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CHAIRPERSON'S PROGRESS REPORT ON THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOLEMN DECLARATION ON
GENDER EQUALITY IN AFRICA

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EQUALITY IN AFRICA**

1. INTRODUCTION

1. It will be recalled that the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) held their first ever Debate on Gender during their Fourth Ordinary Session in July 2004, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At the end of this historic Debate, the Assembly adopted the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA). While reaffirming some of the already existing commitments, the SDGEA expands the scope of these commitments and also makes additional and innovative pledges. Two obligations stand out in particular.

2. The first is the commitment by Heads of State and Government to annually provide each other with updates on progress made regarding implementation of the SDGEA (Article 12). The second is the obligation of the Chairperson of the Commission to submit an annual report for the consideration of the Heads of State and Government on measures taken to implement the principle of gender equality and gender mainstreaming (Article 13). This report is being submitted pursuant to the second obligation, and sets out the measures that have been taken by the AU Commission (AUC) to implement the SDGEA.

3. At the Commission, the implementation framework has had two main prongs. The first focuses on putting the institutional fabric in place, in order to lay a firm foundation for gender mainstreaming within the Commission of the AU and build gender mainstreaming capacity within the Commission. The second involves translating the commitments contained in the SDGEA into concrete actions at the regional, sub-regional and national levels.

2. MEASURES UNDERTAKEN TO BUILD GENDER MAINSTREAMING CAPACITY WITHIN THE AU COMMISSION

4. On the issue of building gender mainstreaming capacity within the Commission and putting the necessary institutional fabric in place, the process of formulating a gender policy has already started. In-house consultations are being undertaken in order to prepare a draft of the policy for consideration by stakeholders. Consultations with gender focal points within the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other key stakeholders are also underway with a view to ensuring that the AU gender policy is at the cutting edge of gender policy formulation and that it adds value to what already exists on the continent. This gender policy, which is a vital component of the institutional framework for gender mainstreaming, is expected to be in place by the end of next year.

Over and above this, the Commission has developed a comprehensive strategy that will ensure a sustained in-house effort of capacity building, gender analysis,

systems and tools development, bench marking, target-setting, data gathering, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, piloting and gender coordination. A medium term action plan and budget for the gender mainstreaming strategy is being developed. Several partners, including UNFPA and UNIFEM are assisting the Commission in this task.

3. MEASURES UNDERTAKEN TO IMPLEMENT THE SOLEMN DECLARATION ON GENDER EQUALITY IN AFRICA

(a) Development of an implementation framework and guidelines for reporting on the SDGEA

5. Translating the commitments made in the SDGEA into concrete gains for the women of Africa requires that the Commission develops an implementation framework that takes account the different challenges and priorities of Member States. Guidelines for reporting by Heads of State and Government are also required to facilitate their compliance with Article 12 of the SDGEA.

6. As a first step, the AU, in collaboration with two NGOs, Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) and the Africa Leadership Forum (ALF), organized a two-day Pre-Summit Consultative Meeting on the SDGEA in Abuja, Nigeria in January 2005. The meeting served to mobilize various networks and organizations in concerted partnership for the implementation of the Solemn Declaration.

7. Consultations have been successfully undertaken in May 2005, with experts from governments and civil society to elaborate a draft implementation framework as well as draft monitoring and reporting guidelines for the SDGEA. It is expected that the drafts will be presented to a ministerial meeting for discussion and adoption during the last quarter of this year. Once the implementation framework and the reporting guidelines have been agreed upon, Member States will be expected to use the designed reporting tool when making their annual reports on progress towards gender equality, as is required in the Solemn Declaration. The first substantive reporting by member States will be expected to take place at the July Summit in 2006.

8. However, while awaiting the adoption, by Member States, of an Implementation Framework and Monitoring and Reporting Guidelines, Member States are encouraged to report on the implementation of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. In this regard, I am happy to note that South Africa has already sent to the Commission, its first annual report in conformity with article 12 of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. In the same vein, President Olusegun Obasanjo, as the Current Chairman of the African Union, and President of Nigeria, convened in April 2005, an African Women Leaders Think-Tank Meeting in Ota, Nigeria. A number of Recommendations and a Road Map for Sustainable Upliftment of African Women were drawn up at the end of the meeting for the consideration of African Leaders

at the 5th AU Summit in Sirte, Libya. The Sudan has also forwarded, to the Commission, the report on the Seventh National Conference of the Sudanese Women General Union, which was held in May 2005.

