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**Title: Women in Governance and Political Leadership in Nigeria: A Turbulent Journey that needs Paving a new path by Legislative and other Actions**

**Outline for discussion**

1. Introduction
2. Problematizing the discourse within women's movement and the quest for recognition of women's human rights in post independent Nigeria
3. Women's participation in political leadership- a turbulent two decades
4. Paving the path: action towards bridging the gender gap in representation
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**1. Introduction**

It is my honour to address this gathering on the occasion of this very high-level event and the launch of the Paving the Path Initiative. The theme of today's event being a forum for women's participation in political leadership in Nigeria: Past, Present and Future couldn't have come at a better time when INEC has embarked on sensitization of citizens on the on-going CVR throughout the country in preparation of the forthcoming elections, especially the general elections of 2023 in view. Importantly, it is coming at a time when the focus is on the review of the 1999 Constitution and electoral laws and other topical issues that have been at the forefront burner of national discourses, including electronic voting to improve the credibility of Nigeria's election. All these issues point to the fact that the polity is already heated and the struggle for inclusion and exclusion has heightened. Unfortunately, the gladiators are the usual suspects- men and women are without their consent- spectators. I think this event is yet another strategic effort to change the narrative

for better. I therefore applaud the organizers, collaborators and in particular the House of Representatives of the National Assembly, Action Aid Nigeria, and the UN Women.

This keynote speech and thematic focus aligns with the several efforts made by the public and private sectors at the national and international level to ensure a balanced and equitable society where women political participation is seen to have been attained. Women participation in politics and representation in power in Nigeria's nascent democracy has been consistently marred by underrepresentation and voicelessness and we must discuss and find lasting solutions to this problem.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Problematizing the discourse within women's movement and the quest for recognition of women's human rights in post independent Nigeria**

On May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999, Nigeria completed its transition programme that enthroned democracy after decades of military dictatorships. The successful conduct of the 1999 election marks the beginning of moving from transition to transformation. However, Nigeria is still battling to cultivate a democratic culture that will transform the political terrain and the participation of all stakeholders, especially women and the youth. Military rule and militarization of state did not create an enabling environment for women's political participation. Unfortunately, Nigerian women have not fared better even in the present democratic dispensation.

Nigeria has come of age as a nation; so also, has its womenfolk more than one hundred years since the great amalgamation of 1914 that brought together the Northern and Southern Protectorates into one entity called Nigeria. Women's struggle in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era, although often relegated due to the nationalist movement and the larger struggle for independence. The colonial rule was a double-edged sword for women's struggles in Nigeria. Whereas women in Nigeria benefited from gains made from women's struggle in Great Britain for example in terms of right to vote, which was a defining issue for women's movement in Europe and North America, the colonialist failed to take proactive measure to address myriad of sex discrimination and gender inequalities and would rather concede to the application of customs and practices to the extent that it doesn't affect their own agenda to govern with least resistance. The

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<sup>1</sup> Joy Ezeilo, (2018) "Assessing the Level of Women Participation in the 2015 General Elections" in Mambayya House Journal of Democratic Studies, Vol. 6, Special Edition, December 2015, pp. 87 - 120.

English laws whose application extended to the colonized territories sometimes had unintended positive impact on the status of women in Nigeria.<sup>2</sup>

Despite suggestions that colonial rule undermined women's status in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, I take the view that we cannot blame the colonialist for all our woes, especially when you consider for example in the case of Nigeria that roughly forty-six (46) years was spent under colonial rule and over sixty (60) years post-colonial rule and yet not much in women's status post-independence that really calls for euphoria. The inescapable question becomes what have we done to right the wrongs and improve the status of women in the post-colonial and modern State Nigeria? How did women choose to challenge the myriads of barriers that undermine their human rights? What accounts for the gross under-representation of women in politics and governance in general? Is the problem with the political structure or our system and the ingrained conceptualized dichotomy of where women belong? The public versus domestic? Or the uniquely termed Nigerian factor? Undoubtedly, we need to undertake a stocktaking of women's struggle; the journey so far, the extent of progress made, milestones recorded if any towards realization of women's rights and barricades that continue to shift the goal post in the women's struggle for inclusion in power and decision-making positions.

