

**SPEECH BY SENATOR BIODUN OLUJIMI AT THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN LAWYERS (FIDA) CONFERENCE HELD AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, ENUGU ON WEDNESDAY 27TH AUGUST, 2025.**

**Topic:** Stand Out, Stand Tall: Building resilience for excellence; Effective implementation of gender parity and protection of the Nigerian child

**PROTOCOLS**

**Opening**

President of FIDA Nigeria, distinguished guests, learned friends, fellow women, gentlemen, and most importantly, sisters in the struggle for justice, good morning.

To stand before FIDA is not like standing before any other body of lawyers. FIDA is not just an association; it is a movement. A movement that has stood, for decades, as the defender of the voiceless—the women silenced in their homes, the children left unprotected on our streets, the widows dispossessed, and the girls denied their right to education.

So, to be invited to speak on *Stand Out, Stand Tall: Building resilience for excellence; Effective Implementation of Gender Parity and Protection of the Nigerian Child* is, for me, deeply humbling. Because this theme is not a topic in a textbook; it is my life's work, it is FIDA's identity, and it is Nigeria's unfinished journey.

For even though I sit here today as a former senator, I still carry with me the weight of battles fought, bills sponsored, dreams deferred, and voices that must yet be heard. Today, I wish to speak not just as a legislator who once occupied a seat in the Red Chamber, but as a mother, as a Nigerian woman, and as one who believes that until women and children are fully protected, Nigeria cannot truly rise.

## **My Journey in the Senate**

Permit me to begin with a very personal recollection. When I entered the Senate, I came with an agenda shaped by both experience and conviction. I had seen first hand how Nigerian women; whether in rural villages or urban centres; carried the heaviest burdens of society, often with little recognition and almost no structural support. I had also seen how children, the most vulnerable members of our nation, were treated not as rights-holders but as afterthoughts.

So, one of the first bills I sponsored was the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, designed to enshrine in law the principles of equality for women and conversely the protection of children. That bill was not born out of theory; it was born out of life; out of the countless women who told me they had been victimized because of their gender, and the countless children I saw hawking on our streets when they should have been in classrooms.

## **The Bill that Almost Was**

I remember the day that bill came up for second reading on the floor of the Senate. I spoke from my heart, but I also spoke with data. I argued that gender parity was not a favour to women but a constitutional duty and a prerequisite for national development.

And for a brief moment, I felt we had broken through. The bill passed second reading. That was no small feat. It meant that, at least in principle, my colleagues agreed that this was an issue worth legislating upon. It meant that the voices of Nigerian women had, if only for a moment, found resonance in the hallowed chambers.

But then came the silence. The bill never left the Committee because the public hearing did not hold. In the legislative language, it simply “never saw the light of the day.”

For me, that silence was louder than outright rejection. Because silence meant dismissal—not only of my bill, but of the women and children it sought to protect.

## **The Pain and the Lesson**

I will confess something to you today. That experience broke me. I left the chamber that day with tears in my eyes. But I also left with a lesson: in Nigeria, justice for women and children is often postponed, but it must never be abandoned.

That unconsidered bill remains one of the deepest wounds of my time in public office. Yet, it is also one of my greatest sources of resolve. Because I believe that no bill is ever truly dead if the cause it represents remains alive in the hearts of the people.

And today, I see that cause alive in the women who protested in 2022 when the National Assembly rejected five gender-related bills, including those seeking special seats for women, affirmative action, and citizenship rights for women married to foreigners. I see that cause alive in the young girls across Nigeria who now boldly declare their ambition to run for office, despite the hurdles. I AM GLAD THAT PARTICULAR BILL ON SPECIAL SEATS FOR WOMEN HAS BEEN REPRESENTED.

## **Why Gender Parity Matters**

Gender parity is not about numbers; it is about justice. It is about ensuring that when laws are made, they reflect the needs of all citizens, not just half. In my time in the Senate, I saw how issues of women, children and the vulnerable was treated, and it made me more committed and dedicated to seeing it change.

Without women in the room, many issues are often pushed aside as “secondary.” But to the mother who buries her child because there was no healthcare facility,

or to the girl child forced into early marriage, these are not secondary—they are life and death.

Parity is also about the Nigerian child. Because where women are excluded, children suffer. It is women who consistently champion policies for child rights. It is women who understand, deeply and personally, what it means for a child to go hungry, to be denied schooling, to be abused. To silence women in governance is to silence children in perpetuity.

### **The Protection of the Nigerian Child**

Let me speak more directly about the Nigerian child. We have on our statute books the Child Rights Act of 2003, a remarkable piece of legislation that was meant to be a shield for every boy and girl. Yet, more than two decades later, not every state has domesticated it, and even where domesticated, implementation is weak.

To protect the Nigerian child is not optional; it is a constitutional and moral duty. And if we fail, we risk producing a generation unable to carry the future of Nigeria.

### **The Way Forward**

So what must we do?

1. **Legally Binding Quotas.** Parity cannot be left to goodwill. Quotas for women in political parties, elective and appointive offices must be legally mandated. Therefore support the ongoing Constitution Review process especially the Special Seats Bill that aims to increase the number of women in the National and State Houses of Assembly by creating new seats designated for women-only contests. The goal is to address the low representation of women in politics, which is among the lowest in Africa, to improve governance and foster gender-friendly policies.

2. Resurrect and Re-enact the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill. We must not accept that a bill which passed second reading can die in silence. We must bring it back, strengthen it, and pass it into law.
3. Domesticate and Enforce the Child Rights Act Nationwide. No state should be allowed to hide under cultural excuses to deny children their rights.
4. Accountability and Monitoring. We must measure progress not by conferences held but by statistics of girls in school, children out of labour, and women in leadership.
5. Cultural Partnership. Implementation requires dialogue with traditional and religious leaders. Without cultural ownership, legal reforms remain paper tigers.

### **Conclusion: A Call from the Heart**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, when I sponsored that bill years ago, I hoped it would mark the beginning of a new era for women and children in Nigeria. It did not. But its failure taught me that no single woman, no single bill, can carry this fight alone.

That is why I stand before you today, not with despair, but with determination. Because I believe that the work I began in the Senate, and which was cut short, can yet be completed by this generation; by you, the lawyers, the advocates, the policymakers, and the young women and men who refuse to accept a Nigeria built on inequality.

We owe it to our daughters to build a Nigeria where parity is reality, not rhetoric. We owe it to our sons to protect their childhoods so they can grow into responsible men. We owe it to history to ensure that the silence which killed my bill never kills our collective dream of justice again.

The FIDA has always stood as the guardian of the law and the defender of the vulnerable. I urge you to continue to do that. Let us ensure that gender parity and child protection move from paper to practice, from aspiration to reality.

I may no longer sit in the Senate chambers, but I will never stop being a voice for women and children. And I invite you all to raise your voices too—until Nigeria becomes a land where no woman is sidelined, no child is abandoned, and justice truly flows down like waters.

So I stand here today with one message: Do not relent. Do not be silent. Do not wait for permission to demand justice.

For the Nigerian woman deserves parity.

For the Nigerian child deserves protection.

And for Nigeria to rise, both must be guaranteed.

Thank you, and may God bless FIDA Nigeria, and may God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

**Senator Biodun Olujimi**  
**Wednesday, August 27, 2025**