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**STATEMENT BY**

**H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma**

**CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**At the Opening Ceremony of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the African Union  
Ministers of Women's Affairs and Gender**

**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

**14 May 2013**

**Chairperson of the Bureau of Ministers,**

**Host Minister of Women and Youth Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,**

**Sister and Vice President of Gambia, who has been here for 3 days discussing women issues,**

**Ministers in charge of Women Affairs,**

**Experts from Member States**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is with great pleasure that I join you, this morning at this 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the African Union Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs. It is the first one I am attending and I am happy that I was asked by the Programme Director to come and speak to you.

I would like to thank you for your messages of congratulations that I received on my election as the Chairperson in July 2012. I also received messages from many women on the continent.

I will concentrate on what is happening at the AUC, as you know more about what is happening at national level.

**Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen**

This meeting takes place at a very critical time, when we are celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the OAU/AU. This celebration should give us a unique opportunity,

as citizens and women, to reflect at what has happened around women since the establishment of the OAU in 1963, and ascertain what progress we have made as women, and where we want to go in the next 50 years. We should do this in the context of Africa looking at itself as *an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena.*

As we go forward, the main issues are about unity, an integrated Africa, at peace with its self and driven by its citizens. We have always said this but we have not always put it into practice. The AU is not an organization of governments only; it must be driven by its citizens.

While indeed we have made some progress in the past, we must acknowledge that it is not enough. Even at pre-colonial times, women have always played a critical role in their civilizations. But of course patriarchy has always been part of our systems - except for a few countries, it is a global issue. Even during the fight against slavery and colonialism, and before the establishment of the OAU, African women came together to establish PAWO, in the spirit of Pan Africanism.

Women continued to struggle, not only for themselves, but for the rest of humanity. That is why women emancipation is the emancipation of everyone. Historically, women played an important part in the family. Even today, if you give the resources of the family to a woman, you will know that the family will be looked after. They will make sure the children are fed, they go to school, and ensure that all members of the family are well looked after. Empowering women

is therefore empowering a nation. Women rights are human rights. The emancipation of women is not about fighting men, and it cannot be about fighting men. Women give birth to men and women. How can it be that they give birth to men, only to fight them? The emancipation of women is about them reaching their full potential, and contributing to the nation. It should not threaten anyone, but be embraced by everyone. Unfortunately, women have not always received the support that they need.

If we look at the Constitutive Act of the AU, the principles of gender parity are enshrined. The AU also adopted the Protocol to the Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on The Rights of Women in Africa, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, (SDGEA), the AU Gender Policy and the declared 2010-2020 as the African Women's Decade, We therefore have many continental and global instruments. If we were just to implement what we have agreed on, without adding many more legal instruments, we would be very far.

Unfortunately, we have not implemented our protocols, declarations, or even our Constitutive Act. Nevertheless, women have been resilient, they struggle, but we would like to invite every one to work with us so that we make progress.

At AU, we need to celebrate the achievements of the continent, and women. We are working with ECA and UNESCO, to see if we can produce a book that will celebrate the achievements of women over the past 50 years. The challenge is that even though women have played an important part, it has not been documented. There is therefore a need to research what they have done. We are seeking the research capacity from UNESCO and ECA so that in the next year we

can have a book that celebrates the achievements of women and their participation in the struggle. We will therefore ask you to contribute from your countries, whom you consider as women who have contributed to bringing us to where we are, so that they can be recognized.

The second aspect is about thinking about where we want to go. Our forbearers ensured that today we are all free men and women. They ensured that they bequeathed to us a better Africa than the one they found and lived in. Especially the women, they have bequeathed us a better baseline for women equality. It is incumbent upon us that we leave a better world for our children.

We had a workshop for women on Sunday and Monday (12-13 May), comprising of women from across all sectors and age groups, including founder members of PAWO, and that is where the Vice President and some of you were. We had very important discussions. This is in line with trying to implement what is expected of us; that this Union should be driven by its people. The women had discussions on the theme of the Summit, and reflected on where we want to be as women in the next 50 years.

In the course of the discussion, one women articulated her vision by saying that in the next 50 years, our grand children will be asking: What was this gender discrimination about? This will be because by then, all women will be emancipated. Gender discrimination will be history. In SA for example, people born after 1994 are asking: “what was this apartheid? You mean our women were minors”? This is because if one was not married, they would have their

unemployed son to help them to open an account. Women were seen as minors for the rest of their lives. So today, emancipated young women are asking; what that was all about? So, this is the kind of conversation we want our grandchildren to have in 50 years.

