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POUR L'AFRIQUE**

*in air*

**THE FIFTH AFRICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**

**Statement**

**by**

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**Addis Ababa, 1st December 1994**

*The Fifth African Ministerial Conference on Women (1994), preparatory to the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), was held in Dakar, Senegal from 21 to 23 November 1994. It was organized jointly by the Government of Senegal and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa as a follow-up to the General Assembly Resolution in 1992 calling for the convening of a Fourth World Conference for Women.*

*The Conference was prepared and attended by a wide spectrum of the African civil society, Governments and international development partners. Participants included numerous ministers and eminent personalities, the 52 African states, 12 non-African observers, representatives of 19 United Nations bodies and specialized institutions, the Organization of African Unity and the African Development Bank (members of the ECA/OAU/ADB Joint Secretariat), 27 observers from international and regional organizations and over 100 non-governmental organizations. In addition, more than 500 representatives of the mass media from the entire world covered the Conference. The major objectives of the Conference were to review progress made since 1985 and the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies (NFLS) to identify obstacles to women's development and to prepare a concrete Action Plan which would accelerate the advancement of women.*

*The Conference was a culmination of two years of preparatory work by African states, who prepared country reports; of sub-regional and regional workshops sponsored by the UN, expert meetings with strong involvement of the NGO community.*

*The NGO Forum preceded the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women from 13 - 15 November 1994 under the auspices of FEMNET, with the participation of ECA. Different activities were organized including workshops and seminars on such critical areas as peace, violence against women, health, family planning, environment etc. On the first evening, most participants marched for peace to the Independence Square.*

*The main NGO committee prepared amendments on the draft African Platform for Action which were incorporated into the final version.*

*Parallel activities included:*

*\* A panel discussion on women leaders organized by UNDP was another opportunity to exchange ideas on the profile of women leaders; the internal and external difficulties they face and the need to mobilize resources to support initiatives of women leaders and managers.*

*\* A Youth Forum was held which prepared specific inputs for the Platform related to youth. In recognition of the primacy of youth in nation building and as future leaders of Africa, two youth representatives were invited to address the experts and the Plenary.*

*\* UNIFEM initiated "a peace Tent" in which debates on peace related issues were continuously held. The recently initiated peace network for women gained additional support.*

\* A Political Tribune organized by the Host country reaffirmed that the most urgent task for Africa is to resolve its conflicts and re-establish stability. A network of women leaders for peace in Africa was launched. The group will pressurize political leaders and public opinion for a female approach in conflict prevention and resolution.

\* A Forum of African businesswomen was organized under the theme "Feminine entrepreneurship". Concrete experiences were reported and business contracts were exchanged.

\* Prior to the Conference, FAO held a one day workshop on rural women and food security to highlight the primary role of women in agriculture. Access to productive resources, appropriate technologies and credits were among the major concerns.

\* A two-day workshop for the media was sponsored by ECA, focussing on the role of the media in changing the image of African women and the potential of communication in development.

\* In addition to official events, The Internationale Socialiste and the World Inter-Parliamentarian Union as well as the African Inter-Parliamentary Union held activities. A fashion show of Senegalese dresses and an Oscar Gala were organized for participants. About 5000 women from all over Africa took part in these different meetings and events.

### Summary of the debate

During the debate on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (NFLS) the Conference noted that the three themes of the Fourth World Conference on Women that is "Action for Equality, Development and Peace" should be interpreted and implemented within the African context. Equality should be implemented within the concept of stability and harmony of the couple and the family unit which is the societal base development on the other hand should be promoted within the framework of respect for African values. Peace must be promoted not only at international and national levels, but also at the level of individuals, both men and women on whom its promotion is based. A recurrent theme of many participants was the imperative for women to participate in conflict prevention and resolution at the community, national and regional level. Several mechanisms for peace networking were strengthened and initiated.

The Conference noted that in some countries progress had been made in such social areas as increased enrolment of girls, achievement of higher literacy rates for women, rise of women employment in the formal sector, liberalization of the freedom of the press, and the introduction of the multi-party system, as well as sensitization of women to the importance of political participation. Unfortunately, it was also noted that in most countries the rate of maternal and child mortality had increased and family instability as manifested by high divorce rates and single-parent households were increasing. In general, however there is inadequate access to resources and political participation and lack of comprehensive national strategies for the promotion of the women.

Education and training for women were considered to be strongly correlated with global sustainable development. It also facilitates access to all other fundamental rights which are one of the critical areas in the African Platform for Action. Education is an indispensable tool in the development of human resources as well as access to new technologies that promote the developing process.

*Increased access to education and training for women must therefore be emphasized in the national policies and plans.*

*It is also necessary that quality education be directed towards the youth in order to prepare them for future leadership. In this respect, their educational programmes should be creative and forward looking, focusing not only on the most current issues, but also preparing them for the competitive global world of high technology before they become emersed in it. In particular, the potential role of youth in peace-making in their communities as well as national development programmes should be promoted.*

*The conference noted that the promotion of gender equality in the entire life cycle of the woman is an important objective in the context of the advancement of women. In addition, girls and women's health needs, as well as protection of young girls from violence against their bodies or armed conflicts should be incorporated in all aspects of development. Their high drop-out rates must also be contained through basic measures to resolve the root causes of the low priority accorded to their education. Thus, sociological and cultural stereotypes that limit the development of the girl-child must be eliminated and more resources allocated for the improvement of her status. The Conference stressed the need to follow-up the implementation of the goals adopted at the World Summit for Children and the International Conference for Assistance to African Children. With regard to health, the Conference suggested that both men and women should be sensitized on family planning and AIDs both of which had serious implications on women's welfare. Noting the high cost of health maintenance, the Conference recommended certain mutual support groups to alleviate the situation.*

