

Opening Address by Chizoba Imoka @ UVA 2nd Annual Teen Conference

October 15, 2011

STTR School Ikeja, GRA

A Nigeria shaken by Boko Haram, a nation filled with so much violence where innocent people operate with fear and sleep with one eye open. A nation where people are prisoners in their homes and their lives is at the mercy of ruthless robbers without reprimand. A nation where a majority of the people spend their life waiting only to be informed that they are too old for the job that they seek. A nation filled with bitter hearts and shattered dreams; stories that end with “I would have been” rather than “I am”. A nation where women and children are sexually and emotionally abused everyday but hey, this is the way of life – no complains! A nation where one’s education or smartness is not necessarily their ticket to a bright future; it’. A nation where people loose their lives because of strike A nation blessed with so many resources but yet the lands are looking grey rather than green. A nation where the basic necessities of life are a luxury even the rich cannot afford. The giant of Africa, I heard when I was young but now I really wonder....

Good morning Everyone! My name is Chizoba Imoka. I am the founder of Unveiling Africa Foundation. I come to you this morning, not in my own words but in the words of Nigerian teenagers and our unborn children who crave and deserve a brighter future than we have today. I come to you in the words of Nigerians in Diaspora who want to come home but rightly fear for the security of their lives.

Five years ago, I started Unveiling Africa foundation as a 3rd year student of University of Alberta with the simple desire to do something about the issues I came to realize overwhelmed my continent. Doing something involved bringing fellow African students together in an attempt to first of all understand the issue and then figure out a way to be a part of the solution. We did this successfully for over 4 years by raising money and organizing youth conferences but this was not

enough for us – we wanted more! This search for more led us to dig deeper to the underlying cause of our nation's demise.

For us at UVA, Nigeria's problem is not really our bad roads, poor infrastructure, poor quality of education, and lack of social services but we argue is a people's problem, it is a mentality problem. We wonder why our politicians don't see the madness in them earning 5 times the pay of American lawmakers yet 80% Nigerians live on less than a dollar/day and paying N18,000 minimum wage became a cause for strike. What we often tend to forget is that the problems we complain about as a nation is often engineered and controlled by people; by fellow Nigerians like you and me. I mean the bad road I have to ride on from my home to ogba for the past ten years now must have been a contract given out to a Nigerian who certainly does not think that his fellow Nigerians have deserved the privilege of riding pothole free road. So therefore, the question now becomes how do we develop a crop of Nigerians who see the dignity in delivering on a job that they have been paid for, how do we develop a group of Nigerians that understand that political power is a platform for engaged and informed service of the people, how do we develop a group of Nigerians who are capable of leading our country forward with a more progressive mentality? How do we develop a group of Nigerians who passionately sees a problem in Nigerians having to go abroad in search of better livelihood?

This quest for a different breed of Nigerians has become the hinge of UVA's existence. We are passionate about re-writing and controlling Nigeria's future by developing a different generation of Nigerians armed with a different mentality as it relates to our country's development and their role in it.

For us, you the teenagers (been people between the age of 9 – 18 years) are the most valuable asset any country has because by engaging with you, a country can rewrite its future. you are moldable, you look up to us for examples, you are teachable and you can be formed. In this breath, UVA is focused on capitalizing on this power to inculcate critical thinking, problem solving and passion for the country while also defining the roles that you play in nation building. The nation building roles we proclaim are academic excellence – every teen must be able to

understand that their success in academics is non-negotiable and is a requirement to get ahead in the future, community activism – a life of service and volunteerism is one that must be promoted from the onset – this is the preparation ground for future service, excellence in social interaction – we are the product of our society, so we must become aware of the power we possess to shape our society through our actions and inactions and lastly, personal leadership – if you can lead your life well, then you can lead others.

It is our belief that the secret to getting it right in our country lies in our ability to train a multitude of teenagers that totally understand these roles and understand that the life they live now was created by a different generation hence the life they will live in the next five – fifteen years as well that of the unborn children is totally dependent on them today. The teenage years of the 15 million or so estimated Nigerian teenagers' is the foundation on which our country's future lie. In our minds, each of the teenagers represented here form a maze of bricks that make up the foundation of our country's future and our goal then as an organization to develop as many great bricks as possible for our country to stand on in the future. We are actively developing these great bricks through our numerous programs such as our essay contest, our teen magazine pacesetters, conferences like these, training for teens and mentorship programs where we challenge our teens to critical thinking and problem solving.

The ability to complain about the issues also comes with the responsibility to do something about them and at UVA we take that responsibility very seriously. We all complain and we all have a role to play in nation building too. Parents you shape our nation's future through the power you have over our teens, we implore you to encourage our kids to become critical thinkers and problem solvers, let them explore and allow them take leadership of things. Teachers, you have a great deal of power over the teens because they spend the most of their time with you in school hence our country's future lie in your hands. Speak to their hearts; remind the teens that they will determine the pension you will receive as a retiree hence you are committed to their future so that your own future is also secure. Uncle's aunties, friends, family members, the ball is in our court on how we want our future to look like; it starts from making the decision to do

something within your area of influence while also committing to engaging the teenagers in your life with more consciousness.

In conclusion, I encourage everyone to make good use of the sessions that will be presented here today. I sincerely hope that you enjoy this event and you learn more about unveiling Africa and support us. The third edition of our magazine will be launched today, please make sure you grab a copy before you leave here. On this note, I had like to thank all the people that have made this event possible; our sponsors : Maple Education Canada for your immerse support, Bedmate for your generosity towards our essay contest, and ST & T Regency School for opening your doors to us. I thank Mrs. Adesuwa Onyenokwe – the chief launcher of UVA’s teen magazine, Mrs. Ladipo for her support, Funke-Treasure Durodola for her guidance and unconditional mentorship and all our speakers present here today. I would also like to acknowledge our partners and donors: Cadbury, Dangote, Nestle, Cool FM, Ofili Speaks, Duvys World, Emcee Pato, CP – Africa, YNaija, Beat FM, and the Moonlight place. I also thank our board of advisors; Mr. Femi Adesina, Mrs. Adefisayo and Aunty Ebi Mama’m – Mrs Obaro , The UVA Super Team , volunteers, our essay contest markers – I am everly grateful to you. Thank you all for your support and I hope you enjoy the rest of the event.