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EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
Fourteenth Ordinary Session
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EX.CL/491 (XIV)

**REPORT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF MINISTERS
RESPONSIBLE FOR GENDER AND WOMEN'S AFFAIR
18 – 19 DECEMBER 2008, MASERU, LESOTHO**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT OF THE MINISTERS MEETING

The African Union Extra-Ordinary Conference of Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs was held from 18 to 19 December 2008 in Maseru, Lesotho. It was preceded by the Meeting of Experts at the same venue from 15 to 17 December 2008. The primary purpose of the Extra-Ordinary Conference of Ministers was to adopt the AU Gender Policy; in accordance with the Decision taken in August 2008 at the joint AU/ECA meeting of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs.

The meeting was attended by 26 AU Member States, namely: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe. ECA and UNFPA also attended the meeting:

The Opening Statement was delivered by the Right Honourable the Prime Minister, Mr. Pakalitha Mosisili, Kingdom of Lesotho.. The Right Honorable Prime Minister was welcomed to make his opening remarks by Ms. Litha Musyimi-Ogana, on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission followed by H.E Ambassador M. Sajo Jallow, the Ambassador of the Republic of the Gambia and Permanent Representative to the Mission to the African Union on behalf of H.E Mrs.Isatou Njie-Saidy, Vice President of The Gambia and Secretary of State for Women's Affairs of the Republic of the Gambia.

The Bureau was elected with the Kingdom of Lesotho as the Chairperson, 1st Vice Chairperson: Algeria; 2nd Vice Chairperson: Tanzania; 3rd Vice Chairperson: Chad; Rapporteur: Gambia; Vice Rapporteur : Togo. The Agenda and the Work Programme were adopted without amendments.

Most of the period of the meeting was devoted to the consideration and amendment of the draft African Union Gender Policy. Thereafter, the draft Gender Policy was adopted with amendments.

The Gender Action Plan was presented for noting. The Director informed the Ministers that due to difficulties in translating the document in all four working languages of the African Union the Action Plan would not be circulated to the Ministers for their consideration.

On the proposed African Women's Decade 2010-2020, Member States proposed that the idea of declaring the African Women's Decade was well received with suggestions that it must be grassroots oriented, and must adopt a bottom-up approach that took into account the needs of rural women and how best to ensure that they are aware of and benefit from this initiative. The objectives of the Decade would thereafter need to be unpacked and organized into an action plan. The Ministers therefore decided that the proposal on the African Women's Decade should be further enriched by the

Commission, in consultation with Member States Experts, and presented to the Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs before submission to the Assembly in June/July 2009.

Regarding the Status Report on the Implementation of the Decision on the Establishment of the Trust Fund for Women, which was presented for noting, the meeting expressed some concerns with the delay by caused by the Africa Development Bank in conducting the Feasibility study requested the Commission. The Ministers therefore noted the Report and recommended that the Commission should report this delay to the Executive Council in Jan./Feb. 2009, highlighting the challenges encountered in implementing Decision Ex.CL/Dec.425 (VIII).

The Draft Maseru Declaration was presented to the Ministers and was adopted as amended.

At the Closing Ceremony, the Vote of thanks was given by H.E Mrs. Nouara Saadia Djafer, Minister of Gender and Women's Affairs of Algeria; and the Closing Remarks made by the H.E Mrs. Mathabiso A. Lepono, Minister of Gender, Youth, Sport and Recreation, Kingdom of Lesotho.

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**EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING OF MINISTERS
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18 – 19 DECEMBER 2008
MASERU- LESOTHO**

REPORT OF THE MINISTERS MEETING

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The African Union Extra-Ordinary Conference of Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs was held from 18 to 19 December 2008 in Maseru, Lesotho. It was preceded by the Meeting of Experts on the African Union Gender Policy held in the same venue from 15 to 17 December 2008. The purpose of the AU Extra-Ordinary Conference of Ministers was to adopt the AU Gender Policy which will be submitted to the Assembly of Heads of States and Government for adoption in January 2009. This is in accordance with the Decision taken in August 2008 at the joint AU/ECA meeting of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs.

II. ATTENDANCE

2. The following AU Member States attended the meeting:

Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe.

The following organizations also attended the meeting: ECA and UNFPA

III. OPENING CEREMONY

Welcome Remarks by Representative of the African Union Commission, Ms. Litha Musyimi-Ogana, Director of Women, Gender and Development.

3. In her opening remarks, Ms. Litha Musyimi-Ogana, on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission welcomed all distinguished delegates and participants to the Extra-Ordinary Meeting of AU Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs hosted by the Kingdom of Lesotho. She thanked the Right Honorable Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho and his government for the warm hospitality extended to the Ministers, AU delegation and Experts since they arrived for the meeting.

