

AN ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR CHIGOZIE C. ASIABAKA, VICE-CHANCELLOR, FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI, AT THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GENDER AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) BEYOND 2015 ON TUESDAY, MAY 26, 2015

PROTOCOL

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the Federal University of Technology, Owerri and specifically to the 4th International Conference of the Centre for Women, Gender and Development Studies. I count it a big honour to be the Chief Host of the 4th conference coming barely some few weeks before my fourth year anniversary as the 6th substantive Vice-Chancellor, of our great University, FUTO.

I welcome to our campus with profound gratitude the presence of our special guests at this year's conference. I deeply appreciate the presence of Dr. Atsuko Toda, the IFAD Country Programme Manager, for Nigeria IFAD, Rome, for coming to present the Keynote paper at this conference.

International Fund for Agric Dev.
The distinguished presence of Prof. Eric Eboh of the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nigeria, who would be delivering the lead paper at this occasion is appreciated. I recognize other important guest speakers who graciously honoured our invitation to be here today which has not only added glamour and colour to this occasion but also has made this conference a huge success.

I welcome and appreciate all the participants from other institutions and establishments, who have invested resources and time to tap from the speakers, enrich their knowledge and derive other benefits accruable from this conference. I assure you that at the end of this programme you will be fully satisfied that the investment made would be handsomely rewarded with knowledge.

I heartily congratulate the organizers of this international conference: ***the Centre for Women, Gender and Development Studies*** of our University for packaging the 4th international conference with the theme "**Gender and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Beyond 2015**". I commend them also for bringing this big question to the front burner. The big issue is beyond the 2015 deadline, what happens to the MDGs; have the goals been achieved?; if

yes, how can it be sustained and if not, what are the remedies? This conference therefore would debate on the realization or otherwise of eight goals of the MDGS which include eradication of extreme hunger, achieving universal primary education, promotion of gender equality, empowerment of women, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development.

According to the Senior Special Assistant to the President on MDGs, Dr. Precious Gbenol, she asserted that "*the country has been able to achieve goal one. We have been able to reduce the number of people that suffer from extreme hunger by half. On gender equality in schools, we have also been able to achieve goal three. We have also been able to achieve goal six, which is the HIV prevalence of the country.*" Continuing, she said of HIV/AIDS: "*It has been halted, reversed and is on the downward slide. Currently, the national prevalence of HIV for the country is 3.4. It rose to 5.8 and then came down to 4.8, 4.4, 4.1 and the current national prevalence of HIV for the country is 3.4.*"

Beyond these appreciable progress made, absence of accurate data in the country makes tracing the successes of MDGs a big challenge. However, inspite of these achievements, it is obvious that we still grapple with the challenges of poverty, unemployment, poor health care and maternal/infant mortality rate among other issues.

Therefore this conference should focus on detailing what way forward out of many challenges facing the country as the deadline for the realization of the Millennium Development Goals draws near. For Nigeria to achieve only three out of eight MDGs goals imply that a lot needs to be done.

It is our expectation that presentations by experts carefully selected and assembled by the organizers of this conference for the main and sub-themes of the conference would offer incisive insights and remedies on how to achieve the MGDs beyond the 2015 deadline.

Distinguished Keynote speaker, other guest speakers, participants, ladies and gentlemen, once more I happily welcome you to FUTO and pray that God grant you journey mercies back to your destinations. I wish you a successful conference in our serene environment.

Thank you and God bless us all.