(b) Actions taken by the Commission to support the implementation of some sector-specific commitments under the SDGEA

9. Paragraph 13 of the Declaration requires the Chairperson to report annually on measures taken to promote gender equality and all issues in the Declaration at the national and regional levels. In this regard, a number of strategic interventions are being undertaken by the Commission, mostly in partnerships with various state and non-state actors, to encourage and support action at the country level.

Article 1

10. On the issue of **HIV/AIDS**, Malaria and Other Related Infectious Diseases, the Commission is collaborating with Population Services International, an international NGO, in order to prepare a continent-wide advocacy campaign to address young women's higher vulnerability to HIV infection.

Article 2

11. With regard to strengthening women's voices in peace processes, the Commission, in partnership with UNIFEM, have agreed to develop a gender-training manual for AU peace keepers and to train and deploy trainers among the African Mission in The Sudan. The manual will be used to train AU peace keepers in other countries too. The Commission has planned effectiveness training workshops for newly elected women political leaders and civil society leaders to prepare them for legislative work and advocacy.

12. For Cote d'Ivoire, a roundtable for Ivorian women of all parties and from civil society is planned, to help them to influence the peace process in that country. In the case of Dafour, three main interventions are planned. First is a Technical Mission to prepare for a high-level women's delegation and to assess the capacity needs of women's grassroots organizations with a view to elaborating a project to strengthen women's voices in on-going peace processes. Second is a High-level Fact-finding Mission to be led by prominent African women to highlight the situation and perspectives of women in the Dafour region. Third is training of AU forces in Dafour in human rights, focusing on gender-based violence, in order for the force to be able to investigate and report on violations of women's human rights and to provide effective protection.

Article 3

13. With assistance from the government of Japan the Commission is taking action to rehabilitate both boys and girls recruited in fighting groups and to campaign for prohibition of the recruitment of child soldiers and abuse of girl children.

Article 4

14. Concerning gender-based violence, the Commission has, in collaboration with the Organisation for Migration (OIM), has scheduled a study into trafficking in women and children, in order to better understand the problem, and find ways of dealing with it.

Article 5

15. The Commission has ensured that the principle of gender parity is observed in the recruitment process. The ten elected officials leading the Commission are five men and five women. Of the fifteen Directors, seven are women and eight are men. The gender parity principle is also being applied at the next level, which is that of Heads of Division. Indeed, the stated position of the Chairperson of the Commission, which is in line with Article 18 of the Statutes of the Commission, is that as the recruitment exercise progresses, this principle will continue to be applied.

Article 6

16. A strategy meeting will be held at the AU Commission Headquarters in September this year to plan on how to take the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Relating to the Rights of Women in Africa forward, after it has come into force. In addition, the Commission, in collaboration with the UNDP regional office, is putting together a plan to establish an African Women's Rights Observatory to support and strengthen the protection of women's rights at country level.

Article 7

17. In the area of women's economic empowerment, the Commission is working, in collaboration with the UN Institute for Economic Planning and Development (UN IDEP), to develop a course on gender, poverty reduction, and economic and trade policies. The course is intended to build the capacities of the staff of the AU and the RECs, government officials and civil society advocates to mainstream gender issues and women's economic rights in poverty reduction frameworks and in social and economic policies.

Article 9

18. As of now, 37 countries have signed and 10 have ratified and deposited instruments on the Women's Protocol. The Commission is, in partnership with the Coalition for African Women's Rights, which is a coalition of 19 civil society organizations, promoting early ratification and domestication of the Protocol.

Article 10

19. AIDS Watch Africa has been established within the Social Affairs Department, and an AUC HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan 2005-2007 is in the final drafting stage. Consultative meetings were held in this regard

Article 12

20. Action has been undertaken, as set out in Section 3(a) above.

Article 13

21. Action has been taken as set out in Section 3(a) above.

4. OTHER MEASURES TAKEN TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

22. In the global arena, two important processes have drawn the attention of all governments to the principle of gender equality this year. These are, the Ten Year Review of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing-Plus-Ten) held during the 49th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2005; and the Millennium Development Goals Review Summit, which will take place at the UN in September 2005.

