

Gender Equality: Overcoming Obstacles and Empowering All.

International Women's Day is a time to reflect on progress made, to call for change and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in their communities. In building momentum for an effective implementation of the new Sustainable Development Goals, especially goal number five, aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, for a brighter future.

In commemoration of the International Women's Day and the celebration of women's heroes, Andy Kopsa Dalal and her friends from the United States decided to write letters of encouragement to women/girls victims and survivors of intimate partner violence participating in a women's empowerment collective in Cameroon piloted by a nonprofit women's organization Mother of Hope Cameroon (MOHCAM).



Be Inspired as you read:

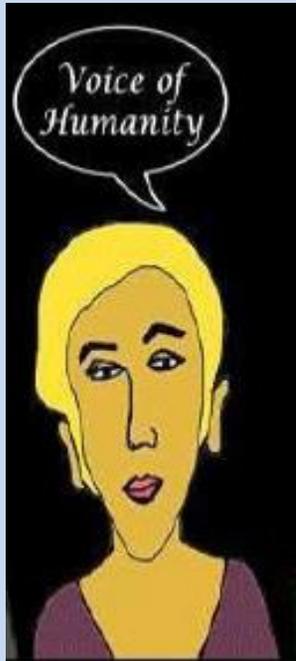
Dear Ladies,

I met this wonderful leader Adah Mbah in Cameroon in 2014 and she is passionate about empowering girls through comprehensive sexual education, access to education, human rights, computer skills, overcoming the stigma of intimate partner violence and so much more.

My story is one of solidarity. My ex-husband was abusive to me. He choked me, punched me in front of my own daughter. I was scared for my life but also my daughter's. And I was scared to leave. As women who have been abused, we know how hard it is to leave. We are told we are "asking for it"

and our laws favor men in so many situations. We, too, are trapped in a different way - but yet we have a long way to go!! Especially when society seems against us. But together we are strong. With the help of the strong women in my life and my strong female family members, I left him and got on with my life. It was hard going in the beginning, being a single mother to a young child, but we push on. That was over 25 years ago and my daughter is now 26 years old. Thank you for being a part of my life, MOHCAM. You give me as much strength and hope as anything. Much Love to all!

Andy.



Dear Women and Girls of Mother of Hope,

Hello. A friend of mine, Andy Kopsa Dalal, invited me to write to support your work. I read about your organization and thought, yes, I have to. I am a university professor at the University of Washington in the United States, where I teach American Studies. (It is the study of how power works in the United States particularly how systemic social injustices affect us.) My university is atypical in the U.S. because we have a diverse student body, including a significant group of immigrants and international students and many students who come from poor families. Through my students, I continue to learn about what it means to them to be in college. Many are the first in their families to be able to go to university. It is a huge challenge for them; they have had to overcome hardships that I only partly know. Many of them struggle, working long hours to pay for college. Others care for family members while working and going to school. Still others fled dangerous situations to come to a new country with a strange language and customs. It can be overwhelming, but when asked, they will say that pursuing the education they want is the most important thing they have done. For many of the students

at the University of Washington, Tacoma, college is helping them to speak up and speak out about their experiences. Coming to speak honestly about my experience has helped me help others. I grew up in a home where my father beat my mother. I was married to a man who hit me and tried to kill me. It seemed impossible, at times, to imagine living a life free of that fear. I couldn't imagine living in a way where I did not feel trapped. By refusing to believe I deserved any of that pain, I started living my life on my terms. It has been a long process, but it began with a book I read in high school that helped me believe in my own worth. (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou.)

I wanted to write to support you in speaking up for women and children. Thank you for insisting that women and girls be able to live free of violence. Thank you for finding your voices to help educate those around you that we all share basic human rights. Thank you for being the example of how to live a different kind of life. Thank you for your good work. I believe in you.

With love and hope, from across the world,
Ingrid.



Dear Courageous Girls of Mother of Hope Cameroon,

You are amazing. Can you see your own light? Are you aware of your own brilliance? Can you see the beauty you create, just by being you? How about your place in the world, can you see how large it is? How important you are? Let me tell you something. You have powers that no one else has. You are a wonderful collection of magical, polished and raw talents. You know things that no one else knows. You are good at things that no one does better than you. The way you care about the people around you, in your own way, makes a

difference in people's lives. The way your love surges and flows, in mysterious ways sometimes, is what holds the world together. Your place in people's lives is more significant than you can possibly comprehend. You hold your own special kind of intelligence. You have unique wisdom that goes far into the future. You don't have to compare yourself to anyone, because no one is in the same league as you. All people are different, and your magnificence is like a secret language. Your life stories are works of art. Even when you are in the midst of great darkness, you have the power to lead and shepherd the people around you. Even when you feel like you fail, over and over again, you have already succeeded. There's nothing else you need to do. I am proud of you.

