

Address by the Deputy Vice – Chancellor Research, Innovation and Strategic Partnerships, University of Ibadan, Professor Oluyemisi Bamgbose, SAN at the United Nations Secretary – General’s Campaign UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women, University of Ibadan On 2nd December, 2021

It is an honour for me today, to join my voice with that of other individuals, organisations and institutions globally to advocate against violence against women and Girls. Today, the University of Ibadan is reaffirming its commitment to eliminate and prevent gender based violence.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the 16 Days of Activism against Violence against women and girls which was started in 1991 by activists at the inaugural Women’s Global Leadership Institute and has since continued to be coordinated yearly by the center for Women’s Global Leadership.

This civil society initiative has since been supported by the United Nations Secretary – General’s Campaign UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women and calls for global actions to increase awareness, galvanize advocacy efforts, and share knowledge and innovations. The global theme for this year’s 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which will run from 25 November to 10 December 2021, is **“Orange the world: End violence against women now!”**

The University of Ibadan joins other institutions and organisations of the world to say No to gender based violence most especially violence against women and girls.

The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defined Violence against Women as “any act of Gender-based Violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

On 8 March 2021, on the occasion of **International Women’s Day under the theme “Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world”**, the President of the Human Rights Council, Her Excellency, Nazhat Shameen Khan said that reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, especially the victims of unreported abuse and violence was key.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the existing high levels of all forms of violence against women. As the world retreated to the haven of their homes, for many women, this was not a safe harbour. There has been alarming reports of increase in domestic violence worldwide, clearly making this a shadow pandemic that calls for concerted action by world leaders, of a similar intensity as our response to the virus.

Our world is undergoing a gradual reshape which deepens inequalities in our societies, as women are losing jobs faster and getting poorer quicker. All hands must therefore be on deck to ensure coordinated and inclusive response and recovery efforts, to build economies and societies that are healthy, equitable, safe, clean, and resilient for all, including our women and girls.

Gender based violence is often used interchangeably with violence against women, reflecting the disproportionate number of these particular crimes against women. It is a global pandemic,

deeply rooted in gender inequality, and is fundamentally a human rights violation. Gender-based violence has no social or economic boundaries. It is present in all countries rich and poor and affects all socioeconomic groups.

The UNiTE Campaign to End Violence against Women “Orange the World: End Violence Against Women Now!” which begins on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to end on 10 December, International Human Rights Day underlines the urgency of ending violence in order for women and girls to enjoy their full rights, and the core role of women in shaping the path to do so.

Violence against women and girls is a prevalent and common problem around the world. Unfortunately, these heinous acts happen to members of our immediate communities, family and friends. We must therefore wake up to our responsibility and take appropriate actions.

It is high time we said No to all forms of gender inequality, including violence against women. The narrative must change, we must begin to have zero tolerance for any form of gender inequality. The issue of gender-based violence is at the heart of human rights and we must begin to address it significantly. We should also look beyond the traditional forms of violence that we know as technology is fueling more forms of violence against women such as trafficking of women, cyber bullying and many more.

We must promote campaigns and discussions that would make and encourage survivors of gender based violence to come out and speak up. Over the years, there has been few conversations on this subject, little or no action, poor documentation and statistics and ultimately limited volunteers to stop violence against women and girls.

We must also rise up to the challenge of getting the required justice for victims of gender violence. Though we have laws in place that are supposed to protect women, however, events have shown that women do not receive the justice they deserve.

Coming home to our own institution, The University of Ibadan, Nigeria is at the forefront of promoting gender equality issues among Nigerian higher institutions of learning. Some of the initiatives being implemented include the take-off, in 2005 of the Affirmative Action Policy, a project for the MacArthur Foundation Grant. This is a Female Faculty Start-up Grant that gives female academic staff the opportunity of accessing funds for research. Also, a Register of “Gender Offenders” was opened by the University Council in 2011. The University’s Gender Policy and Sexual Harassment Policy were also approved by its Senate in 2012. Furthermore, the University formulated and implemented the “Diversity, Disability and Gender Policies” as part of its 2009-2019 Strategic Plan.

The University of Ibadan is committed to maintaining a gender sensitive environment, fairness in accessing resources, opportunities, and ensuring equal rewards for equal work regardless of gender. Although, before the unveiling of the University of Ibadan Gender Policy in 2012, there was no institutional mechanism in place for the promotion of gender equity, however, the Gender Policy of the University now affirms the commitment of the institution to creating a gender friendly space for all. The University of Ibadan Gender Policy prohibits all forms of discrimination and unfair treatments based on sex.

The University’s Gender Policy Vision Statement reads “to be a world – class University where gender equity is institutionalized, and students and staff integrate gender friendly perspectives into personal and professional dealings in achieving the aims and goals of the University.”