To answer that question effectively would require a clear understanding of where we're coming from, where we are and where we want to be. This will necessitate a review of the status of women in Nigeria, the legal and policy frameworks for women's political participation, institutional mechanisms for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, barriers and prospective paths for gender mainstreaming in political leadership and Governance in Nigeria.

Undoubtedly issues bordering on human rights of women are amongst the most topical and contentious in today's global discourses. The United Nations from inception recognized and

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 recognized the right of married women to own property as a *femme sole* jettisoning the Common Law position similar to customary law that treated women as chattels and objects of ownership. Unfortunately, owing to complexities of our legal systems, enjoyment of such rights was not accorded to all women. Thus, women married under the Act or that contracted monogamous marriage were better positioned to enjoy such rights unlike their counterparts married either under the Islamic law or applicable customary law. The colonialist was sensitive to upsetting the traditional family system and ever mindful of repercussions of taking sweeping steps if it were to abolish existing systems that subjugated women.

promoted the principle of equality and non-discrimination, according same rights and freedoms to women and men. In pursuance of the UN ideals and in response to systemic discrimination that has resulted in denial and abuse of women and children's rights, the world body working with its members has adopted specific human rights law of universal application to promote and protect their rights. These include: Universal Declaration on Human Rights; The International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Convention Against Torture (CAT); the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006. In the African continent, under the banner of African Union (formerly Organization of African Unity), major treaties have been adopted for protection of human rights at the regional level, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (1981); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990); and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003).<sup>3</sup>

One of the prominent features of international human rights instruments is their universality and that the rights contained therein are for all peoples.<sup>4</sup> In Nigeria, the Constitution recognizes the fundamental human rights of citizens of Nigeria and others within the Sovereign jurisdiction of Nigeria, including human rights actors. In addition, the Nigerian Government has signed and ratified major international and regional treaties on human rights, women and children's rights.

It must be noted that the history of the women's rights movement is a parallel part of the history and development of modern human rights.<sup>5</sup> The women's movement is deeply rooted in women's organizations in different parts of the world for gender justice. The role played by women in the history of humanity, especially in the struggle for national liberation, the strengthening of international peace, gender equality and national development is formidable but often less

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<sup>3</sup> Joy Ezeilo, *Women, Law and Human Rights: Global and National Perspectives*, Abuja/Enugu: ACENA Publishers, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 42-43.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

documented.<sup>6</sup> The United Nations Second World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, Austria in 1993 reinforced the fact that:

“The human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of the universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community”<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Women’s participation in political leadership - a turbulent two decades**

#### **Where the power is, women are not!**

Over the past 22 years, Nigeria has enjoyed unbroken democratic governance. This has been a period of increased awareness of fundamental rights and increased citizen participation in governance and electoral process. It is however, regrettable that in 6 electoral cycles later, the representation of women in political offices has been on the decline. Given the ground swell and campaign for popular participation by women in the general elections, the poor performance is indeed very troubling. We have the National Gender Policy 2006, which provides for at least 35% representation of women at all levels, and the constitution of the political parties including the electoral law which includes percentages of women representation, but the reality is an abysmal difference. The current National Assembly is only about 3.38%<sup>8</sup>, which is a drop from 5.60% in the 2015 -2019 election cycle. Likewise, the percentage of women elected in the State Houses of Assembly is at about 2.49%, dropping from 3.70%<sup>9</sup> in the 2015-2019 election period. This is far below what is obtainable from across the world, for instance in Rwanda, women represent 51% in the national parliament, 42.7% in Senegal and 42% in South Africa.

Data of women who contested the 2019 general election revealed that out of 2,790 female contestants in the election, only six got elected into the Senate; 14 in the House of Representatives;

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA) - UN Doc A/CONF.157/23, 12 July 1993. The full texts are available at <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/vienna.htm>>accessed 04 August, 2021.

