

**PARTNERS FOR GENDER JUSTICE**  
**CONFERENCE**  
**ON**  
**THE ROLE OF THE JUDICIARY IN PROMOTING GENDER JUSTICE**  
**IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

Accra, Ghana  
19-21 November, 2008

**CLOSING REMARKS BY HER LADYSHIP THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF GHANA**

**MRS GEORGINA THEODORA WOOD**

My Lords, Lady Justices and Magistrates  
Distinguished Participants,  
Invited Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a pleasure for me to give these closing remarks at the end of what has undoubtedly been a hugely successful colloquium on this important topic of advancing gender justice in Africa.

It has been an exciting three full wonderful days of deliberations from all of you from across our motherland Africa and some of her cherished donor and other development partners from other continents. We started off with a set goal for ourselves. This was described in different terminologies by all the various contributors; in whatever capacity they spoke; whether as main speakers, film makers or interveners; everyone's contribution captured the main agenda as expressed in the theme "The role of the judiciary in promoting gender justice and equality in African countries." The presentations were very rich, thought provoking and really empowering. And we can sincerely say our just expectations were met. They were, in an outstanding way! We succeeded, to borrow the words of our terrific sister Yasmine Sheriff in forging ideas that will undoubtedly "make a difference to the millions of women whose lives have been marked by injustice and inequality, whose souls are scarred by violence and impunity."

The last three days has witnessed a cross-fertilization of ideas, we have forthrightly shared experiences, passionately exchanged best practices, learnt many useful lessons, fashioned out approaches and strategies and inspired each other on matters that touch and concern the hearts of all of us. This one message stands clearly out and keeps hammering at the doors of my heart: despite constitutional provisions and all the specially enacted laws to promote gender justice, the status of women, particularly, vulnerable women and undeniably, their children, our children, as we have learned over the last three days continues to be a cause of concern.

And the cry goes out: we must do something concrete to turn these issues we have discussed from mere rhetoric to reality and this we must do quickly.

So at this colloquium we have learnt useful strategies for combating some of the issues that plague women's access to gender justice.

I will not bore you by attempting to capture all that has been discussed over the last three days. I do believe that the organizers will make available to us a pack and summation of the outcomes at this important colloquium.

One thing however stood out very clearly, and that is my honest assessment. It did not appear to me at all that we lacked information on the causes and effects of gender inequalities. A wealth of information was exchanged at this gathering; the discussions were well focused and practical and devoid of theory and rhetoric. It is not surprising that not many sought clarification on issues, not many doubts were expressed, you will recall. So we are quite knowledgeable on these matters and the equally more crucial issue of how to address them, how to minimize the negativities, i.e. the barriers, the impediments that confront women as they struggle to access justice, so life will be a little kinder to them. The amazing fact is that in so doing, they also serve the needs of the many other people whose lives are intrinsically bound to theirs, namely, men and children.

Therefore what I will say is this, we have the raw material, let us add value to it. I saw passion and commitment written all over us. As we go away, we will resolve as women, individually and collectively to ensure that these last three days will not pass off as another talk shop, but rather that we put into practice the interventions and all the practical measures we have learned from each other. And who can better do this for us in a credible, trustworthy, impartial and effectual way, in a way that will promote justice to all, not just women, but all, than women in the judiciary!

This takes me to a matter of great importance as a judge and administrator; women judges must take up the mantle and work hard, really hard, quantitatively and qualitatively. More often than not, we will have to go beyond the call of duty to help our women access justice, and that means for example, fewer adjournments, promoting rather than perverting the cause of justice or dismissing cases on unjustifiable grounds.

We must continue to underscore the need to mainstream gender perspectives not only into the development process but also into all aspects of the work we do.

To this end, continuous education and training will play a key role. Creating awareness among women about their rights and responsibilities will definitively yield positive results.

I encourage you to continue to strengthen and deepen the networks and associations which we have formed here. We must sustain the dialogue for an improved access to justice for all women. Above all, we must continue to pursue policies and practical solutions to ensure that the strategies developed at this colloquium are workable.

I am happy to inform you that I have already put in place some of the things I want to do in relation to gender based crimes and civil actions. I started when the conference had barely travelled into its first hour. I could not wait a day longer. I urge you not to wait for big things, start with what you have, and grow it.

Finally, I make this urgent passionate appeal. I do not know about other African countries, but I can speak of Ghana and I would not be too surprised if the story is not the same in our other sister African countries. Many of us African women in high positions, positions of trust, judges included, have succeeded this far through the collective will, toil and sweat of other women who fought for socio-economic and political rights of women. The fee free education policies, the various scholarships we accessed at the secondary and tertiary levels, accrued from the hardworking Ghanaian cocoa farmers, all of whom without a single exception were supported by our sisters, their wives on their farms. We cannot forget so soon their outstanding contributions. This is the time to give back to our sisters, cousins, sisters –in-law, aunties, grandmothers, etc., all that they have given us so selflessly!

I know you have enjoyed this conference tremendously. I also do know the Partners of Gender Justice (PGJ) is proud to have supported such a worthy cause. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to host this important colloquium, and I thank my colleague members of the bench and other members of the Judicial Service for contributing to this success story. I make special mention of Lady Justice Margaret Welbourne and Sandra Thompson, Director of Reforms and Implementation. I pledge to make myself available to assist in this important cause in promoting gender justice in Africa.

I wish you safe travel back home. Bon Voyage. May God bless the work of our hands in every way and may God bless Africa.

Thank you.