OPENING ADDRESS BY
THE COMMISIONER PEACE AND SECURITY OF THE AU COMMISSION
H.E. AMB. SMAÏL CHERGUI

TO THE 2nd GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NETWORK OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MEDIATION (FemWise-Africa)

SILENCING THE GUNS IN AFRICA BY 2020: WOMEN’S ROLE IN PREVENTING AND RESOLVING NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED CONFLICTS

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 29-30 November 2018
Your Excellency President Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,
Honourable Ministers,
Madam Co-chairpersons of FemWise, your Excellencies Mme Catherine Samba-Panza and Dr. Speciosa Wandira,
Representatives from Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms,
Excellencies, from Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the African Union Headquarters for this second General Assembly of FemWise-Africa. I am particularly pleased that Her Excellency Saleh Work Zewde, President of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, has accepted to joins us. She has a long and distinguished career domestically and internationally. She is a true inspiration to many and I hope that she will inspire many of you in this room to seek higher office. The Africa We Want, is also an Africa where there will be an equal number of men and women leading us into an Africa free from want and fear.

Allow me to thank each and everyone of you for having answered our call to join this important network that aims to professionalize the role of women in preventive diplomacy and mediation at all levels, and ensure a concrete channel for women’s meaningful and effective participation in peace processes. I would also like to express my gratitude to our FemWise Co-Chairs: H.E. Mme Catherine Samba Panza and Dr. Speciosa Wandira as well as the FemWise Steering
Committee who have been tireless supporters of this important initiative, and have taken considerable time out of their busy schedules to assist the Peace and Security Department in organising and convening this 2nd General Assembly of FemWise. Our thanks also go out to our numerous partners who continue to support us in this exercise.

Honorable President,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are meeting here in a very particular context. Of the many challenges facing the African continent, the quest for peace and security is undoubtedly the most pressing. Although significant advances have been made in reducing violent conflicts in Africa, thanks to the collective determination and efforts of our countries, with the support of international partners, many African countries and regions remain trapped in a vicious cycle of conflict with devastating consequences that undermine the continent’s development and integration agenda. The fact that Africa is host to eight United Nations peacekeeping operations, and dominates over 60% of the agenda of the UN Security Council, bear testimony to this reality.

Indeed, the traditional challenges to Peace and Security such as political competition, ethnic tensions or electoral violence are now exacerbated by emerging non-traditional security challenges such as
terrorism and transnational crime, drug trafficking in the Sahelo-Saharan region or the Horn of Africa, and complex competition between super powers which has scaled up the militarization of some parts of the continent. Social and economic discontent as a result of youth unemployment, gender inequality, extreme poverty, and economic disparities constitute the structural factors that fuel the wheels of these conflicts.

The lack of leadership, greed and subordination of the interest of people has created another challenge. We are now operating in a world that is increasingly normalizing intolerance. A world where people have lost their moral compass, the ability to distinguish what’s right from wrong and to stand up for those value that we all hold dear. That we are all equal in dignity!

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the environment under which FemWise is being established. The objective of the network is to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the context of the African Peace and Security Architecture. We will therefore need you to help us in your communities to understand those conflict triggers and help us where possible to end the conflicts at a local level before they transform and become national conflicts. We will need your help in preventing the radicalisation of youth, improve state-citizen relations, or to prevent electoral violence. In this regard, I am pleased
that my sister Commissioner for Political Affairs, Minata Samate, who could not be here with us today, committed to work with FemWise members in preventing electoral violence. We will also call on you to join our efforts in support of our Member States to end border disputes. Today, there are more a dozen border disputes on the continent. Some are dormant while others are active. I am pleased here to report that a FemWise member facilitated a dialogue last October between Malawi and Tanzania over a dispute about the River Songwe. Indeed, there are endless possibilities in terms of the areas of focus including issues related to urbanization, small arms, human and drug trafficking etc...

More pressing for us is to end the conflicts that are active in Libya, the Sahel region, the Horn of Africa, Lake Chad Basin and the Great Lakes region. In collaboration with our Regional Economic Communities (RECs) or other Regional Mechanism, we are making progress but not fast enough. We are also realising that peace is made at several levels. On one hand between external actors who have a stake in a given conflict, the belligerents themselves and at the community level. We want FemWise to support preventive and mediation at all levels. More than at any other time, the AU needs “all hands on deck” to meet our goal of silencing the guns by 2020.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to achieve our goals to end these conflicts and with regards
to FemWise in particular, we will put an emphasis on four areas in the near future. **First**, we will continue to build the capacity of our FemWise members. An induction is not training and it is not enough to become a mediator.

**Second**, we will develop a deployment and mentorship framework to pair each FemWise member with a more seasoned FemWise Mediator and Members of our Panel of the Wise. Nothing is more important than experience and from learning from those who have done it before.

**Third**, we will also strengthen our secretariat in order to assist in the day-to-day management of FemWise in particular with accreditation, capacity building mapping up areas of interests and deployment.

**Fourth**, we will continue to mobilize resources to assist FemWise from our Member States and our partners. In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that we have recorded USD 60.5 million dollars contributions by AU Member States to the Peace Fund. This represents the highest contribution since its establishment and based on additional commitments expressed during the last Assembly of Heads of State, we are projecting to reach USD 100 million dollars contribution by early 2019. As some of you might be aware, the Peace Fund has three windows. Window one is dedicated to support prevention and mediation efforts, window two institutional capacity and window three the initial deployment of
peace support operations. We will tap into this resource where necessary. We will also ask our partners to continue to support us particularly with Quick Impact Projects.

Let me conclude by emphasizing an important dimension of FemWise that is a continental ideal. I want to assure you of the AU’s determination to promote gender parity and empowerment of women across Africa, including within the very many structures and organs of the African Union. We also want to create a conducive work environment, which is a pre-requisite for gender parity. It is our belief that if we are to achieve this across the continent, it should start with the continental organization. And why not take the lead in the world on this? Many countries in Africa including Ethiopia and Rwanda to name a few are already leading the way.

Africa has made significant strides and the possibilities are endless. I want us to be ambitious and to think big, no mountain should be high enough as we seek to end conflicts and create an environment conducive to sustainable development and prosperity for the betterment of the lives of our people. It is an honor for me to welcome you to the African Union family and open this FemWise General Assembly.

I declare this Meeting open and thank you.