In recognizing the need to protect members of the institution against gender violence, the University's Gender Policy gives a broad and wide definition of Gender Violence as "any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to men or women. These include rape, attempt to rape, assault or battery, spousal assault/battery, sexual bullying, stripping a person of his or her clothes, especially in public, collective assaults; coercion of persons to seek protection from predation by cults, verbal assaults based on sexual issues and any other issues that violates the rights of men or women. Gender violence manifests itself in situations where women and men struggle for resources, influence and power in everyday setting. Gender violence can take the form of sexual harassment of female and male staff and students, by their peers, superiors and others."

The University is meant to be a positive and empowering environment that enriches the lives of students but this is impossible when female students experience sexual assault, physical assault and dating violence, rather than healthy it becomes debilitating and damaging. These forms of gender-based violence create a public health and safety concern because of the host of psychological, and academic outcomes associated with student victimization. Violence against female students disrupts students' education and social lives, and potentially results in lower grades and ultimately withdrawal from the institution.

We recognize the need to effectively respond to and prevent gender based violence against female students and staff of this great institution as the impact of gender based violence against female students and staff generally can cause immediate and long-term physical and mental health consequences to victims.

In this institution, we have a collective and fundamental culture that says NO to gender based violence or any form of sexual harassment and abuse. The University of Ibadan does not tolerate any form of gender based violence within the University, amongst its workers, students and even those who do business with the University.

The University has in place a formidable mechanism that implements its gender policies. The Gender Mainstreaming Office (GMO) addresses and investigates allegations of gender based violence. At this juncture, I would like to commend the Gender Mainstreaming Office (GMO) for the good works done thus far. It is indeed a good way of encouraging students and staff to report future gender violence occurrences.

I strongly believe there is more to be done and achieved by our dear University to completely eradicate gender based violence most especially violence against women and girls. We must continue to work with focus and determination to achieve the vision and mission of the University's Gender Policy. As members of the University Community, we must continue to raise awareness of the University's zero tolerance to gender based violence as well as educate others on the mechanism for complaints.

The University of Ibadan also houses a Women's Law Clinic at its Law Faculty. The Women's Law Clinic is a non-profit organisation, established on the 18th of July, 2007 at the Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan. The Clinic was established to provide pro bono legal services through out of court settlement for indigent, most especially vulnerable women. Over the years, The Women's Law Clinic, through its Clinicians, has embarked on several outreaches to educate women on their rights under the law. The Clinic stands against all forms of violence, domestic abuse and injustice against women and children. As the Director of the Women's

Law Clinic, I can boldly say that the clinic has successfully handled hundreds of cases on issues relating to women and their rights.

One may ask “why observe a 16 Days of Activism against Violence against women and girls? Why have Campaigns to End Violence against Women? In my view, the answers are right before us!

Women and girls face far greater levels of vulnerability, marginalization and resulting violence. We have seen an increase in cruelty against women both in times of peace and war. We are also challenged in many parts of the world by harmful practices like child marriage and FGM (female genital mutilation) that still continue most especially in Africa. Although there has been laws against these practices, however, the numbers of prevalent cases are still alarming. I agree that there are forms of violence where we have witnessed changes, but because there are different types of violence against women, it becomes a drop in the ocean. Nevertheless, we would not relent in our pursuit to eradicate completely all forms of violence against Women and girls.

Prevalence figures released by the World Health Organization based on March 9, 2021 data confirmed that Violence against women remains devastatingly pervasive and starts alarmingly young. Across their lifetime, 1 in 3 women, around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner, a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade. According to WHO, this violence starts early: 1 in 4 young women (aged 15-24 years) who have been in a relationship will have already experienced violence by an intimate partner by the time they reach their mid-twenties.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General stated that “Violence against women is endemic in every country and culture, causing harm to millions of women and their families, and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but unlike COVID-19, violence against women cannot be stopped with a vaccine. We can only fight it with deep-rooted and sustained efforts by governments, communities and individuals to change harmful attitudes, improve access to opportunities and services for women and girls, and foster healthy and mutually respectful relationships.”

We must note further that intimate partner violence is by far the most prevalent form of violence against women globally (affecting around 641 million). However, 6% of women globally report being sexually assaulted by someone other than their husband or partner. Given the high levels of stigma and under-reporting of sexual abuse, the true figure is likely to be significantly higher.

We recognize the importance of joint collective efforts of individuals, institutions and organisations in the fight against violence against women and girls. We call for further cooperation among civil societies, Non – governmental Organisations and international bodies to ensure that schemes are put in place, to put an end to discrimination and violence against women and girls and also build societies where women are fully empowered and their contributions are equally recognised.

We have a vision of the world we want, however, the realization of this vision requires the efforts and commitments of each and every one of us. Through collaboration, we can achieve great things and end gender based violence. Together we can make a difference by continually promoting awareness and acting as advocates against all forms of violence against women and girls.

Thank you.