<sup>8</sup><https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/nigeria/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.cddwestafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/How-Women-Fared-in-the-2019-Elections-CDD.pdf>

43 into the States House of Assembly; 1 in the FCT Parliament; and four (4) as deputy governors. Two more females got into the senate post-election by the Election Tribunal Declaration, thereby increasing the number of female senators to 8.<sup>11</sup> Currently, it is now a total of 69 elected females in both legislative and executive arms.<sup>12</sup>

#### DIAGRAM OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN ELECTIVE POSTS 1999 TO 2019

Office	Available Seats	Number of Seats Won by Women					
		1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019
President	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vice President	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Senate	109	3	4	9	7	7	8
House of Representatives	360	12	21	26	27	22	23
Governors	36	-	-	-	-	-	-
Deputy Governor	36	1	2	6	3	4	4
House of Assembly	990	12	38	52	69	39	37

This retrogression is significant and calls for action to study further what went wrong and why women politicians and contestants were unable to consolidate and build on previous gains made at certain levels in the past elections. For example, in 2011, the number of state houses of assembly seat women won was 69, which represented a 30 per cent increment from the 2007 election. However, in 2015, they lost 30 of those seats, which compute to about 40 per cent loss. The story is the same for the House of Representatives, which declined from 27 elected women to 22. Only in the Senate did women manage to maintain the status quo without gaining or losing any seat. This statistical information is gloomy and portends danger to Nigeria's democracy and

development. There is a need for Nigeria actors to bear in mind the axiomatic expression that "Democracy, if not engendered, is endangered". Inclusion is imperative and leaving no woman behind politically and otherwise is a crucial objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, Goal # 5, which targets gender equality and women's empowerment.

Although women are still grossly under-represented in politics and governance in Nigeria, but what is more disturbing is the regression witnessed in the last two elections of 2015 and 2019 making the prognosis for 2023 dire. Unless some urgent measures are adopted to politically empower women to run and win elections as well as appoint them into decision making positions in the public sector, the next election will be predictably negative for women.

Section 42 of the Constitution of Nigeria prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex amongst others, while s. 17 and 14(3) reiterate the principles of the state policy of ensuring equality in access and opportunities. Although women in Nigeria have constitutional rights like other Nigerians to vote and be voted for consistent with regional and international norms that recognise the right of everyone to participate in the Government of their country, the formal guarantees are yet to translate into practice, hence the under-representation of women in governance across all sectors.

As aptly observed in CEDAW's concluding observation and recommendation to Nigeria in 2017, the prohibition of discrimination in section 42 of the Constitution does not comprise a comprehensive definition of discrimination in line with article 1 of the Convention. Also, the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (GEOB) which seeks to incorporate the Convention into the domestic legal order has been stalled. Its provisions included a comprehensive definition of discrimination and the Adoption of Temporary Special Measures to Eliminate Discrimination. According to s. 4 of that Bill: Every agency or organ of government, public or private institution or corporate body, shall adopt temporary special measures as set out in this Bill aimed at accelerating de facto equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women, and such measures shall not be considered discrimination as defined in this Bill or in any other law in force, and shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards or regulations. The proviso is that in the case of the political and public sphere, a minimum of 35 per cent of all offices, positions, or appointments is reserved for women. The GEOB Bill was aimed at eliminating discrimination against women in law and practice; and all spheres of life.

The exclusion of women in politics has been identified in recent times as one of the major setbacks for economic development. It is unarguable that a nation can progress and attain higher development growth only when both men and women are entitled to equal opportunities. According to the Global Gender Gap Report by the *World Economic Forum (WEF)*<sup>10</sup>, women political leadership has shown to have several societal benefits such as inequality reduction, increased prioritization of social issues like health and education and faster development.

Election rigging, including vote-buying, is illegal manipulations of the electoral process that invariably undermine the credibility of the election. Hardly has there been a successful prosecution of cases of election rigging despite extant provisions of the law. Corruption, weak democratic institutions, including poverty and illiteracy militate against Nigeria's nascent democracy and effective implementation of electoral laws. There is a lack of democratic culture and do or die state of affairs in the polity. If this holds sway, it will lead to the institutionalisation of violence, and that will further mar the participation of women in politics. As Hon. Attorney General of the Federation rightly observed, a situation where electoral officials are killed or kidnapped, or where politicians make the environment for elections a war theatre forcing the electoral body to seek extra security measures to protect their officials are issues that require serious introspection and bold legal, legislative and institutional action.

The State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) are the worst culprit when it comes to conducting credible local government elections. This local government is a level where women actual and meaningful political entrants ought to start, but unfortunately, they are most comparatively marginalised at that level. Out of 774 LGAs in Nigeria, women are chairmen of less than 20 of them. The impact of this poor performance on the growth of democracy at the local level is most profound and must be urgently remedied. As it were, many Nigerians and the civil society favour the scrapping of SIECs and transfer of their functions to INEC.

