



CANUK NEWSLETTER

The monthly newsletter of the Central Association of Nigerians in the United Kingdom (CANUK)

SPECIAL EDITION

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Dear fellow Nigerians and readers,

We welcome you to this very special edition of CANUK's newsletter. This edition is dedicated to the newly appointed Senior Special Assistant to Mr President on Diaspora Affairs, Mrs Bianca Ojukwu.

Our editorial team feels rightly, that our delegates and Diasporans need a very good understanding of the person and office of the Senior Special Assistant to Mr President on Diaspora Affairs that will manage their affairs in the next few years and hence came up with this exclusive interview.

Mrs Ojukwu became CANUK's 2nd ever 'Personality of the Week' (week 14th-20 March) after feedback reached our media team from those who had interacted with her and heard of her big plans for the Diasporan community. Our first ever personality of the week was the Acting High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Ambassador Dozie Nwannah OON who is a major source of encouragement to our community.

Since then, we have had three other personalities of the week as follows: Tinie Tempah (the young Nigerian Musician who won the Brits Awards and is the latest musical sensation in the UK), Patti Boulaye (famous singer, actor, painter, choreographer and producer,) and Adebayo Ogunlesi (the big, rich and cerebral Nigerian businessman whose company owns Gatwick Airport in London).

In the UK, we will not only support Mrs Ojukwu's office, (as it is in our best interest to do so), we will also look for and fish out the best and most talented world class Nigerians for the good of our community and country.

In fact, a dinner is already being planned for the end of the year where all of the fifty-two great and inspiring world class Nigerians will be celebrated with the 'who is who' in the United Kingdom and Nigeria in attendance.

Most Diasporans who have met Mrs Ojukwu, agree that she is a powerful combination of rare beauty and brains and wait for this: a breadth of fresh air! The former Most Beautiful girl in Nigeria is down to earth, original, warm and pleasant to be with and have the personality and credentials that will not only help strengthen existing relationships but build a permanent system of relationship that will help the Nigerian Diasporan community to engage and participate with Nigeria for the socio economic, cultural and political development of our country Nigeria. What is more: she is a listener!

Her appointment excites our community for several reasons:

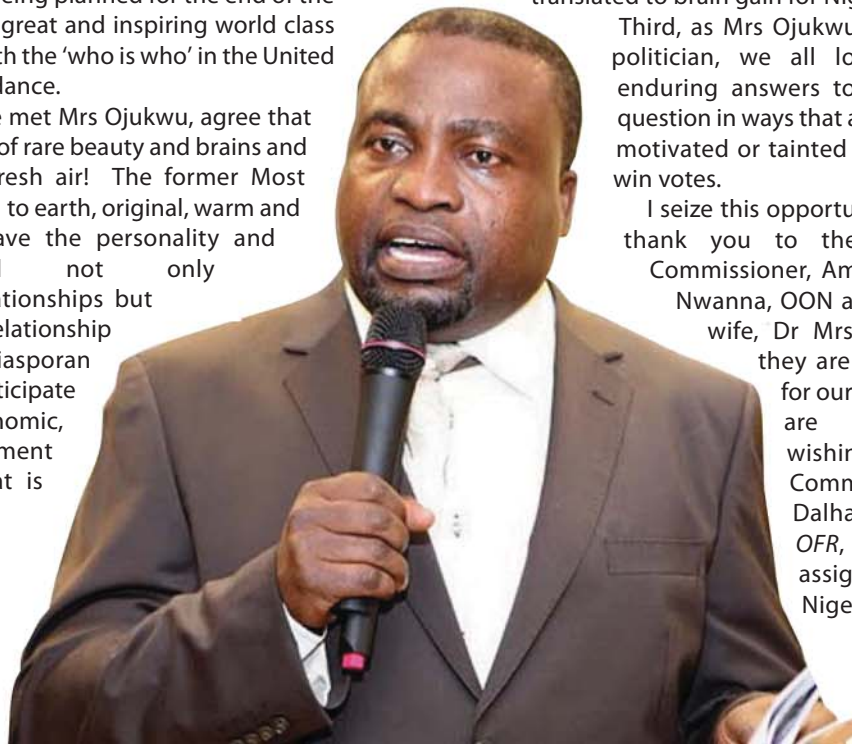
First, The President finally has an adviser who understands the Diasporan community. Mrs Ojukwu is on a familiar terrain here. Apart from schooling and growing up in the Diaspora herself, she is widely travelled and has represented Nigeria in several International fora in the past. Her past relationship with the Diaspora automatically puts Bianca Ojukwu to work right away – on issues confronting the Diasporan community. We are very happy that this office has not been filled by a new learner but by someone who has hit the ground running.

