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Economic Commission for Africa
African Centre for Women

**Report of the Meeting of the Bureau of
The Committee on Women and Development
New York 6 March 2000**

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Introduction

The first meeting of the newly elected Bureau of the Committee on Women and Development (CWD) was convened by the secretariat, the African Centre for Women on 6 March 2000 in New York on the occasion of the second Preparatory Committee meeting for the Special Session on Beijing + 5. The Bureau is composed of CWD representatives from the following countries: Zimbabwe as the Chair, Cameroon as the First Vice Chair, Nigeria as the Second Vice-Chair, Morocco as the first Rapporteur, Tanzania as the Second Rapporteur, Congo, member in its capacity as the Chair of the Sixth Regional Conference, and Algeria, member in its capacity as the current Chair of the Organization of African Unity.

The meeting was attended by the following:

Zimbabwe:	The Ambassador to the Permanent Mission to the UN
Cameroon:	Director for the Socio-economic Empowerment of Women
Tanzania:	The Ambassador to the Permanent Mission to the UN
Congo:	The Ambassador to the Permanent Mission to the UN
Algeria:	The Minister in charge of National Solidarity and the Family

Nigeria was absent at the meeting.

Objectives

The objectives of the meeting were:

1. To review actions taken by ACW in follow to the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women
2. To discuss the Work Programme of CWD for the period 2000-2001
3. To review the strategic orientations of the ACW Work Programme during the year 2000

The Meeting

The meeting was chaired by the Ambassador of Zimbabwe to the UN. The Bureau discussed the agenda as summarized below.

Follow-up to the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women (agenda item 1)

(a) General information on documents of the conference.

Under this agenda item, the Director of ACW informed the Bureau that the outcome of the Conference was contained in four main documents, namely, The African Plan of Action, The Declaration of the Sixth Regional Conference, Modalities for Africa's Participation at the Special Session on Beijing + 5, and Concerns of the African Women on Peace. These documents had been sent to the UN headquarters as background documents to the Preparatory

Committee of Beijing + 5 Special Session. They had also been sent to OAU in preparation for the meeting of the Council of Ministers. The final report of the Conference, however, was in the process of being translated into French and Arabic after which it would be followed by reproduction for wide dissemination.

(b) Concerns of the SADC country representatives

Upon invitation of the Chairman, the Director of ACW presented briefly the concerns that 4 countries from Southern Africa (Namibia, Malawi, South Africa and Zambia) had raised with her on behalf of SADC during the previous week with regard to the African Plan of Action that had been adopted by the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women. Their concerns were centred on the fact that they maintained that the Plan of Action was not sufficiently discussed during the Sixth Regional Conference and therefore did not represent the African position. They had therefore suggested that ECA put in place a mechanism whereby a group constituting representatives from the 5 subregions could review and amend the document accordingly. The Director, however, had reminded the representatives of SADC that a Drafting Group during the Sixth Regional Conference had reviewed the Plan of Action extensively for two days. The Group, which comprised government representatives from all the five subregions of which SADC countries are one, had reached a consensus that was presented in the plenary. The Chairperson of the Conference had also invited all those with comments and/or amendments to submit them to the secretariat for inclusion. A number of countries did submit their amendments that were already included in the document. Since the African Plan of Action had already been submitted to the OAU Council of Ambassadors and Ministers for endorsement, (which was due to meet from 6-8 March), the Director had advised the SADC representatives to channel their amendments through their Ambassadors or Foreign Ministers who would attend the OAU meeting.

The Director also clarified to the Bureau that the Plan was submitted to OAU Ministers before the ECA Ministers because the ECA Ministers meeting for 2000 had been shifted from April to September while OAU's endorsement of the Plan would be required in time for the Special Session on Beijing + 5 in June 2000. In conclusion, the Director suggested that the Bureau considers the following recommendations:

- That the OAU Committee of Ambassadors/Council of Ministers endorse the African Plan of Action that was formulated by a statutory meeting. Rejection of the Plan by some member States would otherwise be obliged to follow the procedure of organizing a meeting on the issue in the presence of a representative of the Bureau of the Sixth Regional Conference.
- That if the OAU Committee of Ambassadors/Council of Ministers have proposals for amendments of the Plan of Action, the OAU secretariat organizes a committee to integrate the amendments.
- That the position of the Bureau of CWD on this matter be communicated to the OAU Chairman of the Committee of Ambassadors which is currently Algeria

In the discussion that followed, the Bureau agreed that it was important to respect procedures and that once a decision has been taken, it should not be re-opened. They agreed therefore that as a matter of principle, the Plan of Action was adopted by the Sixth Regional Conference and therefore only amendments that did not fundamentally change its content could be accepted. They further agreed that if the OAU Council of Ministers were to adopt the Plan, only minor amendments could be introduced thereafter. In conclusion, the Bureau asked Algeria to follow up on the developments in the Committee of Ambassadors in Addis Ababa and recommend to the SADC ambassadors to

present the amendments of their member States at this meeting. The Bureau also cautioned that such incidents should be avoided in future by respecting set rules and procedure.

(c) Africa's participation at the Special Session on Beijing + 5

The Director informed the Bureau that during the Special Session on Beijing + 5 it would be invaluable for the African delegates to have a mechanism for informal consultations. This mechanism would allow them to exchange information on the developments of issues in the various sessions and to discuss any specific concerns that they may have as Africans. It would be a convenient forum for possible briefs that the African Group may wish to give to the African delegations. ECA in collaboration with OAU had established such a mechanism that was in operation during the Commission on the Status of Women and the Preparatory Committee Meeting. It had been found to be useful. The Chairperson of CWD had co-ordinated the consultations. The Director recommended that a similar arrangement be maintained for the Special Session.

