

NINTH COMMONWEALTH WOMEN'S AFFAIRS MINISTERS MEETING
Bridgetown, Barbados, 7-9 June 2010

Official Opening Ceremony, 7 June 2010

Vote of Thanks

*(The Hon Iyom Josephine Anenih, mni, Minister of Women Affairs
and Social Development, Nigeria)*

I feel privileged to have been given the rare opportunity to give this vote of thanks on behalf of all Ministers and delegates attending this 9th Commonwealth Women Affairs Ministers Meeting.

Excellencies, most distinguished Ministers, delegates, permit me to specially thank the host of the 8th edition of the Meeting which held in Uganda, Africa, June 2007. That Meeting extended the platform on which this Meeting is expected to build upon. For this, we say thank you to the government and people of Uganda.

We want to also specially thank Hon. Freundel Stuart, Acting Prime Minister, and the people of Barbados for hosting this event in their amazingly beautiful country, and for their warm and gracious hospitality. If we had a choice, most of us would stay here forever; be rest assured however, that when duty eventually calls us away, some people will leave their hearts behind.

We thank the Hon. Stephen Lashley, Minister of Youth, Family and Sport, Barbados, the Organising Committee and all involved in preparation for the 9WAMM. You have indeed done a marvellous job. Well done.

We would also like to register our appreciation to everyone who has contributed in one form or the other to the successful hosting of this Meeting. Most especially, our gratitude goes to the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Kamallesh Sharma and his Team for providing us with such a rare opportunity for discussions and experience sharing.

The timing of this 9th Women Affairs Ministers Meeting is an auspicious one, and its importance is almost frighteningly significant, because we, men and women, are increasingly being confronted with the fact that all over the world, our issues and concerns are shaped by the harsh realities of our increasingly uncertain - and increasingly interconnected - environments. I'll share a story with you – it happened just this morning, while I was having breakfast. We have all watched BP struggle to stop the huge oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico. On CNN today, a young female professor came up to offer her own solution, an imaginative yet simple solution she proffered AFTER watching the unsuccessful attempts by BP. No loud explosions, no complicated, hi-tech, robotic incursions - she just suggested that a smaller pipe be inserted into the larger, broken one. And her solution just might work, but only

AFTER tens of thousands of barrels of oil have polluted the sea and coastline, and perhaps damaged entire land-based and marine ecosystems irreparably.

We cannot continue to adopt the reactive, passenger-seat model in our interactions with the world. Too often I have heard women say: “*We’ll let the men make the mess, **and then** we’ll come save them from themselves.*” Too often these women forget that when a crisis hits, it is women and children that are usually worst affected. We must drive change, and transformation. We must own not just the solution, but the entire process, in every level of policy formulation and decision making. And we move past rhetoric, and into action.

How do we transform this idea into reality, into our immediate and present reality? That, my friends, is a question I believe we will have an answer to by the end of this Conference.

I believe that this gathering has the ability to successfully reposition the Woman as THE transformational agent in a post-recession world. On my part, I want to assure the Commonwealth Secretariat and other distinguished delegates that when this forum comes up with a Plan of Action that maps out a clear strategy for the mainstreaming of our concerns, hopes, and aspirations into the fibres of national consciousness, Nigeria will strive to domesticate and implement the recommendations of the PoA. The *status quo* is obsolete, and I truly believe that the long desired Age of the Woman has finally arrived.

This vote of thanks cannot be complete, if we do not acknowledge and place on record the support of our various governments, who facilitated our participation at this Meeting. No doubt, without their backing, this Meeting would not have been a reality.

Finally, to the media covering this event, we most sincerely thank you, because without your presence, the fruits of all our deliberations would remain locked within the four walls of this room: unheard, unread, and unsung.

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, we remain committed to making the world fit for everyone, men included. And in the words of the second stanza of the Commonwealth Women’s Anthem, we make a commitment here today that:

**“Women can’t be silent,
When all around the world
People hurt and hungry children cry
We will sing now for justice and development
And hold the rights
Of all the people high”**

Thank you all.