This reminds me of the last Diasporan week in Minna, Nigeria. Several of us Diasporans were so impatient and intolerant with the Nigerian system that a few of the organizers quietly confided in me (I was a member of the planning committee), of their regret working with the 'hot tempered, loud, impatient and angry' men and women from Europe, America and other parts of the world who stormed the event. Most of our people came with unrealistic expectations and descended heavily on the organizers. It will be hard for anyone to intimidate Mrs Ojukwu. Apart from being very charming, she is equally a Nigerian from the Diaspora!

Second, it was said that beyond her extraordinary beauty, one of the main reasons that endeared Mrs Bianca to the judges as a beauty queen was her ability to offer fresh and thought provoking insights and answers to questions. When the President appointed Mrs Bianca Ojukwu, we thought it was the right choice but when we met and engaged with her, we realized that she was not someone who COULD DO the job but someone who WOULD DO the job. For the first time, we are more than confident that Mr President will get the right advice on how the brain drain (which is now brain train) can now be translated to brain gain for Nigeria.

Third, as Mrs Ojukwu is not a career politician, we all look forward to enduring answers to the Diasporan question in ways that are not politically motivated or tainted or calculated to win votes.

I seize this opportunity to say a big thank you to the Acting High Commissioner, Ambassador Dozie Nwannah, OON and his beautiful wife, Dr Mrs Rose Nwannah; they are doing so much for our community. We are praying and wishing the High Commissioner, Dr Dalhatu Sarki Tafida, OFR, success in his assignment in Nigeria. I have met



loads of community spirited Nigerians but have never met people like these leaders. Their concern for the unity within our community is unprecedented. For those who may not know this, the United Kingdom is the only country in the world, where all the moribund associations of Nigerians have been harmonized under one umbrella called the Central Association of Nigerians in the United Kingdom. This success from the UK is about to be replicated across the world!

I have been inundated by calls from several members of the community, religious and community leaders on how CANUK will ensure that there is unity within the community. I like to seize this opportunity to assure all that CANUK will work with all organizations. At the moment, we are engaging in talks with other bodies and organizations with a view to finding mutual ways of working together. I like to remind all that only associations can register with CANUK and we encourage Nigerians to register with NIDO, as well as their professional bodies, like ICAN UK, British Nigerian Law Forum, Association of Nigerian IT Professionals, Engineering Forum amongst several others (please see the long list of associations in the inside pages) that look after the welfare of professionals etc. Where there are no existing professional bodies to cater for certain professions, CANUK has been helping and will continue to help

set up such organizations and bodies that will in turn register with CANUK.

Also, Nigerians in the UK are encouraged to register with their State or town based welfare associations like, Edo State Union, Ebonyi state Association, Abia State, Mboho Akwa Ibom, Ijebu Ode Association etc, Kaduna State Association, etc. Nigeria has 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory; every Nigerian must belong to at least one of such organizations.

Apart from this, we also encourage members of our communities to register with Social clubs and associations, Old school associations, Cultural bodies and Sporting associations. These bodies will send delegates to CANUK and Nigerians will start to speak with one voice. Please contact the General Secretary and Public Relations Officer for more details on this.

Enough said for now, another Newsletter is due in a matter of days. Happy reading, please send us your feedback as we look forward to your contributions.

Many thanks and God bless:

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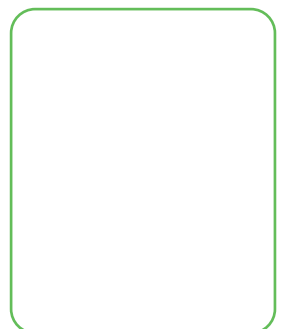
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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE SPECIAL SENIOR ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT ON DIASPORA AFFAIRS, **MRS BIANCA OJUKWU** ON THURSDAY, THE 31ST OF MARCH, 2011

Madam, you are still as beautiful as ever, can we please know more about you, your family and background, daily routine and how you cope being the wife of a statesman of Ikemba's pedigree, especially managing the expectations of his wide followers?