*In reference to the issue of poverty, food security and women, the Conference stressed the importance of the continued access of food relief, rehabilitation of the population in crises and their integration into the development process. This objective was emphasized in the African Platform for Action. The women's role of providing and managing food resources as well as their access to employment opportunities and appropriate knowledge and technology was emphasized.*

*To alleviate the general social situation of women, the 20/20 initiative whereby donor governments should commit 20 per cent of their development assistance to basic social services and developing countries 20 per cent of their GDP to education primary health care, family planning, water and sanitation was recommended.*

### **African Platform for Action**

*The African Platform for Action reaffirmed the need to accelerate the realization of the NFLS through action for equality, development and peace, in full recognition of the crucial roles that women play in the critical areas that promote their advancement. In this regard, at its very core are 11 critical of concern which reflect a broad-based consensus on Africa's priority areas of action in order to accelerate the advancement of women. They include:*

- A. *Women's poverty, insufficient food security, and lack of economic empowerment;*
- B. *Inadequate access to education, training, science and technology;*
- C. *Women's vital role in culture, the family, and socialization;*
- D. *Improvement of women's health, reproductive health including family planning and population-related programmes;*
- E. *Women's relationship and linkages to environment and natural resource management;*

- F. *Involvement of women in the peace process;*
- G. *The political empowerment of women;*
- H. *Women's legal and human rights;*
- I. *Mainstreaming of gender-disaggregated data;*
- J. *Women, communication, information and arts;*
- K. *The girl-child*

*The strategic objectives and actions outlined in each of the critical areas integrate the gender dimension in the political, social, economic, and cultural sectors. Specific measures for its implementation by all development actors, and women, in particular, were outlined not only in the Platform itself but also in a resolution that was adopted by the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women.*

### **Implementation**

*Effective mobilization of all human, material and financial resources for the implementation of the African Platform for Action was strongly emphasized at the Conference. All delegations in Dakar stressed the collective responsibility of countries and the entire international community in ensuring the implementation of the Platform for action which will be carried out at national, subregional and regional levels. At national level, member States and the civil society are required to take into account identified priority issues in the formulation and implementation of their policies and more important, in allocation of resources. On the other hand, NGOs and the international community should continue to backstop and complement efforts made by governments with a view to changing the lives of women and children.*

*A monitoring and follow up mechanism has been built into the Platform to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery of gender programmes and accountability at all levels. At national level, existing machineries should be better placed to be able to carry out their task. At the regional level, follow-up is entrusted to the Africa Regional Coordinating Committee on integration of women in development in close collaboration with existing IGOs and relevant UN agencies. The ARCC will meet annually to review progress made and will report to the ECA Conference of Ministers and the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government every two years.*

### **Immediate Action Required**

1. *The first action to be taken is to send the final version of the Platform to all member States, other UN member States and UN Organizations, NGOs, Regional IGOs, other bilateral and multilateral partners for follow-up and to ensure operationalization of the Platform.*
2. *The second step will be to present this Platform in March 1995 to the Commission on the Status of Women during which the issues from the five regions will be integrated into one Global Platform to be adopted in Beijing. It is therefore crucial that the current African Members of the Commission on the Status of Women are well informed in order to ensure that African priorities are reflected in the Global Platform for Action.*

3. *The operationalization of the platform will require special attention from all partners. It is planned to hold a preliminary inter-agency consultation, with the OAU and ADB on the issue at the beginning of 1995. All UN agencies are also requested to take the Platform into account in 1996-1997 programming exercise.*

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*The Expert and Ministerial Meetings were chaired by Her Excellency, Mrs Ndioro Ndiaye, Minister of Women, Children and Family of Senegal. His Excellency President Abdou Diouf of the Republic of Senegal, presided over the opening ceremony of the Ministerial Conference. Opening statements were made by Her Excellency Ms Mariam Abacha, the First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chairperson of the Fourth African Regional Conference on Women, Her Majesty Queen Fabiola of Belgium; Mrs Gertrude Mongella, United Nations Assistant Secretary General and Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women; Mr Pascal Gayama, Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity; Mr Babacar N'Diaye, President of the African Development Bank; Mr Layashi Yaker, United Nations Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ECA and His Excellency Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal.*

*After the opening, five eminent persons addressed the Conference: Her Excellency Mrs Nana Konadu Rawlings, WHO Global Commission on Women's Health; Mrs Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Africa; Dr Achola Pala Okeyo, Chief, Africa Section of UNIFEM; the Honourable Mrs Winnie Mandela, MP, Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology of the Government of South Africa; and Her Excellency Mrs Laurence Ndadaye, Ex-First Lady of Burundi.*

*The Ministers elected 5 officers: Chairperson (Senegal), first Vice-chairperson (Tunisia), second Vice-Chairperson (Ethiopia); third - (Botswana) and rapporteur (Cameroon). In order to facilitate the work of the Rapporteur, the Ministers elected five "friends of the rapporteur", namely Gabon, Guinea, Kenya, Mauritania and Namibia to assist the rapporteur in her work.*