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**Message of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission
H.E. Mousa Faki Mahamat**

on the occasion of

International Women's Day 2023

Theme: *"DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality - 20 Years of Maputo Protocol"*

My Dear Sisters,

I'm delighted that we celebrate this year's International Women's Day with AU Member States having launched the implementation Roadmap of the African Women's Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion 2020-2030 and its programmatic flagship, the AU Women and Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion 2030 Initiative. The African Women's Decade calls for innovative and sustainable solutions towards the empowerment of African women while the Initiative recognizes digitization at the core of the financial inclusion agenda.

This year we commemorate IWD under the theme ***DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality - 20 Years of Maputo Protocol***. The theme is aligned with several AUC priorities to maximize e-tech dividends for women as a means to contribute to women's sustainable development, through increased women and girls' equal and effective participation in the technology space. The African Union is delighted to join the global community to celebrate the formidable contribution that women have made in Innovation and technological transformation.

In addition, women, especially young women, should be at the core of this digital transformation and this year's theme acknowledges that unless we zoom in on the contributions of women in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM), in a world where innovation is currency, our development agenda will be compromised.

This International Women's Day is also particularly significant in that 2023 marks important milestones at the Continental and global levels in pursuit towards Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE). At the Continental level;

- we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, popularly known as the Maputo Protocol;
- It is also 60 years since the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which gave birth to the African Union;
- We are also marking the end of the 1st 10-year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063, which recognizes Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment as a cross-cutting issue in all its aspirations.

Globally, we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But the road remains long and much remains to be done. The African Union concluded the AU Gender Summit, ahead of the just concluded AU Ordinary Assembly of Heads and States and Government. This Gender Pre-Summit made important recommendations, that need to be reinforced through our collective and concrete action. The recommendation call for:

1. Establishing a network of regional and national champions to increase the reach and inclusion of women and youth,
2. Leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement to strengthen intra-regional trade,
3. Investing in access to digital financial services for women and youth, especially MSMEs to drive financial inclusion,

4. Collecting disaggregated data by gender and youth to inform policy development and program execution,
5. Leveraging the education sector by including financial literacy in school curriculums.
6. Creating more opportunities for women and youth in governance and leadership positions to ensure representation and inclusive in decision-making.
7. Creating financial products and services that specifically meet the needs of women and youth, particularly in rural areas and the borderlands.
8. Strengthening accountability mechanisms and the need for the ratification of the Maputo protocol
9. Cascading mechanisms to ensure grassroots movements, CSO and Women's rights organizations remain at the center of interventions in order to translate macro-level strategies into micro level impact.

It is clear to me that Innovation and Technology are key accelerators for development on the Continent, and more particularly through the pioneering contributions past and present, made by women in this field. It is therefore my wish that we look at critical ways to bridge the gender digital divide and make women, particularly young women and girls, as a priority constituency in this developmental sector of the future to achieve Gender Equality in Africa and beyond.