

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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International Women's Day: African Union Celebrates Women of the Union with Pledge to Strengthen Inclusion and Dignity for All

The African Union Commission (AUC), through its Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD), commemorated the International Women's Day 2026, under the theme "Honouring Women of the African Union: Voices, Work and Community," recognising the diverse contributions of women across all levels of the institution. The celebration, held at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, highlighted the vital roles women play in sustaining the Union's work, from leadership and policy development to administration, security, cleaning and other essential services.

Speaking as "a son raised by a strong African woman," the AUC Chairperson, **H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf**, acknowledged women across all roles, from Commissioners and Policy Officers to Drivers, Cleaners, and Interns, emphasizing that their contributions, whether visible or behind the scenes, shape the African Union's mission.

"Every woman within this Institution, regardless of her grade or role, must feel valued, supported, and protected. Your commitment, talent, and leadership are indispensable to our collective mission. Your well-being, professional growth, and aspirations matter greatly to this Institution," emphasized the AUC Chairperson.

During the interactive dialogue segment to reflect on the AU's theme for Women's Day, participants discussed key institutional priorities, including the review of maternity and parental leave policies, the forthcoming opening of an African Union daycare

center to better support working families, and ongoing efforts to ensure equitable access to health services for all staff regardless of contract status. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission also reaffirmed the institution’s zero-tolerance policy toward harassment and discrimination on women, underscoring the Commission’s commitment to maintaining a safe, inclusive and respectful workplace for all employees.

The AUC Chairperson concluded by calling for renewed commitment to building a Commission where every woman can thrive and where the next generation of African women leaders can serve with confidence and pride.

Addressing the staff, the AUC Deputy Chairperson, **H.E. Ambassador Selma Haddadi**, paid tribute to the founding mothers of the African Union, including Fatia Bettahar, Phoebe Asiyo, Fathia Nkrumah, Albertina Sisulu, and others, on whose shoulders women still stand today. She underlined that the AU was the first among its peers to institutionalize equal representation for women, with women currently representing 37% of the workforce, including 38% of senior leadership positions.

Ambassador Haddadi emphasized the importance of recognizing women at every level of the institution, from young professionals to gardeners, translators, security officers, and cleaners, describing their work as “essential and indispensable” to the Union’s functioning. Drawing on the African philosophy of Ubuntu, Deputy Chairperson Selma Haddadi called for intergenerational and cross-rank solidarity among women and stressed the importance of male allyship in advancing gender equality.

"The solidarity we want for women across this continent must begin inside the walls of our institution. We cannot credibly champion women's rights and justice across fifty-five member states if we do not first practice justice, dignity and care for one another within these walls. This endeavour is incomplete unless joined and genuinely supported by our brothers, at all levels," concluded the AUC Deputy Chairperson.

The event served as both a celebration and a renewed call to action, affirming the African Union’s commitment to building a Commission where every woman can thrive, and where the next generation of African women leaders can serve with confidence and pride.

For further information and Media inquiries, please contact:

1. **Ms. Esther Azaa Tankou**, Head of Media and Information Division, Information and Communication Directorate, AUC and Communication Advisor of the AU Permanent Observer Mission to the UN. Tel: +1 347 812 71 95 , Email: yamboue@africanunion.org
2. **Ms. Adele Onguene Atangana** | Communications Associate, Women, Gender and Youth Directorate | African Union Commission | E-mail: AtanganaA@AfricanUnion.org
3. **Mr. Gamal Eldin Ahmed A. Karrar** | Senior Communication Officer | Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | E-mail: GamalK@africanunion.org

Information and Communication Directorate | African Union Commission
 I Email: DIC@africanunion.org | Web: www.au.int | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia | Follow Us: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)