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**Joint AU/ECA Conference of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs
25 – 29 August 2008
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

Theme: Addressing gender equality: a persistent challenge for Africa



Statement of the Experts Meeting on Accelerating the Implementation of Women and Human Rights commitments in Africa (8-10 July 2008)

We, participants of Experts' Meeting on accelerating implementation of the commitments on women's rights in Africa, organised by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the African Union Women, Gender and Development Directorate (AU WGDD) representing gender and women's rights experts from different African countries, met in Addis Ababa from 8-10th July 2008.

We appreciate the efforts of the African Union and its member states towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However with only seven years to 2015, many challenges remain.

We know that there is a strong link between the enjoyment of human rights by women and the achievement of the MDGs. We therefore appreciate the collaborative efforts of the AU WGDD and UNIFEM to develop a tool that aims to support African Governments to accelerate delivery on their commitments on women's rights.

We acknowledge that:

The strong political commitment of the African Union and its Member States, to gender equality and women's empowerment, as is evidenced by the Constitutive Act of AU, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA), the establishment of the Women, Gender and Development Directorate in the office of the African Union Commission Chairperson and the advanced stage of developing an AU gender policy.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa is now in effect following ratification by the required number of Member States, and that almost all African countries have ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). A significant number of countries have also ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Through ratification of these instruments, African Governments have assumed legal obligations to respect, promote and protect the rights of women in almost all areas of the MDGs.

Important steps have been taken at national level, including providing for gender equality in national constitutions, adopting gender policies, and establishing national machineries for the advancement of women and gender equality.

However, there are wide gender gaps in all the MDG areas reflecting inadequate implementation and delivery on the commitments on women's human rights.

We note and welcome:

The introduction by UNIFEM and AU WGDD of an implementation framework that proposes the integration of women's rights in regional, national and local government development plans, strategies and programmes and the adoption of a multi-sectoral approach in delivering on women's rights targets/indicators. The framework reflects the reality that women's rights cut across all sectors and development priorities articulated in national development strategies the adoption of a multi-sectoral approach for significant progress in ensuring women the enjoyment of human rights.

The emphasis that the proposed implementation framework puts on the integration of women rights indicators based on the Protocol on women's rights in Africa, CEDAW, other human rights standards, and the SDGEA in regional, national and local government development strategies, resourcing, implementation, monitoring and reporting. The framework also calls for inter-ministerial coordination to ensure improved efficiency, accountability, and communication across sectors, the establishment of a strong technical and advisory services unit at the regional and national levels, and an important and strengthened role for national machineries for women affairs.

Good practices in multi-sectoral approaches in a number of areas including national strategies on HIV/AIDS, humanitarian emergencies and in dealing with recent scares on avian flu.

The acknowledgement of the important roles of different government-led partnerships between the AU and governments with donor countries and agencies, the United Nations System, and various private sector actors including international and regional human rights institutions, women's organisations, academic and research institutions, faith based organisations, cultural leaders, and trade unions.

To support the utilisation of the implementation framework at the regional and national levels we recommend that:

1. UNIFEM and the AU WGDD should take advantage of regional and national forums and events as opportunities to present, popularise and generate support for the finalised implementation framework. Examples include the Conference of Ministers of Women and Gender Affairs in August 2008, the African Development Forum (ADF) in November 2008, the Beijing+15 processes, the African Peer Review process, and the AU Pre-summits.
2. The framework should be piloted in five African countries (one from each AU region) in order to demonstrate its usefulness as a tool for accelerating delivery on women's rights. The pilot phase should time-bound, taking at least two years. UNIFEM, AU and other partners should provide financial and technical support for the pilot programme. Criteria for selecting pilot countries should take into consideration:
 - the ratification of human rights instruments guaranteeing women's rights
 - the presence of a supportive national constitution
 - presence of a national gender policy, action plan/ mechanism for implementation of the gender policy
 - availability of resources explicitly committed for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment
 - the status of compliance with the reporting and other obligations under the various women's rights instruments
 - existence and interest of partnerships to support the piloting of the framework
 - experience with multi-sectoral coordination (important but not necessary).
3. After the 2 years of piloting the implementation framework, a review should be undertaken in

WGDD should engage the African Union leadership to further promote the framework for utilisation by more African countries.

4. A common set of African women's human rights indicators should be developed building on existing global and regional women's rights standards and indicators to support the integration of women's rights into National Development Strategies (NDS).
5. As part of the rollout of the pilots participating countries should be assisted to undertake a situation analysis to identify good practices in the country, assess capacity and other needs for effective pilots, as well as to establish baseline data. Special attention should be given to identify capacity needs for national gender machineries and women's rights organisations.
6. UNIFEM and the AU WGDD should work together to establish a regional technical support and advisory unit to support the pilot countries. The Unit pooling together technical expertise in different sector areas from different African countries and the diaspora, can in the formative stages be hosted and convened by UNIFEM AU Liaison Office in Addis Ababa, but should gradually evolve to the AU WGDD as part of strengthening AU capacities.

