Chukwuma Menakaya spoke on the Igbo values and noted that culture is a way of life passed on from generation to generation. He explained on the need to bring up the girl child on the grounds of mother-role model which reinforces adequate orientation on the girl child. Engr. Menakaya further noted that Igbo cultural norms and socialization processes, nurture an orientation to solid personal development, good moral attributes, discipline and achievements within them, while community service, masquerade and dances, reinforce male orientation among the Igbo male child making them become responsible and respectful to their families and community. In virtually all spheres of life, boys and girls, men and women knew what was expected of them as in the culture of Igbo norms and values of life. He emphasized that the present day implications on overlooking these values and norms on Igbo boy- girl upbringing in modern times result to lack of respect, irresponsibility to families, community, and violence of any kind in our society today. One could link it as well to degradation of our scientific and economic empowerments due to the number of youths becoming a liability rather than an asset to the society. Other Speakers as Miss Ozioma Egwuonwu and Miss Ogechukwu Nwaesi admonished that their upbringing by the family in spite of the fact they were born in USA has enabled them understand the richness in Igbo culture and hope the cultural norms and values be seriously reinforced for all boy/girl children of Igbo race.

The important part of the event was the panel discussion from titled Igbo Women and Grandmothers forum. Her Excellency Iyom Stella Odife, former Deputy Governor of Anambra State, Her Royal Highness Lolo Nora Nwosu, wife of the traditional ruler of Awka, and Enyi Rose Mgbajikwe who spoke on the strength and restrictions on the title ship given to Igbo women noted the significant need for mothers to educate their daughters on the values of Igbo land in loving and respecting their parents in-laws, maintain Igbo families and be accommodating. They admonished for the participation of women in town meetings and traditional rights role and other traditional norms.

Women and Girls suffer great harm from men and boys who indulge in violence against them even though the same men depend on them for the continuity and growth of their family and the stability of the community and country. The contribution of women is present in all people and levels of society including commercial, political and decision making aspects.

Violence against women and girls has far-reaching adverse consequences. It harms families, communities and society. It has severe physical and mental consequences for women and girls involved. Relationships and families, relatives, friends and co-workers are affected. It promotes the tradition that runs very deep on inequality between men and women. It hinders sustainable growth and development. It has enormous social and economic costs. It undercuts the contribution of

women to development, human rights, peace and security. Not only does violence against women prevent the raising of healthy children, it also hampers the economic development and stability of the country. Violence against women and girls poses serious threats to cultural norms as well as the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development at the grassroots.

Reported by Dr. Ada Okika,
United Nations Representative,
World Igbo Congress

THE RESOLUTION

Women and Family Affairs Committee of World Igbo Congress Resolution at UN-CSW57

Barrister Dame Unoaku Ekwegbalu
Outreach Director, Women and Family Affairs Committee

Addressing on the Elimination and Prevention of all forms of Violence against Women and Girls since July 2012 through discussions and deliberation at;

- i. World Igbo Congress Unity Convention held on August 25-September 3, 2012
- ii. The Future Women Want Radio weekly program organized by African Views and Women and Family Affairs Committee
- iii. **Pre-CSW Forum held at Awka the capital of Anambra State Nigeria on January 7, 2013**
- iv. **Parallel event at Commission on Status of Women⁵⁷ session at United Nations Headquarters New York on March 8, 2013,**

Women and Family Affairs Committee of World Igbo Congress:

- i. Recalled the commitment of our forefathers in overall protection of Igbo women by the men
- ii. Recognized the importance of girl child rearing practices according to Igbo norms and values
- iii. Urges World Igbo Congress to ensure the participation of women in affairs of Igbo development and growth.
- iv. Emphasizes the collective responsibility and collaboration of WFAC with Traditional Rulers Wives in the Seven Igbo speaking states of Nigeria in reaching out to Igbo families on Violence against women
- v. Noted the significant importance of Igbo culture and resolved to revisit the values and norms of the Igbos in their efforts to end violence against Igbo women and family
- vi. Emphasized the significant need for Social Protection Floor for Igbo women and families

