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African Union and the United Nations Signs the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme 2.0 Agreement

The African Union (AU) and the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) formalized their strategic collaboration through the signing of the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme 2.0 (SIARP) Agreement. This agreement builds on the successes of SIARP 1.0 (2020–2023), reinforcing the robust partnership that has driven transformative action towards gender equality and the eradication of violence against women and girls (VAWG), including harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage across the continent. The agreement marks a step in consolidating the tripartite cooperation between the African Union, the European Union, and the United Nations. It aims to sustain the momentum achieved



under SIARP 1.0, fostering policy harmonization, capacity-building, and community-led interventions that address harmful practices and promote women's empowerment.

Left: H.E. Amb. Nino Perez, middle: H.E. Amb. Minata Samate Cessouma, right: Mr. Yacoub Ali El-Hillo.

The signing ceremony followed the Declaration of Intent, jointly endorsed by H.E. Amb. Minata Samate Cessouma, AU Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs, and Social Development; Mr. Yacoub Ali El-Hillo, Regional Director for Africa at UNDCO; and H.E. Nino Perez, European Union Ambassador to the African Union. This high-level commitment signals a renewed dedication to coordinated action in eliminating violence against women and girls in Africa, while upholding the principles of gender equality and human rights.

H.E. Amb. Minata Samate Cessouma underscored the transformative impact of SIARP 1.0 in deepening insights into the complex challenges confronting women and girls across the continent. She highlighted the programme's role in establishing a strategic platform for delivering targeted interventions and driving periodic, evidence-based responses to eliminate violence and harmful practices against women and girls. "This agreement marks a new chapter in our collaboration, which my successor will continue to champion to safeguard the rights, protection, and wellbeing of vulnerable populations, particularly women and girls, through the eradication of harmful practices," stated Amb. Cessouma.

Mr. Yacoub Ali El-Hillo, Regional Director for Africa at UNDCO, commended the SIARP 2.0 Programme as a testament to the robust partnership between the African Union Commission, the United Nations, and the European Union, reaffirming their collective commitment to advancing the rights of women and girls across Africa.

H.E. Amb. Nino Perez, European Union Ambassador to the African Union, acknowledged the instrumental role of Amb. Cessouma in spearheading the initiative and reiterated the EU's unwavering commitment to strengthening collaboration among the three partners.

In recognition of Amb. Cessouma's exemplary leadership, dedication, and steadfast commitment to the successful implementation of SIARP 1.0, the United Nations presented her with an Award of Recognition of Service, celebrating her legacy in advancing gender equality and promoting the empowerment of women and girls on the continent.

SIARP 2.0 is designed to build on the achievements of SIARP 1.0, scaling up impactful



regional and country-level interventions to eliminate violence against women and girls and advance gender equality. The programme reaffirms the African Union's unwavering commitment to safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of women and girls across the continent, in line with its vision of an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa.

The signing ceremony adopted a hybrid format, convening representative from the Women, Gender, and Youth Directorate, alongside UN Regional Directors and technical teams from UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women. This inclusive participation underscores the broad-based multilateral cooperation and collective commitment of all partners to the effective implementation of SIARP 2.0.

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