



MESSAGE OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION OF THE AFRICAN UNION, MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT, ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**To all African citizens,
To all the women and girls of our continent,**

Addis Ababa, 8 March 2018: The 30th Session of the Summit of the African Union, held in January 2018, strengthened our common will resolve to positively transform the lives of the more than 600 million African women and girls living in rural as well as urban areas.

The adoption of a decision on the principle of parity by 2025 in all professional functions in the organs and institutions of our Union represents a major step forward.

In order to attain these noble objectives, I have made it a priority mission, together with my colleagues in the Commission, to mobilise all the necessary human, material and financial resources for the accelerated transformation of the status of women and youth. In so doing, we commit ourselves to actually implement the aspirations and commitments of Agenda 2063.

As I said on 4 December 2017, on the occasion of the *16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women and Girls*, sexual harassment, in any form, will not be tolerated. As the head of our institution, I make it my duty to ensure the compliance with our Code of Ethics and a Zero Tolerance Policy!

Furthermore, we will ensure the integration of women and girls, as well as young people, in the process of implementing all the flagship projects of Agenda 2063, in order to lay a strong and lasting foundation for the progressive and inclusive transformation of our continent and the realisation of the vision of an integrated and prosperous, conflict free Africa, playing its rightful in the international arena.

I hereby reaffirm our strong commitment to combat corruption, the theme of our Organisation for 2018. Indeed, the many illegal transactions and violence of which quite often the victims are women working in the cross-border informal sector constitute obstacles to the economic development of our continent.

We seize this happy opportunity of the Women's Annual celebration to congratulate those of our Member States which have excelled in the integration of women into governance structures. We also encourage our Member States to honour the commitments contained in the Solemn Declaration of the African Union Assembly on Gender Equality.

I congratulate the 24 countries that have so far launched campaigns to combat child marriage. I encourage all the other States to follow this example and take the necessary action expected of them in the course of 2018.

The celebration on 6 February, of the International Day of Zero Tolerance against Female Genital Mutilation also bears testimony to our commitment to end these harmful traditional practices by 2030.

We are also committed to improving the living conditions of rural women. In this respect, the following measures are of crucial importance: the modernisation of agriculture, access to family inheritance, schooling of girls, reduction of infant mortality and deaths following childbirth, bearing in mind the imperative of ensuring that no woman should die giving life, the resolute pursuit of the fight against HIV/AIDS, of which women are the main victims, access to funding for the projects on women empowerment and many other outlined in the 2003 Maputo Protocol.

On this 8 March, I reiterate my call for concrete, decisive and lasting actions. The promotion of women is not a favour, but an imperative need for the respect of human dignity and the development of the continent.

I encourage women and girls of Africa to take their destiny into their own hands, seizing every opportunity to affirm their rights as stipulated in our relevant legal instruments.

On this 8 March, I appeal to all of us, women and men, to step up the pace for progress so that, as the Chairman of our Union, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, so rightly slated, the role and the rights of girls be fully recognised.

Happy celebration to African women and girls