

ACHIMOTA SCHOOL
78TH SPEECH & PRIZE-GIVING DAY

GUEST SPEAKER

GLORIA OFORI-BOADU - OAA 1980

**LAWYER; MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL AFRICAN PEER
REVIEW MECHANISM GOVERNING COUNCIL-GHANA**

AND

**PRESIDENT, WOMEN ASSISTANCE & BUSINESS
ASSOCIATION (WABA)**

Date: Saturday, November 12th, 2005.

Honourable Chairperson,

Special Guest of Honour,

Madam Headmistress,

Members of Staff,

Fellow Akoras,

Students of Achimota School and Future Leaders of Ghana and the world,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I deem it a great pleasure, privilege and honour to be given this historic opportunity by my year group mates to deliver the speech at the 78th Speech and Prize-giving day of our alma mater, “the Grey City on the outlaw’s Hill”, Achimota School. I wholeheartedly thank my year group for this honour and I also thank Mrs. Adelaide Kwami, the Headmistress of the school for accepting my nomination.

I am an Akora and belong to the 1980 year group, I was a student resident in House Eleven on the Western compound, now Susan Ofori-Atta House. I also have a son in SS3 in this school which shows that I am still a part of the Achimota School family and feel at home to join you to celebrate this annual event.

The International Federation of Women lawyers (FIDA –Ghana), of which I am a member, held its biennial International Convention this week in Malaysia. I had wanted to attend this conference which comes off once in every two years. I also wanted to use the opportunity to join some of my FIDA colleagues to stop over in Dubai in the Arab

Emirates. However when my year group Akoras presented me with the opportunity to deliver this speech, I readily dropped all my earlier travel arrangements and began working on my speech.

When I showed the first draft of this speech to my son for his comments, he warned me that it will put more than half the audience to sleep by the time I am through with the delivery.

Thus I was faced with the dilemma as to whether to give an upbeat speech that will be of interest to teenagers like our students here present, or discuss matters of more relevance to the school's management, staff, fellow Akoras, parents and other invited guests.

Well I have made a modest effort to prepare a speech that will hopefully be of relevance to all of us at this annual event.

Even though I completed my education in Achimota School in June 1980, which is only a few twenty-five years ago, I still remember vividly one such Speech and Prize-giving Day. A day before that Speech Day, I had reported to Achimota Hospital with an illness which was diagnosed as malaria and for which I was given chloroquine tablets as the prescription for my cure. Unknown to me I was allergic to chloroquine. This made me by the next morning, itch all over after taking the prescribed dose of tablets and that eventful day was the Speech and prize-giving Day. With the school's rules and disciplinary standards regarding the compulsory attendance by students at all school functions, I had no other option but to join my school-mates at the school's event. Honestly the itching was so bad that I spent all those uncomfortable hours glued to my

seat and trying my best to sit still on my seat and ignore the itching. What a relief it was for me when the Speech – day came to an end. What year or form I was in on that day, I simply do not remember, who was the Guest speaker on that day, I do not remember, who were some of the students that had prizes on that day, I do not remember, all I remember was the itchy feeling all over my body. I hope and pray no student at this event is similarly going through what I considered a major personal crisis some years ago. However even if you are, just bear it bravely and know that it will soon be over because life as you will grow to experience sometimes presents us with temporary challenge(s) which we bravely have to bear until it is over. The earlier you learn to handle difficult challenges in life, the better equipped you will be to overcome them and not fall defeated to any others the future may present. At this juncture, I will ask a favour of you which I deem to be very important to me. Please, please kindly remember twenty-five years from today that I was the Guest speaker at this Speech and Prize-giving Day. I also hope to be present in twenty-five years, at the 103rd Speech and Prize giving day of Achimota School, to witness for myself which student amongst you is given the honour by your year group to deliver the key-note address. Thank you for listening to me and for not falling asleep so far.

THEME:

Honourable Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, my theme for this afternoon is a discussion or a conversation on adolescent sexuality and reproductive health rights. This is a topic that I feel at home with and have shared with many young persons, parents, adults, legislators and policy-makers in all ten regions of this country.

