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25 FOR 25 SERIES

## LEYMAH GBOWEE

*25 for 25 is an original content series by Gucci and CHIME FOR CHANGE to mark the historic milestone of Beijing +25 in March, as well as Women's History Month. The series will highlight activists, CHIME Advisory Board members, partners and supporters who represent the progress made on gender equality over the past 25 years, and the emerging next generation continuing this critical work.*



As a longstanding women's rights activist, Leymah Gbowee received the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for her powerful leadership of Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, the women's peace movement that brought an end to the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003. Today, Gbowee continues her work as the founder and president of Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa, which provides educational and leadership opportunities to women and girls in West Africa. Read Gbowee's reflections on the efforts to advance gender equality and achieve lasting peace below.

### **What are your hopes and expectations for gender equality in the next 25 years?**

I want to see women and girls taking their rightful place at the decision making table. That means being able to make decisions about their own lives and bodies as well as being actively involved in shaping the agenda for their local, national and international communities.

### **What does gender equality mean to you?**

I often say to young people that if you cover one eye it is impossible to see the entire room. Gender equality is the same. If you take any issue in society that you want to solve, what good does it do to us if we ask half of the population to sit down? To me, gender equality means that we are all free to be who the creator has called us to be, without being limited by socialization that says only boys and men can do XYZ and only girls and women can do ABC. If we are to solve the world's ills, and we live in a very broken world, then we need all hands on deck.

### **What keeps you energized and committed as a leader for gender equality?**

I have the honor of traveling all over the world and meeting with women and women's groups that are doing work to change their communities. The vast majority of these women never receive a dime in compensation for their work. When I get tired and depressed, I think about all of these women around the world. If they can wake up and keep going, then what right do I have to stay in bed and wallow? Equally, I spend a lot of time mentoring young girls and that definitely keeps me young and focused on building a better world for the next generations!

**What advice would you give younger generations on how to advocate / work for gender equality as they get older?**

There are so many pains in this world, and young people often ask me how do they best concentrate their efforts to make a difference. Even as you list off ten things that you are interested in, I bet there is one that wakes you up in the middle of the night and that makes you angry enough to generate ideas on how to solve that issue. That is your passion. Find your passion and run with it, without worrying about money, position, recognition or wealth. After all, things that are trending do not last, but crazy ideas stay with you and they can change the world.

**Who do you look to as an example / role model in the fight for gender equality?**

In women's quests for gender equality, I see women harnessing their pain and using it to connect with one another and fight for justice. From market women to political leaders, I think the most effective role models are the women who can channel their anger into creating positive change that benefits all of society.

