



University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

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International conference to focus on Onwueme's works

RELEASED: Oct. 6, 2009

EAU CLAIRE — An international conference on the works of Dr. Tess Onwueme, distinguished professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, will be held in November in Nigeria, Onwueme's native country.

The high-profile event is expected to attract participants from throughout the world, said Onwueme, one of the best known and most prolific women playwrights of African descent and the recipient of many international awards.

"I'm exceedingly humbled and honored by all the exciting developments," said Onwueme, who joined UW-Eau Claire's faculty in 1994.

The conference — titled "Staging Women, Youth, Globalization and Eco-Literature" — will be held Nov. 11-14 at the University of Abuja in the capital city of Nigeria. It will focus on Onwueme as a playwright, scholar, activist and producer.

Onwueme's works explore a range of social, political, historical, cultural and environmental concerns of the masses being left behind in the geopolitics of today's global market culture, and the people of African descent in the inner cities of America, Africa — particularly the Nigerian Niger-Delta — and other impoverished communities around the world.

"This is an international conference dedicated exclusively to Dr. Onwueme's work," said Dr. Jack Bushnell, chair of UW-Eau Claire's English department. "That is an incredible honor and an indication of just how respected she is throughout the world."

Onwueme persuaded the international conference organizing committee to hold the conference in Nigeria in the hopes that many of her supporters and colleagues from Africa, India, the Caribbean and Europe can attend.

In April, Onwueme received the prestigious African Literature Association's prestigious Fonlon-Nichols award. The award is given annually to an African writer whose work has demonstrated a commitment to democratic ideals, humanistic values and literary excellence in Africa.

"The award elevated Dr. Onwueme to a new level among world-class writers," Bushnell said. "It's an honor that will put her on the radar screen for groups that make decisions about other prestigious awards, including the Nobel committee. It's a very big deal."

Onwueme also was recently appointed to the U.S. State Department Public Diplomacy Specialist/Speaker Program for North, West and East India.

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