Young people particularly those aged from 10-19 years are considered as adolescents and the ages considered globally to be the youthful years are the ages 10 -24 years. I will in most part of this speech, draw the references for our conversation from the Life Planning Skills curriculum for young people in Africa, which is a manual, compiled by the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (i.e., PATH).

Adolescence is that time when a young person is becoming an adult and his or her body begins to prepare for adulthood. The person goes through many changes physically, emotionally and psychological changes and begins to experience and express many different feelings. Both girls and boys develop physical visible signs in adolescence such as menstruation in girls and voice changes and enlarged genitalia in boys. This is a normal and vital part of development and although the individual may sometimes experience difficult times, it is also a period that can be filled with excitement and fun as young adults begin to explore and discover themselves and their abilities.

Now what is sex and what is sexuality? Most people think of 'sex' and 'sexuality' as meaning sexual intercourse, but this is not so. Sex refers to whether or not a person is male or female. Your sex i.e., whether you are male or female, depends on your reproductive system, your genitalia and how you outwardly express yourselves through societal roles, expectations and behaviour as males and females.

Sexuality on the other hand is much more than sexual feelings or sexual intercourse. It includes being aware of oneself as a sexual being, having sex appeal and being sexy in the way we behave, dress and communicate. It includes feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of being female or male, being attractive, being in love, as well as being in

relationships that include sexual intimacy and physical sexual activity. A person's sexuality is shaped by the values and teachings that they learn as a child, as an adolescent or young person as well as other influences such as the media and society. Human sexuality is a process of continuous growth and discovery. Understanding our sexuality is crucial to the decisions we make as well as how we take care of ourselves. Knowing our sexuality helps us to understand the different feelings that we experience and how we should respond to each one.

As adolescents we should appreciate that being attracted to someone and experiencing sexual feelings is a normal part of our sexuality. However it is very important to note that feeling 'turned on' does not automatically mean that one has to have sexual intercourse. What it means is that a person has a strong feeling that he or she wants to express but sexual intercourse is not the only way to express oneself. Many a time, girls are happy to sit and talk about something personal or of common interest to themselves and to their partners. This intimate sharing can build friendship and make a relationship stronger between partners. Boys also need friendship and strong relationships with their partners but because society and other influences have said that sexual arousals equals sexual intercourse, males including boys tend to rush through this part and either miss out or shorten what could have been a beautiful building of friendship and stronger bonding in a relationship between two partners who are attracted to each other. Getting to know one another intimately is important in building strong relationships. It also helps to talk about the sexual feelings that one has towards another, so that both parties realize the tension that exists between them and make a decision about how to handle it.

It is important to note that there are many things that two people who are attracted to each other can do without having sexual intercourse, but at the same time really enjoying being with each other and getting to know each other deeply. The key points to note are as follows:

Firstly, being attracted to someone is just a normal natural part of expressing your sexuality and it is an important step to starting and building relationships and friendships that could be long-lasting.

Secondly, attraction to someone does not necessarily have to lead to sexual intercourse or sexual activity of any kind.

Thirdly, sexual arousal does not always mean that the male or female wants or must have sexual release or sexual intercourse. Thus as young persons, you need to spend more time getting to know each other as individuals and not rush into sexual intercourse as a way of expressing your sexual feelings.

What do you do as a young person when you become attracted or aroused? Spend more time getting to know each other, avoid being alone with the person in a dark area but date in open places. Be honest with each other about how you feel and clearly insist on what you want to do and what you will not want to do. The later advice is of importance to girls, because for far too long, society has socialized males to believe that in sexual relationships, a female says no when she means 'yes' or 'try harder to change my mind'. Females must send the clear message that expresses their feelings and what they will or will not do. People must learn to say exactly what they mean and mean what they say.

The key points to note are as follows:

It is best to say what you want or do not want rather than leave it up to the other person to guess or 'read your mind'.

Assertiveness must be shown both verbally and non-verbally through good use of body language.

When a person is getting conflicting or confusing messages, they tend to believe the non-verbal signs or body language more than the verbal. It is important to make sure that both verbal and non-verbal messages are the same.

