**16TH February, 2021**

**PRESS STATEMENT:**

**ISSUES IN THE APPOINTMENT OF OKONJO NGOZI NWEALA AS DG WTO**

Understandably, Nigerians are jubilating in celebration of the emergence of one of their own, Dr Okonjo Ngozi Nweala as the new Director General of the World Trade Organization, WTO. It is indeed a great source of pride that the first female and African to lead the world body is a Nigerian. Women from across the world would also be regaling in the feat of the former Nigerian Minister of Finance in solidarity that one of their gender has broken what had hitherto appeared like a glass ceiling. In its history first as General Agreement on Tariff and Trade, GATT, 1944 to 1995 and, the world trade organization, 1995 to date no woman had ever emerged as the Agency’s Chief Executive.

The Action Democratic Party ADP, definitely, welcomes the appointment of Dr Okonjo Ngozi Nweala to the exalted position because we stand for any positive development that advances our citizens and adds to the good image of the country in the comity of nations. Our party is also elated because, gender equality, recognition of the capability as well as, elevation of the women folk is a cardinal philosophy of the ADP which will be brought to the front burner as a state policy when we come to power.

However, amidst the euphoria and pomp the ADP takes cognisance of certain salient issues the development has thrown up. For one, it is obvious that Dr Okonjo would not have succeeded in spite of her having secured the support of 162 out of the 164 member countries that voted in the selection process, if, the now disgraced Donald Trump had remained in the White House as US President. Under him, the USA had stalled the Nigerian’s emergence on the pretense that, the WTO was in dire need of reforms and must therefore be “led by someone with real, hands-on experience in the field”.

The above given reason by the Trump’s administration while at once is a blatant assault on the towering educational qualification and experience of Dr Okonjo Ngozi Nweala, it was actually in line with the racist and denigrating posture of the bellicose, belligerent of that US administration towards Africans in general and Nigeria in particular. Let us recall that Donald Trump had classified Nigeria as a “shithole” and a “terrorist country” and had followed that baseless classification of Nigeria with prohibitive travel and immigration restrictions on our citizens. The change of attitude of the President Joe Biden’s administration which has translated into the USA support for Okonjo’s candidacy is a reflection of the changing tide in Washington DC towards our country and the rest of the world. The Nigerian government must recognize this fact and accordingly reciprocate.

While appreciating the USA’s gesture, the ADP however, would like to draw attention to the undemocratic system that governs the WTO and other international organizations and agencies. In this instance, we saw how the vote and position of one country overwhelmed the votes and interest of 162 in a 164-member organization. Until it is corrected, such patent manifestation of iniquity and impunity is a negative phenomenon that will continue to hamper attainment of genuine, enduring peace and security among nations of the world.

If the election/selection of the leadership of international body is subject to swings in the whims of powerful member countries, on account of their financial contribution and the veto powers conferred on them the question that arises is, what will be the level of autonomy such agencies can exert in the initiation and implementation of policies? That in other word is pondering on what Dr Okonjo Ngozi Nweala can do for the benefits of Nigeria and other developing countries in her capacity as the DG of the WTO? Among other responsibilities the global trade regulatory agency is mandated to open and facilitate trade for the benefits of all its members and to support the infrastructure development and other needs of developing countries to enhance their competitiveness in global trade.

So far in its 70 years of existence WTO has not altered the exploitative neo-colonialist pattern of trade relationships between the advanced countries and the less developed countries. How much then should we expect from the tenure of Dr Okonjo Ngozi Nweala with her background as one trained and groomed in the US educational institutions and a long career in Bretton Wood related agencies? Would she not be guided, hamstrung or constrained by the fact that those members who are powerful enough to put her appointment in abeyance, would as well, have the powers to apply the breaks if she veers from policy decisions that run counter to their national interest? While not doubting the competent and finest of character of Dr Okonjo Ngozi Nweala we are however of the view that beside the glory, she can only do as much in terms of changing and established global order that was inception skewed in favour of the developed countries against the fortunes of the developing countries.

The ADP believes that the option for Nigerian’s development lies not in externally imposed or borrowed solutions but in the country’s looking inward by harnessing and abundant human and natural resources. That option has not been realized because Nigerian has been ruled all along by successive inept, unpatriotic, visionless and rapacious crop of leaders which is the reasons why Nigerians when the opportunity avails itself again should elect the ADP, a party that is, **the credible alternative** into power.

**YY SANI**

**NATIONAL CHAIRMAN**