

**A KEYNOTE SPEECH BY MRS DAYO ELIZABETH AKINMOYO,
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Trafficking in human beings is one of the greatest violations of human rights in the world today, children and their families are ensnared by the empty promises of the trafficking network; promises of a better life, of an escape route from poverty and every year, hundreds of thousands of children and women are smuggled across the borders and sold as commodities. The network of this organised crime operates like a vicious cycle. It cuts across both national and international boundaries.

Human trafficking in Africa as a continent can be traced to slave trade where the victims were bought to work as servants, agricultural labourers, etc. Slave trade was however abolished in 1860s after the British, United States, Spanish and Portuguese authorities agreed to stop this inhuman business.

For us to understand the dimensions of modern day trafficking from the Nigerian experience, it is important for us to examine the cultural history of the Nigerian society and its resultant effect in our modern day society.

The traditional Nigerian culture was one that was built on communal lifestyle. This communal lifestyle acknowledged men with large

families as superior or successful men in other words the more the children you had, the more respect you commanded in the society. This value system encouraged polygamy, which led many families to having very large families with multiple wives (in some cases up to 2 digits i.e. over 10 wives). This resulted in such families having many children.

This was further encouraged because these children were seen as assets. They were made to serve on the family farms, so the more the hands the more work they could get done. The children were in a way used to generate wealth and adequate income for their families. Only a minority percentage of the family heads believed that education was more important than working on the farm, so many families limited their income earning potential to the limitation of their manual efforts instead of investing in the education of their children.

It was also the norm during this period that every man and woman saw themselves as their neighbour's keeper hence it was a 'we' disposition to life rather than an 'I' disposition. It was normal to expect that in your absence, your neighbour will keep an eye on your possessions. What we experience in today's society where every one lives in caged apartments with high fences not knowing his neighbour because of fear of armed robbery was not the case. In some instances where criminals were identified, the people were not bothered rather, they envied their ill-gotten wealth. This rot ate deep into our value system as a society. In those days any criminal would easily be exposed because his neighbours would raise an alarm at

any suspicious movement but today many do not even know what his neighbour's occupation is or where they work or what they do for a living.

This communal lifestyle continued and as civilisation started to spread, the rural - urban migration began to increase. At this point in time, a 'fortunate few' had the opportunity to go overseas to study. These 'fortunate few' came back to become leaders in the society. They were usually very successful in their professional fields as a result of their privileged education. These 'fortunate few' also served as 'role models' in the society and were very much envied. As a result of their communal lifestyle and upbringing, they sought to give back to the society some of their fortunes by spreading the opportunities to other. They sent for family members (both immediate and extended) to sponsor and facilitate their education having passed through an educational system themselves and seeing the benefits therein.

It became evident to some family heads that these educated children accomplished much more than all the years of toiling they had experienced, in other words, they could see the benefit of education and enlightenment. The 'fortunate few' were then being pressurised to sponsor as many of their siblings and extended family members as they could afford to cater for. Many families released their children to others so that they could migrate to the city to get proper education and help in bringing wealth to the family.

This communal system, which was a form of 'foster parenting', produced many of the statesmen and women many of who are still alive as testimonies in the society today. It was a source of pride to be looking after your immediate family and the extended ones. This 'foster parenting' became an integral part of our society. It is however important to stress that along with the formal education that the beneficiaries acquired, the traditional training of carrying out domestic chores, discipline and respect for elders also formed part of the curriculum. The resultant effect being a disciplined and diligent adult with proper values incorporated in their value system. As a whole, the society at large benefited from this system with more and more people becoming positive influence in the society.

Prior to the oil boom in the late 1970s, Nigeria's economy was relatively stable and the oil boom brought about abundant prosperity into the economy. The days of Military dictatorship are however today remembered as the beginning of hardship for the citizens. The economy drastically depreciated during this period and the standard of living of the citizens followed suite. The resultant effect of this was the increase in crime and various forms of illegitimate businesses. Many of our core values as a society started to disappear and various forms of exploitations began to emerge. One of this is what we are discussing today, 'Human Trafficking'.