PEER GROUPS AND PEER PRESSURE

The peer group is important during adolescence. There is a great need by the young person to belong to a group and that is a natural part of adolescent development. This creates a need to conform to the behaviour acceptable to the group, which may lead to the individual being swallowed up by the group. The group's behaviour may have a negative impact on the development of the adolescent such as the use of alcohol or drugs or early sex. The adolescent may find him or herself under pressure to take part in activities that he or she would normally not do. This is called peer pressure and often results in the young person joining in the group behaviour rather than risk being ridiculed, called names or rejected by the group. To the students I will advise that do not succumb to negative peer pressure to use drugs or abuse alcohol. This will enable you to stay healthier and look younger even as you advance in age. Remember that alcohol and drugs have different degrees of negative impact on the people who use them, thus you may end up being worse off than the people who introduced you to the unwholesome behaviour. You can even become addicted for the rest of your life whilst those who

introduced you to the substance may eventually be able to break free. Remember that being cool and popular is fun but often can conflict with your personal, family and societal values. It may be unpopular sometimes to do the right thing but it can be more safe, self-satisfying and protective of yourself for now and for the future to do what is right.

Distinguished listeners, HIV and Sexually transmitted diseases are a menace in our national and global society. About 90% of all HIV/AIDS cases in Ghana, are amongst persons aged 15 to 49 years old and heterosexual intercourse accounts for the highest i.e., 80% of the mode of transmission of the virus. Other modes of transmission of the HIV virus are Mother to Child transmission which constitute 15% and transmission through blood products constituting 5% of the modes of transmission of the HIV virus.

A mother can transmit HIV to her new born baby during Pregnancy (Through the placenta); at birth (through blood from the birth canal during delivery) and through breast milk from Breast feeding. The common infectious blood and body fluids through which the HIV virus can be transmitted are blood, semen (including pre-ejaculation fluid), vaginal and cervical fluids, and breast-milk.

The symptoms of HIV/AIDS include Night sweats, Fever which lasts for more than a month, Excessive Weight loss, Dry Cough, Diarrhoea, Swellings in the neck and armpit, Oral thrush (Candidiasis), itching skin infections also known as Shingles.

You must prevent yourself from contracting the virus either through abstinence, being faithful to your partner, use of a male or female condom. Do not share skin piercing instruments such as needles, syringes, razors and blades with another person. You must attend a hospital or clinic for the early treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

Since the highest mode of contracting the virus is through sexual intercourse, it is important that as young persons you practice abstinence. Being sexually aroused is normal and natural but it does not mean that one has to engage in sexual activity. Choosing to have sexual intercourse is a serious decision. It needs to be thought about carefully so that one takes the necessary precautions. No matter the arguments to the contrary, there are clear advantages in choosing to abstain from sex. It protects you from contracting sexually transmitted diseases including the incurable HIV/AIDS, as girls you avoid unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, you avoid hurting your parents, damaging your reputation and having all kinds of guilt feelings. Through abstinence you are able to work hard and attain your future goals in life.

Sometimes, through no fault of yours one can be deceitfully, forcefully or violently forced into sexual activity. This is unlawful and is considered a crime. The laws of Ghana protect any person whether male or female from being forcefully and unwillingly made to indulge in any kind of sexual activity including homosexual activity. This is a criminal offence known as defilement or rape. Any person found guilty of committing the offence of defilement will be jailed for a period of not less than seven years and not more than twenty-five years. A person commits the offence of rape if he has sex with a female or girl above the age of sixteen years without her consent. The person may be jailed for a term of not less than five years and not more than twenty-five years. Indecent assault is also the offence of making sexual bodily contact with another person whether the person is male or female without the person's consent. The penalty for this offence is a minimum of six months imprisonment.

MEDIA :

The media have the ability to influence the highest number of people in the shortest possible time. The media have a responsibility to inform, educate and entertain the general populace without promoting or inciting violence, threatening national security, offending public morality or encouraging the youth to indulge in practices which are harmful to them. In actual fact, Article 164 of our Ghana Constitution provides that the freedom and independence of the media should be exercised without violating all other laws in the land that protect

national security,

public order,

public morality

the reputation, and rights and freedoms of other persons.

