

SPEECH BY THE FIRST LADY AFRICAN WOMEN 2.0 BRUNCH

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OCTOBER 07, 2023

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to attend the 3rd edition of the African Woman 2.0 Brunch organized by Afrique Femme.

First of all, I would like to welcome the Government officials who have come to show their support for this event. Thank you very much.

I would also like to extend my warmest greetings to Ms Aissata Sidibé N'Dia, the person who initiated this wonderful event. Congratulations for your determination to promote Ivorian and African women leadership. I've known Aissata since 1998 in Washington where we were together, and I would like to say that I'm proud of her and the road she's travelled so far.

I would also like to salute each and every one of you and congratulate you on the remarkable work you have been doing in your respective areas.

When I visited the exhibition stands on my arrival, I was able to see the diversity of talent that exists and the creativity that each one displays, and I really appreciated it. My congratulations to the exhibitors.

Dear African Women,

The African Woman 2.0 Brunch is an important gathering for influential women working in different fields on the African continent. And I'm delighted to have the opportunity to support this initiative, as it represents a new opportunity to showcase female talent and leadership across Africa and beyond. I'm also delighted to see that for this third edition, several countries are represented today. Many of you have come to share your stories, your careers and your professional experiences, and to inspire one another. I congratulate you on this spirit of solidarity and unity.

For my part, I have always been convinced that the contribution of women is essential to the economic development of our countries. Today, women are active in all sectors of activity and are involved in the strategic decision-making of our companies. It is therefore with good reason that our young sisters, who have distinguished themselves through their leadership, get together to reflect, forge links and pool their efforts to promote gender equity in the economic, social, political and cultural areas.

Specifically, the African Woman 2.0 Brunch is a wonderful opportunity to share experiences and pass on knowledge between generations. With this in mind, it gives me great pleasure to speak to you today, to share a little of my journey and experience as a woman and as the First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear young sisters,

As you may know, I created and managed several companies before becoming the First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire.

In the early 80s, I began my career in real estate, creating the AICI International Group in Abidjan. Little by little the group expanded in Africa and Europe to become a key player in the profession.

In the 90s, I also created the Nostalgie Afrique group, which managed the Nostalgie radio franchise in several countries on the continent. And in 1996, when my husband was at the IMF, I acquired and developed the Jacques Dessange USA group, which managed the Dessange brand for all hair and beauty salons, training schools and beauty product distribution in the United States.

Of course, I stopped all my professional activities when my dear husband became President of the Republic, in order to avoid conflicts of interest.

Alongside my activities, I have always been concerned about the fate of disadvantaged children and the well-being of women. That's why I set up the Children of Africa Foundation in 1998, while I was living in the United States. Through the foundation, we work in three areas: health, education and social welfare.

In healthcare, our flagship project remains the construction of the Children's Hospital of Bingerville (HME) in 2018. This latest-generation health facility is a not-for-profit hospital, and provides free care for the most disadvantaged. Which means 25% of the hospital's patients are treated for free. I'm happy that we are able to help the local community.

We also organize regular vaccination and deworming campaigns throughout the country, as well as eye screening caravans to solve sight problems among underprivileged children. We also carry out health missions at the Bingerville Children's Hospital, focusing on complex pathologies such as caustic stenosis in children, pediatric laparoscopic surgery and infantile deafness, as we did recently with the Lalla Asmaa Foundation of Morocco.

In the education sector, the Children's shelter was one of our very first achievements. It is a reception center for street children we opened in Plateau in 1994 and is currently being renovated to receive more children.

This was followed in 2000 by the construction of a highschool in the city of Kong and a school group in the neighbourhood Abobo in 2020 by the Children Of Africa where students are selected base on their academic performance and fully supported throughout their schooling.

In addition, all year round, our mobile libraries criss-cross the country, bringing reading to the remotest children. As far as access to the Internet and new technologies is concerned, we have built and equipped several computer rooms in the schools, so that our children can learn how to use computers.

Finally, in the social sector, in addition to the three reception centers for children in distress built in Soubré in 2018, Bouaké in 2019 and Ferkessédougou in 2020, we have begun the construction of a reception center for abused women in Adiaké, which will be inaugurated next year. This is a project very close to my heart, because violence affects the physical and moral integrity of our sisters in distress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire, my commitment to the well-being of children led me to be appointed in 2011, by my dear husband, President Alassane Ouattara, President of the National Oversight Committee for Actions to Combat Trafficking, Exploitation and Child Labor (CNS). The mission of this committee is to coordinate national actions to combat child labor in our country. As President of the CNS, I have been personally involved in resolving this problem, which affects the lives and development of our children. The problem is not yet solved, but we have made a lot of progress and avoided the United States embargo on the ivorian cocoa.

On the other hand, the empowerment of our sisters has always been an important issue for me. That's why I created the Support Fund for Women of Côte d'Ivoire (FAFCI) in 2012, with the support of my dear husband, the President of the Republic. Today, this fund has enabled 365,000 ivorian women throughout the country to start income-generating activities. These women entrepreneurs are lifting nearly 2 million people out of poverty, and keeping families out of it.

In 2014 I was appointed by UNAIDS Special Ambassador for the Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV and for the promotion of pediatric treatment because of my commitment to the health of our children. Indeed, our children had no access to age-specific treatment. This worrying situation prompted me to lobby on all international forums, and through organizations such as the Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS (OPDAS), to make antiretroviral treatments more accessible to patients.

These are just a few of the main actions I'm carrying out for the well-being of our people and the development of our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear young sisters,

At this point, I would like to reiterate my congratulations to each and every one of you, and encourage you to remain determined, bold and active. You are the inspiring role models Africa needs to bring about a sustainable transformation of its economy. Today, the internet and social networks enable you to have an even greater impact on the world. I encourage you to give your best in everything you do so that your efforts benefit our entire continent.

Thank you once again, dear Aissata, and all your team for this enriching moment that I'm pleased to share with you.

Thank you very much.