Poor families started to release their children (even at a cost) to anyone who promised to migrate them to the city or overseas. Various circumstances such as large number of children, multiple

wives, death of the breadwinner, etc made many families vulnerable to being abused for economic reasons. You often hear people use the term “man must survive”. People began to regard the communal lifestyle of caring for each other as a burden and many decided to keep to themselves and their immediate families not bothering about the man next door. The criminals began to use this opportunity to exploit the traditional social system that was already vulnerable due to the economic hardship in the society and the level of illiteracy of majority of the rural communities.

Nigeria today is a transit, source and destination country for trafficking victims. As a transit country, traffickers use Nigeria as a transportation route during their expedition. Victims who presumably are also victims of economic, social and political depreciation are transported into Nigeria to be eventually transported to their destination. In some cases these foreigners acquire Nigerian passports through illegal means to pose as Nigerian citizens for the purposes of their journey.

As a source country, Nigerians are trafficked to other countries for exploitative purposes. Research findings show certain States in Nigeria are peculiar sources for victims, they include, Edo State, Delta State, Cross River State, Akwa Ibom State, Rivers State, Abia State, Ebonyi State, Enugu State, Ogun State, Ondo State, Lagos State, Kano State and Imo State.

As a destination country, victims are trafficked from other West African countries, who themselves are victims of poverty in their own countries. Some of these West African countries include Republic of Benin, Mali, Niger Republic and Gabon.

The methods used in human trafficking in the Nigerian experience are in three phases/stages:

Phase/stage One

The recruitment phase: -

- ✓ Through involuntary means such as force, coercion or ignorance
- ✓ Through voluntary means such as deception
- ✓ Through links with prostitution and drug addicts
- ✓ Signing of contracts / oath taking
- ✓ Procurement of false documents

Phase/stage Two

The transportation phase, this is where the victims are transported through familiar / unfamiliar routes. The transportation routes include:

- ✓ Air
 - Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos.
 - Aminu Kano International Airport, Kano
- ✓ Sea

- Oron, Tin Can Island, Apapa, Calabar and Port Harcourt Ports
- ✓ Land
 - Seme, Jibiya Ilela, Idiroko and Sahara Desert Borders

Phase/stage Three

This phase deals with receiving or harbouring of persons under coercive, exploitative or forced labour conditions in the destination countries. Some of which include: - United Kingdom, Italy, Holland, Saudi Arabia, Germany, United States, Spain, and France.

Over the years studies have shown that the increase in the phenomenon of human trafficking in Nigeria is caused by many factors which includes:

- ✓ Economic factors: poverty and chronic unemployment
- ✓ Materialism and desire for better lives and livelihoods
- ✓ Ignorance
- ✓ Migration
- ✓ Discrimination against women and children and lack of respect for their human rights
- ✓ Lack of educational opportunities
- ✓ Breakdown in traditional and family values
- ✓ Political changes and economic regression
- ✓ The demand for sex related services
- ✓ Organised crime and trafficking networks

- ✓ Demand for cheap labour

It was due to the increasing incidence of this organised crime, its magnitude, effect on the economy, political system, socio-cultural and moral values on the Nigerian society that the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo in a bid to protect the future generation of our country created the office of the Special Assistant to the President on Human Trafficking and Child Labour in 2001.

This office was charged with the following responsibility: -

- 1) Coordinating all the activities of Human Trafficking and Child Labour in the country and making direct input to government in form of policy formulation
- 2) Advising the President on issues relating to human trafficking and child labour
- 3) Initiating and developing programmes of action which would help alleviate the problem
- 4) Coordinate and collaborate with all Governmental and non-Governmental organisations involved directly or indirectly with human trafficking and child labour
- 5) Continually gather relevant data and information on issues relating to human trafficking and child labour

- 6) To influence governmental policies which could serve as a means of eliminating and reducing the scourge of human trafficking and child labour

- 7) To work with international organisations and countries with specific interest on the subject area.

