



## DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

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### **African Ministers adopt Common African Position for more women in leadership positions**

African Union Ministers in charge of Gender and Women's Affairs on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2021, adopted the Common African Position (CAP) that seeks to advance women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life as well as the elimination of violence for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in Africa. The consensus is part of the strategy to ensure the continent and aspirations of African women and girls are well articulated at the global discourse at the United Nations 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65) to be held from 15 to 26 March 2021.

In a meeting convened virtually, the Ministers forged consensus on broadly, five key messages that speak to; the urgent need to strengthen the comprehensive legal and regulatory frameworks through legal reforms to enhance women's participation and representation in public life and eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and regulations; gender mainstreaming in COVID-19 responses and recovery; prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women in public life, and the protection of survivors of violence; championing for change in negative gender social norms on women's leadership and participation in public life; and increasing the availability of financing in support of women's participation in public life.

The Common African Position is aligned to the call for action at the 65th session of the CSW that is focused on "women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls". The CAP makes great import of the continuous struggle for women across the African continent spanning several centuries in the pursuit of parity and equal representation of women in public life. In recent years, progress has been recorded as African governments, public and private institutions implement gender-responsive actions, however, women remain highly

under-represented in the executive, legislative and judicial branches and political party rosters, national institutions, the civil service, as well as in the broader workforce.

This has been attributed to existing and emerging challenges including the limited awareness among men and women on women's rights; unequal power relations, poverty, low access to education; inadequate sex and age disaggregated data on economic disparities; negative traditional norms; the limited database of women qualified for decision-making roles; the limited political will among the authorities to enforce temporary special measures for women including quotas for political party nominations and create women friendly human resource policies in the public sector; limited funds to implement action plans promoting women's rights; and ineffective lobbying and engagement by women's organizations.

The CAP builds on existing commitments at the international and regional levels, in particular Africa's Agenda 2063; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), the Programme for Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (PAICPD); Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDGs) as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) and the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. It also restates the responsibility by governments to develop national policies and priorities in accordance with their international and regional obligations and commitments to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women.

The nexus between women's participation in public life and other crucial rights such as social protection, the right to education, maternal and reproductive health, social protection, the protection from all forms of violence, and access to land and resources to enable women's access to public life, was also underscored by the Ministers.

Conscious of the negative impact of COVID 19, the CAP seeks to consolidate and promote accumulated gains to ensure the gains are not reversed. The Ministers in 2020, adopted the African Union [Gender Responsive Responses](#) to ensure COVID-19 recovery, response, and stimulus packages are made available to both men and women equally and not to leave women and girls behind.

Despite women making up about 50 per cent of the African population, they remain largely underrepresented in leadership roles across financial, investment and entrepreneurial markets. As a result of these longstanding gender gaps, the continent loses over 20 per cent of its GDP every year. H.E Dr. Véronique Tognifode Mewanou,

Minister of Social Affairs and Microfinance of the Republic of Benin, Chairperson of the Bureau of the Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, underscored the importance for the continent to speak with one voice to realize the full gains of gender equality and women's empowerment. She stated, "social justice, equality and women empowerment are prerequisite for both the growth of men and women within nations and between nations. We must clear the obstacles that hamper women in leadership positions or from getting the leadership positions."

Through its legal and binding treaties such as the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights and its Protocol on the Rights of Women (Maputo Protocol), the African Union has made gender equality and women's empowerment one of its priorities. The treaties have translated into political commitments at the level of Heads of State and Government, through the adoption of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, the AU Gender Policy, and the just launched AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018-2028.

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, in a message delivered on his behalf by the outgoing Deputy Chairperson, Amb. Kwesi Quartey noted that despite having these policies in place, women are far from being treated fairly in public services. He stated, "as voters, women constitute the primary pool on which candidates crystallize in order to have the most relevant democratic legitimation by virtue of the majority of universal suffrage. Informally, they are undoubtedly the strong link in all our countries as key players in local small businesses, traditional agriculture, and crafts. They are the backbone of family life. In conflicts and crises, they are, unfortunately, once again on the front lines, victims of the belligerents' atrocities."

UN Undersecretary General and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Dr. Vera Songwe, in remarks delivered on her behalf by Ms. Thokozile Ruzvidzo, UNECA Director, Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division, emphasized the need for stringent policy directive to end impunity and bring justice to victims to ensure that violence against women and girls does not continue to undermine and erode gains made by member states to realize their gender equality commitments. Her sentiments were echoed by Ms Letty Chiwara, UN Women Representative to Ethiopia, Africa Union Commission and UNECA, who underscored the need to Africa to take stock of the progress in eliminating gender and sex-based discrimination.

During the meeting, the AU Commission also launched the [African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#) (GEWE) as a framework document to

strengthen women's agency in Africa and ensure that women's voices are amplified and their concerns fully addressed through, among others, effective implementation of legislation and proper financing of gender equality work.

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