(a) Beijing Plus Ten-Review-Process

23. At the January 2005 Session of their Assembly, AU Heads of State and Government adopted a Decision on the Outcome of the Seventh Regional Conference on Women as Africa's Common Position in relation to the Ten Year Review of the Beijing Platform for Action Process, and requested the Chairperson of the Commission, as well as Member States, to participate fully and actively and to speak as one at the meeting in New York in March 2005.

24. In the implementation of this Decision, the AU delegation to the Beijing +10 Review process was led by the Commissioner for Social Affairs, on behalf of the Chairperson, and carried out activities to ensure that Africa spoke with one voice at the Beijing +10 Review Process by: Organizing an Orientation/Briefing Workshop for Member States, jointly organized by the AU and ECA; Organizing and coordinating the meetings and activities of the African Group; Preparation of the statement that was presented in Plenary by the Chairperson of the African

Group for the month of March; and the Presentation of an AU statement in Plenary.

25. The AU Delegation hosted a Panel Discussion on “Walking Their Talk: Monitoring Gender Equality Commitments of the African Union Heads of State and Government”; and a Consultative Meeting on the Peace Dialogue, within the framework of the African Group and widely disseminated AU documents on the various aspects of its gender programme. The AU Delegation also participated at several panel discussions, both as part of the agenda of the CSW and at other parallel events. The AU Delegation also held bi-lateral and multilateral discussions with development partners, and with the Pan African Women Organization (PAWO).

26. The role of the AU Commission to support Africa’s voice in the global process was appreciated and applauded by African and non-African delegations as well as permanent representatives. Coordinated participation of Member States of the AU at the meeting brought visibility and increased confidence in the AU Commission by Delegations and the representatives of international community.

27. The collaboration of the Commission with the UN-ECA in advocating for an African Common Position during the Beijing Plus Ten Review Meeting has continued. We are currently working together to build synergies between the ECA-coordinated Beijing Plus Ten follow up, and the implementation and reporting on the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.

28. The Beijing Plus Ten Africa regional review revealed that the majority of African countries have adopted plans of action for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and recorded some successes, notably increased primary school enrolment of girls, establishment of national gender machineries, enactment of gender equality laws and adoption of national and regional gender policies and higher representation of women in governance structures. However, these fall far short of the promises made in international and regional agreements. Moreover, the gains made have not translated into substantial changes in the lives of the majority of women.

29. The SDGEA proceeds from the recognition and acceptance of the evaluation made at a number of fora - national, regional, continental and international - that while many commitments have been made, and goals set, the reality is that very few of these targets have been met as yet, and that, therefore, additional measures are required to accelerate implementation of the commitments and to reduce the existing gaps.

30. Some of the gaps that have been identified in the Beijing Review processes (Beijing Plus Five as well as Beijing Plus Ten) are echoed in the SDGEA. These include challenges in the area of the education and training for

women. Here issues of insufficient resources to undertake required educational reforms, persistence of sexist stereotypes in educational materials, and insufficient attention being paid to the link between occupational opportunities and the training of women have been highlighted.

31. In the area of women and health, the review processes have underscored the high maternal mortality and morbidity rates and the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources to provide sustainable health services.

32. Concerning women in power and decision-making, evaluations have pointed to persistent signs of poor governance, lack of accountability and transparency and mismanagement of public resources, and violation of human rights especially of disadvantaged groups such as women and children.

33. Regarding the human rights of women, gender discrimination, persistence of traditional practices that are harmful to women and constricted access to justice constitute major impediments to women's enjoyment of their rights.

34. The absence of adequate institutional mechanisms for effective gender mainstreaming has been identified as one of the most limiting factors. Hence a number of recommendations have been proposed during the review process, to address these challenges, and they include strengthening institutionalization of gender equality through the provision of adequate resources, technical expertise and sufficient authority; institutionalization of the core functions of gender officials in all ministries and departments so as to ensure that gender concerns are mainstreamed into all policies and programmes; and having effective coordination mechanisms within the gender structure and between these structures and all levels of other institutions.

35. For my first report I have chosen to focus on institutional mechanisms, as these are a primary means through which the commitments in the SDGEA will be fulfilled.

