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## **RELEASE**

**The African Women Leaders Network discusses the formation of an African Women's Fund among other initiatives to enhance women's leadership in transforming Africa**



**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 24 April 2018-** Following its first launch at the High-Level Women Leaders Forum for Africa's Transformation at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in June 2017, the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) supported by the African Union Commission, UN Women, and the Federal Republic of Germany, is convening the Second Women Leaders Forum for Africa's Transformation: a groundbreaking

initiative, which seeks to enhance the leadership of women in the transformation of Africa with a focus on governance, peace, stability and development, and on creating space for African women to take leadership positions and share experiences and lessons learned.

During the three day meeting, holding from 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> April, the forum will agree on strategies to implement the aspirations and vision of the network; initiate flagship projects and develop a "Plan of Action" to deliver on priority areas, including the African Women Leadership Fund; as well as define the organizational structure and communication strategy of the platform. The forum aspires to ensure implementation of the commitments for gender equality and the empowerment of women that were made by members of the network through their "Call to Action" in June 2017.

Before the opening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Forum, members of the African Women Leaders Network, together with the AU and UN, paid tribute to the late icon Winnie Madikizela Mandela.

In his opening remarks, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, who received HeForShe Champion distinction from Dr Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka, welcomed the participants to the AU HQ, and highlighted the commitments made on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017, regarding the launch of the Network for supporting the AU Agenda 2063 and UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. He



stressed on the role of women in the implementation of the African Union roadmap in silencing the guns by 2020, keeping in mind that women and girls are the biggest victims of armed conflicts in Africa. “We are also here to celebrate the progress made and formally establish the Network” added the Chairperson.

The AUC Chairperson announced the partnership between the African Union and the United Nations, to launch and establish an African Women Leadership Fund to support initiatives by women entrepreneurs in areas defined by women themselves. He shed light on the institutional reforms to enhance the effectiveness of the African continental body and stated that gender equality and women empowerment are central to this endeavor. The Chairperson also informed the meeting that the January 2018 AU Summit decided to set a target of 2025 for gender parity

In her statement, the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, called for greater numbers of women in parliaments, cabinets, and leadership positions in Africa. Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka stressed the importance of intergenerational dialogue, solidarity and partnership to advance women’s leadership on issues of development and economic growth. She further underlined the need for enhanced support to ensure the sustainability of the network, and noted the role played by the Group of Friends for the “African Women Leaders Network.”



“We align ourselves with the AU and AU leaders in their mission to champion and support gender equality” underlined the Executive Director of UN Women.

H.E Brita Wagener the Germany Ambassador in Addis Ababa assured the gathering of her country's continuous support for the network activities, so as to make a difference in Africa.

The second forum mobilized more than 120 women leaders from various sectors across Africa, including the founding members of the network, eminent women leaders from the political and public sectors, business, civil society and the media. The meeting witnessed the participation of the leadership of the African Union Commission, including the Deputy Chairperson H.E Ambassador Kwesi Quartey, Commissioner for Political Affairs, H.E Minata Samate Cessouma, the Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, H.E. Bineta Diop and the Director for Women, Gender and Development Mrs Mahawa Kaba Wheeler. Senior UN officials included the UN Women Representative to Ethiopia, the AU Commission and the ECA Ms Letty Chiwara, and Ms Thokozile Ruzvidzo Director of Social Policy Division at the ECA. The former President of the Republic of Malawi, H.E. Joyce Banda, and the former Deputy President of the Republic of Zimbabwe H.E Joice Mujuru, ministers and other senior officials were also in attendance.

Since its launch, the African Women Leaders Network adopted an action-oriented approach through high level solidarity missions to conflict affected countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Nigeria in July 2017, the launch of a Group of Friends of the Network to the United Nations in New York chaired by Ghana with Germany as vice chair, and the creation of National Chapters in the DRC and Cote d'Ivoire. The African Women Leaders Network is working on initiating an African Women Leadership Fund to support women led activities on the continent, in line with the objectives and aspirations of the call to action.

**For further information on the network, please contact:**

**Mrs. Wynne MUSABAYANA,**  
Head of Communication, African Union Commission  
[MusabayanaW@africa-union.org](mailto:MusabayanaW@africa-union.org)

**Ms. Verlaine-Diane SOOBROYDOO,**  
Policy Adviser on Women, Peace and Security at the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations  
[verlaine.soobroydoo@unwomen.org](mailto:verlaine.soobroydoo@unwomen.org);

**Mr. Alpha BA,**  
Regional Communications Specialist, UN Women West and Central Africa  
[alpha.ba@unwomen.org](mailto:alpha.ba@unwomen.org).