



**STATEMENT BY H.E. DR. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA,
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**ON THE OCCASION OF
THE COMMEMORATION OF THE AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DAY**

**UNDER THE THEME:
*“WOMEN'S RIGHTS - OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY”***

21 OCTOBER 2016

Dear Fellow Africans:

On 21 October 1986, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights came into force thereby forming the basis for the commemoration of the Africa Human Rights Day. The African Human Rights Day, which is celebrated annually across the continent on 21st October, provides us with an opportunity to reflect, take stock and recommit to the solemn declaration undertaken by the African leaders and the African people to promote and safeguard human and peoples' rights on the continent. The commemoration is also meant to continuously awaken greater awareness of the African peoples and the international community on the value of life and humanity, and to renew our collective commitment to promote, protect and uphold the fundamental human rights.

This year's theme, "**Women's Rights - Our Collective Responsibility**" is timely and appropriate. Timely in the sense that it coincides with the Declaration of the African Union's Heads of State and Government theme for the year 2016: "**The African Year of Human Rights with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women**". It is a clarion call on Africa to do more to promote women's rights, particularly the rights to socio-economic development beyond women's representation in decision-making structures. The theme for 2016 provides a ray of hope that through empowerment of women in Africa, sustainable socio-economic development and structural transformation within the context of Agenda 2063: The Africa we want.

It is important at this juncture to indicate that impressive efforts have been made in recent time to promote and protect human and peoples' rights in Africa, including women's rights. Aside from dedicating 2015 and 2016 to socio-economic empowerment of African women and women human rights respectively, the African Union embarked on human rights observation and reporting, particularly in conflict and post-conflict countries. We have deployed human rights observers in Mali, Central African Republic, South Sudan, DRCM, Somalia and Burundi. We currently have 45 human rights observers in Burundi. The impact of these observers in Burundi for instance has been immense in respect of mitigating human rights violation in the country.

In addition to the above, I am also happy that the African Union has made an impressive impact on deepening the culture of human rights and justice in some of the African Union Member states. For example, the African Union successfully established the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan and this was the first of its kind on the continent. This effort is globally referenced by the international community to be a successful endeavor. The African union is currently working to operationalize one of the outcomes of this effort, namely the African Union Hybrid Court on South Sudan to deal with impunity, promote national unity and justice in the country.

The creation of Human Rights Commissions appears to be a genuine expression of the African Union Member States' pledge to bring more transparency and government accountability, such as in Benin, Ghana, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda. Rwanda's human rights commission was established as part of the 1993 Arusha Peace Accord. By 2010, Africa was host to the largest number of government human rights commissions of any other continent.

Nonetheless, despite of these success stories, the continent continues to face enormous challenges which if not urgently and adequately addressed, may erase the human rights gain recorded over the years. These challenges include, among others: inadequate allocation of resources to human rights institutions, inadequate capacity of human rights institutions, insufficient political will, unwillingness by some States to cede part of their sovereignty to supranational monitoring bodies, insufficient commitment by some States to domesticate and implement international and continental human rights treaties, persistent crisis and conflicts across the continent which result in loss of life, destruction of property and reverse human rights gains, widespread poverty, inequality, vestiges of colonialism characterized by human rights unfriendly laws, bad governance, corruption and disregard for the rule of law.

Currently, the continent has moved from the usual norms setting to implementation and institutional development in the field of human and peoples' rights in general and the rights of women in particular. These have been demonstrated through the adoption of several human rights instruments, declarations and plans of actions, as well as the establishment of human and peoples' rights mechanisms. As a commitment to move from norm-setting to norm implementation, the AU Heads of State and Government meeting in Kigali, Rwanda, in July of this year declared the next 10 years as **"the Human and Peoples' Rights Decade in Africa"**

These opportunities and achievements also provide the continent with enough reasons to be optimistic. The success of the AU, including the implementation of Agenda 2063, and its first ten-year implementation plan, will depend to a large extent on the importance accorded to the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human and peoples' rights, particularly the rights of women, on the continent. To be effective, and to achieve its goal, the African Union must integrate democratic governance, respect for the rule of law and respect for human and peoples' rights at all levels. If Africa is to be economically and democratically transformed as envisioned in the Agenda 2063, together with its positive spin-offs, it must be committed to women's rights.

Women are the backbone of Africa's socio-economic development and structural transformation. Since the early 1990s, when many African countries opened up their political systems through regular multi-party elections, several African countries have increased women's representation in decision-making structures. Some African countries, including Burkina Faso and Uganda have constitutional provisions reserving seats in National Parliament for women, while in some other countries political parties adopted internal rules to include a certain percentage of women as candidates for political offices.

Before I conclude this statement, it is important to indicate that one of the most important continental instruments today in the advancement of good and democratic governance, constitutionalism and rule of law in Africa is the African Charter on Democracy governance, Elections and Governance; adopted in January 2007, the Charter has been signed by 41 Member States out of the 54 but only 24 have thus far ratified it. In this our human rights development journey, we believe all key stakeholders must be on board to expedite the ratification of this important instrument. Without the support, contribution

and commitment of all the African Union policy making organs and the people of Africa, it will be difficult to promote democracy and good governance as African Shared Values.

As we commemorate the 2016 Africa Human Rights Day, I wish to seize this opportunity to call on all AU Member States to ratify all the African Shared Values Instruments and domesticate them at the national level. The time has come for all stakeholders to collectively promote and protect human and peoples' rights on the continent and in particular, the rights of women. AU Member States should take stock of what they have done so far to entrench establish a culture of respect for human rights on the continent, and what they can do to enhance the enjoyment of peace and development in Africa.

In conclusion, it is important to bear in mind that there can be no sustainable socio-economic development and peace in Africa without respect for human rights. *Let us, therefore, join hands together to promote and protect human rights to guarantee inclusive and socio-economic development and durable peace in Africa.*

I thank you.