



STATEMENT

OF

H.E. M. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

À

**THE MEETING OF AFRICAN MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF GENDER
ISSUES AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): « INTERVENTION AND RISE»

Addis Ababa, Tuesday 12 May 2020

Mme Chairperson of the AU Specialised Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women,

Honourable Ministers,

Dear Partners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the second time that a meeting of Ministers responsible for Gender issues is being convened by videoconference. This is proof that the circumstances governing the convening of these meetings, imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic, are extremely serious. At the same time, they impose on us a new working method, in particular by videoconference, to which I extend a warm welcome to you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Covid 19 pandemic has imposed itself on the world and on Africa with its human, social and economic consequences, the extent of which has yet to be measured. This extreme health situation is, rightly, a major source of concern for the African Union and for all of you, Ministers in charge of Gender, entrusted with the mandate of ensuring well-being, especially when we know that the sectors, where the majority of women operate, are the most affected.

Efforts are being made at all levels and measures are being implemented at the national, regional and continental levels to face this common enemy.

The African Union Commission, for its part, has worked out a Continental Strategy and established a Fund in Response to Covid 19 to support a sustainable medical response to this pandemic and mitigate its socio-economic consequences in its Member States. In doing so, it bases itself on the excellent expertise of its specialised institution "Africa CDC".

Mainstreaming gender into all of these initiatives is a duty for all of us. This is what justifies the convening of this meeting today, the main objective of which is, on the one hand, to apprise you of the AU guidelines drawn up by the Gender Directorate, in taking into account the gender dimension in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and, on the other hand, to determine together the strategic priorities for the management of this pandemic in the long term and a recovery framework integrating a transformative approach.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It seems to me that this is an appropriate opportunity to share with you my concerns about the issue of gender-based violence and the situation of female staff in the health sector.

Like any epidemic, Covid 19 accentuates the inequalities and discrimination of vulnerable groups. The confinement and the social distancing, can transform the haven of peace, which must be the home, into a place at high risk of violation of human rights and particularly the rights of women. We must, therefore, together ensure that this situation does not become the breeding ground for the propensity of violence against women. The fight against impunity, respect for dignity, equality and solidarity must be the cardinal values in the gender approach against Covi19.

The current pandemic has destabilised our health and social service systems, making their availability and accessibility difficult. The heroines, working in these fields, constituting the majority of health personnel, deserve our respect and need our support and protection.

May I, here, salute, in this regard, the efforts of the African Women Leaders Networks and many other civil organisations, which carry out remarkable work of support on the ground. I thank UN Women for the establishment of 25 national chapters of African Women Leaders Networks.

Furthermore, I would like to seize the opportunity of this meeting to request the Economic Commission for Africa to support our Member States further in the process of digitalizing the economies and all sectors of development. This will enable, within the framework of the AfCFTA, women and girls, who are in informal activities, to graduate to the formal sector.

For this I can rely on my Sister, Vera Songwé, here present. The pandemic must serve as a trigger to implement strategies allowing better employability and social protection of African women and securing their income.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Aware that we are fighting against an invisible enemy, I encourage you to share information on good practices to be put in place to mitigate the negative socio-economic effects of COVID-19. Solidarity and cooperation between public authorities, the private sector and civil society are more than ever necessary. This emerged clearly from the virtual meeting of women Foreign Ministers, held on 7 May 2020.

Finally, the current health crisis and its impact on the African society calls upon the Member States of the African Union and the social partners to continue to develop and implement policies and systems enabling the empowerment of African women, as stipulated in Agenda 2063.

I thank you.