



**MESSAGE BY  
HER EXCELLENCY DR. AISHA ABDULLAHI  
COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS  
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**ON THE OCCASION OF**

**THE CELEBRATION OF THE 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
PROTOCOL TO THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND  
PEOPLES' RIGHTS ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA**

**ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA  
AUGUST 2013**

The African Union has championed and facilitated the development and adoption of many important instruments that pronounce on our African Shared Values. Among them is the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, known as the Maputo Protocol or the AU Women Protocol, which we gather here today to celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. While 36 African Member States have ratified this protocol, I must hasten to admit that I still reflect constantly on whether we have done or doing enough in addressing challenges affecting women on the continent. The state of ratification is a clear victory for those who over the years have tirelessly mobilised and worked to achieve this goal. Moreover, in many countries, legal and institutional measures, such as laws prosecuting perpetrators of sexual violence, criminalising domestic violence, prohibiting female genital mutilation, or establishing mechanisms mandated to promote women's rights have accompanied these ratifications.

On this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Maputo Protocol, I wish to pay tribute to the determination and courage of the women and men who advocate tirelessly ensuring that the rights guaranteed in the Maputo Protocol are not lost. And I wish to seize this opportunity to call on the remaining 18 African Member States to join in by expediting the ratification process of this protocol.

The Commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the African Union's Women Protocol is, therefore in my view, very instrumental in reaffirming our dedication and commitment towards attaining the African Union vision on universal access to women rights that is so eloquently enunciated in the adopted Maputo Protocol.

Also, it is noteworthy mentioning that African women are indeed proud of the fact that many women in Africa have assumed high ranking leadership and decision making position at the continental and global levels. For example; H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the republic of Liberia, H.E. President Joyce Banda of the republic of Malawi, Ms. Boussaina Kamel, the very first female presidential aspirant of Egypt, Honorable Rebecca Kadaga, first female Speaker of the House in Uganda's Parliament, Honorable Rabiaa Nejlaoui, youngest Member of Parliament in Tunisia, and Honorable Hlobisile Ndlovu, youngest Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture in the Kingdom of Swaziland, just to mention a few. I also wish to stress the fact that the

African Union Commission is the first continental organization ever to be chaired by a woman, in the person of H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and that is a clear indication of what women can do to lead Africa towards its goal of becoming a united, prosperous and peaceful continent.

I also wish to take this opportunity to reflect on the participation of women in African Parliaments. It has been noted that four African countries occupy places among the top ten countries in the world when it comes to the number of women in legislative bodies, namely; Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal and South Africa.

Although, our Continent still continues to grapple with multifaceted challenges as we seek to build a more consolidated human rights path into the future, it is imperative at this stage in our journey that we build on that which we have succeeded in putting in place, the most significant among which are, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the numerous human rights instruments setting out the normative framework for their work. Our Member States have been mindful of the significance of these institutions and the importance of ensuring that they are able to act with impartiality and integrity.

Ten years after the adoption of the Women Protocol, Why should we care? What would be the judgment of future generations on the progress that we would have achieved in terms of ameliorating the conditions of the peoples of this Continent? In the context of the recent events unfolding in Africa and elsewhere, we cannot but express sadness and concern that even though we have over the years, established various instruments and instruments to facilitate actions to assist the exercise on human rights, we have at times been found wanting in averting situations that result in the loss of lives in the struggle to secure these very rights through peaceful means.

The most disastrous consequences would occur, in my opinion, if we remain pessimist, and stop trying. Human rights are not peripheral to the survival of people or development of states. Our collective pursuit of human rights is part of a broad effort towards creating a continent in which human beings can live in peace, freedom, and with their basic needs adequately met, in short, a better Africa and a decent life

for her peoples. The need for robust mechanisms for collective action on human rights is so real, so undeniable and so essential to the quality of all our lives. Although universal in its aspiration, the African Charter is truly African in its content and context, it enjoys both regional and global legitimacy and it is today still relevant to the central concerns of citizens from Cape to Cairo and from Djibouti to Dakar.

The central message I convey to you as we celebrate this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Women Protocol is an ardent call for a reaffirmation of faith in this Protocol as well as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights: faith that indeed the Women Protocol remains our best opportunity for collective responses to women's rights promotion and protection on the Continent; faith that the Women Protocol will stand strong and tall; faith that the Women Protocol provides the basis to construct an African platform that will not be judged by poverty, deprivation and backwardness but by our collective commitment to human and peoples' rights and faith that the Women Protocol will provide us with the requisite content to guide us cope with the realities of this rapidly transforming world and after all be proud of our women's achievements on the continent.

I thank you.

**Dr. Aisha L. Abdullahi (Amb.)  
Commissioner for Political Affairs  
African Union Commission**