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STATEMENT BY
HER EXCELLENCY DR. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION
TO AFRICAN REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONSULTATION ON
PREPARATIONS FOR THE 58TH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW)

7 January 2014

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

Your Excellencies, Ministers of Women and Gender

Our host, Hon. Minister Zenebu Tadesse, Minister of Women, Children and Youth Affairs of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia

Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Lakshmi Puri

Representative of Dr. Carlos Lopez, Executive Secretary of the UNECA

Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities

Technical Experts and Representatives of Civil society

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of International Organisations

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured to address this regional consultation in preparations for the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, to be held under the priority theme *Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls*.

These consultations ahead of time are critical, because it helps to consolidate our common positions, as an integral part of Africa taking its rightful place in the world.

The issues before the 58th Session - *access to education, training, science and technology, to full employment, decent work and productive resources* - are vital to our transformation agenda for women and girls on our continent, as we embark on the African Year of Agriculture and Food Security.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

On all global gender indexes dealing with educational and economic opportunity, individual African countries are beginning to be ranked among the best performers in the world.

For example, Burundi, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and Ghana are ranked in the top 25 best performing countries on the World Economic Forum *Global Gender Gap Report 2013*, on Economic Participation and Opportunity for women; whilst Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia are amongst the top 25 countries with regards to educational attainment.

At the same time, as a continent, we score consistently low on both these indices, due to large differences across countries and regions.

This means that we have to do more, at country, regional and continental levels to ensure that all girls are in school and stay in school, in order to close the gender gap in educational attainment. In addition, there is still a paucity of girls and women in science, mathematics and technology fields, and in further and higher education more generally, and we have to ensure a concerted push around these areas as well.

As part of Africa's transformation agenda for 2063, we talk about a skills revolution, but this revolution can only happen if it includes the other half of Africa's human resources, girls and women.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Large numbers of African women have joined and continue to join the labour markets over the last few decades. They do so as informal traders, as the majority of the agricultural workforce, in the services industry, in the public sectors and slowly but surely, within the professions and as entrepreneurs.

As we talk about Africa's economic transformation today, to ensure high levels of sustained growth, to ensure growth that is inclusive, lead to economic diversification, industrialization, decent jobs, and greater intra-African trade, we must be conscious that this transformation takes place in the context of "*a world economy that has been premised on the exploitation of gender divisions since the dawn of modern capitalism*", as Dr. Amina Mama reminded us last year during the 50th Anniversary summit debate on Pan Africanism and African Renaissance.

She went further:

The terms of women's integration into development have been based on a flawed premise – that we sit around as a vast underused reserve army of labour. The inclusionary strategies have thus added work to the overworked, women already doing double shifts between their homes and farms.

Economic reforms have simultaneously sapped/zapped state efforts to address poverty, ignorance and disease – through public health, welfare and educational services necessary to sustain and reproduce labour in a waged-based economy.

(However), African women are no longer ignored, as we celebrate a new level of hard-won recognition and global consensus on the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment.

But, Dr. Mama concluded:

Recognition demands redistribution of resources.

This demand for the redistribution of resources is no more apparent than in the Agricultural sector. African women constitute the majority of the workforce in the sector and are therefore the main producers of food on the continent.

And yet, their access to productive resources, including skills, training, technology including ICTs, capital, seeds, irrigation, market access, distribution networks, storage facilities and especially land, are negligible.

As we therefore embark on this African Year of Agriculture and Food Security, we must ensure that our practical plans as Member states, Regional Economic Communities, as continental organisations and civil society are implemented, so that Africa's agrarian revolution, and the much needed gender transformation of this sector becomes a reality.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The progress that women are making in the political sphere is in large part due to a combination of the introduction of proactive and affirmative action policies and programmes; gender aggregated

data and monitoring; and the mobilization and activism of the African women's movement. This is indeed the history behind the emergence of the Commission on the Status of Women.

We must therefore ensure that our national, regional and continental bodies and institutions of women are strengthened, from the Ministerial forums to the AU Commission's Gender department, to the Pan African Women's Organisation and civil society in its great diversity. Only through strong institutions and gender activism can we ensure that we push ahead with the challenges that remain, and enable us to implement what needs to be done.

In addition to the CSW review-taking place in March, there are a number of global processes in which women's voices need to be louder. This ranges from trade and climate change negotiations, to the development of the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 global development agenda.

This quest to mainstream gender in all global policies and architectures, also informs our approach to the post-2015 Agenda, and the proposal from African women that gender be a key pillar (the 6th pillar) of this global consensus.

As we therefore develop our Pan African Development Goals as part of Agenda 2063 first ten-year plan, Africa will certainly ensure that women's empowerment gets the attention that it deserves in our continental priorities, whether this becomes part of the global consensus or not.

The January 2014 African Union Summit just adopted the consultative framework for Agenda 2063, which will be our roadmap towards an Africa that is integrated, prosperous, peaceful and taking its rightful place in the world. It is also an Africa that must be non-sexist and people-centered.

Through Agenda 2063, we must also articulate our aspirations of what a non-sexist Africa should look like and set milestones towards its realization. Agenda 2063 will therefore of necessity

incorporate our short and medium goals as set out in the AU Gender Protocol, and in the African Decade of Women.

AU Heads of State and Governments, emerging from the Summit, decided that they would hold national consultations on the Agenda 2063 framework, and give feedback to the Commission by April this year. It is therefore our responsibility to ensure that women participate in this process, so that Agenda 2063 also leads to the gender transformation of our countries, regions and continent.

As we therefore prepare for the upcoming 58th session of the global Commission on the Status of Women, we have a responsibility to the women veterans who fought against colonialism, for gender equality and who participated in the first Beijing Conference in 1985.

We also have a responsibility to secure the freedoms, security and prosperity of future generations of African boys and girls, of men and women.

I thank you.