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Statement

By

**H.E. Amb. Minata SAMATE CESSOUMA
Commissioner for Political Affairs and
Head of African Union Delegation**

To Commission on the Status of Women, 63rd Session, CSW63

On behalf of

H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat

Chairperson of the African Union Commission

**On the occasion of the Official Presentation of the African Union
Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
(2018-2028)**

New York

13 March 2019

- H.E. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Head of Mission, Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations
- Honorable Lopusa Chantal Safou, Minister for Gender, Children and Family of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chairperson of the Specialised Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
- H.E Hawa Koomson, Minister of Special Initiatives, Republic of Ghana representing H.E Nana Akufo Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana and African Union President leader for Gender and Development in Africa
- H.E Dr. Maya Mohamed Abdelmoneim Morsy, President of the National Council of Women, Arab Republic of Egypt
- All African Union Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs here present
- H.E. Pinky Kekana Deputy Minister of Communications, Republic of South Africa
- and Secretary General, Pan-African Women's Organisation (PAWO)
- H.E Ambassador Olof Skoog Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations
- H.E Ambassador Louise Blais, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations
- Members of the Africa Group and Permanent Representatives present
- H.E Bineta Diop, African Union Special Envoy, Women, Peace and Security
- Mrs. Mariama Cisse, Director, Department of Social Affairs, African Union Commission representing H.E Amira Elfadil Mohamed, Commission for Social Affairs of the African Union Commission
- Ms. Noura Hamladjii, Assistant Deputy Administrator et Deputy Regional Director for Africa, UNDP
- Dr. Izedua Derek-Briggs, Regional Director UN Women East and Southern Africa
- Ms. Rahima Kandahari, Director USA Permanent Mission to the United Nations
- Mrs. Mahawa Kaba-Wheeler, Director Women, Gender and Development Directorate, African Union Commission and her entire team
- Representatives of Regional Economic Communities
- Representatives of Civil Society Organisations
- Members of the Media
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

On this august day and on behalf of H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, I have the pleasure and the honor to preside over the first official unveiling of the African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Indeed, the current presentation follows the solemn launch of this important continental strategic roadmap by our Chairperson H.E. Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat during the official opening of the 32nd AU Summit of Heads of States and Government on February 10, 2019 in Addis Ababa.

In this seminal moment, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat was once again placing the AU's gender agenda at the center of the continent's preoccupations and priorities. His message was clear: "achieving gender equality and women's empowerment will remain critical to Africa's quest for peace, security and prosperity."

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen;

In 2016 the African Union Commission upon recommendation by the AU Ministers for Gender and Women's Affairs mandated its Directorate for Women, Gender and Development to design its first ever strategy for gender equality and women's empowerment. The Commission was thereby acknowledging that the goal posts for the continent's transformational agenda had significantly shifted following the adoption of Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030; it meant that, we needed to define newer, bolder and higher standards in order to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa.

Anchoring this quest for a strategic roadmap in its existing policy and legal frameworks for gender equality and women's empowerment, the Commission was also making a distinct call to rapidly implement actions for impact. This first ever strategy is therefore a tool that will enable us accelerate the pace and translate and transform our approach towards implementing our existing commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen;

The process of developing any strategy is one that takes many unknown turns, especially when it is done at continental level and for the benefit of the more than 600 million women in Africa. As a Union however, we were already endowed with a strong knowledge base, tangible policies and best practices within our Member States, the goodwill from within our institution and our wealth of development partners; and the strategic partnership framework of the UN Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM).

We are also fortunate to be in a world where several leading global voices have made gender equality a critical parameter of their policies. It was therefore a windfall to be inspired by feminist foreign policies of several of our international partner countries, Strategic plans and latest research from key UN organizations, including UN Women and UNDP.

This strategy is also the result of extensive real-time technical consultations across the institutions and organs of the Union, Regional Economic Communities, development and UN partners, CSOs, media; and views collected through on-line discussions. We ensured that knowledge from all these sources was funneled and sifted into creating the key priorities for gender equality and women's empowerment the continent will pursue over the next ten years.

