

AN ADDRESS BY COSMAS I.B. OKOLI, PRESIDENT/CEO MOBILITY AID AND APPLIANCES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (MAARDEC) THE ORGANISERS OF MS WHEELCHAIR NIGERIA PAGEANT, ON THE OCCASION OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE FIRST EVER MS WHEELCHAIR NIGERIA PAGEANT

Gentlemen of the press, members of staff of MS WHEELCHAIR NIGERIA PAGEANT, Members of staff of MAARDEC, The event Mangers Double D Marketing, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is great honour and privilege to welcome you to this historic event.

The idea of Ms Wheelchair Nigeria Pageant was born three years ago during one of our brainstorming sessions at MAARDEC. Since then, we have been researching, consulting, mobilizing and packaging the idea and finally we are ready to organize the first ever Ms Wheelchair Nigeria Pageant, certainly the first in Nigeria and indeed Africa.

Ms Wheelchair Nigeria Pageant is not a beauty pageant in the sense that there is no emphasis on the physical appearance of the contestants. There are no bikini contests and the contestants will be judged on their achievements since the onset of their disabilities, their projection and communication skills, and their abilities to successfully advocate for over 20 million Nigerians with disabilities.

A female disabled person will be selected annually as our title holder to carry out activities aimed at achieving our mission statement which is:

"To provide an opportunity for women achievers who happen to use wheelchairs to successfully advocate for Nigerians living with disabilities and raise awareness of the abilities and needs of the disability community in order to influence attitudinal architectural and social change for all Nigerians" and our vision statement which is:

"To produce role models of hope and courage, who inspire and motivate Nigerians to greater heights."

THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MS. WHEELCHAIR NIGERIA ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. To select a spokeswoman for the over 20 million persons living with disabilities in Nigeria.
2. To celebrate the accomplishments of women in wheelchairs, as well as their unique contributions to society and the richness of their lives.
3. To produce role models of hope and courage.
4. To challenge the artificial boundaries that seems to exist in the beauty and fashion industries and cast a new light on the concept of the ideal woman.
5. To challenge traditional views of what makes someone beautiful.
6. To educate the public on the realities of architectural and attitudinal barriers.
7. To celebrate diversity in voices, in appearance, in thought and physical abilities.
8. To raise social awareness and understanding about different disabilities.
9. To challenge some wrong perceptions that people have toward those living with disabilities.
10. To integrate persons living with disabilities into the mainstream society by giving them a hand up instead of a hand-out.

The Ms Wheelchair Nigerian Pageant 2010 Title holder will receive a handsome prize and will be branded and equipped to carry out the following specific assignments:

- 1) Ensure that at least, 500 persons with disabilities are gainfully employed.
- 2) Ensure that persons with disabilities are mainstreamed in Nigeria's efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals, in line with the 2010 International Day of Persons with disabilities theme **"Keeping the promise: Mainstreaming disability in the Millennium Development Goals towards 2015 and beyond"**
- 3) Pursue enactment of laws to protect the rights of persons with disabilities by the Federal and state Governments and promote implementation of such laws.
- 4) Support activities of Disabled Persons organizations and promote synergy among them.

WHY MS. WHEELCHAIR NIGERIA?

A wheelchair is the universally accepted symbol for all forms of disabilities, and women on wheelchairs are the most vulnerable and suffer triple jeopardy:

1. As women, they suffer the stereotype that goes with women all over the world.
2. As women with disabilities, they also suffer the stereotype associated with disabilities.
3. As African women, they suffer from cultural, traditional and religious stereotypes associated with womanhood.

CONTESTANTS REQUIREMENT

- To qualify, contestants must be women aged between 18 and 50 by May 2010
- Contestants must be able to carry out the official duties of Ms Wheelchair Nigeria on wheelchair should they win.
- Contestants may be married, single, divorced or separated
- Contestants may have children, grandchildren, great grandchildren or no child at all.

There will be zonal competitions/Auditioning, to select state representatives at the grand finale

THE GRAND FINALE

The grand finale will be a red carpet day filled with the razzmatazz and panache of a world class show. This unique event will command a roll call of the cr me de la cr me in the show biz, fashion, corporate and government sectors

- There will be workshops, speeches and judging, as well as a time to make new friends, dance, play and be inspired.
- The contestants will have dinner with the governor of the host state and state officials
- There will be pageant rehearsals and photo shoot sessions
- The contestants will also set up state displays and give gifts representing their states to their fellow contestants.

- There will be an interactive session with students from selected schools - an educational session for students to gain understanding and promote acceptance of those who are different from themselves.

The first Zonal Pageant will be held on November 7th, 2010 at Owerre Imo state for South-East and South-South states. The second Zonal pageant/auditioning will be held in Ondo state on November 13th 2010 all South-West states while the Auditioning for the rest of the North will hold on November 20th, at Abuja.

The Grand Finale will hold on December 4th 2010 in Lagos, at Yard 158 Simbiat Abiola Way, Ikeja Lagos.

At this juncture, I wish to recognize the following partners: ABC transport, Coalition for Change (C4C), Kpakpando Foundation, DAAR Communications Plc, Champion Newspapers, Accolade International Magazine, Vanguard Newspapers Ltd and Cosokoli Ventures Nigeria Ltd.

Finally, I wish to appeal to the corporate Organizations and well meaning Nigerians to support this noble project through sponsorships. I also wish to appeal to you the forth estate of the realm to please give this project a deserved publicity.

Thank you for honouring our invitation.