**Appreciation of Life**

**Oluwaseyi Ojo**

**Adetiloye Hall, Fountain Hotel, Ado Ekiti**

**9th January 2020**

Tribute by Olawale Fapohunda, Attorney- General & Commissioner for Justice, Ekiti State

* Your Excellency, the first lady of Ekiti State,
* Seyi’s beloved family, Febisola, Bamidele, Omoyeni, Ponle and her extended family here present
* Dr. Kehinde Adekeye
* Learned Friends,
* Allow me to specially recognise two persons who played major roles in Seyis professional life, Attorney- General Obafemi Adewale and Permanent Secretary Adeniyi Familoni,
* Colleagues in Government,
* FIDA family,
* Friends of Seyi, Ladies and Gentlemen

1. We are here today to appreciate a truly special woman. An activist and a dedicated public officer who embodied so much that is best in the public service - commitment, dedication, sacrifice and selflessness.

2. I took notice of Seyi in my first term as Attorney – General. What attracted her to me was the passion with which she spoke and campaigned for the rights of women and children. It has been said that there is a way activists bond together in whatever setting they are placed. Given my background it was therefore not surprising that we found each other.

3. Four years latter on my return as Attorney- General I found that the fire had not gone out of her. I had thought that age would have tempered her fierce commitment but on the contrary she appeared to have found additional energy to pursue her advocacy.

4. I appointed her my assistant on gender and vulnerable persons. Weeks into her tenure, I found she had too much energy for the Ministry of Justice. I thought that the only other place that she could express her passion to the fullest was in the office of the first lady

5. I was confident that she will be an asset to Erelus team and I was not disappointed. She thrived in that office. Indeed she fitted so well, that at some point I was concerned that we had lost her to the office of the First Lady but any time I complained she always disarmed me with her toothy soothing ‘ogaa’.

6. All this week a lot has been said about her unapologetic commitment to the rights of women. I should add that she was never too busy to take up the cause of an abused woman or victims of sexual violence. She will promptly respond to SOS text messages and there was no community in Ekiti State that was too far for her. She was not a 9am to 4pm civil servant.

7. Such was the predictability of her routine and her commitment to work that I knew something was not right when I sent a text message to her on the 25th December and got no reply. I had forwarded a text message from one of our traditional rulers informing me that a 7-year-old girl had been raped in his community and wanted me to intervene so that the matter was not swept under the carpet.

Seyi had passed on early that morning.

8. In the weeks preceding her death we had travelled to Abuja for the inauguration of the National Sex Offenders Register and she was particularly excited about the British Council training workshop on the establishment of Sexual Assault Referral Centers. She was determined that Ekiti State opens a center for victims of sexual violence. I could read her excitement from the text message that she sent to me. Which read:

*‘Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend such an insightful meeting. I learnt so much and I am proud of the miles we have covered as a state, thanks to your efforts and drive. You are amazing.*

*I hope I am able to put the training into great use in setting up our SARC. By Gods Grace.*

*Thank you Oga Mi.’*

9. Seyi was struggling with sickle cell anemia yet somehow, she never lost her energy, her optimism or her zest for life. She always maintained that buoyant spirit, too stubborn to sit still, as ever, fiercely devoted to her work. She radiated that kind of grace and serenity that God specially gives to those who stand in the line of fire for justice and speak for the weak and vulnerable.

10. What better way to honor Seyis life of service than to follow her example to prove that the willingness to get in the arena and fight for the rights of women, children and against sexual violence is not reserved for the office of the first lady or members of FIDA. That it is open to all of us, and in fact it is demanded of all of us.

11. We all need to respond to the scourge of sexual violence in Ekiti State. The Fayemi administration has made huge strides in improving the position of women in society, however gender-based violence is the state remains a concern. Studies prove that the incidence is far bigger than what is reported to authorities and the frequency of GBV cases are therefore difficult to determine, as they are often not reported.

12. We will be told that the causes of sexual violence are complex-spirituality clothed many times in the work of the devil. No single law — no set of laws can eliminate the devil from this State, or prevent rape, and child defilement or other forms gender violence in our society. But that can’t be an excuse for inaction. Surely, we can do better than this. When the rape of women, girls and babies become the norm in any society the soul of that society is dead. A soul-less society cannot inspire growth to enable its citizens achieve their God given potentials.

13. In the coming weeks, I will begin to reach out to the 16 local government councils in the state in an effort to have a shared appreciation of what the issues are and to develop a statewide agenda for the enforcement of the GBV Prohibition Law. We will also intensify our efforts aimed at establishing a sexual assault referral center in Ekiti State. We will review the effectiveness of our name and shame policy and Seyis absence will not affect the zeal with which we prosecute sex offenders. It would be a betrayal of everything Seyi stood for to settle for symbolic gestures without following up with the hard work of more lasting change.

14. That is perhaps how we honor her best, by recognizing that there are some things bigger than ambition, money or fame, that there are things that are worth fighting for, principles that are eternal, truths that are abiding.

15. To the family of Seyi Ojo, I am very mindful that mere words cannot match the depths of your sorrow, nor can they heal your wounded hearts. I can only hope it helps for you to know that you are not alone in your grief; that our world too has been made sadder; that all across this state and indeed across Nigeria, we have wept with you. And you must know that whatever measure of comfort we can provide, we will provide; whatever we need to do to ease this heavy load, we will gladly bear it. You are not alone.

16. The Lord has now called Seyi to give her rest. For those of us who remain, let us find the strength to carry on, and make our State worthy of her memory. It now falls on us to continue her work, so that women, girls and babies across Ekiti State might too have a chance live in peace, dignity and to grow and to flourish. That’s how we will honor her. That’s how we will remember her. That’s what she would hope for.

17. May God bless the memory of Oluwaseyi Ojo. May He grace all of us with His holy comfort. And May God bless this State that she served so well.