



**STATEMENT BY DR. KHABELE MATLOSA
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**3RD AU HIGH LEVEL PANEL ON GENDER EQUALITY & WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT**

ON THE THEME :

**"THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MAPUTO PROTOCOL ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN
ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN AFRICA: STOCKTAKING, OPPORTUNITIES
AND ACCOUNTABILITY"**

**KIGALI, RWANDA
8 JULY 2016**

Your Excellency, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission;

Honorable Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Rwanda;

Your Excellencies Ministers and Heads of Delegations;

Distinguished Members of the Rwandan National Assembly;

Distinguished Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps;

Distinguished Representatives of UN Agencies;

Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society Organizations;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and privilege to make these opening remarks this morning on behalf of H.E. Dr. Aisha Laraba Abdullahi, Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union Commission on this occasion of the 3rd AU High Level Panel on Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment. This meeting is indeed timely as it is taking place on the margin of the 27th AU Summit. I am quite sure that the deliberations of this meeting will go a long way in influencing the outcomes of the up-coming Summit.

I wish to begin this statement by expressing, on behalf of the African Union Commission, our profound appreciation to the Government and the people of the Republic of Rwanda for hosting this meeting and welcoming all of us to their capital city, Kigali.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

From the onset, I would like to re-affirm the African Union's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. The African Union has clearly demonstrated its commitment through the various Shared Values Instruments, including the 2000 Constitutive Act of the African Union, the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. Through these key instruments, the Heads of States and Governments have made political commitments aimed at accelerating

progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment on the continent. As a result, the Heads of States and Governments in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea declared 2015 as the "Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063". The Africa Agenda 2063 is the long-term development blue print of the continent over the next fifty years. Its noble goals will not be fully realized without the full participation and equal representation of women in governance, peace and security and development spheres. Women must be the backbone of Agenda 2063.

During the January 2015 Summit held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the African Union (AU) Heads of State and Government declared 2016 as the African Year of Human Rights with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women. Coming on the heels of the 2015 theme of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Agenda 2063, the 2016 theme signifies the importance that the AU attaches to women's rights.

Africa boasts a plethora of progressive human rights instruments which have been articulated on a wide range of human rights issues. What remains is the political commitment of all Member States to ratify, domesticate and implement these instruments. The success of the AU, including the realization of its Agenda 2063, will depend largely upon the importance given to the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human and peoples' rights on the continent, particularly the rights of women.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Our host, Rwanda remains a shining example of gender equality and women's empowerment to be emulated by other AU Member States. In Rwanda, women are visible by their presence in the state sphere, civil society sphere and the private sector at various layers of society from the national to the community/village levels. We need much greater commitment and action to tackle the problem of low participation rate and poor representation of women in governance processes, in peace and security initiatives and in development programmes and projects. In Rwanda today, the minimum quota for women representation in decision-making is 30%. But Rwanda has surpassed this threshold. Women in Rwanda constitute 64% of the Legislature; 40% of the Executive; 50% of the Judiciary; 50% of Provincial Governors and 44% of the

District Councillors. What lessons can we learn from Rwanda's success story? What are the key success factors or drivers for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment from the Rwanda experience:

1. Visionary and transformative political leadership is required for gender equality and women's empowerment at the highest echelons of the state;
2. Effective policies, enforceable laws and resilient institutions that persistently drive the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment are necessary;
3. Specifically, gender machineries including a dedicated ministry in charge of gender issues are necessary to champion the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment;
4. With respect to increasing women's participation and representation in political decision-making, the electoral model in place in each country is critical; winner-take-all electoral models such as the First-Past-The-Post have tended to inhibit gender equality; while the Party-List Proportional Representation models tend to be facilitative of gender equality;
5. Affirmative action measures of various types, including legislated gender quotas, do play a catalytic role towards gender equality and women's empowerment;
6. Since State power in democratic settings is accessed through political parties, it is in these institutions that women must play meaningful and leadership roles;
7. Besides their effective and meaningful presence in political parties, women should play influential and leadership roles in the larger society through inter-alia civil society, trade unions, media, academia, faith-based organizations, Community-Based Organizations and the private sector.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

In conclusion, I hope today, we will focus our attention on how Africa can bridge the gap between norm-setting and norm-implementation. As I indicated, the AU has an expansive normative framework on gender equality and women's empowerment. But the continental body faces serious challenges in respect of translating these norms into policy practice at national level. I also hope we will take the opportunity of this forum to spend more time on proposing practical solutions to the problem by way of sharing lessons learnt and best practices from various AU Member States which, like Rwanda, are making commendable progress in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

I thank you