(b) Millennium Development Goals Plus Five Review Process

36. At its Sixth Ordinary Session in Abuja, Nigeria, in January 2005, the Executive Council adopted Decision EX.CL/Dec.166 (VI) on the Review of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Decision welcomed the convening of the High-level Summit in September 2005 to consider the UN Report on the Review of the MDGs, and strongly supported the elaboration of an African Common Position as the Continent's contribution to the UN Report on the Review of the MDGs, based on the results and the progress accomplished, and in the light of the commitments made by Africa's partners. The Decision also requested the Commission to coordinate and lead in the process of developing the African Common Position in collaboration with Member States and in close consultation with NEPAD Secretariat, the Regional Economic Communities

(RECs), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (ADB), and to submit a finalized draft African Common Position to the July 2005 Session in July 2005. To that end, the Commission has convened several consultations in-house and also with other stakeholders in the preparation of this African Common Position. AN assessment of progress towards Goal 3, Gender Equality and Women's empowerment, has been included in the Common Position to be discussed at this Summit.

37. Within this framework, Goal 3 of the MDGs aims to "promote gender equality and empower women," and provides just one specific target, that is, eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education by no later than 2015. However, the essence of Goal 3 goes beyond parity in numbers, it seeks fundamental transformation in social, economic and political roles and relationships between men and women in ways that ensure an equitable distribution of power, opportunities and outcomes. Hence, the underlying principle of Goal 3 is that gender equality has to be mainstreamed in all the other Goals, and indeed, that such a cross-cutting integration is a precondition to the achievement of all the other MDGs.

38. As regards implementation of Goal 3 itself and in the specific area of women's representation in political structures, Africa has made steady and impressive progress. For instance, in 2004, 37 countries reported having legislated gender quotas; and in an additional 33 countries political parties have applied gender quotas on a voluntary basis. Rwanda stands out as a model country with women now holding almost 50 percent of seats in the legislature, up from 17% in 1990. A lesson to be learnt from the Rwandan and South African experiences is that post-conflict reconstruction sometimes provides a unique opportunity for increasing women's political representation.

5. THEMATIC ISSUE: THE MEANS TO MAKE IT HAPPEN: THE STATE OF GENDER MACHINERIES AT VARIOUS LEVELS

a) Analysis

39. The National Gender machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas and to promote the implementation of laws and policies that promote the advancement of women. It is important to find out how these machineries operate because the implementation of the Solemn Declaration falls squarely within the mandate of these machineries

40. The Beijing Platform for Action, which our countries have adopted and signed, gives guidelines on actions to be taken on this matter. Governments are expected to ensure that the responsibility for the advancement of women is

vested in the highest possible level of government and ensure that there are sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity. The machineries are supposed to have clearly defined mandates and authority and also have the opportunity, ability and competence to influence the development of all policies of government.

41. In order for the gender machineries to operate effectively, a number of factors must be taken into consideration.

42. Firstly, there must be political mobilization of change agents. These agents include leaders at all levels of government who control critical levers for change such as financial and technical resources. Government leaders must work with civil society institutions, especially organizations that represent women's interests.

43. Governments must ensure that there is technical capacity to implement change. To achieve gender equality and empowering women requires technical experience and knowledge of how to mainstream gender concerns into development policies and programmes. Gender training for staff of the gender machinery will develop their capacity to use the transformation from gender analysis in policies and programme development and implementation.

44. The other important step is to establish institutional structures and processes to support the transformation, including structures that enable women to successfully claim their rights. It is important for the gender machinery to work with women's organization because they articulate women's priorities and organize and advocate for change. These organizations continue to mobilize actively to put gender equality and women's empowerment on the agenda of major international activities, transforming international norms on women's roles and rights. Working together with women's movement will enhance the legitimacy and credibility of national gender machineries

45. Government agencies also play a key role in institutional transformation, to create an enabling national environment for gender equality. Through legislation, regulatory reform and expansion and strengthening of public services, governments can rectify the deep-seated gender biases inherent in their own institutions and establish structures and processes that enable women to claim their rights. To advance such institutional changes, a central unit or ministry needs a mandate to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are addressed across all ministries and departments.

46. The location, structure and size of national gender machineries influence their ability to promote gender equality in policies and programmes.

47. Gender machineries must develop effective coordination mechanisms with clear lines of communication, roles, responsibilities, accountability and levels of

authority. Coordination frameworks must define specific terms for collaboration and partnership between public sector, development partners and private sector for the effective coordination of gender mainstreaming at all levels

48. Adequate financial resources must be allocated so as to enable direct interventions by governmental and non-governmental organizations, capacity building, collection of data and evaluation of outcomes. Gender is a crosscutting issue. The danger of cross cutting issues is that they are supposed to be everyone's business and tend to become no one's responsibility and thus end up receiving lower priority in budgetary allocations than sector specific issues.

