

PRESS RELEASE

A response to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

South Africa, 13 March 2017

“I think if you’ve lived in the world as a man, with the privileges that the world accords to men, and then sort of changed, switched gender, it’s difficult for me to accept then we can equate your experience with the experience of a woman who has lived from the beginning in the world as a woman.” These are some of the words of famed Nigerian-born writer and academic, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, which sparked heated debate over the weekend.

Iranti-org is disappointed to hear such language from a respected African author who has a body of work dedicated to decolonisation through storytelling. Such language is reductionist, cissexist, and contributes toward the ongoing marginalisation of transgender women across the world. To say that trans women “switch” gender fails to account for the existence of trans identities regardless of access to hormones and surgery. Further, Adichie’s implication that being misgendered at birth somehow disqualifies transgender women from womanhood invalidates the severe physical and psychological hardships that such misgendering brings to many trans people. Her statements also fail to account for the experiences of trans men and nonbinary persons entirely.

Adichie, later responded to criticism via Facebook by reiterating her views, adding that “of course trans women are part of feminism.” Throughout the original video and in her latest statement, Adichie’s refusal to refer to transgender women simply as women, belies her true feelings on the matter, and it is our hope that she will reconsider her words and make attempts to learn from and engage with the transgender community before making further contributions to this topic.

Adichie, who has no doubt been a role-model for many Africans of all gender identities, is famed for her TED Talk: ‘The Danger of a Single Story’. Adichie notes in the talk that predominantly white, western, male forces have shaped societal ideals of normalcy to the detriment of Africans and people of colour, and that a diversity of voices is needed to redress such post-colonial influence. We implore her to consider the fact that she is now silencing and speaking over the many trans voices who have also been colonised and misrepresented for far too long, and to not let Western definitions and stereotypes be her sole source of knowledge on trans identities.

We reassert that all women are women, be they transgender, cisgender or intersex, and if we are to end systemic oppression, we need to work in intersectional and accessible ways.

If you’d like to engage on this topic or find out more, contact us.