

Statement from the Africa Women's NGO Consultative Meeting Beijing +15 Review

**November 16, 2009
Banjul, The Gambia**

We, the representatives of civil society organisations addressing women's and human rights issues across Africa, **meeting in the margins of the 8th Africa Regional Conference on Women (Beijing +15) on November 15 and 16, 2009 in Banjul, The Gambia;**

Having assembled to deliberate on the progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Africa since the last review (Beijing +10), to validate the Africa Regional NGO Shadow Report on Beijing +15 which incorporates national and sub-regional reviews from women's civil society organisations and networks;

Recognizing that the Beijing +15 Review process is taking place at a time of both great opportunities and challenges for African women in the realization of their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights;

Considering WITH GREAT CONCERN that although the process of implementation of Beijing Platform for Action over the last 15 years has utilized significant resources, progress remains minimal, slow and fragmented, and has not resulted in fundamental changes in the lives of the majority of women in Africa;

Noting that the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and human rights instruments that reinforce its provisions such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol on the Rights of women in Africa involves a range of stakeholders, the primary responsibility rests with member states of the African Union;

Further noting that the Beijing commitments have been repeatedly articulated as human rights guarantees which states parties are obligated to protect, promote and fulfil to the fullest extent possible, and that this requires visible and consistent political will and resources in order to deliver on this agenda;

We therefore highlight the following actions among others, specified in the Beijing +15 Africa NGO Shadow Report as an urgent **Call on African Governments** to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action over the next 5 years;

1. Ensure universal ratification of the African Union Protocol on Women's Rights, CEDAW and its Optional Protocol, as an indication of their political commitment to the human rights standards and urgently domesticate in full the instruments on women's rights to provide a legal basis for protecting, fulfilling and enforcing provisions on women's social and economic rights in particular;
2. Accelerate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and all women's rights commitments through a multi - sectoral approach, that States committed to in Beijing in 1995, by the end of the first three years of the Africa Women's Decade;

3. Ensure that structures established to lead the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda have adequate resources as an indication of member states' political commitment to women's advancement;
4. Ratify the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, harmonize the electoral laws and democratic structures with its provisions and consistently implement the African Union gender parity commitments at national and local governance levels by 2015;
5. Ensure that electoral and policy reforms are fully implemented to guarantee women's full and effective participation in leadership and decision-making in terms of equal representation, participation in political parties and as key stakeholders in the democratic processes of their countries;
6. Allocate funds from the African Union Women's Fund for training and education programmes for women politicians aspiring for elected positions as a priority to enhance their capacities to effectively participate in and influence decision making processes.
7. Enact Freedom of Information legislation in line with internationally accepted human rights principles and standards in order to guarantee citizens' access to critical information particularly to African women, to facilitate their full and effective participation in governance, democratic processes and development.
8. Urgently implement their commitments to change attitudes and practices that negatively impact on the protection, promotion and fulfilment of women's rights by using the media among others, as a powerful tool for building public and targeted awareness and education on women's rights and advancement.
9. Meet their reporting requirements on progress made towards gender equality in Africa and where there is non compliance we call upon the African Union to institute additional mechanisms for ensuring accountability under the Protocol on the Rights of women (2003) and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004).
10. Address the burning issue of impunity in Africa with regard to violations of human rights of African citizens, particularly violence against women and children in conflict situations, and ensure fulfilments of commitments to the protection of women and children from all forms of violence;
11. Ensure that member states prioritise women's health as a human rights issue, particularly maternal, sexual and reproductive health, as a critical component of sustainable development in Africa, and intensify actions to reduce the feminisation of HIV/AIDS;
12. Take deliberate efforts to nominate female candidates for the position of Chairperson of the African Union Commission as a sign of equal sharing of leadership and responsibilities for delivering on the development agenda in Africa;

13. Invest in women's education with particular attention to science and technology training, to ensure that African women benefit from the changing global technology framework;
14. Build the capacity of rural women in agriculture and strengthen women's land rights as part of the process of implementing the New Partnership for Africa's Development Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) and the AU Land Policy Framework and Guidelines;
14. Invest in research on climate change in Africa and its implications for women, and address gender dimensions with respect to mitigation, adaptability, response and compensation mechanisms. Invest in research and technology on clean and renewable energy sources ensuring gender analysis is integrated;
15. Desist from engaging in bilateral and international trade and economic agreements that undermine the regional integration process and impact negatively on women's rights and advancement;
16. Invest in women's entrepreneurship for effective economic empowerment and eliminate barriers to women starting businesses and small/medium enterprises and commit sufficient resources to infrastructural development that facilitates trade within countries and across borders in the region; and
17. Ensure that gender equality is incorporated in all planning and budgeting processes at different levels, and the deliberate development of sex disaggregated data and gender sensitive indicators, as one of the ways to guarantee effective implementation of all the Beijing commitments and as a strategy for promoting, protecting and fulfilling African women's right to development.