It is therefore unconstitutional when media images on television, radio, the newspapers and the internet, promote violence or sex crimes. Movies, Films, TV-weekly soaps, the lyrics of music and the stage performances of musicians which are shown or aired by the media on television and radio including FM stations should not promote violence, condone sex crimes or defame the rights and reputations of other persons. Hip-life music which is listened to by our youth should portray positive messages. It is reported that in the U.S. a teenager in Los Angeles confessed to a court that he was influenced to shoot an off-duty police officer by music. The music was the lyric's in the late Tupac's album titled 2paclypse. This caused the then Vice-President of the U.S. Mr. Dan Quayle to call for the ban of the music on the American market. I hope the music has not found its way to Ghana. It appears there is now a free for all market for the music and movie industry

in Ghana which can now churn out all kinds of trash for the Ghanaian public's consumption in the name of press freedom. It is a fact that a song like Konkotibaa which promotes sex with children as young as three years old has won an award in this country but as citizens of Ghana, we should not allow a small section of self-serving, profit-motivated musicians and producers with their collaborators in our media houses to place us under siege and destroy the morality of our society particularly our children and youth. Article 28 of Ghana's Constitution has also mandated Parliament to enact such laws as are necessary to ensure that children and young persons receive special protection against exposure to physical and moral hazards. I believe it is time that parliament passed a special law that will be enforced to curb the menace of violence against our children and young persons being perpetuated on our airwaves. A recent report that the Board Chairman of the Ghana Cinematograph Examination Board has directed film-producers, to classify their movies before coming out is worthy of commendation. It is important that Ghana as a country also adheres to the universal practice whereby films are classified e.g, as '18', or 'Parental Guidance required' or Universal, to determine the venue or time when they should be aired. Some movies are also classified based on the minimum age that a child can watch them, e.g. 'minimum age 13' or etc. I will also join the call by some persons for the establishment of a National Music Examination Board to regulate and monitor musical lyrics before they are released, to ensure that the music does violate our laws on national security, public morality and the protection of the reputations, rights and freedoms of other persons as provided for, under Article 164 of our Ghana constitution.

There is also a practice in recent years where we see on our very few national television channels (there are only four at present in Accra, but even one or two in some of the regions) during primetime, musicians are shown on stage with half-naked young women dancing, shaking their buttocks and wriggling their waists. This practice has influenced our society to the extent that when you attend children parties or fun fairs you find the girls including very young children dancing by shaking their buttocks and wriggling their waists. This kind of role-modelling for children in Ghana, should not be allowed by our television stations!

During adolescence and young adulthood young people experience a transition during which period, they learn values, self-esteem, skills and behaviours that can benefit them as future employees, employers, professionals, future parents, heads of households and productive citizens of a country and the world's economy. However, at this age young persons tend to be highly impressionable. It is mandatory that what ever they learn either directly or indirectly from their families, teachers, the media and society at large will have a positive impact on their lives and prepare them for a productive future.

Even though adolescence as a period of transition is so short when compared to the average lifespan or number of years that a person is expected to live on this earth, it is a period where one minor mistake can have a lasting impact on a person's life. Therefore let us support and encourage our youth to build positive values. It is important for every one of us to do our best to excel in whatever task we perform. Whatever we do let us not adopt an apathetic approach and let us strive for excellence. This may mean reading an extra page, calculating an extra sum or working on an extra problem, or speaking more of a language to improve our vocabulary in a language we are studying. In order to excel in

whatever we do, let us strive for excellence because in excelling we gain recognition, we gain self-esteem, we gain acceptance and we go very far in life.

CONCLUSION:

A famous African-American athlete Jesse Owens who won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympic games and set three world records stated and I quote him as follows: “There is something that can happen to every athlete and every human being, the instinct to slack off, to give in to pain, to give less than your best, the instinct to hope you can win through luck or through your opponent not doing his best instead, of going to the limit where victory is found. Defeating those negative instincts that are out to defeat us is the difference between winning and loosing and we all face that battle every day.”

To the youth of Ghana, some of whom are represented in this Auditorium, I will encourage you to endeavour to excel in all you do, work hard, take no short cuts, never give up, persevere and aim for the ultimate goal of excellence so that you don’t look back with any regrets or delay your accomplishments. You have the opportunity now so make the best use of your time. For those who are receiving prizes today as well as those who do not win a prize, many laurels await you in life provided you continue to pray for divine wisdom, work hard and persevere to attain excellence. Do what you enjoy best and you will gain society’s recognition.

Thank you and May God continue to richly bless us all.