I am the sixth of the eight children of Chief and Mrs C.C. Onoh. I was in boarding school at the Ackworth School in Pontefract, West Yorkshire in the early eighties and did my A'levels at St Andrews College and the Cambridge Tutorial College. I commenced my degree in Politics, Economics and Law (PEL) at the University of Buckinghamshire but my dad wanted me to study law. He got me admitted to the University of Nsukka, Enugu campus where I did my law degree; I then went on to the Nigeria Law School.

I practised law briefly then went into business, starting BIANCA BLEND, a successful skin and cosmetics manufacturing company as well as MIRABELLA, an interior decorating business. I am really involved in my NGO, Hope House Trust, whose mission is to rehabilitate juvenile offenders. Based in Enugu, we try our best in identifying innate skills and interests in these youngsters and then help them develop these skills through training programmes and apprenticeship schemes.

Being the wife of the Ikemba has been most fulfilling and challenging as I combine the role of wife, mother, business woman and chief hostess and like other women, my multi-tasking abilities are very well advanced. Our home is extremely busy as we host leaders from all spheres of life – community, political, religious etc on almost a daily basis.

I am blessed with four children; the youngest is a boy of twelve; his immediate seniors are twins, a boy and a girl, aged thirteen and my first born, a young lady who is fourteen years old – she is actually my sister's child who came on a vacation when she was two years old...she is now fourteen and I guess she is still on vacation.

How many beauty contests did you participate in, please?

I won my first beauty contest, the Miss Martini Pageant when I was doing my A'levels at the Cambridge Tutorial College. I had to give it up as the prizes include a modelling contract which would have affected my studies.

In year two when I was studying law, I contested and won the Most Beautiful Girl in Nigeria (MBGN) pageant and went on to win the Miss Africa and Miss Intercontinental pageants.

I also participated in Miss Charm in Russia as well as the Miss World and Miss Universe pageants.

Thanks for giving CANUK leaders the opportunity to visit the Ikemba in the hospital. They came back giving us cheering news that he is now getting better and spending time resting. We hope and pray that he recovers fully soon... how do you feel about the



Mrs Bianca Ojukwu

whole experience, looking after him and also managing the children and family?

It was quite a traumatic experience when he got admitted into the hospital. Thank God, he has had a steady and remarkable improvement since. The children are in different schools and business and work is at different places. I am learning that reality is always subject to change and we always have to adjust to new developments. Many thanks to CANUK's executives and members for honouring the Ikemba with a visit along with that glorious massive bunch of flowers and card. On behalf of my family, I am really grateful to the Nigerian community in the United Kingdom for this kind gesture.

As a wife and mother, what are your expectations this coming Mother's Day, especially given that your darling, the Ikemba is still recuperating in the hospital?

Children make Mothers' Day special. When they were younger, they will make greeting cards, sweets, cakes, handkerchiefs, there was loads of hugging etc. Now they are a bit older, it has become more of a religious day as we go to church, pray and reflect on the privilege God has blessed us with, the opportunity to be a mother. Yes, I am really looking forward to spending Mothers' day with the Ikemba.

Members of our community and umbrella organization in the UK (CANUK) were very excited and celebrated your appointment by Mr President because you are not seen as a career politician and because we believe that you are on familiar terrain having represented Nigeria in the past in international circles. (CANUK leaders were so impressed at your vision that you were made our 'personality of the week') Do you see your past roles building into this new one to justify our optimism?

When I won the MBGN, in those days, it was a winners' take all opportunity. I must have visited about twenty five countries in that one year and I went to countries like Bulgaria, Russia, Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, Sierra Leone. You become an Ambassador as you meet so many government officials in each country you go to and as you are representing your country, you present the best side of your country and people in all situations. And also being hosted by Nigerians in Diaspora making real success stories of their lives all over the world was a real joy e.g. in Russia, my translator was a Nigerian.

I attended numerous conferences and events and became more and more exposed to how Nigerians in Diaspora become role models in their peculiar host countries. Nigerians in Diaspora are dynamic, resourceful, and intelligent and I was able to learn a lot from them.

Again, do be reminded that I also schooled here in the United Kingdom as I did my O' levels and A' levels and commenced my undergraduate life in the University of Buckingham before relocating to the University of Nsukka. So, I can relate to the Nigerian student in

Diaspora.

I have also been blessed to run successfully businesses and being actively involved in an NGO that impact positively in the lives of a lot of youths. Significantly, as the wife of the Ikemba, I have been blessed as the chief hostess to relate to literally thousands of leaders from all spheres of life and have gained from my dealings with each and every one of them. All these roles and experiences, I hope, will come useful in this role and my prayer is God will guide my team and me in doing our best for our country.



