

Honorable Chairperson, dear Nkosazana,

Your Excellences, Honorable Members of Parliaments, dear friends,

All protocols observed,

It is with the greatest pleasure and honor that the Women in Parliaments Global Forum takes part in the ceremony which opens the 3rd African Union High Level Panel On Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment.

In many ways, being here feels like coming home: In 2015, during the African Year of Women Empowerment, the WIP Summit took place in the Headquarters of the African Union, in Addis Ababa. In 2014, the WIP Summit was hosted by Rwanda, the World Champion of women in parliamentary representation, and we commemorated together the 20 years after the end of the Genocide.

Female political leaders from all continents came to Africa, to learn about the progress and achievements, meet African leaders and discuss opportunities for women.

The Maputo Protocol is landmark for gender equality in Africa. It has the power to be a giant's leap for advancing societies as a whole. Its comprehensive and broad nature is an important tool for politicians, who understand that Women's Rights are Human Rights. The Maputo Protocol has been called a Magna Charta for Women in Africa, rightly so.

However, we all know the saying: "Beware of the nice words, beware of the silver tongue." It's to add: "Verify the delivery!" This message goes straight into the parliamentary chambers, all around the world (by the way). It is the role of Parliaments to facilitate the ratification of such Protocols, to hold the government accountable to the international commitments made, and, specific for Africa, to implement the Articles of the Maputo Protocol.

This is where women in political decision making have a crucial role to play: while “gender” of course means more than “women”, it is women who most often put gender on the agenda. They are the strongest advocates for women and girls in their societies – thanks to the male leaders who prove this statement. And – it is women political leaders giving the additional push needed to their male peers, to do what is right.

Lasting progress towards a fair society, where it does not make a difference if you are born as a girl or as a boy, is only possible when men are working hand in hand with women. Men need to be champions of gender equality, too. That is why WIP invited male Presidents and Prime Ministers, to issue their personal testimonial, on why we need more women in political leadership – for example, among others, the leaders of Angola Cameroun, Ethiopia, Rwanda joined that campaign.

For progress, the world needs more women as political leaders, in Parliaments and Governments. Today, the gender gap in politics is larger than the gender gap in the economy, larger than in education and larger than in health (according to the Global Gender Gap Report). Less than 20 countries in the world do not discriminate against women in their constitutions and legislation (according to the World Bank). One can rattle down the names of the female Presidents and Prime Ministers in less than one minute, and the last time the World Bank counted, there were six female Finance Ministers on the globe.

Closing the gender gap is not only a moral issue. (But indeed it is a moral issue!)

Closing the gender gap is certainly not a charity issue.

Closing the gender gap is the smart thing to do: for both women and men, for boys and girls.

Economically, closing the Gender gap is like adding another China or India to the world economy.

Politically, there is a clear correlation in democracies of better legislation for all society, and a more women in political decision making.

For peace and security, it makes all the difference if women are active agents of peace, and not passive victims of war.

This High Level Panel takes stock, identifies opportunities and accountability. That the African Union became a champion of gender equality, beginning in its own house and reaching far in political initiatives, needs strong leadership.

Every important political decision needs leaders to embody it. Leaders, who show the courage to bring letters written on patient paper into action, in the reality of people's lives.

For the gender equality in Africa, for the Maputo Protocol, this leader is undoubtedly Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

The Chairperson during the WIP Summit 2013 stated: "There are two kinds of women leaders: those, who pull the ladder up, so that nobody follows them. And those, who push the ladder down, so that many follow them." Hence, WIP asked female Members of Parliaments in Africa, in which way the Chairperson inspires their work as politicians (the compilation will be presented to you as a book later this year). It is to no surprise, that the many, many answers received show admiration and respect to this outstanding woman. In concluding, I would like to quote five voices of female African Parliamentarians to this distinguished audience.

“She is a role model of self-resilience, self-reliance and self-confidence.”

(Rwanda)

“She epitomizes bravery and inspiration, particularly for women and girls that continue to be marginalized within the corridors of power simply because of their gender.”

(Namibia)

“She embodies all the qualities I admire in a woman; Very African, Decisive, Humane, Intelligent and Visionary.”

(South Africa)

“She is creating energy and enthusiasm about what can be, and engages the hearts, minds hands, and feet of the people one leads.”

(South Sudan)

“That she was able to be the chair of the African Union Commission is an achievement for women in the world and not just African Women. This woman gives us the will to continue the fight for the empowerment of women in decision making positions.”

(Algeria)

Ladies and Gentlemen, let's all fight for the empowerment of women.

I thank you for your attention.