

Ex-Gender minister calls for Gender Equality and Empowerment



Nana Oye Bampoe Addo

By Jennifer Ambolley

A former minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection during National Democratic Congress regime, Nana Oye Bampoe Addo, has called for gender equality and empowerment.

The former minister was speaking at the Ghana Registered Nurses Association's celebration of International Women's Day under the theme: "Investing in women-Accelerating Progress".

According to her, the journey towards gender equality is ongoing, and it requires the collective effort of society as a whole.

Championing Women's Rights

The struggle for gender equality is not a solitary effort but a collective endeavour that involves men, women and children alike.

Addressing the gathering, she bemoaned that there has been a consistent struggle to ensure women's rights are human rights, that women are treated equally and with dignity, and not as second-class citizens, principally by women for women.

She said since time immemorial "we have been seeking a more inclusive world for women, but and so the theme for this year's international women day is very apt, thus, "inspire inclusion."

Challenging Cultural Norms

Nana Oye Bampoe Addo further indicated that there is a strong influence of proverbs and sayings on gender relations.

Citing an example she said, "If a woman purchases a gun it is kept in the man's room, meaning, no matter the woman's financial strength, she is reliant on a man. A woman sells eggplant and not gunpowder. A woman lies behind a man, a woman's beauty should be credited to a man. A woman behaves like a kid and must be guided all the time, 'obaa tisere abofra'."

Also, "there are issues of patriarchy and the subservient nature of marriage and relationships. The issue of widow-

hood rites, FGM, child marriages, menstruation and other socio-cultural practices that are inimical to the development of women and our ability to progress", she complained.

With these limitations, she said the state, the Government, civil society groups, individuals, and women themselves, have sought throughout history to change the status quo to improve the lives of women.

As a result of this, she said at the global and regional level, Conventions and Charters have been adopted and/or ratified, to create a strong normative framework for protecting, realising and respecting women's rights.

"Having regard to our social norms, our unique socio-cultural religious context and the predominance of patriarchy?"

"We have, over the decades, built a strong robust legal and policy framework globally, regionally and in some instances nationally, to protect women's rights", she added.

The ratification, she mentioned, include the ratification of the UN CEDAW Convention (1979), the UN Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, Joint General Recommendation No 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; the Cairo Declaration, and the Beijing Platform for Action, with its ten Critical Areas of Concern.

"The Annual Conclusions on the UN Commission on the Status of Women Sessions; the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, and now the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on women's rights, have provided global measuring tools for advancing women's rights", she told the gathering.

Investing in Women's Education and Health

The former minister also noted that investing in women's education, health and gender-based violence has helped to progress and advance the cause of women, especially in protecting women's rights.

Nana Oye Bampoe Addo disclosed that investments in girls' education have led to significant gains in enrollment and gender parity in schools.

"Initiatives like the Girls Education Directorate and STEM programs have opened doors for young women to pursue careers in traditionally male-dominated fields", she added

The former minister emphasized that in the Africa region the maternal mortality rate has declined from an estimated 857 maternal deaths per 1000 live births in year 2000, to 525 deaths per 1000 live births in 2017. This is still far from the global target of 140 maternal deaths per 1000 live births.

To her, healthy women hold up the family, hold up the society and as such measures must be adopted by the health-care sector to ensure progress in health-care and access to better quality healthcare services.