We are still analysing the best structures to set up that will make my office not only effective but also very efficient. After the imminent elections, the review would be concluded and we will decide on the best date for the Diaspora week after consultation with relevant parties.

What is the relationship between the Diaspora Commission, the high commissions/embassies of the Federal Government of Nigeria and the office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on the Nigeria Diaspora?

What were the President's directives to you when you were appointed the Senior Special Assistant on the Nigeria Diaspora and how do you plan to bring order into the chaotic Nigerian Diaspora community.

Mr President was quite clear about what he wants from Nigerians in the Diaspora. He is acutely aware of the significant role being played in terms of remittances into the country by Nigerians in Diaspora and believes that it is critical to Nigeria's development that the human and financial resources possessed by Nigerians in Diaspora be harnessed as soon as possible into reliable channels flowing into the country. Mr President is also aware of the numerous conferences, seminars and events whose original missions were never implemented.

Mr President wants to establish an effective two way communication channel with Nigerians in Diaspora – for the government of Nigeria to be aware of the needs of Nigerians in Diaspora and to look at ways to ease whatever pressures they are going through.

Also, for Nigerians in Diaspora to be aware that there is now an office in the Presidency that is reaching out to them, inviting them to help develop their home country not only through the very valuable remittances they have been sending but also to help with effecting structural changes to the economy of the country e.g. in the health industry, strategic partnerships is being sought with professionals who can help with the transfer of knowledge, training and equipment to complement the ongoing efforts of the people and governments in Nigeria. Such partnerships will be established in relevant industries with proven professionals and it has started.

In education for instance, out of the nine Federal universities, three of them are headed by professors from Diaspora. The current Minister of Finance is from Diaspora. Mr President has taken the issue of Nigerians in Diaspora more seriously than any other Nigerian leader. He has established an Office in the Presidency that will focus on Diaspora issues. However, one area of concern for Mr President regarding Nigerians in Diaspora is communication, - the channels of communication, what to say, how to say it so that Nigerians in Diaspora can relate effectively with the people and various governments of Nigeria.

The Diaspora week is usually organized by the NNVS (Nigerian National Volunteering Service), an arm of the Presidency and the next one is scheduled for Lagos State. Is your office now going to take over the management of this programme and when should we be expecting the next Diaspora week in Nigeria?

When I assumed office, I was updated on the Diaspora week and the activities of the NNVS.

The high commissions/embassies are the primary interface of the government of Nigeria with her citizens in the countries in which they are based. Each country has its own peculiar issue concerning Nigerians in the country.

The Diaspora Commission's bill has just been passed by the House of Representatives and is now with the Senate. The Commission is going to be a governmental agency that will be engaging Nigerians in policy-formulation, project management and participation in national development. It will be an effective communication channel to transmit ideas, perspectives and advocacy messages from Nigerians in Diaspora to the people and governments in Nigeria and vice versa. The Diaspora Commission will be a much needed entry point in which Nigerian Diaspora groups and individuals are used to implement concrete objectives in the National development Programmes. I urge every Nigerian group and individual in Diaspora to ensure that when it is set up, the Diaspora Commission is proactive and effective in its activities and does not become moribund and inefficient.

My Office reports directly to Mr President. We complement the laudable services offered by our embassies and will also complement the work of the Diaspora Commission. Because of the critical importance Mr President places on Nigerians in Diaspora, we are strategically resourced to ensure his objectives on matters relating to Nigerians in Diaspora are carried out. My Office will also step in to fill gaps left by other bodies because of one reason or the other.

There are thousands of Nigerian, and Nigerian-related organisations based in Diaspora reflecting the estimated twenty million Nigerians outside our great country. In the United Kingdom, they have all come together to form a Central Association of Nigerians in the United Kingdom (CANUK). This is the umbrella body in the United Kingdom representing all associations and organisations with links to Nigerians and Nigeria. What kind of relationship should be expected between such an umbrella organisation, the Diaspora Commission and the office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President?

CANUK will help with us with creating awareness as it liaises with groups and individuals in the UK. It can help with the authentication of organisations and the coordination of organisations. It is necessary and imperative that the government has a credible communication channel that is not only structured but transparently reaching out to Nigerian associations in a professional way. It will also help if Nigerians in the UK, through CANUK, can help us all combat the unearned negative image of Nigerians.

