

H.E. Former President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, AWLN Patron

HE Minister Nkosazana Dhlamini Zuma, Minister for women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

H.E Mme Loun Yacout Zaido, Minister of Health, Solidarity, Social Protection and Gender Promotion of the Union of Comoros

HE Bineta Diop (Special Envoy on women, Peace and Security, (AUC).

All protocol observed

Ladies and Gentleman

Allow me to extend my sincere gratitude to the government and the people of South Africa led by his Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa for your hospitality.

As we have all converged here for the 3rd African Union Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity in Leadership to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

This could not be more timely & neither is it a ticking bomb. It's a bomb already. Young women and girls rights have been continuously violated for a longtime. This issue has been passed from generation to generation and we cannot afford this to be passed to the future generation to deal with the consequences , if we do not attend to it now.

What is even more alarming is Research by the Commission for Gender Equality found while cases of gender-based violence (GBV) are increasing, there is also a concerning rate of criminal cases being withdrawn.

The findings also depicted the alarming withdrawal of cases by victims, high levels of poverty and distance from police stations and courts as some hindering factors for victims' ability to access justice. This means we need our duty bearers to do more & provide access for the under privileged & marginalized who cannot even be with us in this room today and perhaps some not even accounted for.

But while the issue above is an issue of responding, one case has become to many. It is worrisome that recent figures reported shows that South Africa recorded a shocking staggering number of 10 818 women that were raped in just the quarter of 2022. A total of 87 thousand women were intentionally killed in the world of which 19 thousand were from Africa. Meaning that 137 women are killed every single day. That's someone daughter, someone's sister, someone's mother. It is worrisome. As we speak right now a young women's destiny is being cut short due to this inhuman act.

While gender-based violence affects women and children of all ages, in East and Southern Africa, adolescents and young women are particularly at risk. The risk of experiencing gender based violence remains high between 46% and 78% among adolescent girls. In addition Youth in conflict contexts are particularly vulnerable to gendered violence. The case of rising violence globally and in some countries on our continent remains a concern on our peace & security.

Gender-based violence is not a women's-only issue nor is it an only-male problem. It is a human issue, a societal issue, a continental issue which breaks down to a national issue.

Violence against women is pervasive, including on digital spaces. Worldwide, data from The Economist Intelligence Unit indicates that 38 per cent of women with Internet access have personally experienced online violence. Some have been lured in human trafficking, ultimately resulting in physical abuse. How ironic that the same tools used to transform and develop the world globally, are the same tools utilized to harm us. How do we create the balance. It clearly needs all sectors on board and all hands on deck.

Whilst I acknowledge the efforts made, starting with this forum to which our mothers have created and rallied policy makers , showing a positive step taken by our African leaders towards combating gender based violence by making it a top priority on our continent's agenda for women rights.

But it remains a dream for us to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030, Eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres.

We call upon our respective leaders to put in place legislations that protect our women and girls and that we also teach our young men and boys to respect women at a tender age. This also has a family dynamic.

Ladies and gentlemen I will end my statement with a quote made by the late South African President Nelson Mandela during his 1996 speech , calling for full equality and an end to sexual violence against women which is 27 years ago to the issues we still dealing with now.

I quote "As long as women are bound by poverty and as long as they are looked down upon, human rights will lack substance"