

AFRICAN UNION

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2015 Year of Women's Empowerment and
Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063



**STATEMENT OF H.E. Dr. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA
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AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

08 MARCH 2015

***"WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS AFRICA AGENDA
2063"***

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Ladies and gentlemen,

On this memorable day of 08 March commemorating International Women's Day around the world, I would like to add my voice to all women worldwide and especially the women of Africa in acknowledging the fight led by female pioneers for the rights of women throughout the past centuries. On International Women's Day, we celebrate the determination of women around the world to fight for equality and for social, economic and political rights.

The celebration of 8 March gives us the opportunity to highlight the economic, political and social achievements of women worldwide. It furthermore allows us to take stock of the progress made and the challenges we still face in recognizing and protecting the rights of women.

Today, the issue of recognizing women's rights and its implementation is pivotal because it has been proven that sustainable development, political stability and economic growth cannot be achieved when a portion of the population is marginalized and excluded in the access and distribution of national resources.

Today, we can point to marked achievements in the representation of women – we have our first women Presidents, increased numbers of women in African parliaments, and we have gender parity in the African Union Commission leadership.

These must be celebrated, but much more remains to be done to increase women's representation in all spheres – in the judiciary and in parliaments, in the economy and in the security sector. We must also intensify efforts to improve the visibility of African women on the national, regional and international scenes. Indeed, in traditional African society, it is actually women who are often, but discreetly, consulted by men when important decisions have to be taken in the community.

But why is it that women's decision-making power is not reflected in public? Why the African woman is always relegated to the background in the instances of modern public decisions? Why is the African woman excluded during elections in our countries? Why is she deprived from access to credit? To land? To education? To employment? To participation

in peace negotiations? and so forth. These are existential issues for women who are awaiting concrete answers from all leaders.

On the eve of this 08 March, 2015, let us try to envision an International Women's Day in the next 50 years, and know that the world will not celebrate women just for their struggles for gender equality, but will recognize every day as the days of both female and male citizens regardless of gender with equal and equitable rights for both women and men to be autonomous, educated, free to move and living in a stable and prosperous Africa.

Indeed, Agenda 2063 is led by the African people, particularly women and young people who are considered as the driving force of the continent, the pillars on which the continent must rely on to achieve a sustainable development and a prosperous and peaceful Africa. Agenda 2063 envisages a non-sexist Africa, an Africa where girls and boys can reach their full potential, where men and women contribute equally to the development of their societies.

It is with a view to successfully complete the Post-2015 Development Agenda, to accelerate Beijing and Dakar Platforms for Action and to implement gender equality and women's empowerment policies that the Heads of State and Government of the African Union have declared 2015 as the "***Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063.***"

The choice of African Union's theme this year is indeed an opportunity for us to demonstrate our commitment to the empowerment of African women to make it a reality rather than a mere statement.

Allow me to emphasize the five (5) major priorities areas that African women have identified as essential to empower them in achieving Agenda 2063. During the Consultation of Stakeholders held from 21st to 23rd January 2015, on the margins of the AU Summit, African women agreed on the following:

1. **Women's health** is a major concern in our countries since the sexual health and reproductive rights of women are still not sufficiently respected, which is why maternal and infant mortality rates continue to be high in the continent. I commend the national launches of the CAARMA (Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal, Newborn and Child Mortality in Africa).

Its effective implementation will contribute to strengthening healthcare systems to benefit women and their socio-economic empowerment. We must invest in quality health services for all women and girls. I take this opportunity to recall the vulnerability and courage of women in countries affected by the Ebola virus outbreak. Women are *paying the heaviest price* for this epidemic, and special measures for their physical and mental recovery must be taken to protect them.

2. **Quality education** must be accessible for all our girls so that they do not become brides. This concern is one that's shared today by many mothers and fathers in Africa, especially after the abduction of the Chibok Girls, in Nigeria. Africa needs a well-educated and prepared child and youth to succeed the elders. Agenda 2063 calls for the mobilization of an education revolution on the continent. This has been demonstrated by the Pan-African University, which is an educational institution that provides access to education in science and technology especially to young women and girls. Moreover, the private and public sectors of Information Communication Technology continue to provide training to girls and women, an effort that must be encouraged and promoted.
3. **Peace and security** on the continent is another priority of the African Union. It is an essential condition for the effective empowerment of women. Generally regarded as the most vulnerable group during armed conflicts and post-conflict, women should not only be seen in this light. Rather, it is necessary to see the contribution of African women in the peacekeeping process and the post-conflict reconstruction, and even in the transitional phase of justice and in the drafting of a new constitution. In the implementation of the AU program "*Silencing the Guns by 2020*", the African Union is committed to mainstreaming gender in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and its African Governance Architecture (AGA). For this, African women should be strongly engaged in policy and decision-making processes to reach 50/50 gender parity, especially during Presidential and Legislative elections on the continent. Women's voices should not count anymore as those of mere voters, but as candidates in instances relating to the highest decision-making bodies.

4. **Agriculture** is indeed one of the priorities that, if properly taken into account, will be the catalyst for the economic growth and social development of Africa. It is this vision that our African leaders had in 2014, when they declared it as the “*Year of Agriculture*” with the objective to achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development. The theme of 2015 “*Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development towards Africa’s Agenda 2063*” is indeed a continuation of this commitment.

How can we speak of inclusive growth and sustainable development without recognizing the work of some of our African population, consisting mostly of women in rural areas? African women constitute more than 70 percent of small farmers that help to feed the majority of the growing population of Africa. They are mainly present in the agricultural sector and the informal sector of the Agribusiness.

Despite this critical role, rural African women continue to work the land with archaic working methods such as the handheld hoe! African women made this clear when they said:

“THIS HOE, WE DO NOT WANT IT ANY MORE!! IT MUST HENCEFORTH BE CONFINED TO THE MUSEUM AS AN ARTIFACT! A SUBJECT OF ART FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS!”

Each male and female farmer should now have a “Tiller”, a modern agricultural working tool that gives more dignity to the human being in her/his function as a farmer by reducing heavy labor load and by contributing to increased yields in agriculture, fisheries, livestock and poultry.

5. **Economic empowerment of women** essentially aims at the creation of a Bank for African women as has been done in some African countries such as Ethiopia, an example that should be replicated throughout Africa. I congratulate all those African countries who have gone beyond microfinance and microcredit by including gender equality in the financial mechanisms. Indeed, we must harness the power of women entrepreneurship with increased access and control over resources by

African women. Our continent is rich in natural resources but our people, and, in particular women, remain poor.

I would like to conclude my message of this day, 08 March 2015, by emphasizing that the effective implementation of the theme of 2015 requires joint and determined efforts by all stakeholders: the RECs, Civil Society Organizations, and of course our Development Partners. **We need all of you, men and women, as actors and actresses to achieve the Africa we want.**

I thank you and wish all of you a Happy International Women's Day