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen;

Throughout the development of this strategy, I must emphasize that feedback we received from the consultations pointed to the same message: the time is right and the time is now. We ought to move from commitments to actions; actions that will truly transform the lives and livelihoods of women across the continent and strengthen the AU's position as the continental voice for gender equality and women's empowerment. This paradigm shift is defined in four critical pillars:

- **Maximising opportunities, outcomes and e-tech dividend;**
- **Ensuring dignity, Security and Resilience**
- **Guarantying effective Laws, Policies and Institutions**
- **Providing Voice, Visibility and Leadership,**

Ladies and gentlemen;

This strategy does not seek to replace or duplicate what we already know, but instead, to crystalize those accomplishment into pieces we can each call our own, knowing that we are working in harmony towards our global goal for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Over the next decade, we can all therefore marshal our energies and goodwill towards implementing the priorities defined in this strategy. Nonetheless, in my capacity as representative of H.E. the Chairperson and Commissioner for Political Affairs, let me assure all of you that, this strategy will not amass dust on our shelves, but instead become our everyday companion. Therefore, to our esteemed team at the Directorate of Women, Gender and Development, in commending highly this timely and measurable strategic achieving, I hereby make a call to you to continue to put in place the necessary coordination mechanisms and incentives to ensure this strategy remains our collective bargaining tool. It means making sure that all things gender equality and women's empowerment start and end with this strategy at its core. We therefore look up to you to guide us and keep holding us accountable for its implementation. This call for action if fully aligned with the Assembly Decision that adopted the AU Gender Strategy at its 31st Ordinary Session in Nouakchott and requests that all AU Programmes, actions and reporting is henceforth aligned with this strategy.

Excellency ladies and gentlemen;

Now that we have unveiled the strategy, it is therefore my pleasure and privilege to express our gratitude to all of our stakeholders for bringing this important project to life. They include: all AU Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs hereby represented in strong numbers and led by the Chair of the Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. Our development Partners under the Joint Financing and Programming Arrangement (JFA/JPA), hereby, represented by His Excellency the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sweden, Her Excellency Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada and Director Kandahari from the USA Permanent Mission. A special recognition to the UN Family, in particular, UNDP; and UN Women, UN ECA, UNFPA for accompanying us throughout the process. They are all hereby represented by the UNDP Assistant Administrator and Deputy Regional Director for Africa and UN Women Regional Director for East and Southern Africa and UNECA Director for Social Affairs. Additionally, gratitude to all of our RECs and hereby represented by SADC, ECCAS and EAC. Our sincere gratitude also goes to our CSO partners: GIMAC, IAC, FEMNET, WiIDAF, Plan International and IPPF among others for leading various CSO consultations to inform the strategy; and to the Media for giving us the necessary visibility and platforms to amplify our voices.

As we look to the future, I wish to invite new partners to accompany us in the implementation of this new gender strategy at our headquarters and in our Member States and RECs. We are eager to fully enact this in our member states and look forward to the results, which we expect, will be a significant advancement in our quest for gender equality and women empowerment. Equally important, I am also hopeful that this strategy will support the efforts of H.E Nana Akufo Addo, AU President Leader on Gender and Development in Africa in delivering his mandate for women on the continent.

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen;

Behind every important achievement there is a strong group of locked arms to pull it forward.

H.E Ambassador Fatima, AU Permanent Observer in New York, thank you and your team for encouraging and supporting the Directorate in organizing and implementing this high level event, here in New York. Indeed, what better place than the CSW to unveil our newest tool.

H.E. Mme. Bineta Diop, from the initiation of the concept note of the strategy until adoption, your guidance and support have been immeasurable: thank you.

My fellow Commissioners and the entire leadership, thank you for providing the unfettered support to the Directorate.

I thank the departments of the Commission for actively developing this strategy. Your continued inputs and feedback are what led to this successful outcome. They are here represented by Mrs. Cisse Director for Social Affairs, colleagues from CIEFFA and the Peace and Security Department.

To the Directorate of Women, Gender and Development, I congratulate you on your staunch determination to create our first ever strategy for gender equality and women's empowerment; indeed we are all grateful for the great leadership at the helm of the department, spearheaded by Director Mahawa Wheeler, to the staff accomplishing the day-to-day tasks: gratitude!

On my own behalf and on that of all women Commissioners and Directors, I wish to thank the Directorate for giving us such a concrete and forward-looking tool.

I thank you and hereby look forward to the official presentation of the African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment to all of you.

New York, Wednesday March 13, 2019
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