

# *Women Against Rape, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation (WARSHE)*

## **WARSHE 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations (3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008)**

To mark the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the inception of WARSHE, which was inaugurated in 1998, WARSHE held a four-hour programme tagged: TIWALOLA – Luncheon/Fundraiser of Dreams, Hopes and Possibilities, on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008, at the Ogunbanjo Community Centre, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Highlights of the WARSHE anniversary celebrations included: the launch of the WARSHE Educational DVD titled ‘Tiwalola’, the WARSHE booklets, titled, ‘Justice in Sight?’, the WARSHE ‘N500 Shop’, the launch of the seed fund for Tiwalola - the Young and Older Women’s Cooperative Investment and Credit Society, the WARSHE Annual Umbrellas and the WARSHE Honours Roll. There was an art exhibition and auction, and drama that depicted a whole range of sexual violence and abuse that a woman could go through in a life time if society is not alert to her responsibilities.

Obafemi Awolowo University was one of the organizations/institutions that were placed on the Honours Roll of Women Against Rape, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation (WARSHE) during the 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary celebrations of WARSHE. The citation of OAU, presented at the occasion, reads in part

In a positive sense, we like to think that Obafemi Awolowo University, which is steeped in the liberal academic tradition, produced WARSHE. .... University of Ife and Obafemi Awolowo University did not just nurture the minds that gave birth to WARSHE, the University also allowed it to thrive. The leadership of the University in the past ten years has been tacitly supportive of the efforts of WARSHE, many of the active volunteers of the organization are products of Obafemi Awolowo University, and OAU has provided a safe space from which some of her own and other concerned Nigerians are offering a distinct and important community service.

Other organizations, institutions, and individuals that made the WARSHE honours roll are among others: the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF), Accra, Ghana; The Global Fund for Women, San Francisco, USA; the Vice-Chancellor, Obafemi Awolowo University, Prof. M.O. Faborode; Former Vice-Chancellor OAU, Prof. Roger Makanjuola; Former Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Profs A. E. Akingbohunbe and Femi Ajibola; Ms Funmi Iyanda, a media practitioner, and Ms Debo Jimoh, a graduate of OAU, and former WARSHE student volunteer.

In her opening remarks, the Chairperson of the anniversary celebrations, Mrs Egun Balogun (a retired rehabilitation officer), cited several disturbing instances of sexual abuse and violence of young and older women, by their relations, and strangers in Nigeria and abroad. She commended

the pillars of WARSHE for setting up the organization and for the work they had done in the past 10 years. She called their efforts ‘bold’, given the Nigerian socio-cultural context.

Two of the three co-founders of WARSHE, Dr Olutoyin Mejiuni and Professor Oluyemisi Obilade, a Trustee of WARSHE who is also the legal adviser to the organization, Barrister Olasupo Ojo, and another Trustee of WARSHE, who was the Director, Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies, Prof. Sumbo Abiose, at different times during the anniversary celebrations, said the anniversary provided the opportunity to take stock, celebrate survivors of sexual violence and abuse, honour those who have supported WARSHE efforts, inform stakeholders about the work of the organization, and raise funds from Nigerians to expand and deepen her reach. They said some of the achievements of WARSHE since inception in 1998 include the fact that the organization has broken the silence around matters of sexual violence and abuse; she has supported victims from different socio-economic backgrounds in town and in gown in their search for justice, and has used education as the key tool in the prevention of sexual abuse and violence. They indicated that the organization could better impact the society through the work of education, intervention, advocacy and research, if Nigerians drive the initiative by committing funds to the work of WARSHE.

Present at the anniversary celebrations were: present and former key functionaries of Obafemi Awolowo University, high school students and their teachers from Ile-Ife and Ibadan; media practitioners; social workers; WARSHE volunteers from tertiary institutions; representatives of the Osun State Police Command, etc.

Responding on behalf of all who made the WARSHE honours roll, the Vice-Chancellor, Obafemi Awolowo University, commended the ‘operatives’ of WARSHE. He said the work of WARSHE has impact beyond Nigerian shores and has placed OAU on the map of institutions of higher learning that are pro-active in matters of sexual violence and abuse. He indicated that the University is committed to defending the rights of women, children and men, and cited the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies and the University gender policy as institutional frameworks through which this is to be achieved. Prof. Faborode said that OAU is proud of what WARSHE is doing and will continue to support her efforts. He urged that the arrow heads of WARSHE should give more publicity to their work in spite of the need for tact and diplomacy. He said if the work of the organization is publicized, more young women will gain the confidence to report cases of sexual violence and abuse, and it would send clear signals that sexual violence and abuse is unacceptable. The Vice-Chancellor said OAU will continue ‘to bring sexual abusers to justice, not just to book, but will respect their right to fair hearing in the process’. He concluded that any member of OAU community who falls foul of very simple codes of existence will face disciplinary action.