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**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR AFRICA**



**NATIONS UNIES
COMMISSION ECONOMIQUE
POUR L'AFRIQUE**

EXPERTS GROUP MEETING

**DRAFT AFRICAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION
FOR THE FIFTH REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY

**Layashi YAKER
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the
Economic Commission for Africa**

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*Distinguished Experts,
Representatives of UN Agencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa the capital of this great nation of Ethiopia. I would also like to thank you for finding the time despite your very busy schedules to attend this Expert Group Meeting for the Final round of preparations of the African Platform for Action, prior to its submission to the member States, for their critical examination, and endorsement at the Fifth Regional Conference on Women to be held in Dakar, Senegal, 16 to 23 November 1994.

Let me emphasize at this juncture that we consider your present involvement and input a critical component for the finalization of the Document before you, particularly because you have all been involved in one way or another with the preparatory process right at the outset. You are therefore much better placed to give the assurance and confirmation that the Draft Platform for Action is now ready for presentation to the member States before they meet in Dakar next month.

The Dakar meeting is a crucial part of the preparations by the African region for the Fourth World Conference on Women, that will be held in Beijing China from 4 to 15 September 1995 with the consistent theme of Equality, Development and Peace. As you are undoubtedly aware, the Beijing Conference has two basic objectives: firstly, to give direction to the United Nations and its member States on the actions and policies to be undertaken around the theme of the Conference, and secondly, to accelerate the implementation of the 1985 Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (NFLS) for the Advancement of Women in critical areas, as identified by each region, to make women's equality a reality by the year 2000.

The formal responsibility for the on-going preparations of the Beijing Women's Conference lies with national governments, with the support of UN Regional Commissions and other United Nations organizations and specialized agencies.

On its part, The Economic Commission for Africa has organized a series of intergovernmental preparatory meetings at regional and subregional levels to review and

appraise the progress made in implementing the NFLS as an input into the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. Participants in the preparatory process have involved governments and NGOs, as well as UN agencies. At national level, preparations have focused on the national reports which have been prepared by women's national machineries with inputs from grassroots communities, women's organizations and NGOs. The focus of the preparatory meetings has been the identification of the critical areas of concern as indicated in the structure of the 1995 Conference Document, "The Platform for Action".

Most of you have been involved in the wide-ranging consultations that have taken place throughout our region at local grassroots level, as well as the national, subregional and regional levels. The emerging consensus view from all these consultations is that, in order for African countries to accelerate the process of the advancement of women, Gender-based policies, plans and programmes, must address 8 main concerns namely: (i) poverty, food security and economic empowerment; (ii) education, training, science and technology; (iii) culture, family and socialization; (iv) population and health; (v) environment and natural resource management; (vi) political empowerment; (vii) legal and human rights; and (viii) peace process. Let me hasten to add that all these areas are deserving of attention and are not ranked in any particular order of priority.

Distinguished Experts, it should be borne in mind that there were positive milestones on the road to the Dakar and Beijing Conferences. These include the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, the World Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in September 1994, and the World Social Summit that will be held in Copenhagen in March 1995. These developments constitute important building blocks for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the accelerated implementation of the NFLS.

As you are aware, two main documents will be placed before the Fourth World Conference on Women. These documents which will be based on national, regional and international preparations will be :

- A World Survey on the Role of Women in Development

- The Platform for Action.

In view of the above, the UNECA has convened this meeting of Experts to assist to assist in providing the final touches to the formulation of an African Common Position on the Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women. The document before you is the result of a consensus document, and in its final form after the Dakar Fifth Regional Conference next month, it will represent a mutually agreed framework for action in the identified critical areas of concern to Africa. The Document will symbolize the unanimous agreement and commitment of the member States on the necessary measures to accelerate the advancement of African Women for the remaining part of this century and into the twenty first century.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I trust that as Experts well acquainted with the issues related to African women, you will help us in having a more concrete and sharper articulation of the rationale, the goals, objectives and proposed actions as intended in the Draft African Platform for Action that has been put in front of you. As it stands now, the Document embodies an important and carefully worked out framework and reference, that will provide policy guidance and an actionable agenda for future and on-going work after Beijing. We are looking for your confirmation that the structure, contents and overall thrust and orientation of the Document are a correct reflection and representation of the spirit, the concern and commitments that have characterized the regional, sub-regional and national preparatory processes. The objective of this meeting, on which the Draft document is based, is to ensure that the African Platform for Action is a synthesis of national, subregional and regional perspectives and priorities for the advancement of women, and that it constitutes a realistic framework for formulation and implementation by national governments and their partners in development, of concrete and sustainable programmes that can be translated into action, with the involvement and active participation of women at all levels, in concert and consonance with the NFLS.

The African Draft Platform for Action has as its overall objective, the accelerated advancement of women in Africa, within the framework and goals of the 1985 NFLS, but given a fresh impetus by the on-going preparatory meetings and the

identification of the critical areas of concern. The post-Beijing agenda for action is meant to strengthen African Women within the regional, subregional and national political and socio-economic contexts, to reduce their vulnerability to both external and internal shocks, to increase and enhance their dynamism and entrepreneurial spirit, to provide them with an enabling environment in which they can fearlessly and confidently articulate their own concerns and priorities, and to internalize and enhance their process of development and self-reliance.

The document has benefited from an extensive interaction among various Divisions within ECA. These interactions have been facilitated by the availability of an abundant and wide documentation including 40 country reports, the outcomes of subregional workshops organized by the ECA African Centre for Women and a large number of technical reports .

I believe therefore that an intensive and critical examination has led to the formulation of the Draft African Platform for Action, and I am confident that a further look by this Expert Group will confirm such an assessment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me now take this opportunity to wish you fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.