4. The Director also thanked the Prime Minister's office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy of Lesotho accredited to the African Union for their efforts in ensuring that the first ever Meeting of AU Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs was a success.

5. She indicated that the Minister's meeting was being held pursuant to the decision of the Ministers responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs taken in Addis Ababa in August 2008, to convene this Extra Ordinary meeting of Ministers responsible for Gender Women's Affairs before the January 2009 Summit. She informed the delegates that two consultations for the Anglo- Luso phone and Southern African countries and the Franco-Arab - phone and Northern Africa countries had been held as planned from 1 to 2 December 2008 in Johannesburg and from 6 to 7 December 2008 in Cairo, respectively to discuss and own the policy.

6. She highlighted the progress made by the Commission in implementing the Ministers' decision, namely the inclusion of the two consultations and the Extra Ordinary Ministerial meeting in the 2008 AU calendar of meetings, the mobilization of additional resources, presenting the Ministers decision to the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), as well as obtaining the necessary approval from the AUC Chairperson.

She mentioned that the Commission was satisfied with the outcome of the Experts' Meeting and looked forward to the approval of the AU Gender Policy by the Ministers.

Finally she welcomed the Ministers to the AU Gender Policy Meeting on behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission.

Statement by H.E Mrs.Isatou Njie-Saidy, Vice President of The Gambia and Secretary of State for Women's Affairs of the Republic of the Gambia delivered by H.E Ambassador M. Sajo Jallow, Embassy of the Republic of the Gambia and Permanent Representative to the Mission to the African Union.

7. At the opening session, H.E. Ambassador Jallow, on behalf of H.E. Mrs. Isatou Njie-Saidy Vice President of Gambia and Secretary of State for Women's Affairs, thanked the African Union as well as the Government of Lesotho for their hospitality and commitment towards advancing issues around Gender and Women's issues.

8. Ambassador Jallow stated that ensuring equal opportunities for men and women and improving women's status are important prerequisites for socio-economic and sustainable development. He further illustrated how the Gambia has, in line with the spirit of the AU gender processes, committed itself to mainstreaming gender through various legislative and policy mechanisms.

9. His Excellency the Ambassador indicated that as part of domesticating various commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Gambia reports on CEDAW thought ustrated in Gambia's establishment of the National Women's Bureau. Ambassador Jallow also noted the AU Plan of Action aimed at implementing the Gender policy. However, his Excellency further listed factors essential for successful implementation of the policy as including: political and resource commitment, mechanisms for implementation such as operational plans, and accountability.

Opening Statement by the Right Honourable The Prime Minister, Mr. Pakalitha Mosisili, Kingdom of Lesotho

10. In his opening remarks, His Excellency, the Right Honorable Prime Minister welcomed the delegates to the Kingdom of Lesotho and expressed his utmost gratitude to the delegates and the African Union Commission for agreeing to bring the Extra-Ordinary meeting of the AU Conference Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women Affairs in the Kingdom of Lesotho.

11. The Right Honorable Prime Minister referred to, inter alia, the July 2003 Maputo Summit, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the Maputo Plan of Action, as amongst instruments that demonstrate the AU member states commitment towards gender equality on the continent. The Prime Minister also thanked the Chairperson of the AU for his continued commitment towards promoting the goals and principles of gender equality and women's empowerment.

12. The Prime Minister referred to the AU Gender policy as an instrument that fulfills the values and principles of the AU as reflected in the Constitutive Act of the Union.

13. His Excellency the Prime Minister highlighted Lesotho's ongoing efforts towards the realization of an Africa free of gender discrimination and that promotes gender equality. The Prime Minister informed the delegates that Lesotho was a signatory to International and regional instruments that promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

14. At the National level, his Excellency referred to the Lesotho constitution and policy mechanisms such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy 2004-2007 and the National Vision 2020, as some of the efforts that demonstrate his country's commitment towards creating a stable democracy that eliminates gender disparities whilst providing equal opportunities to all its citizens.

15. Further to the above, his Excellency noted that although Lesotho has made notable strides in improving the quality of life of women through, inter alia, the Sexual Offences Act, Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act, the Gender Sensitive Budgeting through Medium Term Expenditure Framework, and the pending legislation on Domestic Violence, women still suffer disproportionately from such challenges as HIV/AIDS.

16. His Excellency further expressed his concerns about institutional impediments that can reverse gains being made towards women's equality and empowerment. These include a lack of co-ordination and harmonization of programmes at both national and regional levels. In addition, the Prime Minister highlighted lack of adequate funding as well as inadequate capacity to implement gender sensitive policies as serious impediments towards achieving goals of gender equity.

