

Nigerian women artists unite at UN to change perceptions of women and Africa

Three Nigerian women will spotlight themes such as human trafficking, suicide bombing, and sexism and sexual harassment at the United Nations, showing the strength of women as agents of change in African societies often dominated by men.

“We have to see ourselves as part of the solution, not just as women reserved for sex or for the kitchen,” author and Queen Blessing Itua told *UN News* ahead of a special event planned for this Sunday in the UN General Assembly Hall.

“Unity in Diversity: An Evening of Art and Hope with Nigerian Women” will feature excerpts from Ms. Itua’s book “We Are the Blessings of Africa,” as well as monologues from Ifeoma Fafunwa’s HEAR WORD! and Nadine Ibrahim’s films “Tolu” and “Through Her Eyes.”

The event is organized by UN WOMEN, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Nigerian Mission to the UN, with other partners.

“Africa is a diverse continent, rich with different countries and different cultures, and natural resources. Africa has the talent – men and women,” said Ms. Itua. “When men in Africa look at women, women are reserved just in the kitchen or at home. So there’s a need to shift thinking that women can be powerful agents of development, then they’re able to support and empower women.

“If women understand that they have a critical role to play, they do not see themselves as just wives or women at home, they also raise up into mental engagement with the men and hopefully strategize about developing our Mother Land,” Ms. Itua continued.

Born in Nigeria and living in the United States, Ms. Itua said she wants to create awareness and give voice to women who do not have a platform to speak out about social ills, particularly rural women.

Her latest film, *Mrs. Adams*, – which will premiere during the Commission on the Status of Women next week – follows human trafficking routes in Nigeria and Europe. It is meant to be a statement not just about brutalization of women and sexual violence, but also highlight the economic reasons that people choose to migrate in the first place – to change some of the misinterpretations about exploitative work practices, forced labour and smuggling.

The issue is personal, Ms. Itua said. She hails from Edo state, which recently inaugurated a migration resource centre, and which has been cast in the spotlight after reports of Nigerians from that area being sold in modern slave markets in Libya.

"As an African woman, I believe that my goal is to work with other women in creating awareness. Together we are stronger. Working together to be stronger to change the narrative coming out of Africa," Ms. Itua said.

She will be joined this Sunday by 24-year-old Nadine Ibrahim, whose film *Through Her Eyes* follows the internal struggle of a 12-year-old female suicide bomber in northern Nigeria.

Ms. Ibrahim, who is a Muslim, has said that she wants people to understand the rich and beautiful culture surrounding women, Islam and north-eastern Nigeria.

The film was filmed with security on location and after the original actress's mother pulled the daughter out of the film for fear of safety.

The Sunday night event will also feature Ifeoma Fafunwa, whose stage play "HEAR WORD! Naija Women Talk True" is a collection of monologues based on true-life stories of Nigerian women challenging social, cultural and political norms in the country.

A line from the play declares: "I have a vital contribution to my nation's transformation. I am a force, a tidal wave, and I won't hide. My destiny is not for you to decide."