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Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone : 011-551 7700 Fax : 011-551 7844
website : www.africa-union.org

**OPENING STATEMENT FROM H.E. RHODA PEACE TUMUSIIME, COMMISSIONER
FOR RURAL ECONOMY AND AGRICULTURE, AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

Topic: GENDER AND YOUTH IN ARICA'S WATER SECTOR

Venue: Palais des Congres PC-3

Time: 17.00-19.00

15 March 2012 Marseille, France

Honourable Deputy Minister, Republic of South Africa,

Dr Baimass Taal, Executive Secretary of AMCW,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, my dear sisters and brothers in Government, civil society, media and trade unions

This is a happy day for me. It is one of the most exciting and rewarding, to present to you, mainly from Africa but tanking also those from Asia, Latin America and Europe who have come to share our special occasion with us.

To celebrate, and consider, the opportunity that is before us- to highlight the imperative of mainstreaming gender in Africa's water sector.

The road has been long and narrow. Staring ten years ago, my sister Hon Maria Mutagamba , Uganda's Minister of Environment and Water Resources, was one of the lone voices asking and beseeching our governments, civil society, UN agencies and anyone who would listen (and even those that would not) to join hands and redress the gender imbalance in the water sector.

This path was greatly improved in the last three years, when hundreds of organisations from more than 40 countries hammered out a common contract to work on gender within their respective spheres of operation, but having one rallying point- the African Union Gender perspective. This AU system provides a common frame of reference- so that civil society can compare with NGO and government departments the progress, using the same measure. And any country can compare with any other country, so that we can all see the challenges and opportunities, the success and failures, in order that we may all learn how to do better.

GENDER, WATER AND DEVELOPMENT: ENGAGING THE POWER OF WOMEN TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY IN AFRICA

Transforming food, energy and health by recognizing and harnessing women's contribution is the focus of this exercise. That by addressing the stumbling blocks and harnessing the knowledge, capacity and productivity of women, Africa may accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) where it has fallen even further behind when compared with the rest of the world.

May I thank the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW) under the capable leadership of my sister Edna Molewa, Minister of Water and Environment of South Africa. Let me also recognise the Global Water Partnership, the Water and Sanitation

Program (World Bank) , United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), who worked hand in hand with the hundreds of other organisations to bring this initiative to fruition.

Turning now to the Youth Program.

You young people are incredibly lucky. As Goethe, the German writer says, you stand on the shoulders of giants, that you may see further.

You have a ready made framework through which to empower yourselves and achieve your goals and recognition of your value in society.

The Heads of State of the African Union have already opened the door for you, by making a common declaration to engage the youth in all development programs. A very large number of countries in Africa have already embarked on this process.

In addition, you have the readymade mechanism to similarly develop your strategy and actions using the same vehicle that was used to bring to fruition the gender mainstreaming policy and strategy.

I understand that GWP is once again working with the youth to help them achieve their aspirations in this area. I am also informed that just before Christmas last year over 150 young water professionals from more than 14 African countries, with some young visitors from Japan, Germany, and Austria congregated in Kampala, Uganda and gave a wonderful demonstration of the real potential that exists in the youth. I look forward to getting exact details today from the Chair of the All Africa Young Water Professionals who will be speaking today.

I look forward to getting not only the professionals in this venture, but also the huge number of young entrepreneurs who are making a difference in urban and rural areas, the young artisans on whom the hope of modernising agriculture rests, and the very young in primary schools that have been so instrumental in reducing the water borne diseases and hazards of droughts and floods by carrying appropriate messages back home. This is an untapped potential we should all see how to utilize properly.

Finally, I wish to thank you, the audience, for coming to this session at this late hour and bear witness with us. We commend your encouraging gesture and trust your continued support.

Thank you, and welcome to this important meeting.