

Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa

We, the Heads of State and Government of Member States of the African Union, meeting in the Third Ordinary Session of our Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 6-8 July 2004:

Reaffirming our commitment to the principle of gender equality as enshrined in Article 4 (I) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, as well as other existing commitments, principles, goals and actions set out in the various regional, continental and international instruments on human and women's rights, including the African Platform for Action (1994), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW - 1979), the African Plan of Action to Accelerate the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action for the Advancement of Women (1999); the Outcome Document of the Twenty-third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2000); and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003);

Standing by our decision on gender equality taken at the Inaugural Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2002 in Durban, South Africa;

Re-affirming our commitment to continue, expand and accelerate efforts to promote gender equality;

Commending the progress that we have made so far in addressing issues of concern to the women of Africa, while also recognizing that major challenges and obstacles to gender equality still remain;

Deeply concerned about the negative impact on women and on the development of our countries of issues such as HIV/AIDS, conflict, poverty, violence against women, women's exclusion from politics and decision-making, and illiteracy;

Expressing grave concern regarding the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among girls and women, and the disproportionate burden on women to care for and support those infected and affected by the disease, and re-affirming the need to systematically address all these issues at all levels of society;

Aware that AIDS orphans and older people, especially grandmothers, shoulder excessive responsibility for providing care for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, most times without support of any sort either from the society or from the State;

Re-committing to the goals and strategies set out in the Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases which we adopted in April 2001 during our Summit which was kindly hosted by the President, Government and People of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nigeria;

Conscious that, while women bear the brunt of conflicts and internal displacement, including rapes and killings, they are largely excluded from conflict prevention, peace-negotiation, and peace-building processes;

Taking cognizance of the adverse impact of gender inequality on the economic growth of Africa and the fact that African women bear a disproportionate burden of poverty;

Recognizing that extreme poverty cannot be addressed without concerted efforts to improve women's access to resources and that access to resources increases the level of spending, especially on food and children's education;

Aware that women's literacy and improved girls' education spin off a wide range of benefits including improving the welfare of the family and the quality of the labour force, increasing the tax base, and boosting levels of agricultural output;

Noting that, while women's participation in the labour force has increased significantly over the past two decades, wide disparities still persist between men and women in terms of access to employment and remuneration;

Conscious of the fact that low levels of women's representation in decision-making increase poverty and impact negatively on women's ability to derive full benefit from their participation in the economies of their countries;

Also conscious that under-representation of women in decision-making structures reflects the level of maturity of the democratic process in that state, and is an indication that a society is less democratic and less egalitarian;

Concerned that religion and culture are often erroneously used as a justification and an excuse for perpetrating and perpetuating discrimination against women;

HEREBY AGREE TO:

1. Promote gender specific economic, social, and legal measures aimed at combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, make treatment and social services available to women at the local level more responsive to the needs of families that are providing care, and increase budgetary allocations in these sectors so as to alleviate women's burden of care;
2. Undertake concerted action to provide support for those who care for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, especially women, children and the elderly who in most cases are grandmothers;
3. Urge the full participation and representation of women in the prevention, resolution, and management of conflicts in Africa;
4. Extend the gender equality principle that we have adopted regarding the Commission of the African Union to all the other organs of the African Union, to the Regional Economic Communities, and to the national and local levels;
5. Mount, within the next one year, a campaign against the recruitment of child soldiers and abuse of girl children as wives and sex slaves, and thus bring an end to this inhuman treatment of our children;
6. Lead from the front sustained public campaigns against gender based violence for the protection of women at the national level;
7. Galvanize national legislative processes to promulgate and enforce specific laws relating to violence against women in all its forms;
8. Deploy all efforts to expand the gains already made in bridging the gender disparity in education and to meet that Millennium Development Goal which seeks to close the gender gap in primary education by the year 2005;
9. Actively promote the implementation of legislation to strengthen women's land, property and inheritance rights including their rights to housing;
10. Strengthen measures to reduce women's workload, expand employment opportunities for women, and ensure equal pay for work of equal value;

11. Sign and ratify, in the next one year, instruments aimed at promoting and protecting women's rights, especially the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa Women, and ensure their implementation;

12. Strengthen the gender machineries in our countries and provide them with enough human and financial resources to enable them to carry out their responsibility of promoting and tracking gender equality;

13. Consider the establishment of a Special Investment Fund for Women to support women entrepreneurship, possibly for management by the African Development Bank

14. Be agents of change and personalty undertake and champion advocacy campaigns to address all these issues, support national and regional processes and mechanisms, and regularly provide each other with updates on progress during our ordinary sessions.