The beautiful truth is that you don't have to do anything differently. Please don't try to change who you are. Just being alive, just being you, getting up in the morning, doing what you love – all you have to do is breathe. "Because your breath is life". Your life is important. You cannot be replaced.

Thank you for being you.

Thank you for your abundance and your grace.

Alison.



Dear ladies,

I'm thrilled to be able to connect with you today, on International Women's Day. My name is Sara and I live in New York City. I've heard about you and your organization and I think it's a great thing you have going on over there. It's so important for women to stick together and take on this world, hand-in-hand. I have found my greatest support in life from the women around me; always uplifting me to become better, supporting me through the hard times, encouraging me to better myself, and always opening opportunities for me. I think it's so important to surround yourself by a group of women who can be that for you. This can be one of the most important things in life. No matter what can possibly happen in life, you will have a strong support network to fall back on. We are all so excited for you to create those networks in Cameroon, to succeed in your studies and to be amazing at whatever it is you choose to do in life. We are all sending our encouragements! No woman in this world can possibly be alone because she has sisters looking out for her worldwide.

Endless love and support!

Sara.

Chères mesdames,

Je suis enthousiaste de faire votre connaissance aujourd'hui, la journée des femmes internationales. Je m'appelle Sara et j'habite à New York City. Je suis familier avec votre

organisation et je pense qu'il est une merveilleuse organisation que vous êtes associé. Il est donc important pour les femmes de se serrer les coudes pour relever les luttes dans ce monde. J'ai trouvé mon plus grand soutien dans la vie des femmes autour de moi; toujours élever moi de devenir mieux, me soutenir dans les moments difficiles, me encourageant à mieux moi-même, et toujours l'ouverture d'opportunités pour moi. Je pense qu'il est si important de vous entourer par un groupe de femmes que vous le soutien. Il peut être l'une des choses les plus importantes. Peu importe ce qui peut éventuellement se produire dans la vie, vous aurez un solide réseau de soutien à se replier sur. Nous sommes tous si heureux pour vous de créer ces réseaux au Cameroun, pour réussir dans vos études et être incroyable à tout ce que vous choisissez de le faire dans la vie. Nous sommes tous envoyons nos encouragements! Aucune femme dans ce monde peut éventuellement être seul dans ce monde parce qu'elle a des sœurs qui la soutiennent dans le monde entier. Beaucoup d'amour et de soutien!

Sara.



Dear MOHCAM and women everywhere,

On this special day of recognition and solidarity, International Women's Day, I am honored to join you. I raise my voice to say, "YES! We celebrate our strength and courage together as women. "I am a victim of violence who has become a survivor. When I shared my experience with others, I learned I am not the only woman who has been hurt by someone who claimed to love and honor me. My personal strength grew in knowing it is possible go beyond survivor status to Thriver! This I learned by meeting Adah in 2013, through the power of women supporting women and use of the internet. From Washington State, USA to Bamenda Cameroon, Africa, we are more than

women. We are sisters, we are kindred spirits. We share a common bond of violent experience and a strong desire to make the violence stop. It does not matter where we live in this world. It does not matter if our religious and faith practices are the same or different. It does not matter that our ages cross the span of a lifetime from child to elder. It does not matter what our social and economic status is determined. We are women! Together, we have overcome violence and oppression against women in our lifetime. We will continue to work together to make the changes needed, by sharing our stories and opening the closed doors that condone violence against women. On this International Women's Day, March 8, 2016, we are working together, globally to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." This is Goal #5 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform.

(<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>)

By elevating gender equality, women and girls will be ensured access to education; protection from violence and discrimination; equal pay for work; access to healthcare and reproductive resources; full participation in decision making at all governmental levels; developing policies and legislation; and full access to economic rights such as ownership of land and property. In this work, we are together,
Together we are Stronger.

With love and determination, I am Always Your Sister!

Debra.



Precious women of the world,

I read your stories in awe.

