



Head Office Secretariat:
Plot 109. Ndubisi Kalu
New Owerri
Imo State

Telephone:
+234 810 394 1394

Email: admin@nchekwa-oha.org
www.nchekwa-oha.org

Welcome Address

May I begin by welcoming each and every one of you to this year's Nchekwa Oha, International Women's day. Permit me to specially recognise the presence of Eze ndi Eze Ebonyi State, Eze Charles Mkpuma of Izza LGA; His Eminence Dr. Patrick Acholonu, Igwe XI of Orlu; HRH Eze Ugbaja G. Emenike, Obi II of Obinorie, Obinorie Autonomous Community, Ezinachi Okigwe; HRH Eze Sam Ihekwoaba, Omereoha Nke Abuo of Ihitta Ogada Ancient Kingdom, Owerri North LGA; Hon. Anna Dozie, former Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development, Imo State; Hon. Kenneth Ghandi, the Chairman, Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation, Europe; Prof. Joe Ukaemenam, the; Chief Sir O. A. U. Onyema, Former Deputy PG of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Nigeria and Worldwide; Assistant Commissioner of Police, Abia State, Prince O Onyeka; Hon. Chuka Eneh, Member Representing Udi LGA Enugu State House of Assembly; Titled men and women, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I say a good morning to you all.

Nchekwa Oha Advocacy Foundation was launched on the 8th of March, 2015 by Igbo Women's Forum, UK in Owerri. It was initially designed for the single purpose of assisting Igbo Women attain a higher level in their community by advocating for issues that are of particular interest to them within the Igbo community. The organization works to achieve this by advocating for legislation, policy and cultural change and implementation of said changes. However, after careful lobbying from men and women to the directors of the organization it was agreed that the structure of the organization will change to be inclusive of men hence making it gender friendly. The primary agenda remains, promoting the welfare of the voiceless with particular emphasis on promoting women's right.

Last year activities were centered on Igbo Perspective on Domestic Violence and the new law called Violence Against Persons Act 2015. We sought the views of the traditional rulers across the South East Geopolitical Zone. The Keynote speech on the 8th of March 2016 was delivered by HRH Igwe Chijioke Nwankwo of Nofia, his words were very clear, '**domestic violence is not an Igbo culture**' therefore he welcomes the support Nchekwa Oha Advocacy Foundation has proposed to roll out within the Igbo communities. This positive statement was supported by other traditional rulers from the South East Geopolitical Zone. During the 8th of March event, in partnership with Association of African Social Workers UK and Europe, Nchekwa Oha launched a domestic violence service called '*Power to Choose*'.

The year saw a series of discussions with traditional rulers at state level where the new law - Violence Against Persons Act 2015 was fully deliberated between the traditional rulers and members of Nchekwa Oha.



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The outcome of this confab was the approval of the traditional rulers for the law to be domesticated within their states, of which Imo state, through the sponsorship of Hon Ugonna Ozuruigbo (Deputy Speaker, Imo State House of Assembly) and his colleagues has had its 1st reading in the House. A Stakeholder's Strategic Committee was set up to develop an assessment tool for assessing victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. They also agreed on what the job title and description for people supporting victims of domestic violence, thereby setting a standard for all. I am happy to announce that other African groups have endorsed these assessment tools as a basis to be used by organisations who want to provide domestic violence services in Africa.

We rolled out a series of training for our stakeholders of which the police were the main focus. We have successfully trained the Abia and Imo State Senior Police officers and we are grateful to CP Taiwo Lakanu of Imo State and the former CP of Abia State DIG Joshak Habila who is now the Deputy Inspector General of Police–Operations. These Commissioners saw the importance of training their officers in understanding the dynamics of domestic violence hence they facilitated the training and accepted to work in collaboration with 'Power to Choose'. I borrow the words of CP Lakanu, who said 'domestic violence is not a private matter but a crime against the State'.

We are very happy to say that within the last year we secured a large portion of land to build our Headquarters in Owerri. We are also in discussion with community leaders in other states to secure lands for our state chapters. At present we have secured offices in Imo, Ebonyi and Enugu although we still operate telephone services for those communities without an office.

The excitement that brought us together today is the annual celebration of International Women's Day 2017 of which the theme is '*Be Bold for Change*'. Our focus this year is on sexual violence against Igbo Women: Let's Chat a Cause. This discussion will be led by Professor Joe Ukaemenam, we have selected a man for this discussion as we want male perspective in the discussion in order to form a view towards male understanding of the issue at hand. However, our **Boldness** this year is to start the discussion on the role described for Igbo Women under the Igbo Leadership Structure.

The other key highlights for today will be the message from Diasporas in Europe presented by Hon Kenneth Ghandi, agricultural projects from Face of Igbo Heritage, opportunities from Nchekwa Oha etc. There will be drama, different dances from our states and loads of food and drink.

Finally, I am honored to have addressed you all as the founder of Nchekwa Oha Advocacy Foundation. May I finish by saying that the strength of womanhood and the amazing driving force that we have in developing our communities is not being utilized to the fullest. If we look back in history, we will recall that behind many successful men was a hard working woman; Winnie Mandela, Hilary Clinton need I go on? However, it is time for us not to be behind, but take our rightful place beside our male counterparts. For so long, women have been regarded as the fragile part in a male dominated society, however we play an equally important role as our men for the



betterment of our individual families, communities and society in general. Our mission is not to diminish the power of our men (heaven forbid) or dwell on the age old fight between the genders. We have no wish to fight with our fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, for if we do, we do so to the detriment of our very existence. Rather, our mission is to promote equality based on indispensability of either sex to each other.

I, Adaobi encourage women to be the comfort and strength of our fellow Igbo women. Once again ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for gracing this occasion with your presence and look forward to welcoming you to 2018 IWD celebration in Enugu State.

Thank you, have a pleasant day and God bless us all.

Warmest Regards



Megan Adaobi Clement
Chairperson Board of Directors – Nchekwa Oha Advocacy Foundation

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