The Bureau was in agreement that such a consultation mechanism was useful to facilitate information flow and communication. It was important, however, that it does not overlap with other important meetings such as the Group of 77 meetings. The secretariat was asked to co-ordinate programming to avoid this. The Bureau suggested that this forum could be called the African Caucus to avoid confusion with the meetings of the New York African Group. Its chairmanship could also be rotated among the members of the Bureau.

CWD Programme of Work for 2000-2001 (agenda item 2)

(a) Follow-up to the Syrte Summit

The Acting Co-ordinator of the African Women Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD) briefed the Bureau on its new mandate by the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women to ensure gender sensitivity in the establishment of the four regional institutions following the recommendations of the OAU Summit in Syrte. The Summit had recommended that in accordance with the Abuja Treaty, the OAU should launch the process of setting up a Pan-African Parliament, the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Union, and the African Court of Justice. The process would begin with the drafting of constitutional legal texts to govern the structures followed by appointments and/or elections into those structures. In this connection, the OAU secretariat had requested AWCPD to identify experts in each of the 4 areas covered by the structures who would join the group drafting the terms of reference of each institution. Expert members of the Committee would also be included in the drafting groups.

In the discussion that followed, the Bureau observed that the institutions to be set up by OAU entailed a long-term project. In the short run, however, the Bureau suggested the establishment of an observatory that would monitor the human rights of women and children. Such an observatory could be linked with the ECA African Centre for Women.

It was also recommended that CWD members who had expertise in any of the 4 areas of the OAU regional institutions should serve in the drafting group in order to further ensure a gender perspective in the establishment of the organs. Besides, each of the CWD members would be invited to send names of experts in the areas of peace and development so as to widen the data base of experts who should be called upon from time to time to serve in peace related activities.

(b) CWD's leadership role in the reflection on gender issues in Africa

The Director of ACW observed that CWD had the important role of being advocates for gender mainstreaming at the levels where policy decisions are made. In this connection, she proposed a strategy for operationalizing this role in the context of the ECA Conference of Ministers in charge of economic and social planning. She proposed that an issue could be selected either by the Bureau or the Secretariat with the approval of the Bureau from the Platforms for Action, which could be included in the agenda of the Conference of Ministers in charge of economic and social planning. An issue paper would then be prepared by the secretariat with inputs from resource people from CWD. The draft document would then be sent to the members of CWD one month before the meeting of the Committee scheduled in 2001. At the meeting, the document would be discussed, amended and a synthesis presented at the ECA Conference of Ministers in 2001.

A lively discussion followed the proposals made by the Director and eventually the Bureau agreed on the following:

- The Committee on Women and Development should play an advocacy role on gender issues vis-à-vis the ECA Conference of Ministers
- In this context, CWD will prepare a strong advocacy document on the implementation of the African Plan of Action at the national level, which will be presented at the next ECA Conference of Ministers in September 2000 to seek their support.
- CWD should assume leadership in its advocacy role at the regional level by organizing subregional consultative meetings on modalities and procedures for implementing actions that have been decided upon in different fora. In this connection, the Bureau decided to focus on the issue of feminization of poverty first. It therefore decided to accept the invitation to attend the regional conference that Algeria will organize later in 2000, which will focus on the issue of poverty alleviation among women and children. The outcome of the regional conference would inspire the subregional consultations, which would be organized under the leadership of CWD and co-ordinated by SRDCs in 2001. The outcome of the subregional consultations would be discussed in the CWD general meeting in 2001 and the results submitted to the ECA Conference of Ministers in the same year.
- The Bureau emphasized that in dealing with the problem of poverty, priority should be given to African solutions as a matter of urgency.

Strategic orientations of ACW Work Programme 2000-2001 (agenda item 3)

In presenting the ACW Work Programme for 2000-2001, the Director explained that the Centre had just completed an in-depth assessment within the region, of the level of awareness, commitment and understanding of the importance of gender mainstreaming in policies, plans and programmes as a strategy for achieving gender equality. This assessment was carried out through the monitoring of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action, the evaluation of the implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern, and through a needs assessment for gender mainstreaming at ECA. The major outcome of the assessment was the revelation of the enormous gap in knowledge, methodology and skills required to achieve gender mainstreaming at the policy and programme levels, both at ECA and in the member States.

The Bureau was also informed that ACW had conducted a strategic orientation exercise, which had resulted in the clarification of its mandate, mission, and functions.

In view of the above, the main areas of focus of the Work programme 2000-2001 which were also presented through its new organizational chart would constitute ACW's contribution towards reducing the gap by:

- continued implementation of the capacity building programme for gender mainstreaming at ECA
- Improved collection of gender-disaggregated data
- Continued provision of briefs for policy guidance in gender mainstreaming in the 12 critical areas of the Platforms to decision-makers in the member States

Finally, the Bureau was also informed that ACW had been upgraded to the level of a Division and provided with 5 additional posts to enhance its capacity.

In response, the Bureau advised that the role of CWD to disseminate good practices should be highlighted in its work. It also expressed satisfaction with the upgrading of ACW.

Any other business (agenda item 4)

Under this item, the Bureau appealed to ACW to ensure geographical representation in its recruitment process. In this connection, the Bureau was informed that ACW was seeking to recruit 2 qualified men into some of the vacant posts.

The Bureau also decided that the Committee on Peace and Development should be an ex-officio member of CWD in view of its relationship with ECA and OAU.