

**Minister's Remarks at the Women and Climate Change Side-Event on the sidelines of the 17th Ordinary Session of the African Union (Malabo – Equatorial Guinea), 27 June 2011**

Dear Chairperson;  
Honourable Minister Edna Molewa;  
Ms. Biente Diop;  
Ladies and gentlemen

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this important event, which touches on the very critical relationship between Women and Climate Change. Noting that this event takes place on the side-lines of the Summit of the African Union, I take wish to implore you to allow me to make very specific remarks on this subject.

COP17/CMP7, which will be held in South Africa later this year, presents all of us with a challenge of ensuring that what-ever outcome flows from this international gathering should at least address itself, in some way, to the effect of climate change on women. As we converge here this afternoon, we need to talk about how we will ensure that COP17/CMP7 indeed lead to outcomes that are fair, transparent, inclusive and equitable for everyone.

As South Africa, we have embarked, with the support and assistance from Ms Mary Robinson and the United Nations Economic Community for Africa on a process of national, continental and international consultations with women. Our brief is very simple - to ensure that the needs and aspirations of women in the context of the effects of climate change are met.

In South Africa, we have already started this process and are planning to undertake provincial road-shows to meet and share views with our women-folk in both urban and rural South Africa; the young and the not so young; the educated and uneducated. We need to know and understand their socio-economic plight, especially as brought to them and/or aggravated by changing climatic conditions.

As the incoming President of COP17/CMP7, South Africa has an onerous task of assisting state parties to deliver an acceptable, fair, transparent and equitable deal in the upcoming Climate Change negotiations in Durban. We are here, amongst others, to continue our engagement with key constituencies whose role will be important in Durban.

In an effort to gauge the expectations and interests of the parties before the hosting of COP17/CMP7, we have been to a number of informal consultations, for example the Mexico Dialogue, BASIC and the Major Economies Forum. We are humbled by the openness and willingness of state parties to support us in order for Durban to be a success.

Chairperson,

In our effort to build trust and transparency, South Africa has since held open-ended informal consultations in Bonn with all Parties and stakeholders – in an effort to solicit their views on their expectations on the Outcome of the Durban Climate Change conference. We are pleased to report that responses to this initiative have relatively been very positive.

We are humbled by the openness and willingness of state parties to support us in order for Durban to be a success. At this point, I must say that the key issues and priorities for Durban that have emerged in the various negotiations thus far, relate to achieving a balance between the Bali Roadmap and operationalizing the Cancun Agreements, as well as striking a balance between and within both the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol negotiating tracks.

Chairperson,

Why are we focusing on women and climate change? Indeed, women and men experience climate change, but they do so differently - across regions, generations, and classes.

However, there is no denying the fact that it is women who have to walk long distances to fetch wood and water in the face of drought and desertification. It is women who hold households together when our ecosystems come under strain. It is women who are hardest by natural disasters. We also know that women are held responsible for food security of their households, thus at the receiving end of the negative impact of climate changes.

The most vulnerable to climate change are children under 5; lactating mothers; elderly persons; female headed-households and, single women. Clearly, in most of these categories women are the most prominent.

Furthermore, the increased global competition for “green” and natural resources, including the competition for scarce resources like water and land, have put many women in a precarious situation especially those depended on subsistence farming.

Africa is one of the most vulnerable continents to climate change and climate variability, and is already under pressure from climate stresses. Africa’s vulnerability to climate change is increased by the climate-dependency of its major economic sectors, and the existing development challenges such as poverty, weak institutions, limited infrastructure, limited access to technology and information, as well as complex disasters and conflicts.

Chairperson, I wish to take this opportunity to pay homage to one initiative that we are particularly excited about – and that is the Network of African Women Ministers and Leaders for the environment (AFWMLE). The AFWMLE was formally launched in South Africa in August 2010 and is composed of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment. I believe that this Network of women leaders in the environment space will be a good partner in Durban when we host COP17/CMP7.

In conclusion, I am reminded here, Chairperson, of what one rural South African woman once told a team of researchers, that:

*As a woman who is a head of my family, I go through a lot of stress when my crops fail. It means I will have nothing to sell and nothing for the family to eat. I will have to think and work harder to find a way to feed the family and still get money to do other things. In our community you find men with families who are also having so much stress, when their crops fail”. (close quote)*

I thank you!!