

Addressing Gender Equality: A Persistent Challenge for Africa AU/ECA Conference of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs kicks off today in Addis Ababa

ECA Press Release No. 14/2008

Addis Ababa, 25 August 2008 (ECA) - The Conference of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs jointly organized by the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) kicks off today Monday 25, August 2008 with a two-day meeting of the Committee of Experts. The Ministerial segment of the Conference will take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 28 to 29 August 2008.

Over 25 Ministers and 3 Deputy Ministers will attend the Conference, which is a collaboration between the Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) of the AU Commission, and the African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGS) of UNECA.

Participants also include over seventy five experts from gender ministries and resource persons, representatives of Regional Economic Communities and UN agencies, as well as African and international media.

The major agenda item of the Conference is the discussion and adoption of the AU Gender Policy a coherent strategy for the achievement of gender equality and the advancement of women on the continent. The Plan of Action for the effective implementation of this Gender Policy will also be reviewed and endorsed.

The Conference will review the preparatory process for the Beijing +15 regional review due to take place on the African continent in 2009 and in 2010 at the global level. The Conference will also take stock of progress achieved in the implementation of the AU Heads of State Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) and debate on how to effectively use the African Gender and Development Index.

"The pressing nature of the development challenges facing Africa including gender inequality made necessary for our continental institutions and other development partners to collaborate in order to harness resources, ensure coherence and avoid duplication," said Ms Thokozile Ruzvidzo, Officer in charge of the African Centre for Gender and Social Development addressing the Experts today.

Likewise, the Conference is expected to discuss the establishment of the African Women Trust Fund. The African Development Forum (ADF) VI scheduled to take place in November 2008 in Addis Ababa is also on the agenda and options of making this major multi-stakeholder event a success will be deliberated. In light of the upcoming review of the Paris Declaration, the Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs will reflect on the gender dimensions of aid modalities and development cooperation.

The convening of this ministerial conference coincides with the renewal of the Bureau of ECA's Committee on Women and Development, whose work and new mandate will be examined during the Conference.

Strengthening national women's and gender machineries will also feature high on the agenda of the Conference as the momentum gathered during the Beijing Conference in 1995 seems to be on the wane.

As to the crucial issue of women's human rights, and given the alarming and persistent violation of these rights across the Continent, the Conference plans to discuss and recommend a strategy for adopting a multi-sectoral approach to fast track the implementation of commitments on women's rights. To address this critical issue, the Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Development Program, Regional Gender Program (UNDP/RGPA) will be launching the African Women's Rights Observatory.

This is an innovative project, aimed at following up the status of women's rights in Africa and creating a forum for knowledge and experience sharing among countries, institutions, partners and individuals who are involved in advocating for the promotion of women's rights across the Continent.

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For further information on the conference go to: http://www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/acgd/events/cfmGender/Default.html

Issued by the ECA Information and Communication Service

PO Box 3001
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Tel: +251 11 551 58 26
Fax: +251 11 551 0365
E-mail: ecainfo@uneca.org
Web: www.uneca.org
