

BEVERLY HILLS COURIER

May 8, 2015

Nobel Peace Prize Winner Leymah Gbowee Shines Bright In B.H.



VISIONARY WOMEN—Pictured, from left: Lili Bosse, Ambassador Nicole Avant, Angela Nazarian and Veronica Smiley. Pictured above (from left): Smiley, Nazarian, Bosse, Gbowee and Avant.

By Laura Coleman

From the ballroom stage at The Beverly Wilshire on Tuesday, vibrantly attired in traditional Liberian dress, 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee offered a message of hope and perseverance at the Beverly Hills-based Vision-

ary Women's second salon.

Gbowee's call to heal the world through nonviolent means resonated palpably amongst those in attendance. At times, this vibrant, poignant African woman, who had helped bring about the

(see **VISIONARY WOMEN** page 14)

VISIONARY WOMEN

(Continued from page 1)

end of the Liberian Civil War of 2003 through peaceful protest, much like Mahatma Gandhi had sought to do in India, brought those in attendance to tears with her words of power.

"When we step into our power, then we are able to transform society," she said during the salon, "The Role of Women on the Front Lines of Peace-Building," which was presented by Vhernier.

"Whether you're an L.A. or a Liberian woman, everyone expects you to carry all the dirt...and to change, you must squeeze the dirt out," said Gbowee, a peace activist, trained social worker and women's rights advocate who led the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace to help end Liberia's Second Civil War. "When you want to step into your power and make changes...you have to get rid of the dirt."

That dirt, she explained, is the raiment of complaints that women take on, particularly from husbands and children.

Gbowee advised the over 200 women in attendance, the majority of whom were successful and well-connected, to reach out to the inner city and create opportunities for children to transform the world.

"In transforming the world, you have to also transform the community," she said.

Born in Ghana in the 1970s, the fourth girl with no brothers, Gbowee learned early on that no man was going to stand up for her and was socialized to be independent. Still, that didn't stop her from falling into an abusive marriage; albeit one that didn't

BEVERLY HILLS COURIER

subscribe to her notion of abuse, since her husband did not beat her.

"My children could only call me stupid mama, because that was the name that he called me," she said.

Eventually she realized that she had been aching to get out of the marriage. She then hitchhiked from Ghana to Liberia, her children's devotion to her trumping profound suicidal intentions.

She enrolled in social work school, cultivated the voice inside her, and eventually inspired a coalition of Christian and Muslim women to launch a nonviolent movement that was pivotal in ending 14 years of bloody conflict which had claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Liberians, including child soldiers.

"No textbook can tell you the mind of young killers," said Gbowee, who as a student had worked with child soldiers, many of whom she said were victims of circumstances.

Today, Liberia's president is a woman; a first in the country's history. It also now has laws against rape and laws to protect female inheritance.

"It's one step at a time, it's never automatic," Gbowee said. "You're bound to fall, but it's how well you're able to pick yourself up."

Also in attendance were 15 girls from Hamilton High School. Indeed, inspiring generations of young women to make the world a better place is something that every woman should strive to do.

"Until God calls me home, I will speak, and I will speak for myself," she said. "Each of us has a story in this grand story of the world to make a difference."