

**FEMMES AFRICA SOLIDARITE  
STATEMENT IN OBSERVANCE OF THE 100<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
8 MARCH 2011**

Africa has always been home to strong women leaders. Going back hundreds of years, African women have held key decision-making positions in politics and have excelled in all walks of life. In the most challenging of situations, African women are survivors and continue to amaze with their resourcefulness and resilience. As is true for countries around the world, women in Africa make up 50% of their populations and even with limited access to education, health care, economic opportunities, legal protection and a decided lack of inclusionary policies, African women continue to make their voices heard, their faces visible and their actions felt. In that regard, Rwanda acknowledges their centrality and was the first nation in the world to include 56% of women in their parliament.

Yet in view of all this strength, African women face challenges on a daily basis that seek to sap their spirits and to make life more difficult in already difficult circumstances. As we are reminded by recent events in Ivory Coast where six women were killed while in peaceful protest, women in Africa are usually vulnerable targets in situations of unrest and conflict. Women do not only have to deal with the fear, displacement, grief and uncertainty that generally accompany war, they in addition have to worry about being targeted for sexual violence and exploitation.

In peace time, cultural practices and discriminatory laws and policies limit women's full access to education, health care, human rights and economic opportunity. This is a cause for concern, not only for women, but for every person that wishes their country to excel in the social, economic and political spheres. Any country that actively prevents the full participation and contributions of 50% of the population that could be geared towards development risks mediocrity.

International legal provisions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which safeguards the rights of women and United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889 which aim to protect women in conflict, have provided an avenue for women to hold their governments accountable. Moreover, African Union instruments which include the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the Solemn Declaration of Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) have equipped women with additional tools to advocate for their rights.

However, even with the adoption and ratification of these laws by African States, tangible gains to improve the status of women are sporadic and in short supply. Through its work in the Great Lakes Region, the Mano River Region and the Horn of Africa, Femmes Africa Solidarité contributes to the efforts of women in Africa to seek durable solutions that protect and empower women. The

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organization also contributed to the adoption of the Parity Principle of the African Union, the Maputo Protocol and the SDGEA.

On this 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of International Women's Day, we salute the women and men that support, advocate and fight for justice for women around the world. There is much more that needs to be done, many barriers to break down and many glass ceilings to shatter, but there is also cause for recognition and in some cases, celebration of what has been achieved over the past 100 years. We hope that in half this time, we would have accomplished even more than it took us to achieve in 100 years, come 2061!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bineta Diop', written in a cursive style.

**Bineta DIOP**  
**Executive Director**  
**Femmes Africa Solidarité**