We hope that going forward we can define the steps that will take us towards that conversation.

Right now, we think that we have made progress because we can count that we have two female presidents, less than ten countries have 30% women in Parliament, and we have a number of successful women in business. However, real progress should be when we can no longer count. Men do not count when a male president gets elected. Women's progress should be when we no longer have to count.

During the two days discussion, a young woman asked why we cannot have women Chairpersons of the AU Commission for the next 50 years. Men have done it. It will just mean that we have made progress. We must just decide where we want to be, but also how we want to get there.

At the AUC, we have been tasked with developing our own strategy (2014-2017), and an AU-wide strategy. So we are working on a 50-year framework, which will point to the direction we want to take, and the steps to get us there. Then we can all develop, within that framework our short to medium term action plans. The Framework will not be ready immediately; we need to consult all institutions

and citizens in their various formations. When we put this framework together, it must be a framework where Africans have had a say. The two-day workshop I mention earlier was about that. We also said in the workshop that each and every one of the participants must go back, and engage with citizens locally.

The Strategic Plan, which the AUC is working on, has been reviewed by the Executive Council, and will be adjusted as soon as the Heads of State and Government have adopted the 2063 framework.

We have also identified a few priorities, which we have to focus on if we are to be prosperous and peaceful. This does not mean that other things will not be done.

As a start, we have asked ourselves what assets we have, and how we can use them to attain prosperity and peace. We have said that the most precious of our resources/assets is our people. We need to invest in our people. This means investing in women, youth, and everybody. There must be access to healthcare, we must reduce child mortality, and improve the general well being of our people. In the area of education we must go beyond universal education and focus on higher education, science and technology, and innovation, for both young women and men. If we invest enough in the young population we have, this population will be one of the drivers for the future of the continent. But if we do not invest in the youth, they will be our greatest liability. When young people are restless and cannot reach their potential, they will be involved in revolutions.

We also said we must invest in agriculture. 75% of workers in agriculture are women. We must invest so that women also become farmers and entrepreneurs for processing what is being produced.

I am talking at length with you because you are the law-makers. Women must have access to land, finance, technology, so that they can progress to farmers who make a great living from farming. The continent is spending billions importing food, even though we have vast amounts of arable land. The money we spend on importing food can go into funding development. So we would like to work with you so that we convince governments to put money into agriculture.

We have also prioritized infrastructure and transport-in all its diversity; road rail, air and ports.

Indeed, if we are integrating, why can we not dream that those same grandchildren can visit Cairo from Cape Town and Dakar on a speed train. It happens in other continents, so why can it not happen here?

We also need to think how to use technology to leapfrog the various stages of infrastructure development.

In the next few years, India and China will be sending to the world more than 300 million tourists. What proportion of that will be coming to Africa? If we do not have infrastructure, they will not come, despite the endowments we have in tourist products.



We need to invest in energy. If we do not have energy, girls will fetch firewood, instead of going to school. This is in addition to fact that we cannot industrialise. But from a gender perspective, girls and women are disadvantaged, because they are the ones to fetch firewood, firewood smoke is also not good for health.

There is a World Bank study that shows that if we provide energy, women can go into much more productive activities. The same applies with water. Our policies must ensure that we provide water so that women are free to do all the other things that will make Africa prosperous.

ICT is also very important. Africa is second biggest consumer of telephones, after Asia. But we do not make them, we just consume. So when we get our young people into science and technology, they can also innovate and create technology.

Trade can only flourish when we have infrastructure. Compared to other regions, Africa has the lowest level of intra-regional trade. But all this will not happen if we do not have peace, and good governance.

We also have youth and women as priorities. We have also prioritized resource mobilization, as well as strengthening of our institutions.

But if we take women out, we will never be prosperous, never be at peace, if we do not include women and youth.

Women have always been the protectors of the environment, because they survive from the environment.

We also have short-term goals. 3 years into the 10 years of the African Women's Decade, we need to implement this. We are working with UNDP to implement some of the basket of issues for women in a number of areas, including women in business and agriculture, women in political leadership, as well as budgeting. We want to invite a lot of partners to work with us on this. Women in leadership is very important. If we had enough women leaders in decision making, we would not be talking about access to water. By putting women in position, we ensure that development is people-centred.

We therefore rely on you to ensure that women are part of every endeavor for prosperity and peace, so that our continent can reach its full potential.

Thank you