In August 2003, I was appointed by Mr President as the Special Assistant to the President on Human Trafficking and Child Labour. My office has been involved in various activities, some of which are the:

- ✓ Facilitation of a training workshop for law enforcement officers in conjunction with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) in Abuja.

- ✓ Facilitation of a training workshop for Nigerian and Ghanaian cross border security personnel in conjunction with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Accra, Ghana.

- ✓ Facilitation of a training workshop for investigation officers organised by the National Agency for Prohibition of trafficking in persons (NAPTIP), in Abuja.

- ✓ Coordination of the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement, between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Italian Government, (Anti-mafia bureau) in conjunction with the United Nation Office of Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) in Rome, Italy.

- ✓ Organisation of a workshop for state commissioners responsible for women affairs and social development, titled “The right of a child to a brighter and better future; a grassroots approach in eradicating human trafficking and child labour” during the commonwealth heads of government meeting in December at Abuja.

- ✓ Organisation of a one week Exhibition of materials and audio-visual presentation, distribution of information and souvenirs on subject matter to create public awareness during the commonwealth heads of government meeting hosted in December in Abuja.

- ✓ Presentation of a paper to Local Government Chairmen at a national seminar for local government chairmen, titled: “A grassroots approach in protecting the future generation; your role as local government chairmen”.

- ✓ Production of a documentary on human trafficking and child labour, to act as educative enlightenment programme.

In July 2003, a Trafficking in Persons Prohibition Law Enforcement and Administration Act was ratified by the National Assembly and accented by Mr President. This Act prohibits and states clearly the punishment for traffic in persons, particularly women and children, and other related offences.

I stand proud to say here today, that Nigeria is the only first West African country with a Law on trafficking. Our commitment as a Government in fighting this menace is a priority for this Administration.

The law also created the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP). This agency has responsibility for investigating and prosecuting offenders, counselling and rehabilitating trafficked persons. The Agency was formed in August 2003 and commenced full operations from its Abuja Head Office in February 2004. Some of the activities embarked upon by the Agency to date include:

- ✓ Sensitisation tours in the various States where this problem is endemic to raise awareness on the Act, targeting the traditional rulers, commissioners, states police and immigration
- ✓ Consultative meetings with anti-trafficking stakeholders
- ✓ Training of law enforcement officers and investigation officers.
- ✓ Facilitation of rescue, counselling and rehabilitation of victims

Nigeria as a nation recognises the importance of youth and the future generation. President Olusegun Obasanjo has reiterated this many times and I quote one of his public statements:

'Youth are the foundation of a society. Their energy, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and the security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured'.

President Olusegun Obasanjo, February 2001.

We believe that with the support and assistance of the international community, our modest achievements can be greatly improved to guarantee the success of our overall efforts in preserving not only this generation but also the generation unborn.

While the government has made a commitment in the fight against this modern day slavery, cooperation between and among countries especially the developed countries and international agencies is needed.

We would appreciate your individual, collective and institutional support and collaboration in combating this form of human abuse, which has indeed become a global menace. Some of the key areas where we currently require assistance and support include: -

- ✓ Developing a structured care package for children
- ✓ Developing a structured risk assessment analysis for vulnerable children
- ✓ Special Training for key social workers
- ✓ Exchange and sharing of information
- ✓ Collaboration / capacity building for Government officials, law enforcement officials and the media
- ✓ Information database system and management

A Chinese proverb says “The journey of a thousand miles starts with a step”. It is with great pleasure that I represent the Federal Government of Nigeria in this laudable 3rd Africans Unite Against Child Abuse National Conference 2004.

I believe our time and efforts in this one day conference is an investment in the future of mankind and I hope that what we learn today will not only be inspirational but will be developed upon to achieve the freedom of mankind which if not tackled by all threatens to extinct the dreams and potentials of the future generation.

Thank You