



Women and Girls Education and Development given priority as Nigeria's First Lady convenes the inaugural Women & Girls Summit 2014 in Collaboration with the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD) & Friends Africa

(October 21, 2014) The Women and Girls Summit 2014 convened by the First Lady, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Her Excellency, Dame (Dr.) Patience Faka Jonathan in collaboration with the National Centre for Women Development and Friends Africa on October 13th & 14th in Abuja, was a successful commemoration of the International Day of the Girl-Child with leaders from government institutions, indigenous and International Organizations and Gender Advocates, Students, Civil Society Representatives, Women, seasoned Speakers and Technical Experts from within and outside Nigeria in attendance.

The Summit, with the theme- **Reinforcing the Agenda for Girl-Child Education**, focused on developing an all-inclusive policy framework that will help Government achieve its objectives of addressing the immediate and long term needs of the Girl-Child. The Summit focused on Education, Health, Safety and Security and Economic Empowerment for Women and the Girl-Child in Nigeria. It provided a platform for dialogue on existing barriers, challenges and progress from all stakeholders, giving the girls an opportunity to propose a way forward for improving education in Nigeria.

In her opening address, the First Lady, Federal Republic of Nigeria stated that *"...there is no meaningful development without women; individuals*

and corporate organizations in Nigeria must continue to support and partner with women to realize the goals and objectives of the summit”. She also pointed to the fact that “With the support of well-meaning Nigerians, women will be able to care for themselves, and also contribute to the development of their families, communities and the nation”.

Hajiya Zainab Maina, MFR, CON, the Honorable Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development on behalf of the President, Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, congratulated the First Lady for a successful summit with high turn-out and greatly commended the effort of the National Center for Women’s Development and Friends Africa noting that the summit will be a reference point and will contribute to national development.

According to Mr. President “... we cannot claim to be developing if we do not recognize the sacrifices women and girls have had to make in this great journey. From the Aba Women Riot of 1929 over double taxation by the then colonial administration, the fortunes of women and girls have continued to improve as a result of access to education. Women and girls represent the heartbeat of any nation. Our women and girls hold the key to the untapped potentials of this great country.”

Speaking further, His Excellency noted that “... no meaningful development can take place if issues affecting women and girls are not factored into national development processes. This is why my administration believes that for us to achieve the goals of the Transformation Agenda, these issues must be at the fulcrum of national discourse”.

On her part, the co-convener of the Summit, the Director-General/Chief Executive Officer, National Centre for Women Development, Lady Onyeka Onwenu, MFR, said that “The summit was a “game changer” in policy planning and implementing programmes for the Girl-Child and women in the country as it drew attention of policy makers to the

important issues of the Girl-Child and created a platform for high level discourse on the challenges confronting women and girls in Nigeria. The summit outcomes include new strategies for economic empowerment for marginalized women and girls.”

The CEO/Founder, Friends Africa, Dr. Akudo Anyanwu Ikemba in her speech noted that “...The special role of women in the field of sustainable development has already been acknowledged globally, girls are change agents, they play a crucial role in solving the most persistent development problems facing the world today. By investing in their economic potential through education, issues such as HIV and AIDS can be resolved and the cycle of poverty can be broken.”

In the keynote address, Chimdi Neliakuchukwu (16 years old girl-child), noted that “...Within social development, lies the factors that can bring about its destruction. I speak for the girls in my generation when I say that though we desire to be educated, we do not want to be educated to the point where the lines of right and wrong begin to get blurry. We desire to be citizens with a healthy dose of Godly fear leading us to imbibe and joyfully uphold moral values. So as the Girl-Children of today, we desire our mothers in positions of power and our fathers too, to ensure that we are given qualitative education that puts us on the platform of competitive advantage with the rest of the world, while at the same time doing all that can be done to ensure we continue to uphold the values that we as a society have been known for from the old days.”

In his remarks, the Minister of Health, Prof Onyebuchi Chukwu emphasized that “...as Nigeria successfully contained the Ebola epidemic, the Federal Ministry of Health is determined to deploy the same exhaustive strategies to manage the health issues affecting women and girls.”

In her contributions, the Country Representative, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Dr. Mairo Mandara noted that “...the reality is that children's programs focused on 0-5 year-olds, youth programs tend to focus on males

and older groups, and women's programs don't typically capture adolescent girls. Programs that do reach girls rarely address the ones most at risk. To break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, programmes must be designed for, and measure the impact on, girls and their education”.

The Summit convened by the First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in collaboration with National Centre for Women Development, (NCWD) and Friends Africa as an annual event was targeted at achieving the following:

- Specific emphasis on strategic importance of the Girl-Child to the development of the society and the nation at large;
- Engaging key stakeholders of Girl-Child Education in Nigeria for the purpose of discussing and evolving effective strategies on how to curb situations that threaten the well-being and ultimate success of the Girl-Child”.

Some others include; “demonstrating government’s commitment towards the eradication of threats to the education and development of every Girl-Child in Nigeria; inspiring hope for success in the minds of affected categories of Girl-Child in Nigeria and beyond and to sensitizing the public on the need to complement Government’s efforts at tackling prevalent Girl-Child and gender related challenges in Nigeria.

The high point of the Summit was the presentation of the voices of the Girl-Child tagged “**Girlifesto**” to the First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Her Excellency, Dame (Dr.) Patience Faka Jonathan and appointment of a child ambassador from the entertainment industry, Maryam Booth as Advocate of the Girl-Child in Nigeria.

The Summit is expected to release a communiqué highlighting key conclusions from the meeting, as well as, key announcements and decisions agreed by the thematic working groups. The Summit outcomes will be disseminated on various global development platforms, circulated

to stakeholders at the National, Regional and International levels, as well as the United Nations Post 2015 Development Planning Unit.

