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**STATEMENT BY**

**H.E. Mme BINETA DIOP, AU SPECIAL ENVOY ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY**

**At the Opening Ceremony of the Consultation Meeting of AU Ministers in charge of Gender and Women's Affairs**

**Permanent Observer Mission of the AU to UN**

**20 March 2017**

**14H00-17H00**

**Your Excellency Ms. Fatmata Tambajang, Vice President of the Republic of the Gambia,**

**Your Excellency, Dr. Jean Kaliyani, Minister for Gender of the Republic of Malawi and Chairperson of the STC,**

**Your Excellencies, Ministers in Charge of Gender and Women's Affairs of African Union Member States,**

**Your Excellency Amb. Antonio Tete, Permanent Observer of the African Union Commission to the United Nations,**

**Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic corps,**

**Mme Mahawa Kaba-Wheeler, Director, Women, Gender and Development Directorate, African Union Commission,**

**Distinguished Experts,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I have the honor and pleasure to bring you greetings and best wishes from the new Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, who assumed office on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2017 in a well-organized and dignified handover ceremony with H.E Mme Nkosazana Dlamini- Zuma who returned home on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017, after a four years term that saw remarkable progress on gender equality and women's empowerment on the continent.

Spelling out his priorities, the new Chairperson clearly stated that he will endeavor to place the women and youth at the centre of Africa's development and I quote his words“:

*- Hisser les femmes et les jeunes à la place qui leur revient dans la promotion de la paix, du développement et la Renaissance africaine. Je suis résolu à faire de la "moitié du ciel africain" que sont les femmes et des "porteurs de l'avenir" que sont nos jeunes, le cœur palpitant de notre projet ».*

The determination of the new chairperson is a testimony of the efforts that you have all carried out and continue to undertake in our continued fight to bring to the forefront, the rights of women's on the continent.

### **Excellencies,**

Allow me at this juncture, to salute and congratulate you, for once more, showing your strong commitment to the advancement of the women's agenda, by taking the time, despite the very heavy schedules that you all have, to stay on for this meeting, on the margins of the CSW 61.

Your presence here today, building on the consultations that we had in Addis Ababa, is a confirmation that, more and more, we are all garnering our efforts towards an enhanced harmonization, a common place to share our experiences and lessons learned, so that we speak with one voice to be heard loud and clear and to always push forward a common agenda, the women's agenda.

In that vein, today meeting objective is to give you an update on AU activities on gender equality and women's empowerment and to receive your guidance on the way forward.

As you know AUC's efforts to promote gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment are taking root, and never again can women's rights be set to one side and treated as a separate issue. Great strides have been made to redress the imbalances between women and men in the full enjoyment of their human rights. But, we also know that there is still much to be done by both women and men of good will, if we are to achieve an African society in which everyone enjoys equal access to their human rights, as stipulated in Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 and Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Since the 27<sup>th</sup> AU summit in Kigali, the African Union Commission is exploring innovative and sustainable ways of mobilizing the much needed financial resources to deliver on our

vision of a people-centered Africa, in which women would be catalytic in fighting poverty, creating wealth and closing the gender gap and thereby, halt African women's marginalization. While we undertake to mobilize internal resources, it will also be as important and critical, that we revisit and enhance our own responsibility and accountability.

**Excellencies Ministers,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is important in this respect that we move resolutely to implementation, that we set clear indicators and commit ourselves to reporting regularly on what we are doing. Yes, we all celebrate the advances brought about by landmark policies and instruments, the Beijing Platform for Action, UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, AU Protocol on Women's Rights, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, AU Gender Policy, African Women's Decade, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and many others. But we have also decried the nail pace that has hampered full translation of those instruments into true transformation of the lives of the common woman in our countries. Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 provide as with a unique opportunity to step up efforts, hand in hand, with stronger collaboration with women's groups, to truly and in a transformative way, achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, in all spheres of life.

In her farewell speech, Dr Dlamini-Zuma echoed the voices of the pioneer of African unity, Nkwame Nkrumah, who said in those early days. " that Africa now needs the courage to work hard, with determination and focus, to deliver on the aspirations of Africans".

These words are as true today as they were when Africa was emerging from colonialism.

**Excellencies Ministers,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Conflicts and strife continue to be the single most source of major sufferings and abuse of women's rights on the continent. In recent solidarity missions to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, we witnessed first-hand, once more the unacceptable situations of women and children in conflict-affected countries. It is critical that women take a leading role in silencing the guns on the continent, for us to create the space for stability and prosperity on our continent.

Let us build on the gains we have made and continue to strengthen our efforts towards greater gender equality and women's empowerment, mobilizing our young people, for a better today and tomorrow for all of us.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you fruitful deliberations.