Again, it seems some Nigerians at home have the mistaken

notion that Nigerians in Diaspora want preferential treatments when they come home and they want to take over their jobs, businesses, contracts etc. I know this is a totally wrong notion as Nigerians in Diaspora want to come and work alongside their brothers and sisters in creating a more successful country. Nigerians at home should help those Nigerians in Diaspora who are relocating back home to make the process as stress-free as possible as we will all benefit from the skills, experiences and financial resources they are bringing with them.

What contributions and inputs will you be expecting from those of us in the Diaspora, as individuals and groups, to help actualise the objectives of your office?

Nigerians in Diaspora have been very helpful – hopefully they will continue to add value, through CANUK in the UK for instance, in developmental projects e.g. in Anambra State every year, town and village unions from America, carry out projects like the building of schools, bore holes, fish farms, maternity wards, poultries, bus-stops, equipment supply etc. If all towns and villages in Nigeria benefit from their kinsmen abroad in this way, (and I am aware some of them do) imagine how transformed the whole country will be and the empowerment given the country by Nigerians in Diaspora.

Finally, you have met our (CANUK) leaders in the UK. Could you tell us what you feel about our mission and vision as expressed during the meetings with CANUK leaders and what should Nigerians in the UK Diaspora expect of our very first Senior Special Assistant to the President? And more specifically, should we be expecting CANUK-like organizations in other parts of the world and how can you use the experience of CANUK Diasporan leaders as you engage the Diaspora in other parts of the world?

CANUK has always had credible leaders. I have had very good meetings with Dr Mark Abani, the former chairman and the new chairman, Chief Bimbo Roberts Folayan. These leaders have a very good idea of the Nigerian terrain – they know what obtains there. I even spoke to Bimbo a few times in Nigeria before he came back last week. He knows the current climate and conditions in Nigeria and can relate this back to his fellow executives and the associations and various groups that make up CANUK. CANUK is a bridge-building organisation at local, state, national and international levels. An incredible pool of expertise currently exists with Nigerians in Diaspora. CANUK can facilitate Diaspora professionals through their various associations and link them up with their counterparts in Nigeria, enabling knowledge and equipment transfer and capacity building.

There is no doubt Nigerians in Diaspora currently contribute financially to Nigeria. It is the wish of every Nigerian in Diaspora to also contribute strategically and to assist in the country's development. There are many unemployed or underemployed youths who are available to partner with Nigerians in Diaspora on various small to medium scale enterprises. And the market in Nigeria is just huge. With the knowledge, expertise, skills, technology and financial resources available to Nigerians in Diaspora, there is limitless business potential for the enterprising Nigerian in Diaspora who wants do good business as well as developing his/her country. This



President Goodluck Jonathan

intermediate manpower base will help the private sector to meet local and international demand for our various products.

Every country has peculiar issues. There are so many Nigerians in many different host countries, each with its peculiar nature. Unless they all come together, it is difficult to relate to them in a structured manner. It is difficult to also assess the impact of individual groups. However, each country has peculiar issues eg Togo, in each village, the leader of the Nigerian town or village union issues identity cards to Nigerians. Nigerians now take these identity cards to the Nigerian embassy where they are given Nigerian identity cards which they could use to get jobs and so on.

This is peculiar to Togo and it works well there.

An umbrella organisation like CANUK should be replicated in other countries and we aim to encourage other embassies to come up with a strategic body like CANUK that nationally represents Nigerians in the country, through her member-associations.

Please note I do not have any white elephant plans. I am here to pick up the pieces and work with Nigerians in Diaspora, very resourceful, hardworking leaders in every facet of their host country's landscape. My remit is to transfer these human and financial resources back home and to transmit the incredible opportunities available at home to Nigerians in Diaspora. I aim

to encourage Nigerian entrepreneurs in Diaspora to network with the private and public sectors in Nigeria and to participate actively in fairs, exhibitions etc. PR and marketing skills are in short supply in Nigeria and there is good business in helping to market our export products abroad.

We plan to foster and grow relationships between constructive traditional bodies with current structural developments like CANUK and NIDO so that together, we can complement ongoing national development programmes in Nigeria while relating positively with, and meeting with the needs of Nigerians in Diaspora.

Many thanks for this most informative interview, madam. We wish your office the absolute best and here at CANUK with the support of our member associations and unions, we will do all we can to ensure that the objectives of your office and Mr President are carried out in the United kingdom.

Thanks a lot.

**Interview conducted by:
Mr Shola Oluseitan
Publicity Secretary
Central Association of Nigerians in the United Kingdom (CANUK)**