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## **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SPEECH**

**H.E. DR. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA**

**CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**“African Women, Especially Young Women Succeeding in  
the Changing World of Work: Africa 50:50 by 2063”**

**8<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2017**  
**AUC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Excellencies,**

**Commissioners of the African Union Commission**

**Members of the Permanent Missions here in Addis Ababa,**

**Chairperson of the PRC**

**Representatives of RECs**

**Members of the Diplomatic Corps**

**Representatives of UN System and other Development  
Partners and international organizations**

**Representatives of Civil Society**

**African Union staff**

**African Union Citizens**

**African Union Spouse Association**

**A special greeting to the Secretary General and my sisters the  
Commissioners**

**President of PAWO and Mrs Adelaide Ruiters**

**Distinguished Delegates**

## **All the recipients of awards and all of us**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am delighted and honored to deliver this address on this special day. It is a special marker for women all over the continent.

It is a significant event for women across the globe, as we celebrate acts of courage and determination by women from all walks of life who have played extraordinary roles in their societies. Allow me, before we go any further, to acknowledge and honor Mrs. Jeanne Martin CISSE from Guinee Conakry, the first woman and first African woman to serve as president of the United Nations Security Council. She was also the Secretary General of the Pan African Women's Organization (PAWO) from 1962 to 1974. Mrs Martin passed away on 21 February 2017. She will remain one of the symbols of African women's contribution to freedom, equality, justice and empowerment. May Her Soul Rest in Peace.

### **Excellencies**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

May I also extend a very special warm welcome to our sister Mrs. Assietou Koite, one of the founding mothers and current President of PAWO as well as Mrs. Pinky Kekana, the Secretary General of PAWO. As you know PAWO stands for Pan African Women's Organisation. I always want to remind all of us that the women of this continent founded a pan African organization before the OAU. Without them we wouldn't be standing here.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence of Mrs. Adelaide Ruiters, and congratulate her for receiving the Women Super Achiever

Award conferred by the International World Women Leadership Congress, in India. Mrs Reuters was honoured, on behalf of all African women, for achievements in the world of business. We are very honoured to have you here and very inspired by your story. We hope many women can follow in your footsteps but that can't happen if we don't educate and provide skills to young women. That certainly can't happen if women are married off at a young age.

The other day I went to a project and it showed how oppressed women still are. What they do there is weaving but they said before that they were carrying wood. One of them said she got married at the age of 8 and the man was 40. She had 5 children and once her husband went blind she had to beg in the streets. Through this project they are now respected members of the community and are taking their children to school and feed them. They've gained their freedom through this economic empowerment. At all levels empowerment of women is critical. Not only for them but for future generations. It is clear that we still have a lot to do.

Gender equality also plays a role in the workplace. Today, Africa has reason to celebrate the significant strides that have been made over the years in protecting and promoting women's rights to gender equality in the workplace. However, Africa should also be cognisant of the gender inequalities and discriminatory practices that are still prevalent in the world of work, such as sexual harassment, gender wage gaps where women are systematically paid less than men for work of equal value, gender-insensitive working conditions, maternity protection, and unequal access to opportunities. Lack of access to quality education and resources for self-empowerment as well as unpaid care and domestic work, further restrict women's free time and propel them towards jobs

with lower income. I hope one day we can get to 50:50 for better results. There are still a lot of struggles in the workplace that women go through.

Many of us are able to work because there is a woman looking after your children and your home. We need to acknowledge that work as important work. Men also go to work and they know they will have clean shirts and a clean house. In some countries they have started looking into the value of that work.

On this International Women's Day, I encourage African Union Member States to commit to eradicate all structural barriers, discriminatory laws and practices including social and cultural norms that hinder women from realising their full potential and succeeding in the world of work. Unpaid care work should be valued and integrated in policies and domestic workers, especially female domestic workers have to be protected. It is our collective responsibility, particularly as this will affect the economic performance of our countries.

Africa must resolve to end marriages of young girls and other harmful traditional practices that violate young girls' dignity and human rights as well as end violence against women. These are some of the greatest impediments to women's development in society, including in the place of work. African Men ought to sign up for the HeForShe Campaign and unite to end all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls.

It is very important for us to do what needs to be done via Agenda 2063. The young people are getting restless. They want to put their energies into productive work. They want support in order to innovate and be industrialists. They want to drive prosperity in this continent. It's not the smart or right thing to do but our very survival staff depends on it.

