



# PRESS RELEASE

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## THE AFRICAN REGIONAL CONFERENCE IS COMING TO A CLOSE.

Representatives of many African delegations spoke on Tuesday at the African Regional Conference on the urgent need to put in place machinery for the advancement of women, as the meeting, started 12 days ago, entered its last stage.

Their demands and recommendations are similar - from women empowerment, politically, socially and economically, to the dismantling of legal and traditional barriers that have inhibited African women from realising their potentials.

International agencies such as UNICEF and UNFPA also presented their views at the plenary session.

Below are highlights :

Niger points out that the war and drought have worsened the plight of women in that country, while devaluation of the currency has wiped out little gains made in the area of social development.

The country calls for the establishment of small and medium scale industries, as well as technical and vocational training for women and girls.

The country has already drafted a law to strengthen women, most of whom have organized themselves into groups.

Sudanese women are calling for peace as the cornerstone of women development, even as the National Conference established by the Government is currently debating on how to achieve a lasting peace in that country.

The Government has also put in place opportunities to make women excel in their chosen fields and make them contribute meaningfully to national development.

Women in Lesotho are asking for a change of societal attitude and gender-stereotyping, while discriminatory laws should be abolished.

They say the issue of women reproductive health and aids should be tackled more vigorously.

In Tanzania, women say that their power is being curtailed by traditions, thereby undermining their confidence.

They add that their involvement in politics is also restricted as only 28 members are women in the Parliament of 248. But the Government is doing everything to reverse the trend.

In Kenya, a law on women advancement, being reviewed by five Kenyan women judges, is already at an advanced stage.

In health, Kenya hopes to be one of the flagships in Africa in the achievement of the mid-decade goals set on child survival, protection and development.

Kenya salutes the courage of those who have contributed to peace promotion on the continent, but says more resources should be allocated to tackle impediments standing in the way of women advancement.

UNICEF calls for the promotion of gender equality among men and women in all spheres of life, while joint efforts should be promoted between boys and girls in nutrition, reduction of infant mortality and provision of education.

It asks African Nations to pursue the goals set for the survival, protection and development of African children.

It emphasises the need for adherence to the 20-20 initiative which ensures that UNICEF and governments contribute 20 per cent of their budget to basic education, promotion of basic health care and provision of water and sanitation.

It calls for the strengthening of NGOs and the promotion of equitable partnership between men and women.

UNFPA remarks that Africa still presents low economic and social status of women as depicted by the high rate of maternal mortality and job opportunities.

It states that the last World Conference on Population and Development in Cairo focuses on equity and empowerment of women, reproductive rights and reproductive health, safe motherhood, abortion and family planning.

It says African countries face new challenges in its adolescents whose population is projected to reach 170 million by the year 2000.

It suggests the active involvement of men in responsibility sharing with regard to child bearing while communication should be improved to reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, including aids.

UNFPA says it has devoted half of its fund to maternal health, family planning and safe motherhood, and advocates for family law to place women on the same status with men.

The Fund calls for coordination among donor agencies to avoid duplication and enhance efficiency, adding that the fund is the only UN organisation with 45 per cent of women on its staff list.

#### Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference addresses newsmen.

The Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on women, Mrs Gertrude Mongella said that the Dakar Regional Meeting has attested to the ability of women in crisis management.

"The Conference should therefore be seen from what it has been able to achieve, from the strength of women and not from their weakness", she says at a news conference.

She says that she will go away with memories of dedicated women and men, and their commitment to the development of their continent.

"The voice of peace has been loud and clear at the conference". she remarks.

Mrs Mongella states that deliberations at other regional conferences will form part of the final plan of action of the Beijing Conference.

She notes that issues presented at the regional conferences are similar, but differ in outlook depending on poverty level, development and technology in those regions.

She says that arrangements are on schedule for the hosting of the World Conference which is expected to attract 30.000 delegates and appealed for early registration to avoid any hitches.

#### Ghana's First Lady, Mrs Nana Rawlings speaks on women health

The Global Commission for Women in Health said that the reproductive health of the African woman as well as her environment will greatly enhance development in the region.

A member of the Commission and Ghana's First Lady, Mrs Nana Rawlings, says at a press conference at the on-going Regional Conference on Women in Dakar on Tuesday that Ghana's experience has shown that improvement of women's health will increase their participatory role and guarantee quality life.

The Commission is part of the efforts of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to enhance the health of women globally.

Also working with Mrs Rawling in Africa are Dr. Veronique Lawson of Benin Republic, Dr. Florence Manguyo of Kenya and Madam Joyce Kadandara of Zimbabwe.

The team has established a network in 11 African countries for effective co-ordination of activities in reproductive health, campaign against Aids and female genital mutilations.