The problem of a lack of credible elections has further worsened women's chances of running and winning elections since most women are ill-equipped to beat men at their own game. Nigerian women have no confidence in the country's electoral process and are of the view that,

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<sup>10</sup>[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2017.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf)



without significant reform in this sector, women will continue to be underrepresented in power and decision-making positions.

Varying forms of threats militate against women's political participation, including political godfatherism; hijacking of political party structure (garrison politics); mercantile politics where only the wealthy succeed; political gangsterism, aka do or die politics; thuggery, kidnapping, and general insecurity in the polity; political parties' biases against female candidates; "indigeneship" contestations; zoning and power-sharing formula; gender-based political violence against women; cultural and religious fundamentalism; family and societal biases against female politicians; and use of pejorative name-calling for female politicians and unleashed propaganda against their persons.<sup>11</sup> Other factors include women's apathy, complacency, absence at points of decisions making, cheer ladies' syndrome (in which women praise female singers/ clappers who have effectively clapped themselves out of power), willingness to accept tokenism and poor self-perception, and consistent inability to network and use the numerical strength of the female electorate to their advantage. Finally, Nigerian political parties and their modus operandi constitute a major threat to women's participation, yet ironically women can only succeed through this mechanism since there is no room yet for independent candidature.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. Paving the path: action towards bridging the gender gap in representation**

Having done the above analysis of previous elections, the vital question becomes how will women fare in future elections. Women's performance in upcoming general elections will depend on a number of variables, some of which are challenges facing the polity in organizing a credible election. This is not just a question for women but one with which the Nigerian Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, and other stakeholders are all grappling. However, for women, this question has assumed a larger-than-life image given their continuing marginalization in power structures and power sharing mechanisms.

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<sup>11</sup> Women, Politics and the Law: Beyond 2011 General Election in Nigeria, Women Policy Journal of Harvard (WPJH) Volume 8, [2010-2011] 48.

<sup>12</sup> Id 49.

Before now, political parties have taken different action at their party level to improve women's political participation, including waiver of nomination and expression of interests forms for women, quota and campaign support. These measures have not yielded fruit for several reasons and in the main because it is not backed up by law and once there is no sanction for breaches, accountability is jeopardised. The challenge therefore remains in Nigeria. The challenge is not just due to the absence of a normative framework for the inclusion of women in power-sharing arrangements; in fact, it is more because of a lack of political will and institutional mechanisms to operationalize and mainstream gender. Such measures would have been necessary to realize the already recognized percentage reserved for the representation of women not just in the NGP but also in the manifestos and constitutions of some political parties.

This leaves me as a lawyer to come to the conclusion that the answer is in a legislative intervention not in a policy. The Gender Policy adopted in 2006, fifteen years after, has not had the desired impact. Evidence has shown that other countries that succeeded in bridging the gender gap in political leadership and governance did so through constitutional and legal reforms. For far too long, especially following the Beijing World Conference of 1995 and the adoption of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action women in Nigeria has clamoured as her counterparts elsewhere in Africa for affirmative action. But unfortunately, Nigeria's political ruling class and Government have not listened to women's demands for inclusion and social justice. Where Nigeria has failed, several African countries have succeeded, including Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Eritrea, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana etc. The Global Gender Gap report, 2020<sup>1</sup> published by the World Economic Forum, ranked Nigeria 146th out of 153 countries benchmarked concerning women's political empowerment, which focuses on women's representation in both elective and appointive positions.<sup>2</sup> Pathetically, Nigeria surpassed only seven countries, namely: Belize, Brunei Darussalam, Lebanon, Oman, Yemen, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu in that order. Disturbingly, Nigeria came last amongst 34 African Countries that the report assessed.

Gender equality, including the equal participation of women and men in all aspects of political and public life, is a cornerstone principle to which Nigeria has subscribed as a member State of the United Nations, African Union and ECOWAS. There have been a number of international commitments to eliminate discrimination against women in the political arena.

Firstly, Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) stipulates that “States shall ensure that women have equal rights with men to vote, hold public office and participate in civil society”. Secondly, Article 18(3) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights obligates States to ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of the woman and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions. The African charter has been ratified and domesticated in Nigeria by the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act, 1983.<sup>13</sup> To date, it is only the African Charter that has been domesticated as a treaty of relevance to women. The Protocol to the African Charter is equally part of Nigeria’s domestic law by virtue of the said ratification and domestication of the Charter. In this context, article 9 of the Protocol to the African Charter states that “State Parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure” amongst other things, “that women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes”.

