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Opening Statement for the Ministerial Segment of the 9th African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing + 20)

**Remarks by Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Special Envoy on Gender,
African Development Bank
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 19 November, 2014**

Good Morning.

I would like to recognize Ambassador Phoebe Potgieter, who is standing in for Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the AUC Chairperson; His Excellency, Dr Carlos Lopez, the United Nations Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Commission for Africa; Ms. Lakshmi Puri, the UN Women Deputy Executive Director and Assistant Secretary-General and Honorable Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, Malawi, Patricia Kallati, who is chairing this Bureau session.

I also recognize Mama Getrude Mongella, for her role as Chair to the Conference in Beijing and Secretary General.

It is a great honour for me to be here. And in recognizing that honour, I want to take you back in time in relating to this process of achieving gender equality in Africa. In 1995, I was the deputy leader of the South African delegation to Beijing; and the leader of the delegation was Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, now the Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

It is by no accident or coincidence that at this time we have come together, not only to reflect on the previous 20 years, but to also look at the road ahead. Much has been achieved, but there is even more to be done; and it is being done with the African women at home and the African Union Commission. We need to take advantage of this opportunity to make the difference and make the prayer titled “Letter to my unborn Child” as presented by Nebila Abdulmelik of FEMNET, we heard this morning, a reality for each and every African girl, African Child and African man and woman.

There must be a difference in the way we do business and that that difference is within a global setting. We are gathered here today recognizing that Africa is at a tipping point. And all of us who have the privilege of being in this room, must ensure that when we leave this meeting, the Addis Ababa Declaration must contribute to the acceleration of the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action towards transformational change for women and girls. And this should not be a mere dream.

While we are here, we have the obligation, and responsibility, to make this a reality. We have to do it, because we are carrying it for all those who are not in this room, or at this occasion.

I come here today with the words of Dr. Donald Kaberuka, the President of the African Development Bank: “Gender is not an annex.” Since it is not an annex, it should be part and parcel of the developmental agenda, and especially the development landscape in Africa. The narrative of Africa of the recent decades has been that of great optimism and great prospects. We have heard of the image of Africa rising and there has been questions around this such as “Is Africa rising with all its citizens?” “Are all the people and citizens rising together?” “Are we ensuring that Africa’s prosperity and growth story is indeed inclusive of the interest of both women and men?”

We believe that this is a fact; that there is inclusive growth and therefore, the tide is turning. But we note that we are not at the tipping point yet and together we should work to reach the point. We know that gender equality is still evasive in many sectors much as women have been active participants to a certain degree. Their full potential through their full involvement is yet to be reached. Gone is the time where they are passive actors.

So what has to be done! The rights of women has been clearly spelt out through a global framework. The twelve critical areas have been captured in the Beijing Plan of Action.

In 1994, at the 5th Regional Conference on Women, held in Dakar, Senegal; we drew up the Africa platform with the participation of African governments. The Regional perspective, and position, to Beijing was clearly articulated.

Thereafter, it was – and is – the responsibility of African countries to produce reports and monitor progress in the implementation of the platform of action. The questions could be asked through an inter-generational lens: have we monitored our progress as closely as we should have? Whether we have put in place an accountability mechanism across all sectors of the society? This would entail tracking accountability by Heads of States; governments; the African Development Bank; civil society and the private sector. Looking at what has transpired so far, we can say that this has not been done as rigorously as required.

We should all be activists for change. Activists determined to attain the “tipping point” for the change we want to see! We must monitor the achievement of the intended outcomes of the identified actions.

As per the demand of African Member States, a small initial fund for women’s economic empowerment, the African Women in Business Fund was established in the African Development Bank in June 2000. An initial amount USD 10 million was committed to serve as guarantees and seed funding for women’s entrepreneurship. Separately, within the Bank we have framed our policies and focus of operations to mainstream Gender Equality across our work.

As we engage with the practical realities of the 50 plus per cent women and girls whose story ending is still being written, we need to ensure that resources are available for the transformational change. It can be done and will be done!

Africa is rallying behind the Ebola cause, standing by the women, and men, who are at the face of it. The Bank, along with the women of the Mano River Union, are engaging with the social and economic impact

of Ebola on women. This forms part of the “fight back” and “rebuilding” of their livelihoods.

More still, the Heads of the three Pan African institutions – UNECA, AfDB and AUC had met in early November, this year, to explore the engagement of the private sector in responding to the Ebola. An initial pledge of USD 28 million was harnessed, with an outlook for additional contributions through users of the major mobile operators on the continent. The participation of all Africans in the cause, with a minimum of one dollar contribution per prescriber is expected to bring about USD 300 million dollars. We must not forget the women in this initiative.

Now, a challenge to the Ministers of Gender and Women’s Affairs. You are influential and must be strategic in targeting key drivers of growth which include infrastructure among others.

Ministers, you need to re-position yourselves to serve as catalysts for change. For example, how can women be involved in construction, and investments into the large projects (energy, water, ICTs, etc). Women must be seen as business owners and ensure job creation.

Women, therefore, should be part of productive sectors and global value chains. We need to see women from the seed planting to the global markets in the agriculture sector. The Bank, the UNECA and AUC will support this agenda. We must leave no one behind!

Thank you.