

TALKING POINTS

H.E President Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

The Africa Pre – CSW- 66 Consultations and Ministerial Meeting

28 FEBRUARY 2022

H.E Dr. Monique Nsanzabagwanwa, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission

Hon. Dr. Véronique Tognifodé, Chairperson, Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and Minister of Social Affairs and Microfinance, Republic of Benin

Honourable Ministers and experts,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to add my voice to the words of welcome conveyed by the Ethiopian Minister of Gender and Women Affairs to welcome you all to Addis Ababa. I welcome all of you who are here physically as well as those joining virtually at this Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) Ministerial Consultation.

This year, the 66th Session of the CSW will be focused on gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risks. It will also review the theme, 'women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work' and consider how recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic needs to be implemented in a manner that ensures gender equality and building a resilient future.

The relevance of these themes for our continent and African women is evident. There is no better manifestation of the inequalities in the global world order than the issue of climate change. While contributing a small fraction of greenhouse gas emissions as compared to developed countries, Africa bears the debilitating effects of climate change to a disproportionate degree. The impacts are vast and far-reaching.

It is very critical to consult before any gathering where Africa will be part of other groups. As has already been mentioned by previous speakers this allows us to harmonise our positions, speak in one voice and have our concerns spelled out clearly and identify where we require support. It is also an immeasurable opportunity for us to ask the right questions and seek the right answers.

Without going too deeply into the details of the theme, allow me to focus on a few points which I believe are essential if we want to see substantive changes with regards to the status of women.

1. Women in leadership

This pillar is critical and we must appreciate the strides already taken in many African countries, however changing the narrative on the continent requires even more women reaching the highest possible positions. There is no shortcut to this. We understand that it is important for women to be given these positions, so the status quo begs the question; why is Africa not advancing in this regard? Look around us, in Africa only two women are Presidents. That's not good enough and saying that is an understatement. Even in the history of the continent – the numbers of women in leadership positions are unsatisfactory, so this means any interventions we may have or develop will always be found lacking. We need to consider what else we are doing to get women onto the ladder so they may be able to climb. Advancing women in a sustainable way will not be possible if there is no guarantee that it will continue. We all have the responsibility to prepare the next generation, we must be mindful that whatever we do can still regress. Which is why we must inspire other to rise, inspire women to go out and make a difference and ensure those women have a guarantee that they will be supported by other women.

We need to train women; we need to build their capacity and get them ready so when the question is raised “where are they?” in reference to women ready to be promoted and elevated we will have the right answers.

We need credible women who will bring transformative change when they get to these levels. I say this with the full understanding that it is not an easy feat to accomplish but it can be done. When I say that it is easier said than done, I am envisioning the many obstacles along the path of this responsibility. It is imperative to identify the obstacles and to resolve them.

2. What makes this CSW different to others?

Our approach is always the same; we identify a team, we consult, we go to New York but from one meeting to the other we need to have substantial movements towards the right direction otherwise this will be yet another gathering.

The theme of this year is extremely important because it touches on the lives of millions of African women who are facing climate change and natural disaster effects.

I want us to appreciate that the women who face these problems also have the solutions – this is therefore to invite our respective countries to have consultations with the concerned parties. This is their reality and they are surviving these effects every day, therefore their inputs are incredibly valid. I invite you to have consultations with them too so we can add depth to our deliberations.

Our approach to women in leaders as a solution for some of the long-standing issues which plague our continent needs to be cognizant of a leadership that cascades down and empowers all women in the ways they require. Our duty is not only to deliver on our respective mandates but also towards upgrading other women.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

As we know approximately 74% of Africa's continent is made up of women and youth and they have been disproportionately excluded from financial and economic opportunities. If you had the privilege to listen to the statement made by H.E Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa, the African Union Commission's Deputy Chairperson during the AU Honor Day media briefing at the ongoing Dubai Expo yesterday, you will have heard her drive home the importance of financial and economic inclusion of women and youth. We are currently in the African Women's Decade, 2020 – 2030, and this period calls for the promotion of equality between men and women by accelerating the financial inclusion and empowerment of African women, in line with Agenda 2063 and the regional policy frameworks. There is no better time than now to unleash their untapped potential.

I also take the opportunity to congratulate H.E. the Deputy Chairperson on the upcoming AU Women and Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion Initiative, to be championed by her office, which will focus on creating parity in employment, unlocking financing for African women and youth entrepreneurs while contributing to economic growth and job creation on the continent. Deliberate interventions such as these will ensure our efforts reach as many African women and youth within this critical decade where we are all called to action. You can count on my support Your Excellency.

In conclusion I'd like to say in all we do we must keep ourselves accountable. "What difference am I making?". By doing so we promote personal accountability and I want

to see more women championing this because there are millions of African women who look up to us and we should be, unhesitatingly, in a position to deliver according to their wishes.

I wish you a successful meeting and thank you for your attention.