Moreover, Goal #5 of the SDGs- Agenda 2030, seeks to “promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women.” One of the indicators for measuring the achievement of that goal is the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament and the extent that gender is mainstreamed in governance. Since Nigeria is a state party to both CEDAW, the African Charter and its Protocol, it has state responsibility to ensure that women in Nigeria enjoy that right to participate in political leadership.

The national average of women’s political participation in Nigeria has remained 6.7 per cent in elective and appointive positions, which is far below the Global Average of 22.5 per cent, Africa Regional Average of 23.4 per cent and West African Sub Regional Average of 15 per cent. In view of the continued inequalities and poverty faced by women, and governance challenges in mainstreaming gender, it is deemed necessary to initiate a legislative framework that will provide legal backing that will support and encourage the participation of women in elective and appointive political positions.

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<sup>13</sup> Now CAP A9, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004

**As we urge the Government to take urgent measures to redress women under representation in power, we commend the National Assembly for recent bills being considered to that effect. Of significance is the proposed bill for an additional seat titled: Electoral Reform (Gender Equity) and House Bill proposed by Hon. Nkiru Onyejeocha. This is a Bill for an Act to alter the provision of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 to provide for specific seats for women in the National and State Houses of Assemblies; and for related matters.**

There are corresponding Bills from the House of Representatives and Senate on political affirmative action in favour of women. This has now been harmonized into HB. 1301- An Act to alter the provisions of the CFRN, 1999 to create additional seats for women in the federal and state legislative houses and for related matters. Relevant sections of the Constitution are: SS: 48, 49, 71, 77, 91 and 117. This Bill seeks to alter the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 to provide for specific seats for women in the National and State Houses of Assembly.

**This Bill is a welcome development, so also is the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, (GEOB) 2019 being re-considered by the Senate. This Bill Seeks to enable effect to be given to Certain Provisions of The United Nations Convention on The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, The Protocol to The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on The Rights of Women in Africa.**

**The GEOB in sections 4 and 5 as mentioned earlier provides for the adoption of temporary special measures and measures to eliminate discrimination Elimination of discrimination in political and public life.**

## **5. Conclusion: women's prospects in future elections**

Political arrangement in Nigeria has significantly excluded female legitimacy. From the 1999 election to today we have seen only a marginal increase in the number of female representatives in elected and appointed positions. The increasing abandonment rate of political projects of women aspirants and the high, outright-failure rate of political campaign projects by women are now a recurrent feature of politics in Nigeria. In the same vein, we are aware of the fact that women are disadvantaged in terms of knowledge, skills, and control of physical resources

which invariably influence political arrangements and polity. In other words, those who aspire to power must have access to, control of, and a share of the necessary knowledge, skills, and physical resources to guarantee their inclusion in leadership positions. This state of affairs has prompted concerned persons/actors to conclude that “where the power is, women are not.” There have been persistent calls in Nigeria for affirmative action to remedy the gender gaps in politics especially in the aftermath of the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, which popularized the recommendation of at least 30 percent representation of women in power and decision making. The 2006 National Gender Policy (NGP) in Nigeria further raised the gender stakes by putting it at 35 percent. The Bill for Additional seats is a right step in the right direction for elective posts that target more female inclusion in the parliament. Why we welcome this we need also GEOB that goes beyond that to appointive posts. There is also a need for additional amendments of some constitutional provisions, including sections 147(3), 171(2), 192(1) and 223. Sections 147 and 192 of the 1999 Constitution also referred to the above-mentioned s. 14(3) as it relates to the appointment of Ministers of the Federal Government and Commissioners of State Government to ensure conformity to this all-important principle of federal character. Section 223 states that the constitution and rules of a political party shall ensure that the members of the executive committee or other governing body of the political party reflect the federal character of Nigeria. The critical question is why not the gender character to ensure women’s inclusion?

In assessing women’s prospects for future elections and beyond it is pertinent to perform a quick reality check and consider the opportunities and threats to enhancing women’s representation in power. I believe this is part of what this meeting is about. Women must work in concert and leverage the global political climate to promote increased representation of women in elective and appointive positions as well as the conduct of free and fair elections. This global climate is helping in no small measure to mount pressure on Nigeria to conduct a credible election, which ties closely to popular participation in the electioneering process and inclusion of all genders.