Although it was somewhat difficult to understand the pain you went through, it was very inspiring. I sympathize with your courage and determination not to give up to violence, but to break free from the cycle of violence. To fight for your right to live freely without violence of any kind in your life. Indeed, it's our prerogative to live free and happy in this world without being subjected, to terror, violence, threats or fear from any other human being. However at this

important hour, it's difficult to ignore and shake the feeling that there is a strong need to emphasize the significance and the true meaning of the concept "gender equality" and all its entails. Often we are exposed through various media to a distorted and unrealistic idea of the concept "gender equality". In an attempt to change and dictate different -more fashionable- meaning to this concept, by imposing a twisted idea about this concept. This twisted concept lacks good intent, does not serve a good purpose and does not lead to a positive outcome. The various media try to dictate our society a "fashionable" way of life which interferes and twists the deep and wonderful harmonious meaning of the concept "gender equality" that mother nature created, by defying its laws.

We are being brainwashed into believing that a man and woman are equal. There is no difference, whatsoever, between them and that everything a man can do, a woman can equally do it and sometimes even better than a man. This is a blunt defiance to mother nature and the creation of humankind. One cannot ignore the physical differences between men and women. The man is stronger than us, has a tendency to be "in charge", his appearance is different from us and his mental state of mind derives from a different concept of life. God- almighty, created him like that for many reasons to fill many needs in

life and to survive. On the other hand a woman is different from the man, she's physically weaker, her appearance and body is different from a man, she wants and needs to feel protected and secured' and her mental state of mind derives from a different concept of life. God - almighty, created her like that for many reasons to fill many needs in life and to survive. Both man and woman were created as opposites to each other in order to complement and elevate each other! The reason that there are fundamental differences between men and women lies in the divine and deep wisdom of God-almighty. Defiance of nature laws constitutes a big source of conflicts between men and women. Each one patronizes the other by saying or acting: "I can do better than you I'm worthy than you". The consequences are harsh and often each of us find herself in life acting against her will or nature merely to prove men and society "I'm of worth". Here's a news flash for whoever needs to know: In a revised society it's not a real necessity, for women, to prove themselves constantly to society in order to live in harmony with men, and to feel and be treated "of worth". Our grandmothers and great-grandfathers lived in dignity and respect with each other. Throughout humankind history a dignity of a man in society, was based on his respect and honor to his wife or the woman in his life. The way he behaved to his woman and, his children established his place in the society. It was based on how much respect and honor he gave to his wife and children. It says in the holy bible that when a woman is born into this world her main goal is to complete the man and elevate him spiritually and emotionally the root of this basic understanding in relationships is crucial and fundamental in order to shape it properly. Mutual trust, understanding and respect to one another is an additional element for establishing relationship in a correct and healthy manner. Understanding that a woman does not need to be physically strong to be equal to man, because she was born with a great mental and spiritual talent to be able to integrate with the man and lead their relationship to a better place is an additional element for establishing relationship in a correct and healthy manner and so on and so forth. Therefore, not only that there is a full justification for women to break the circle of violence

in their lives but also, there is even greater need for education and guidance of both sexes, especially us women. We were born with the ability, talent and inner strength mentally and spiritually to lead our lives through understanding and education to a better place with men. Women should allow themselves to enjoy life to its fullest and become much more productive and creative. We are the women of the world and mothers of the next generations. A happy woman is a fruitful mother who leads and teaches her children to create a better humanity and a better world to live in. We are blessed and have inner strength to overcome challenges in life. We should stay blessed and believe in ourselves and our abilities educate ourselves and elevate our lives.

Humbly yours

Carmey.

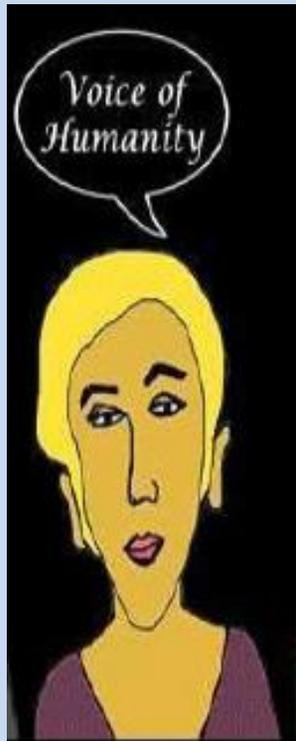


To the survivors of intimate partner violence in Cameroon:

