



DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

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Women are special breed, there's no task which women cannot do - President Robert Mugabe



Johannesburg, South Africa - 14 June 2015: *“Whenever I think of the virtues and the indomitable spirit that epitomizes the African woman, I am reminded of the heroines across the African continent, who stood up against the forces of colonialism and occupation,”* President Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe and current Chairperson of the African Union said as he described the heroics of the African woman. He was addressing the opening ceremony of the 25th Assembly of African Union Heads of State and Government, on Sunday 14 June 2015, in Johannesburg, South Africa.



During his address, President Mugabe recounted the important role played by women for many years, while acknowledging the need for more to be done in line with the AU theme for the year, “Women’s empowerment and development towards Agenda 2063.”

He cited the examples of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, amongst others, whom he described as trailblazers and living testimonies of women leadership. He cited the role they played in the fight against Ebola, adding that today Liberia is free of Ebola.

President Mugabe, however, said though much had been achieved, a lot more still needs to be done, particularly in the areas of economic empowerment and decision-making. He expressed the wish to see the Summit engaging in open and frank discussions aimed at empowering the women of Africa.



On her part, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma reflected on a number of issues, including the opportunities presented by Africa's Agenda 2063, lessons learned from the fight against the Ebola Virus Disease, the blue economy, its demography especially with women and youth constituting a greater majority of the population. She highlighted the need for the continent to remain focused on its transformation agenda, to ensure that the continent achieves its vision of “an

integrated, prosperous, peaceful and people-centered Africa which is a dynamic force in the world.”



After congratulating President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Dr. Dlamini Zuma reflected on the fight against the Ebola Virus Disease, which has been stopped in Liberia, but is still affecting Guinea and Sierra Leone. The AU Commission Chairperson said the lesson learned from the epidemic is that, “with African solidarity and resolve, we can find our own solutions to our challenges.” She said the disease exposed the weaknesses of Africa's health systems, especially public

health, noting the need to train more health workers, and build and strengthen Africa's health systems and infrastructure.

During the opening ceremony, the AU Commission Chairperson took the opportunity to present tillers to the Heads of State and Government. She said the tillers were meant to replace the handheld hoes that should be sent to the museum, a request that had been made by women farmers during Agenda 2063 consultations.

Presenting one tiller each to President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and President Macky Sall of Senegal, she invited the other Heads of State and Government to collect theirs to take back home.



South African President Mr. Jacob Zuma, who is host of the summit, delivered the official welcome statement. He called for the realization of the aspirations of Agenda 2063. “The expectations from our people are high and we cannot fail in the implementation of

Agenda 2063 to redefine, lead and fund our own development and the future”, he said.

Other speakers at the Summit included Mr Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestine Liberation Organisation; Secretary General of the League of Arab States Mr. Nabil Elaraby; new Heads of State and Government of AU member states such as President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, President Hage Geingob of Namibia, President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi of Mozambique and Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Outgoing President of Tanzania, Mr. Jakaya Kiwete also addressed the opening of the Summit.

The 25th AU Summit ends on 15th June with the adoption of key decisions and resolutions. A final press conference will be held immediately after the closing ceremony, to which members of the media are invited.

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