Some have argued that a quota system is undemocratic. Proponents of this point of view regard a quota system as tokenism that does not deal with the underlying causes of discrimination. Moreover, they argue that guaranteeing 30 percent of places or more to women would diminish

the democratic credibility of elections. However, quota strategies have worked successfully in countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, India, Bangladesh, Eritrea, and even to a limited extent in Ghana. In Argentina, the electoral law stipulates a compulsory 30 percent quota representation for women for elective positions. These nations have achieved a significant level of equal representation through the establishment of a quota system. Despite a stated desire to include more women in the political arena, Nigeria is reluctant to use structural devices like quotas and proportional representation to accelerate inclusion. I hope this time around the 9<sup>th</sup> National Assembly will break the jinx and pass relevant legislative reforms needed to make this happen.

The Nigerian political parties have failed to play the pivotal role expected of them in facilitating the political advancement of women. How do we hold political parties accountable to their female members? A cursory examination of political parties' manifestos and constitutions in Nigeria shows glaringly the lack of political will to change the status quo and ensure a better gender balance of power in the political system.

Men must understand that progress for women is progress for men and progress for family and the nation too. As women we need to work together with our male counterparts to surmount some of the identified barricades in women's political participation, especially in running and winning elections. The time to support women to develop and realize their full potential is now. Democracy and development that is not gendered is in danger.

The indigeneship policy and practice that hampers women's electoral and political appointment bids in Nigeria should be abolished. A "woman should have a choice in residency/state of domicile for the purposes of elections rather than having to battle with the indigeneship issue" (Citizens' Forum for Constitutional Reform 2004, 38).

Voter registration exercises, grassroots mobilization, and civic/political education must be pursued with greater intensity to ensure full participation of women.

Political parties should be vigorously engaged to rearticulate female concerns and promote gender-equality principles in their manifestos and constitutions through concrete actions.

Prof. Joy Ngozi Ezeilo (OON) Keynote Speech on Women in Governance and Political Leadership in Nigeria, Hilton Transcorp, Abuja 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2021.

Furthermore, in order to enhance women's political participation, I encourage Nigerian women to harness the existing opportunities discussed above, beware of the aforementioned threats, and work in concert to overcome these roadblocks to power. It is pertinent to observe that there is no legal enablement to promote or enhance women's participation in politics beyond a policy framework as contained in the National Gender Policy. Therefore, those interested in promoting women's participation must first work to ensure that affirmative action is entrenched by law. The time is now! Pave that path now! It is women's human right to participate in governance. It is also about inclusion and social justice.

**I thank you all for your attention.**

**Speakers brief profile (Professor Joy Ngozi Ezeilo [Ph.D. (Nig.), LLM (London), LL.B. (Nig.), BL, Diploma Peace & Conflict Res (Uppsala)])**

Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, is a **Law Professor**, the Emeritus Dean of Law, University of Nigeria and the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children (2008-2014). She also served as a Member, United Nations Civil Society Advisory Board on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Feb 2019 to Feb 2021). She founded Women Aid Collective (WACOL), Tamar SARC and the West African Women's Rights Coalition (WAWORC). Professor Ezeilo is an activist and a scholar of repute. She is the 2019 winner of the National Human Rights Award in Nigeria and has been recognized and given several awards internationally and nationally, including being honoured by the then President of Nigeria in 2006 with a national honour- Officer of the Order of Niger (OON) for her activism and contribution to human development. She is currently the Deputy Chairperson of the African Women's Leadership Network (AWLN) Nigerian chapter and also a Member of the Enugu State Judicial Panel of Inquiry on Police Brutality and Extra-Judicial Killings.

She has impeccable credentials as a scholar and activist. Prof. Ezeilo has an enviable public service record and has been honoured nationally and internationally for her work.

Professor Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, OON has impacted thousands of lives through provision of free legal aid to the poor, especially to women and girls whose human rights have been violated. Not surprising, in April, 2013 **Professor Ezeilo was recognized by Newsweek/Daily Beast International Magazine, USA as one of the 125 women of impact in the world for her work, especially in combating human trafficking--a modern day slavery.** Joy Ezeilo, features regularly in both local and international media and has been interviewed by CNN, BBC, Sky News, Aljazeera etcetera.