

PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

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AFRICA

Invictus Africa decries the gross under-representation of women in Principal Positions in the National Assembly

NASS should atone for this anomaly by appointing women as Chairpersons of key Committees

Invictus Africa decries the gross representation of women in the recent appointment of Principal Officers in the Senate and House of Representatives. Of the 10 Principal Officers in the Senate, none is a woman; and there is only one woman among the 10 Principal Officers in the House of Representatives. This is very disappointing!

“It is very disappointing that in 2023, after decades of debates, relentless advocacy, and multipronged actions towards ensuring increased women representation in political leadership, we still struggle to achieve at least 35% women representation,” says Bukky Shonibare, Executive Director of Invictus Africa. Shonibare adds, “We expected at least seven women out of the twenty Principal Officers in both Chambers; sadly, we have only one woman. This is too low.” This brings to the fore the need to, and importance of, enshrining in the Standing Rules of both Chambers affirmative action for women to guarantee their proportional representation as Principal Officers.

To bridge this gender representation gap, we advise the leadership and Members of the Senate and House of Representatives to appoint women as Chairpersons of key Committees to give them leading roles in budget appropriation, policy formulation, and execution of key oversight functions.

It is crucial for political leaders to recognize that the underrepresentation of women as Principal Officers in the National Assembly reflects broader gender inequalities in society and within political structures, thus preventing women from honing their peculiar experiences, perspectives, and skills in advancing legislations that are responsive to the peculiar and intersecting needs of women, children, persons with disabilities, and other historically marginalized and structurally disadvantaged groups. It is only when women are proportionally represented that we can boast of a legislature where women are active participants and key contributors to national development.

It continues to be disheartening to observe the persistent gender disparity in key leadership positions in Nigeria’s legislative bodies at the national and state levels. Yet, the gross under-representation of women violates the fundamental principles of equality, fairness, equity, and inclusion in Nigeria’s democratic governance. This glaring gender representation gap underscores the persistent systemic challenges that women face in Nigeria’s political spheres.

This abysmally low representation comes as Nigeria still grapples with the sharp decline in women’s representation in the Tenth Assembly. Comparatively, of the 109 Members in the Senate, there was a 3.6% decline from seven (6.4%) in the Ninth Assembly to just three (2.8%) in the present Tenth Assembly. Although there is a 1.1% increase in women’s representation among the 360-Member House of Representatives, from 13 (3.6%) in the Ninth Assembly to 17 (4.7%) in the Tenth Assembly, only one woman (Hon. Adewunmi Onanuga) was appointed as a Principal Officer (Deputy Chief Whip in the House of Representatives).

It is hoped that the legislature, in its actions, decisions, and legislation, continues to challenge and dismantle the deep-rooted gender biases and stereotypes that obstruct women’s progress in political leadership while implementing special measures such as gender quotas as effective measures to promote proportional representation.