On this International Women's Day, I hope you feel connected to other women and survivors around the world. The abuse you experienced was not your fault, despite what your abuser and others may have told you, or how they made you feel. Nobody deserves to be abused, for any reason. You are worthy of respect, love, and honor. Through See the Triumph, we are thankful to partner with Mother of Hope Cameroon to work toward ending the stigma surrounding intimate partner violence. We know that, around the world, survivors of intimate partner violence often face stigmatizing experiences, which adds to the challenges that stem directly from the abuse they experienced. Put simply, this is wrong, and we must work to change cultures so that survivors receive the support and respect that they deserve. To be a survivor means that you are

strong and courageous. It means that you are walking the journey of recovery, and every big and small step along that journey should be celebrated. Sometimes, steps that seem "small" to the outside world took a world of courage to achieve. But you know what it took to survive the abuse. And you know what it takes to keep moving forward toward recovery and triumph over abuse. Know that you are not on that journey alone. In solidarity with you on International Women's Day and beyond,

Christine.



Dear Women and Girls of MOHCAM,

It is an honor to write a letter of encouragement and support to you today. I want you to know that you are loved by a good God who is fighting for you. He sees the injustice. He sees your pain. He sees everything that is coming against you and he is bigger than everything you are facing. Your work is effective and important. You will succeed. You will prosper. You are favored and chosen. Do not listen to any voice that tells you otherwise. You must make a decision now to partner with the truth and reject the lies that confront you. You are worthy of respect and honor. You are worthy of receiving an education. You are worthy of the right to protect your body, make decisions about your body, to make decisions about when and if you would like to marry, and what you want to do with your future. You are the ambassadors of this important message and I am so very proud of you. I know that you are making a difference. I once lived in a world of fear and shame. I was being battered by my husband and when he threatened to kill me I believed the lie that there was nothing I could do about it. Thankfully, I listened to the voice of truth and decided to fight for my life. I am happy to tell you all that I am no longer living in

abuse. My mind has been completely transformed and I know that it is not God's will for anyone to live in abuse. God has restored every part of my life and he is using everything that went through to help others. I am using the internet to reach women all across the globe with news of healing, hope and deliverance. I have been given the opportunity to speak at conferences and churches, and I have written two books. If I can do all of this - so can you. Keep up the good work. I am proud of you and you are very important. Blessings,

Jenny



Dear Women of Mother of Hope Cameroon.

International Women's Day is such an important day for all women, everywhere! To you who have struggled against gender inequality, that faces abuse each and every day, that is when we have to all say, "enough is enough". Basic human rights should not be an option; it should be something you are born with. An education is something that should be available to you, having an education is the most important thing you can have to give you hope. Adah Mbah has given so many women and girls that hope. Mother of Hope Cameroon is an oasis of hope for so many who are looking to empower themselves, to better themselves, educate themselves, and to pass that on to their next generation. Although I can never know personally what each and every one of them go through, my heart aches for their struggle. I was once a victim of domestic violence, It took me too long

to say "enough is enough" I can't imagine a lifetime of suffering. Thank you Adah for saving so many beautiful lives. And to women everywhere, to live a life full of love, respect, and hope for a bright future is a beautiful life!

Kathy.



My Dear Ladies,

I challenge you today to rise and never give up. I have been encouraged by your powerful words. I was stuck and couldn't move away from my fears. I was caged by my culture and what people think about educated women. My people think educated women are not submissive and they are mostly likely to be bad house wives. They say they can't stay in their marriages. But I challenge you to make a change. I was beaten several times in front of my kids and declared useless. I long for freedom. I long for true love. I yearn for total liberty to own land and be part of the decision making body of my country. I dream of that day where women and girls will be free and their rights completely given to them. But thanks to women like you. I have had the courage to move on and fight for many who can't fight. MOHCAM has reestablished the lives of 300 girls in schools through her program to fight against psychological violence. She has reconnected 50 adolescent girls with their mothers. She is providing assistance to 20 teenage mothers and 10 women through her sister's support scheme. She is educating 400 youths in schools with sex education and human rights. She is working with 20 women leaders of women associations to prevent the stigma against intimate partner violence and sexual violence. Mohcam has change my life and made my voice heard. Thanks to you, Andy, Alison, Ingrid, Sara, Debra Carmey, Christine, Jenny and Kathy. Together we are Stronger. Adah.