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Statement by H.E. Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa

Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission

On the occasion of the

**3rd Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity in Leadership to End Violence
Against Women and Girls**

28 November, 2023
Pretoria
South Africa

- Your Excellency Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa
- Your Excellency Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of Comoros and 2023 AU Chairperson
- Your Excellency Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
- Your Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of the Republic of Liberia and Patron of the African Women Leaders Network
- Your Excellency Catherine Samba Panza, former President of the Central Africa Republic
- Your Excellency Bineta Diop, AUC Chairperson' s Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security
- Members of the South African Cabinet
- Members of the Delegation from Comoros accompanying the President
- AU Ministers in Charge of Gender and Women's Affairs
- Your Majesties and Royal Highnesses
- Representatives of United Nations Agencies
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Members of Civil Society Organisations
- Representatives of the Private Sector and of the Academia,
- Women and Youth Leaders
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to deliver this statement during the 3rd edition of the Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity in Leadership to End Violence Against Women and Girls. I bring you warm greetings from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, on whose behalf I am delivering these remarks. He would have liked to participate, as he did during the last two Conferences, however he was seized with equally important priorities that needed his personal attention. Nonetheless he gave his blessings and wishes us a successful event.

I would like to express appreciation to H.E. President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa and by extension, the people of the Republic of South Africa for their unmatched generosity and hospitality and for affording us this opportunity to experience the rich South African history, heritage and culture that has permeated not only the entire Continent, but the world at large.

This Conference convenes at a significant time in the African Women's Rights Calendar as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights, Africa's Bill of Rights for women. One of the key implementation principles of this legislative framework relates to strategic partnerships as demonstrated today by the partnership between two African Union Member States, South Africa and Comoros who have joined hands to convene this important meeting. On this note, I wish to congratulate H.E. Azali Assoumani, President of the Union of Comoros and 2023 AU Chairperson and H.E. President Ramaphosa for their excellent leadership in jointly hosting this 3rd AU Men's Conference.

I would be remiss if I do not recognize my elder, H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who pioneered the Men's Conferences and my sister Mme Bineta Diop, the AUC Chairperson's Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security for her facilitation of the Men's Conferences. Similarly, I extend tons of gratitude to our senior leaders here present, for always gracing Men's Conferences with their presence.

**Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Please allow me to pay a special tribute to the South African women who marched to the Union Buildings, then the seat of the apartheid government, to protest against the extension of Pass Laws to women. This march left an enduring mark in the minds and hearts of all women in Africa, that when women come together in one accord, change is indeed possible. Inspired by the resilience and relentless spirit of the 1956 women's march, the women of Africa continue to lead battles against gender-based violence. In that same spirit as that of the 1956 women's march that contributed to the fall of apartheid, Gender Based Violence will too fall in Africa!

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

It gives me great pleasure to report to this meeting, that following your calls for the AU to adopt a legal mechanism to strengthen efforts to end violence against women in Africa and drawing from the outcomes of the first two Men's Conferences, the AU Heads of State and Government during their 36th Assembly held from 18 to 19 February 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, adopted a historic decision to negotiate the AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU CEVAWG).

Once adopted, the Convention will be the first continental legal instrument for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, showing African leadership and influencing global standards in efforts to protect women and girls. As the African Union Commission, we expect the full participation of the AU citizens in shaping this important legal instrument.

I'm also pleased to report that in furtherance of both the Kinshasa Declaration and Dakar Call to Action, the AU Campaign on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls as well as the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index were duly launched during the High-Level Conference to mark the 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol. In addition, the Circle of Heads of State Champions on Positive Masculinity is fully established. AU Member States have on their part, developed a rich array of legal, policy and institutional mechanisms to combat Violence Against Women and Girls as the work to finalise the Common African position on Positive Masculinity continues. We successfully convened, the 2nd International Conference on Ending Female Genital Mutilation where fresh commitments were secured and new strategies were adopted to end FGM in Africa. Although Violence Against Women and Girls still persists, Africa is unyielding in its efforts to push back on this scourge and we believe working together, we can indeed win this battle.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

We are mindful of the linkages between the lack of economic and financial inclusion with vulnerability to violence and as a form of structural violence itself. It is for this reason that I launched the African Union Women and Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion Initiative (WYFEI), which among others, will unlock financing for African women and youth entrepreneurs and mobilize key stakeholders to provide financial products and services for African women and youth. We believe that addressing the underlying structural drivers of violence against women and girls will yield better and long-term results for the women of Africa.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As we are meeting under the auspicious skies of the Rainbow Nation, I would like to recall the statement of the Founding Father of this Nation, H.E. Nelson Mandela on 08 May, 1994 in the South African Parliament in Cape Town when he said “***Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. Our endeavors must be about the liberation of the woman, the emancipation of the man and the liberty of the child***”. The wisdom of this statement comes to bear especially on a day such as this as we are gathered to discuss how positive masculinity in leadership can support efforts to end violence against women and girls, so that they are fully emancipated and liberated. This is consistent with Goal 17 of Pillar 6 of Agenda 2063, which *prioritizes* ending Violence Against Women and Girls as a means to the prosperous and peaceful Africa that we all want.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

As I close, I would like to recall the words of another son of Africa, Thomas Sankara, the late President of Burkina Faso on International Women’s Day, 8 March 1987, when he said: “***Inequality can be done away with only by establishing a new society where men and women will enjoy equal rights, resulting from an upheaval in the means of production and in all social relations. Thus, the status of women will improve only with the elimination of the system that exploits them.***”

These words are as relevant today as they were in 1987. As we continue to look for solutions to end violence against women and girls, we have to be deliberate about dismantling the patriarchal systems and other harmful traditional systems that subjugate women and expose them to violence and inequality. This cycle has to stop and it is all in our hands. On this note, I wish to reiterate the commitment of the African Union Commission to continue to work with you to end this scourge of violence against women and girls. Please count on us to jointly implement the outcomes of this 3rd Men’s

Conference and to facilitate all processes towards the negotiations and adoption of the AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. **THANK YOU!**