

A welcoming remark by H.E. Madame Filsan Abdullahi, Minister, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, at the 5th Specialized Technical Committee meeting on “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”

Virtual Meeting, Convened by the African Union Commission’s Women, Gender and Development Directorate. (AUC/WGDD)

Esteemed Ministers and Representatives of African states,

Esteemed leaders and officials of the African Union Commission,

Your Excellences, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would have loved to say to all of you, welcome dear participants to Addis Ababa, our capital, your capital city, the seat of the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. But unfortunately we are deprived of the pleasure of welcoming and hugging each other in the African way, in person, but instead we are interacting from thousands of miles away through the lens of technology due to the unprecedented effect of the COVID-19 pandemic which has caused so much damage but also demonstrated our indomitable spirit and resilience.

I would like to begin my welcoming remarks by thanking the African Union Commission’s Women, Gender and Development Directorate for organizing this essential virtual meeting of the 5th Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (STC-GEWE), and for giving me the opportunity to welcome all of you.

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen, we are holding this meeting at a critical time for the gender equality and women’s empowerment agenda evaluating our successes, the issues that we felt short on and the challenges that held us back as we celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the 20th Anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women’s Peace and Security Agenda and the end of the African Women’s Decade on Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.

This meeting offers us an opportunity to assess the accomplishments we have made as a continent in reaching women, share best practices and lessons learnt, chart the future through novel initiatives and reiterate our commitments towards achieving the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment. It will be an important platform in mapping the next decade on financial and economic inclusion for African women, an issue of vital importance for African women to fully benefit from the continent's development.

It is my conviction that we cannot achieve our goals and desires with an attitude of business as usual. We need to come up with new and improved approaches. We need to strengthen our accountability systems in order to ensure that policies approved and commitments made by our member states are followed up and implemented as designed. We need to mobilize and organize the youth as a force for change. We need to ensure that our legal instruments provide the framework for achieving full rights and benefit for women and have the desired impact at the grassroots level. We need to form strategic alliances with the media and the private sector and strengthen our collaboration at a continental level. Above all, we need to ensure that adequate financing is available for our strategies and initiatives.

We are having this meeting at unprecedented time of the corona virus pandemic that has impacted so many lives. The pandemic's adverse impact has been worse on women. Their livelihoods have been disrupted; their normally high load of unpaid care work and domestic responsibilities has been compounded and violence and exploitation has increased. We need to put in place mechanisms to address these issues. On the other hand, the pandemic also offered us a chance to witness the strong leadership of women either as frontline workers fighting the pandemic, community mobilizers or heads of families, institutions and countries. We should also note that COVID has taught us and the rest of the world, how to unite to fight the common enemy the Pandemic, how to support each other as there are no winners and no targeted losers and that we are all in this together.

As African nations, as women, as advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment, we have no choice but rise to the challenges we are facing, including COVID-19. We should not be distracted but rather remain unified and

focused in achieving our goals as set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda 2063: the Africa we want.

Thank you again to all of you for attending this meeting and the WGDD for organizing the meeting. I hope we will have a very productive and successful meeting.