

Leila Ben Hassen IC Publications General Manager

“Good evening, distinguished guests, your excellencies, honourable delegates, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends.

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the inaugural New African Woman Awards. The fact that many of you have travelled long distances to celebrate with us tonight is a reminder of how important it is to recognise our achievements and how we must continue tirelessly to be the voice of African women all over the world.

The New African Woman Awards were birthed from the same ethos that launched the New African Woman magazine 8 years ago: to represent African women, share their stories, celebrate their success, shed light on their struggles, challenges and ultimately to show the world and each other the beauty, strength and above all the diversity of African women.

African Women have been instrumental in shaping African society and are a critical force for growth & development – as mothers, sisters, employees, employers, leaders, entrepreneurs, educators and decision makers.

Recent research shows clearly that by not closing the gender pay gap, there are serious, worldwide economic consequences.

In fact, according to a McKinsey Global Institute report, advancing women’s equality could add \$12 trillion to global growth in just 10 years.

It’s clear from over a decade of research on the gender gap that some progress has been made. Around the world, almost a ¼ of a billion more women are in the workforce today than a decade ago. In many countries, more women are graduating from university than men.

And yet the findings of the latest Global Gender Gap report are disappointing. Across health, education, economic opportunity and politics, the gender gap has closed by only 4% in the past 10 years.

The economic gap has closed by just 3% and, if progress continues at the same slow pace, it will take another 118 years for women to be earning the same as men.

That is already too long. Must we wait so much longer?

When we look at Africa – the picture is even more discouraging. Although it rose to 6% last year, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has reported a 61% loss in development due to gender inequality. This illustrates clearly that more than 50% of Africa’s population is not being used optimally.

The fact that only 20% of women in Africa have bank accounts means the vast majority operate outside the financial sector.

Therefore they do not have the opportunities nor the security that financial institutions offer.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The main questions remain: What can we do moreof in order to accelerate gender equality in all spheres of life to impact positively on education, health, peace and security, the economy and human rights?

What exactly is preventing the majority of African women from reaching their full potential and holding top positions???

And what are the contributing factors for those who have succeeded? Once we find the answers to these questions, we will be well on our way to achieving the goals of Agenda 2063.

With this in mind, we decided to organise the first edition of the New African Woman Forum and Awards, which is squarely aligned with this year's theme for International Women's Day, "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality". We feel that it is our responsibility to highlight the role that we, as African women, play in promoting the peaceful progress of our continent.

During this awards ceremony, we will be celebrating some of the most amazing women from across the continent who are changing the game in their respective fields.

My co-judges and I were enthralled and challenged in equal measure during the selection process: enthralled by the depth and breadth of talent and achievement and challenged by how to select just one winner in each category.

Tonight, I would like to thank these amazing women – both those shortlisted and those who will emerge as winners – for their courage, boldness and resilience – just some of the attributes of the New African Woman.

I would also like to thank all our sponsors who made this evening possible: Our high patron, the African Development Bank, Ecobank, Brand Communications, High Life Foundation, Yves Rocher, Evertex, Service Medical International, UUU Group, TunisAir and the John Edward Group.

I would also like to thank our strategic and media partners, as well as all the individuals and organisations who supported us in making this event happen.

Finally, to answer the question asked by most people about our next edition, it will definitely be in Africa.

Once again, thank you all for joining us in tonight's celebration. I wish you all a pleasant evening.

And now over to you Vimbai & Henri ...”

L.B.H

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