17. In concluding his remarks, his Excellency reiterated Lesotho's unwavering commitment to international, regional and continental efforts aimed at achieving tangible results in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa. He proceeded to commend the African Union and AU Member States for their efforts in taking forward the promotion of gender equality and assured the AU and Member States of his country's willingness to work together with them towards the realization of these goals.

18. After inviting delegates and participants to explore the wonders of the mountain Kingdom, his Excellency declared the AU Extra-Ordinary Meeting of the Conference of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs officially opened.

IV. ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

19. The following Bureau was elected:

Chair:	Lesotho
1 st Vice Chairperson:	Algeria
2 nd Vice Chairperson:	Tanzania
3 rd Vice Chairperson:	Chad
Rapporteur:	Gambia
1 st Vice Rapporteur :	Togo

V. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT AGENDA AND DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

20. The Agenda and the Work Programme were adopted without amendments.

VI. PRESENTATION OF THE DRAFT AU GENDER POLICY AS REVISED BY THE EXPERTS

21. The draft African Union Gender Policy was presented to the Ministers by the Director of the Women and Gender and Development Directorate. After consideration of the document, the draft Gender Policy was adopted with amendments.

VII. PRESENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN OF THE AU GENDER POLICY

22. The Gender Action Plan was presented by the Director of the Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) for noting. She informed the Ministers that due to difficulties in translating the document in all four working languages of the African Union the Action Plan would not be circulated to the Ministers for consideration, in the Extra-Ordinary Meeting of Ministers.

23. She further informed the Ministers that during their meeting, the experts had decided that due to the technical nature of the document, it was necessary to de-link the Action Plan from the Gender Policy and only submit the Policy to the Assembly for adoption during the January Summit in 2009. In that case, the Gender Action Plan could be further enriched and finalized, and thereafter presented to the Ministers for adoption at a later date.

24. The Ministers accepted the Director's proposal, but impressed on the need to ensure accurate translation of the document in all four AU working languages for the next meeting.

VIII. PRESENTATION ON THE PROPOSED AFRICAN WOMEN'S DECADE

25. Following the discussions on the Gender Action Plan, the Director for WGDD presented the Paper on the Proposed African Women's Decade 2010-2020. She gave a background to the initiative, which she said dates back to the beginning of the African Women's Liberation Movement and their participation key international Process including the Mexico City World Conference on Women in 1975, and other subsequent global and African initiatives on women's empowerment and gender equality. She thereafter highlighted Africa's leadership role in championing initiatives on women's empowerment and gender equality, through the adoption of important commitments and protocols on the issue.

26. The Director further informed Member States that the idea of the African Women's Decade had been presented at the AU-ECA Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Women and Gender Affairs in August 2008, and based on the interventions at the said meeting, the Commission had developed the proposal. In this regard, Member States were expected to give input on the objectives and expected outcome of the African Women's Decade.

27. Member States expressed their trepidation with adopting yet another initiative to promote gender equality and women's empowerment when little success of their implementation had been registered among rural African women. In that regard, it was proposed that the objectives for the African Women's Decade must be grassroots oriented, and must adopt a bottom-up approach that took into account the needs of rural women and how best to ensure that they were aware of and benefit from this initiative. The objectives of the Decade would thereafter need to be unpacked and organized into an action plan.

28. The Ministers therefore decided that the proposal on the African Women's Decade should be further enriched by the Commission, in consultation with Member States Experts, and presented to the Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs before submission to the Assembly in June/July 2009.

IX. Presentation of Status Report on the Implementation of the Decision on the Establishment of the Trust Fund for Women - EX.CL/Dec.425 (VIII)

29. The Director for WGDD presented the Status Report on the Implementation of the Decision on the Trust Fund for Women to the Ministers for noting, and reminded them that a full report on the Continental Conference on the Establishment of the African Trust Fund for Women that was held in Malawi in March 2008 had been presented to the AU/ECA Ministerial Meeting on Gender and Women's Affairs in August 2008. In that regard, the present report was an update on the initiatives taken by the WGDD Directorate to implement the Decision.

30. The Director reported to the meeting that following the request made by Member States for a feasibility study to be conducted on the viability of the Trust Fund by the Commission, under the leadership of the African Development Bank (AfDB), there had been no concrete response from the Bank on this issue. Accordingly, WGDD had taken the initiative of writing to the Chairperson of the AU Commission requesting that the Directorate be given the responsibility of taking over leadership of conducting the feasibility study on the Trust Fund, and had identified a consultant to carry out the study in time for submission to the Executive Council in Jan/Feb. 2009.

31. The meeting expressed some concerns with the initiatives taken by the Commission towards the establishment of the Trust Fund, particularly with regards to the procedure of conducting the feasibility study on the Trust Fund. The Ministers therefore noted the Report and recommended that the Commission present a status report to the Executive Council in Jan./Feb. 2009, highlighting the challenges encountered in implementing Decision Ex.CL/Dec.425(VIII).

