

SOLEMN DECLARATION ON GENDER EQUALITY **IN AFRICA**

We, the Heads of State and Government of Member States of the African Union, meeting in the Third Ordinary Session of our Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 6-8 July 2004:

Reaffirming our commitment to the principle of gender equality as enshrined in Article 4 (1) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, as well as other existing commitments, principles, goals and actions set out in the various regional, continental and international instruments on human and women's rights, including the Dakar Platform for Action (1994), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW - 1979), the African Plan of Action to Accelerate the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action for the Advancement of Women (1999); the Outcome Document of the Twenty-third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2000); UN Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security; and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003);

Standing by our Decision on gender parity taken at the Inaugural Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2002 in Durban, South Africa implemented during the Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly in Maputo, Mozambique, 2003 through the election of five female and five male Commissioners;

Noting with satisfaction that our Decision on gender parity is a historic achievement that does not yet exist in any other continent or regional organizations;

Re-affirming our commitment to continue, expand and accelerate efforts to promote gender equality at all levels;

Determined to build on the progress that we have achieved in addressing issues of major concern to the women of Africa;

Taking cognizance of the landmark decision to adopt the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa during the Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly in Maputo, Mozambique, 2003;

Noting the decision of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission to transform the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD) into the African Union Women's Committee (AUWC), which will be located in the Gender Directorate and serve as an Advisory Body to the Chairperson on Gender and Development;

Recognizing that major challenges and obstacles to gender equality still remain and require concerted and collective leadership and efforts from all of us including networks working on gender and development;

Deeply concerned about the status of women and the negative impacts on women of issues such the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among girls and women, conflict, poverty, harmful traditional practices, high population of refugee women and internally displaced women, violence against women, women's exclusion from politics and decision-making, and illiteracy, limited access of girls to education;

Aware of the policies and programmes we have put in place to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as the current challenges in this campaign;

Concerned that, while women and children bear the brunt of conflicts and internal displacement, including rapes and killings, they are largely excluded from conflict prevention, peace-negotiation, and peace-building processes in spite of African women's experience in peace-building;

Aware of the fact that low levels of women's representation in social, economic and political decision-making structures and feminisation of poverty impact negatively on women's ability to derive full benefit from the economies of their countries and the democratization process;

Aware of the digital divide between the North and the South, men and women and the role of information telecommunication technologies (ICTS) in the advancement of the gender issue as stated in the e-gender Forum Declaration of Tunis, May 2004 in preparation for the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) 2005;

HEREBY AGREE TO:

1. **Accelerate the implementation of** gender specific economic, social, and legal measures aimed at combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic and effectively implement both Abuja and Maputo Declarations on Malaria, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Disease. More specifically we will ensure that treatment and social services are available to women at the local level making it more responsive to the needs of families that are providing care; enact legislation to end discrimination against women living with HIV/AIDS and for the protection and care for people living with HIV/AIDS, particularly women; increase budgetary allocations in these sectors so as to alleviate women's burden of care;
2. **Ensure** the full and effective participation and representation of women in peace process including the prevention, resolution, management of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa as stipulated in UN Resolution 1325 (2000) and to also appoint women as Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the African Union;
3. **Launch**, within the next one year, a campaign for systematic prohibition of the recruitment of child soldiers and abuse of girl children as wives and sex slaves in violation of their Rights as enshrined in the African Charter on Rights of the Child;
4. **Initiate, launch and engage** within two years sustained public campaigns against gender based violence as well as the problem of trafficking in women and girls; Reinforce legal mechanisms that will protect women at the national level and end impunity of crimes committed against women in a manner that will change and positively alter the attitude and behaviour of the African society;
5. **Expand and Promote** the gender parity principle that we have adopted regarding the Commission of the African Union to all the other organs of the African Union, including its NEPAD programme, to the Regional Economic Communities, and to the national and local levels in collaboration with political parties and the National parliaments in our countries;
6. **Ensure** the active promotion and protection of all human rights for women and girls including the right to development by raising awareness or by legislation where necessary;

7. **Actively promote** the implementation of legislation to guarantee women's land, property and inheritance rights including their rights to housing;
8. **Take** specific measures to ensure the education of girls and literacy of women, especially in the rural areas, to achieve the goal of "Education for All" (EFA);
9. **Undertake to Sign and ratify** the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa by the end of 2004 and to support the launching of public campaigns aimed at ensuring its entry into force by 2005 and usher in an era of domesticating and implementing the Protocol as well as other national, regional and international instruments on gender equality by all States Parties;
10. **Establish** AIDS Watch Africa as a unit within the Office of the Chairperson of the Commission who should render annual report on HIV/AIDS situation in the continent during annual Summits; and promote the local production of anti-retroviral drugs in our countries;
11. **Accept to** establish an African Trust Fund for Women for the purpose of building the capacity of African women and further request the African Union Commission to work out the modalities for the operationalisation of the Fund with special focus on women in both urban and rural areas;
12. **Commit ourselves** to report annually on progress made in terms of gender mainstreaming and to support and champion all issues raised in this Declaration, both at the national and regional levels, and regularly provide each other with updates on progress made during our Ordinary Sessions;
13. **We request** the chairperson of the African Union Commission to submit, for our consideration, an annual report, during our ordinary sessions, on measures taken to implement the principle of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, and all issues raised in this Declaration both at the national and regional levels.

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