

**AFRICAN WOMEN AT HOME AND IN THE DIASPORA:
AN OPPORTUNITY FOR COLLABORATION**

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Thank you so much for that introduction, (Madame President Nwigwe). I want to thank Madame President Nwigwe, and Venerable Dr. Emeka Nwigwe, as well as the entire Women's Ministry, for your gracious invitation to be with you here today. I am also honored to be among such esteemed speakers as are on the program today.

Today I'd like to talk about how we, African women from the continent and in the diaspora, can work together to overcome the myths that continue to separate and divide African people globally. We are living in a very exciting time for the continent of Africa. Indeed, Madame Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the first woman to be a Minister of Finance of Nigeria; the first woman to be Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria; and now a Vice-President of the World Bank, stated that "sub-Saharan Africa is the world's next frontier market." Additionally, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, stated that "Africa is rich and its stock is rising. The value of its land and minerals is going up. There is no lack of resources, no deficiency of knowledge and no shortage of plans. Africa's progress rests above all else on the mobilization of political will."

We all know that more competitive economies produce higher levels of income. What we know now is that Africa desperately needs high rates of growth over several decades (just as we've seen in Asia), to significantly raise the living standards of its people. Although we can clearly say that the African continent had no input into the global economic collapse, that global financial meltdown is an opportunity to make many of the structural changes that will place Africa on a much stronger economic footing. In fact, Africa is rebounding from last year's slump faster than much of the world. The International Monetary Fund forecasts growth in sub-Saharan Africa at nearly 6% this year. Of course you know that Africa has 10% or more of global oil reserves, and 1/3 of the world's cobalt reserves. South Africa has 40% of the world's gold. And in the midst of this, agricultural potential has hardly been touched.

Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown recently stated that he is seeking the creation of "an African century." Brown said that the "future growth in the world economy, and future jobs in the developing world, will depend on harnessing both the productive potential and the pent-up consumer demand of the African continent."

But wait. Although Brown's remarks can be considered charitable at best, it points out the need for African people to be vigilant. The development of the African continent has moved to the forefront of the global agenda, and countries and companies are falling over themselves to obtain contracts. Many if not most of these companies don't necessarily have the well-being of the continent in mind. As noted recently by Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, in observation of the Vale Mining Company's negotiations to construct a railway between Guinea and Liberia, "Liberia needs investment and we welcome the creation of jobs, but we need decent jobs which will lead to local prosperity and not just the exploitation of our land and the export of our country's wealth." This is an example of an African woman remaining vigilant regarding the rape of Africa's resources.

We are all familiar with the tens of thousands of aid groups and philanthropic organizations that are on the continent. Many of us participate in some of them. It is important for all African people to extend a hand beyond our organizations, churches, and businesses, so that there is a collective effort to advance an agenda that will benefit African people globally. Africa, the richest continent on the face of the earth,

is struggling to maintain its independence and upgrade the conditions of her people. Those of us in a position of access can assist. How do we do that?

Some of you may have read the book written by my husband, Edgar Ridley, called *The Golden Apple: Changing the Structure of Civilization*. If you have, then you know that the book describes a behavioral concept that we use with our consulting clients. Essentially, the book advocates a behavior change that eliminates symbolic thinking, and replaces it with a *Symptomatic Thought Process*®. What does this mean? In fact, this is a revolutionary approach that indeed, will change the structure of civilization.

Most of us don't consider the act of symbolic thinking, but it is commonly done, to our detriment. Symbolic thinking would be to accept the mythologies and superstitions that are designed to separate us – what are they? African-Americans have been heard to say that “we left Africa so long ago, we're not really African”. African people have been so denigrated in the global society that it is very common to hear negative language attached to us – it is more uncommon to hear positive stories of our cooperation and collaboration. And it doesn't help when the President of the United States describes himself and other African-Americans as a “mongrel people”, as he did two weeks ago, when he was interviewed on “The View”. Africans in America receive an elementary and secondary schooling that is full of negative symbolism regarding Africa and everything connected to it. The extent to which African-Americans do not identify with Africa is the extent to which we have been so damaged by those negative symbolic references.

In fact, the engine that runs all disciplines and the economy is people behavior. There must be a mindset transformation if Africa is to compete effectively in the global economy. This is important. Changing the mindset so that a behavior transformation can take place must be the top priority. What does this look like?

Several months ago, Edgar J. Ridley & Associates and African Profiles, USA sponsored our inaugural International Conference on African Productivity. Although the keynote was delivered by my husband, Edgar Ridley, we also featured a panel of speakers from throughout sub-Saharan Africa as well as African-America. This *Africa Forum*, as we called it, was very successful in addressing the issue of removing symbolic behavior, exhibited by ethnic conflict and ritual cleansing, to pave the way for symptomatic behavior that will usher in a new dynamic. This new dynamic will feature cooperation among all groups of Africans, from the continent and in the diaspora, to maximize opportunity and growth for Africa.

Since my topic today is the collaboration between African women, at home and in the diaspora, let me close by sharing a story. At the “Women in the World” conference a few months ago here in New York City, Leymah Gbowee, executive director of the Women Peace & Security Network Africa, spoke on a panel on *Rape as a Weapon of War*. Leymah Gbowee emphasized that throughout every country in sub-Saharan Africa, it was the wives of the Presidents who actually run the country! She stated, “One group of powerful people that everyone overlooks is the first ladies of Africa.” She suggested that “Michelle Obama call a summit of African first ladies to come, not to do a fashion parade, but to talk about rape and sexual violence.” She went on to boldly suggest that we “set benchmarks –for instance, we talk to the first lady of the Congo, let's say, and if the cases of rape come down by just 1%, we could continue this engagement at another level.” Leymah Gbowee emphasized that “first ladies run Africa, and everything they say to their husband is law and gospel.” She certainly summarized in a nutshell what we all know, that behind every successful man is an even more powerful woman. As importantly, she was emphasizing a need for African women to collaborate across the

Atlantic to solve the problems of Africa. We African women, in partnership with our husbands, can be the drivers of the change taking place on the continent, while we remain vigilant to guard against exploitation and corruption. This is symptomatic behavior at its best, free of symbolism and superstition. This is the change in behavior that I am speaking of – if we all display this to one another, then the African continent can only flourish in the 21st century.

Thank you again having me today.