X. Presentation on the Draft Maseru Declaration to the Ministers

32. The Draft Maseru Declaration was presented to the Ministers and was adopted as amended.

XI. Closing Ceremony

Vote of thanks by H.E Mrs. Nouara Saadia Djafer, Minister of Gender and Women's Affairs of Algeria

33. H.E Mrs. Nouara Saadia Djafer, Minister of Gender and Women's Affairs on behalf of other Ministers thanked the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Lesotho for the warm welcome and hospitality, the other Ministers for their commitment as well as the Experts for doing an excellent job. She also commended the AU Commission Women, Gender and Development Directorate for the work they have done in preparing for the Meeting. She congratulated the Kingdom of Lesotho for the adoption of the Maseru Declaration by Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women Affairs which she acknowledged as a very significant and historical event.

Closing Remarks by the H.E Mrs. Mathabiso A. Lepono, Minister of Gender, Youth, Sport and Recreation, Kingdom of Lesotho

34. In her closing remarks she thanked all the Ministers and Experts for their commitment and for the valuable work accomplished within a few days which culminated in the adoption of the AU Gender Policy. She also thanked everyone who contributed to the success of the meeting in particular the National Organizing Committee for a job well done. She expressed her gratitude to the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for offering to host the Second Conference of Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women's Affairs.

35. Finally she wished all the delegates a safe journey back home and a Merry Christmas a prosperous New Year.

Annex

**MASSERU DECLARATION ON THE AFRICAN
UNION GENDER POLICY**

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**THE EXTRA ORDINARY MEETING OF THE
AFRICAN UNION MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE
FOR GENDER AND WOMEN AFFAIRS**

15-19 DECEMBER 2008

MASERU, KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

**MASERU DECLARATION
ON THE AFRICAN UNION GENDER POLICY**

WE the African Union (AU) Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women Affairs, having met at the AU Extra Ordinary Meeting which took place in Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho from 15 to 19 December, 2008,

DEEPLY CONCERNED that despite the significant progress made in advancing women and gender equality, the gender gap remains wide as reflected in inequitable allocation of resources, unequal participation in decision-making including peace processes, gender violence, and harmful practices on women;

1. **WELCOME** the convening, by the African Union, of the Extra Ordinary Meeting of the African Union Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women Affairs;
2. **THANK** the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho for the excellent hosting of the Meeting;
3. **TAKE NOTE** of the Report of the Meeting of Experts;
4. **TAKE NOTE OF AND APPRECIATE** the process undertaken by the Commission in convening the two Review Consultations and ensuring the success of the Extra Ordinary Meeting and for providing a platform to adopt the Experts and Ministers Reports of the joint ECA/AU Meeting of Ministers in charge of Women and Gender held from 25 to 29 August 2008 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
5. **ADOPT** the African Union Gender Policy as a instrument that will accelerate the empowerment of women and achievement of gender equality and thereby facilitate the implementation of Article 4(L) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union on Gender Equality, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA), and other global commitments adopted by AU Member States;
6. **REAFFIRM** the key Regional and International commitments on gender equality and empowerment of women;
7. **COMMIT** ourselves to spearhead advocacy efforts and accelerate the implementation of the Gender Policy;
8. **REQUEST** the AU Organs, RECs and Member States to implement all the commitments made in the Gender Policy and make the required resources available;
9. **URGE** to Member States to submit their periodic reports on the implementation of the AU SDGEA;

10. **APPEAL** to Member States, which have not yet done so, to sign and ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; and **CALL ON** Member States that have ratified the Protocol to domesticate and implement it;
11. **REQUEST** the Assembly and the Executive Council to institutionalize the Conference of AU Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women Affairs;
12. **REQUEST** the Commission of the African Union to establish a monitoring and evaluation reporting mechanism for the implementation of the AU Gender Policy;
13. **REQUEST** the AU July 2009 Assembly of Heads of State and Government to declare 2010 to 2020 as the Decade for African Women and **FURTHER REQUESTS** that the AU Organs, RECs and Member States to develop, support activities and avails the necessary resources for the Decade;
14. **REQUEST** the Commission of the African Union to intensify its efforts to ensure that gender is mainstreamed into all the programmes and activities of the AU Organs, the Regional Economic Communities and Member States;
15. **WELCOME** the offer of the Government of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to host the 2nd African Union Conference of Ministers Responsible for Gender and Women Affairs in 2010;
16. **REQUEST** the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union to submit the Gender Policy and the related documents to the AU Policy Organs for adoption in January 2009 Summit and report back to the next Conference on the implementation thereof.

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