49. Lastly, it is important for governments to develop accountability and monitoring systems to ensure that fundamental change is broad-based and lasting. Such systems include a strong legal framework and enforcement mechanisms within and outside government, a strong women's movement and open processes that enable women's groups to inform and influence government policies and resource allocations.

50. Governments must comply with their reporting obligations in terms of regional, continental and international women's rights instruments. The reporting mechanisms established in most of these instruments create the conditions for enabling women to fully enjoy their rights. National courts in some countries have successfully used these instruments as a basis for decision-making.

b) Gender machinery at the AU Commission

51. The gender mainstreaming machinery within the AU Commission is a Directorate of Women, Gender and Development, which is located in the Office of the Chairperson. In line with the Solemn Declaration, the Chairperson of the Commission will have, at his disposal, the African Union Women's Committee to serve as an advisory body.

c) Gender Machineries Within the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

52. All the RECs have units responsible for gender mainstreaming. Most of them have developed regional gender policies. The SADC Heads of State and Government have gone further and adopted a Declaration on Gender and Development and its Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children in 1997 and 1998 respectively.

53. The Commission, through its Women Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) has started to engage with the RECs, to discuss a gender mainstreaming strategy, including a gender policy framework. A meeting with the RECs gender advisors in July, to discuss the harmonization of gender policies

and how to build synergies. Future reports will give more information on this aspect.

d) Gender Machineries at National Level

54. All Member States have established national gender machineries, at different levels, and others have, in addition, also developed national gender policies. However, as already indicated above, the Beijing Plus Ten Africa Regional review indicated weaknesses within national gender machineries which compromise their effectiveness. That is why, I have chosen to address this critical issue as the theme of my first report on the Solemn Declaration on Gender equality in Africa.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING GENDER MACHINERIES

55. All African countries have put in place some form of machinery to promote gender equality. However, what still remains a problem is the lack of change on a large and deep enough scale to bring about transformation in the way societies conceive of and organize men's and women's roles, as well as responsibilities and control over resources.

56. The following recommendations are made to assist governments to make gender transformation a reality. Each recommendation is made in the light of the gaps that have been identified during previous global and continental reviews, but most especially the recently-concluded Beijing Plus Ten Africa Regional Review and the on-going MDG Plus Five Global Review, in which the Commission has led the elaboration of an African common position. The package of recommendations constitutes a minimum agenda that Heads of State and Government can adopt and advance in order to put in place the means through which the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality can be implemented. Without restructuring and empowering national gender machineries, it will not be possible to fulfill the commitments in the Solemn Declaration.

57. To that end, Heads of State and Government are urged to:

- Ensure that responsibility for gender mainstreaming is vested in the highest level of government, such as at the Cabinet level, with clearly defined mandates and authority
- Steadily increase the annual budget allocation to national gender machineries to enable them to perform the various tasks of gender mainstreaming such as gender analysis, capacity building, tools development and monitoring
- Review the expertise within national gender machineries with a view to endowing them with the capacity to integrate gender into economic policies and poverty reduction strategies. ;

- Build the capacity of the Ministries of Finance and Planning to ensure that their policies and activities incorporate a gender perspective;
- Advocate for effective coordination mechanisms with clear lines of communication, roles, responsibilities and accountability for gender machineries;
- Encourage gender machineries to work together with women organizations so as to bring concerns of all women on board and thus enhance the legitimacy and credibility of these national machineries.

58. This, Your Excellencies, is my first annual report to you in terms of Article 13 of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. I am sure that you will agree with me that at the level of the Commission, an encouraging start has been made, and it is my intention to continue to pursue vigorously activities in this area, in order to ensure that the benchmarks that we have set ourselves are reached. I am also quite sure that you on your part will also be doing everything in your power in order to do the same. I want to assure you that the Commission will ensure that the guidelines to facilitate your own reporting to each other within the framework of Article 12 as well as an implementation framework that takes account the different challenges and priorities of Member States will be ready for consideration, endorsement and adoption at your next Ordinary Session. I am confident that Your Excellencies will make very good use of these documents, once they have been agreed. I thank you.

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Chairperson's Progress report on the implementation of the solemn declaration on gender equality in Africa

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