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**H.E. DR. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA**  
**CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION**  
**COMMISSION**

**Statement on the occasion of**  
**the launch of the**  
**Board of IGAD Women and Peace Forum**

*Djibouti, 25 October 2015*

**Your Excellency Mr. Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed,  
Prime Minister of the Republic of Djibouti**

**Honourable Mahamoud Ali YOussouf, Minister of  
Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Djibouti,**

**Honourable Mme Hasna Barkat Daoud, Minister for the  
Promotion of Women and Family Planning in charge of  
Relations with the Parliament,**

**Your Excellency Amb. Mahboub Maalim, IGAD Executive  
Secretary,**

**His Excellency Ambassador of the European Union**

**Excellencies, the women of IGAD, Ladies and  
Gentlemen,**

I am very happy to be in Djibouti, I am glad I am here. I see now that it could be a missed opportunity.

It gives me great pleasure to be here today as IGAD launches the Board of Women and Peace Forum. Indeed, it was two years ago that IGAD launched its Gender Milestones, and it is a remarkable achievement since then that the Board of Women and Peace Forum, which is now taking place.

I am also happy to see many men here. It is only when we work with progress men we can achieve women's rights.

This comes at a befitting time when we are celebrating the Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Agenda 2063, mid-way of the African Women's Decade, 20 years since the Beijing Women's Conference and the 15th Anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 that brought to the forefront women, peace and security's agenda.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Across the world, the evidence is overwhelming about the impact that the empowerment of women and girls can and will have on the development and stability of their societies. We find this on a range of social and economic indicators, and that is why in our Agenda 2063 priorities, we emphasises the participation of women and girls. As well as in the SDGs that have just been adopted.

The priorities, which we have now elaborated into an action plan in the first 10 year Implementation plan, include investments in people - especially education, health and the provision of other basic services; it includes infrastructure development; the modernisation of agriculture and agro-processing and the development of manufacturing and beneficiation of our natural resources. We are also urging out Member States to look into the Blue Economy. In July

2015, we launched the African Decade of Oceans and Seas. I am sure Djibouti will take advantage of that. This is an area that women must take advantage of especially in actively participating in the Women in Maritime Association.

To achieve any of the above, we have to pay more attention to education and skills, the single most important factor in speeding up our development, and creating lasting peace. We must give our young people, boys and girls, and young men and women hope for the future. Education is an equalizer.

We are making progress in terms of women's development, with twenty-three African countries now having more than 30% women in parliament (with Rwanda leading the world). The list - who were acknowledged as we introduced the African Gender Score Card at the June Summit of the AU in Johannesburg - also include IGAD countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Sudan and South Sudan. I hope Djibouti will be in the scorecard soon.

In the year of women, we are committed to advance women and girls in every area of human endeavour: in education, science, technology, mathematics and research; in agriculture and agro-processing, as entrepreneurs and in the judiciary. We are also taking steps in addressing violence, in conflicts and in peacetime, as well as other harmful cultural

practices against girls and women. In November there will be a Conference in Zambia that looks at Girls Marriage, in efforts to ensure that girls go to school instead of becoming brides.

## **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

We are ever-mindful of the critical relationship between peace and development. Instability and violent conflict and war set back, and indeed destroy prospects for development and shared prosperity. In addition to the loss of lives, war displaces and destroys communities, family and individual assets, and interrupts access to basic services such as education and health.

The majority of countries in the continent today are stable, and this is mirrored in the fact that many social and economic indicators (growth, investments, children in education, maternal mortality and so forth) across the continent are moving in the right direction.

We must therefore remain resolute to implement our Agenda 2063, so that we transform our continent and ensure the creation of lasting peace.

Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 specifically focuses on ensuring the end of all forms of violence against women and that women are fully empowered to contribute to a people-driven Africa.

To transform the lives of girls and women, and indeed the creation of stable and prosperous communities, women need to be engaged and to become real agents for change.

Africa aspires to be a “Peaceful and Secure Continent with harmony among communities starting at grassroots level”. We all know the role of women within families and communities. Joining our efforts can only bear the fruit of change.

It is from this perspective that I see the launch of Board of IGAD Women and Peace Forum, providing a vehicle for women in the region to congregate their efforts.

Indeed, coming together will provide opportunities to strengthen solidarity between women’s groups, share experiences, increase collaboration and enhance capacity to interact with governments and regional organisations.

The African Union realises the critical importance of having women at the negotiating table during conflict. We all know

that there is no war that has been started by a woman on the continent, but many conflicts with women bearing the most burden.

The voices of women must be heard more clearly and articulately in all endeavours to prevent conflicts and to build and sustain peace on the continent.

Excellencies, I also strongly believe that women are central to conflict prevention on the continent. They understand very deeply the impact that conflict have on education and health services, and on every other aspect of community and family life, since they so often have to bear the brunt of responsibilities during conflicts. They and their children fill the refugee camps, and they also have to take responsibility for the sick, disabled and the elderly as they flee from conflicts.

To ensure the protection of women, children and other civilians in situations of conflicts, we have assigned Officers in the various AU and regional Peace Support Operations to ensure that women's voices are heard and amplified, and that women participate in conflict resolution and peace building efforts. For the first time, we appointed an AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security. (I am sure most of you here know Mme Bineta Diop, whom we have entrusted with this responsibility.)

Most importantly, we must continue the campaign for women's voices and participation during peacetime, as part of building stable, democratic and peaceful societies. I am sure that as we prepare for the next African Gender Score card for 2016, IGAD countries will do better on a range of different scores, such as education, health, political participation, women's access to land, to name but a few.

The responsibility for the emancipation of women is not only the task of women, but of democratic-minded men and women alike. We must therefore work together to empower women and girls, and where their rights are being trampled upon, to address this together.

### **Excellencies,**

In conclusion, we appreciate and support the efforts and work of IGAD to ensure lasting peace for the region, and to make its contribution to the pledge of our Golden Centenary, to silence the guns by 2020.

We also acknowledge the strides that many IGAD countries are making, including our host Djibouti to build shared prosperity, stable and inclusive countries and a prosperous and integrated region.



The IGAD Women and Peace Forum joins two other Forums that were created in the Great Lakes region and more recently in the Sahel Region. The African Union welcomes these initiatives and looks forward to working with them to ensure the recognition of the role of women in peace, and to strengthen our partnerships with regional bodies in our common journey towards the Africa We Want.

So congratulations to the IGAD women but also to the men who support this initiative.

I thank you