

AFRICAN UNION

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UNION AFRICAINE

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STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Africa,

This year, we dedicate the International Women's Day to all our sisters and brothers who are victims of the scourge of forced displacement on the Continent.

This echoes the theme of the African Union for the year 2019. The Declaration adopted on this issue by the February 2019 Summit outlines a set of practical measures relating to all aspects of the problem. The objective is to better pool our efforts to find a lasting solution to this scourge and to improve access to basic services and infrastructure for the millions of Africans who are either internally displaced or crossed national borders to seek refuge elsewhere.

Our Continent has been at the forefront of the struggle to protect victims of forced displacement. As early as 1969, the Organisation of African Unity adopted the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. In 2009, the Kampala Convention on Assistance and Protection of Internally Displaced Persons - the first of its kind in the world - supplemented this legal landmark.

On the ground, and despite the meagre resources available to them, host countries and local communities have continuously shown generosity and hospitality towards the affected people.

These efforts have been complemented by those dealing with the root causes of forced displacement, through renewed action for conflict prevention and resolution, the promotion of human rights and the improvement of the daily lot of our peoples.

In spite of this multifaceted and long standing commitment, the sad reality is that Africa is now home to a quarter of the population in forced displacement in the world.

Girls and women are the main victims of this scourge, exposed as they are to all sorts of atrocities, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

African girls and women are bearing the brunt of this situation on the Continent because of the violence that characterizes conflicts, instability and the multiple acts of discrimination they are subjected to and which are linked to age old prejudices.

They are also bearing the brunt because of rising national egoism and intolerance, as well as the concomitant erosion of the right to asylum. The human hecatomb, of which the Mediterranean Sea is the theatre, is a stark reminder of this reality.

During my visits to different crisis and conflict zones, I witnessed the plight of displaced persons, the unspeakable suffering they experience and their resilience in the face of adversity. I also noted the solidarity of the host countries and communities, their sense of sharing and the humanity that imbues them.

This 8 March affords us the opportunity to pay tribute to the women of the Continent, to our mothers and sisters, who work tirelessly for peace, security and harmony. They make peace, nurture and cultivate it in our homes, our schools, our religious centers, our markets and across our borders.

Their perseverance and courage are worthy of admiration and are a source of inspiration for all those who are labouring for a better world.

We witness this commitment at all levels.

It manifests itself in actions taken at the level of national governance structures; in initiatives launched by women within the framework of our Union and its Regional Economic Communities - as shown by the African women mediators grouped within FemWise-Africa; in joint efforts with the United Nations, including through the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN); in everyday civic action, where the gestures of solidarity, compassion and care for others abound.

The launch of the Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment at the February Summit will create a stronger momentum for all these efforts. Among other objectives, it aims at ensuring respect for the dignity and integrity of women in times of peace and conflict.

On this day, I would like to reiterate my tribute to those Member States that have taken bold steps to give women their full place in their decision-making processes. I urge the other Member States to do the same.

At the level of the Commission, no stone will be left unturned to attain the objective of full gender parity by 2025, in parallel with increasing the role of young people within our Union. In so doing, we will consolidate the tangible progress made with the parity composition of the leadership of the Commission.

Joyous celebration.