As the AU Goodwill Ambassador on Child Marriage, H.E. Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda said: *"The future is young and female. That is why we must invest in girls"*. and Maths (STEM), and adopt new technology for digital jobs.

As we celebrate International Women's Day this year, let us also appreciate and pay tribute to all the women who have sacrificed their lives for the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid liberation struggles in Africa. We owe a great depth of gratitude to all the mothers of the continent who ensured that the voices of women are heard and that African women take their rightful place in history. It's sad that our sister, the only elected woman president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf will be leaving soon because as a woman she's a true democrat. When her term is over she leaves.

Africa is endowed with stories of great queens who led rebellions against colonialism and white rule. Many of you may have heard of Queen Amina of Zaria in Nigeria; Queen Ann Nzinga of Angola, Queen Alyssa of Carthaginian Empire, Nehanda of Zimbabwe, Queen Yenega of Burkina Faso; Queen Al-Kahina of Mauritania; Yaa Asantewa of the Ashanti Empire, Amina of the Zazzau, Manthatisi of the Batlokoa, Buktu of Mali and of course Makeda the Queen of Sheba on whose land the African Union is headquartered. These legendary African women were followed by other legendary women but this will never be enough, not until this

has become normal and we are no longer counting women. Their heroic acts remain hidden in fireside stories in the remote villages of Africa. Today, we remember all the mothers of the continent- the queens and all the other invisible great African women - who fought for the liberation of our continent.

In honour of these women, the AUC will display, alongside the paintings of the founding fathers of Africa, portraits of African queens and other heroines of the African liberation struggle from far back in history. Today, it is indeed my honour to officially launch this project, which will start with the collection, from all AU Member States, of portraits and stories of African legendary women. It will be important for us to publicise the museum and sculpture garden once it is realised.

On this International Women's Day, I would also like to invite all of Africa, to pay a special tribute to the Pan-African Women's Organisation (PAWO). PAWO was established in 1962, a year before the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). PAWO has made an indelible mark in the history of the continent. It not only united African women from all corners of the continent to fight against the oppressive colonial and apartheid rule, but it also ensured that women's rights and gender equality are fully integrated in the liberation agenda. Beyond that, PAWO has continued to raise the flag of gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa.

It is therefore my honour, to officially unveil the Portrait of the Founding Mothers of PAWO and a Plate inscribed with all the founding members of PAWO from across the continent. The

Portrait and Plate will take their rightful place alongside the founding fathers of the continent in the AUC Building to remind us of the great contribution of these women towards the establishment of the OAU/AU and to building the Africa we have today. As you may be aware by now, the African Union has already decided during the recently-concluded Summit to transform PAWO into a Specialised Agency of the AU.

## **Excellencies**

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

The Assembly of the Union at its twenty fifth ordinary session in Johannesburg, South Africa, decided to install a monument at the African Union Headquarters honoring women who have contributed to the African anti-colonial and anti-apartheid liberation struggles.

Today, I am greatly honoured, to officially launch the African Women's Historic Sculpture Garden and African Women's Museum.

The Women's Garden will consist of sculptures portraying African women in history. It will be a permanent exhibition in the AUC compound, reminding us of the contributions of African women to the struggle for independence, the establishment of the OAU/AU and the vision of Agenda 2063.

The Women's Museum will be a full resource centre and library and will document, maintain and disseminate information about the role played by women in Africa's political, economic, social and cultural development. The Museum will raise awareness and be a learning



platform for the younger generation to learn about the role of women in Africa's history.

In closing, allow me to congratulate the AUC Team, who worked tirelessly to make this event a success. Those who partook in the debate, the recipients of the awards.

But my appreciation goes to each and every one of you for participating in these celebrations of International Women's Day but mostly for helping me as I tried to achieve a common continental agenda for gender during my tenure as Chairperson of the Commission. I would like here to borrow the words of a great African woman, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize Mrs Wangari Maathai who said: *"I am very conscious of the fact that you can't do it alone. It's teamwork. When you do it alone you run the risk that when you are no longer there nobody else will do"*

I have no doubt that with your support and commitment the incoming commission will sustain and even go beyond what has been achieved.

May we celebrate women every day as the women's struggles and achievements are a daily phenomenon. I also want to thank you for the work you've done. Let me also thank all the men who understand the importance of women's empowerment. Together we can go far. Thank you also to our interpreters who are always here and help us communicate with one another during meetings. Last but not least let me thank you the AU Choir who always entertain us. A special thank you to the choir master Emanuel Shimbidi.

Happy Women's Day to all of us.