- vii. Called on World Igbo Congress to establish World Igbo Congress Information Center on Violence against Women and Igbo Families in Diaspora to assist on issues of violence among and within Igbo families in Diaspora
- viii. Emphasized the need for more discussion Forums and research to enable WFAC obtain and strengthen good statistical data on violence against Igbo women and girl child
- ix. Recognize the urgent need to hold WIC-WFAC Traditional Rulers Wives Retreat in Nigeria to discuss further on Violence against Igbo women and family
- x. Call on women organizations to form strong coalition and recommend measures, ways and means at all levels to end violence against women
- xi. Recognize the need to adopt a comprehensive and universal approach to ending all forms of Violence against Igbo women and girls.
- xii. Considers the significant need to have Specialized Service Centers for women and girls who are victims of various forms of violence
- xiii. Understand the social and economic hierarchies that between women and men and among women as roots to family and gender violence.
- xiv. Decide that the Future Igbo Women Want is for government and those involved with law and decision making to strongly condemn all forms or acts of violence against women, call for elimination of all forms of violence based issues against Igbo women and girl child from grassroots and enact Family and Women Protection Bill for Igbo Families
- xv. Call for the support of World Igbo Congress, its Board of Directors and Executive Council to enable WFAC reach out to Titled Igbo Women and Wives of Traditional Rulers of the Seven Igbo States and form WIC Rural Council of Titled Igbo Women to facilitate and develop strategic framework on “Back to Igbo Cultural Norms and Values” for families and Child Rearing Practices.
- xvi. Considered the significant need on Re-orientation of Igbo young ones on family value system
- xvii. Breaking of culture of silence among Igbo families and communities on issues of violence against women.
- xviii. Training and Education of our children in school at all levels in our south east Zone, working towards curriculum of schools in our Igbo states to include gender law issues.
- xix. Create awareness on need for effective communication between mothers and their children.
- xx. Considered the need for Igbo people to revisit the traditional system of female marrying female and wife inheritance.
- xxi. Called for the Abolition of baby factory (selling) in Igbo community

Women and Family Affairs Committee of World Igbo Congress;

- i. Deliberated on the outcry of various forms of violence against Igbo Women and Girls
- ii. Recognized the numerous negative impediments on the communal and societal development
- iii. Noted concerns over the continued occurrence of various forms of violence especially Domestic Violence and sexual violence at home, community, work place, schools and colleges, churches and politics
- iv. Noted various neglects on youths, including employment search, low standard of education, sexual abuse and parental neglects rooted on poverty
- v. Recognized the uproar on Baby Selling most of which occurred as a result of sexual abuse on the girl child

- vi. Identified significant need to partner with men and boys to address gender equality.

The Forum acknowledges existing cultural best strong practices such as;

- i. Igbo Culture has strong Protective and Security practices for Women and girls
- ii. Igbo Culture holds women and girls in High esteem
- iii. Igbo Culture empowers women to resolve unresolved conflicts within the family, kindred and community
- iv. Igbo culture maintains Sustainability between maiden and marital families of Igbo Women which is the Key to development and progress
- v. In traditional Igbo religion. The “Ani” or “Ala” is a Goddess, the most revered, respected and feared and any crime against any woman is considered an abomination and must be appeased

Women and Family Affairs Committee of World Igbo Congress hereby further among others resolved as follows:

- i. Establish Center for Women and Family Education in all the Institutions of Higher learning in the Seven Igbo Speaking States. The Institution will also have Distant Learning programs for Igbo Children born in Diaspora
- ii. Develop Advocacy Manual and curriculum for pre and primary institution
- iii. Hold Traditional Rulers Wives and Titled Igbo Women Retreat on Gender Equality, MDGs and Works of UN Women
- iv. Establish Collaboration and networking Opportunities with Agencies, Civil Societies, Women Organizations, Institutions of Higher learning, Centers for African Studies, Women Education Institute and Hotline Education Discussion (HED) Series on Strengthening Families
- v. Resolved to hold rotational Post CSW every year within the States of United States of America, Nigeria and other parts of the Diaspora to advocate adequately for positive communal-living existence of Igbo Families
- vi. Establish Better Woman Better Family Initiative Club in Schools in all the Seven Igbo Speaking States of Nigeria and Historic Black Schools in Diaspora to educate and create awareness on Igbo cultural Norms and Practices

In agreement to these resolutions the Outreach Director, Women and Family Affairs Committee Barrister Dame Unoaku Ekwegbalu called on World Igbo Congress Member States to sign the resolution.

The motion for the resolution was made by

Her Excellency Dame Virgy Etiaba	Anambra State
Her Excellency Iyom Stella Odife	Anambra State
Ambassador Kema Chikwe	Imo State
Dr. Eleanor Nwadinobi	Abia State

World Igbo Congress member states delegation to the event who signed the resolution are

Abia State	Mrs Otuodichinma Nwankpa
Anambra State	Honorable Eucharua Azodo
Delta State	Mary U. Agbmuche

Ebonyi State
Enugu State Ezinne Charity Anioke
Imo State Princess Grace Osuagwu
Rivers State Barrister Chioma Chuku

In support to the action plan of Women and Family Affairs Committee for women and family of Igbo race, the Executive Director, of World Igbo Congress, Dr. Anthony Ejiofor attested to the resolution under the leadership of Iyom Chi Ezekwueche Chair Women and Family Affairs Committee in submission by Dr. Ada Okika United Nations Representative, World Igbo Congress on March 8, 2013 at UN Plaza Church Center, United Nations during the CSW57 Session.