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**Revisiting the Beijing Platform**

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Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is with great honor and with distinct pleasure that I share this discussion platform with my fellow panelists to address this audience. Let me again express my thanks to the Kenyan Institute of Management (KIM) and the African Leadership Forum (ALF) for the invitation to speak on this important topic on “Revisiting the Beijing Platform.”

In preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing, China in 1995, Ministers and representatives of African Governments met in Dakar, Senegal in 1994 at the Fifth Regional Conference on Women and adopted an African Platform for Action. They reaffirmed their commitment to the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the advancement of women through accelerated action for equality, development and peace. They recognized that there can be no equality and development without peace and that peace can only be achieved with the full involvement of women as equal partners with men at all levels of decision-making, diplomacy and mechanisms for peace and conflict resolution and reconciliation.

As such, the operating principle of the African Platform for Action was the integration of the gender perspective in all policies, plans and actions directed towards the achievement of equality, development and peace.

In 1995, **the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA)** covered **12 Critical Areas of Concern**:

- Women and Poverty
- Women and Education and Training
- Women and Health
- Violence against Women
- Women and Armed Conflict
- Women and the Economy
- Women in Power and Decision-making
- Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women
- Human Rights of Women
- Women and the Media
- Women and the Environment
- The Girl-child

As stated by Ms. Gertrude Mongella, the Chair of the meeting, the African women’s movement has played a key role in achieving the BPfA –from grassroots to policy machinery.

The outcome emphasized that full implementation of the BPFA can only be realized if the values, attitudes, practices and priorities that inform development programs and initiatives are also transformed to reflect women.

Over the years, The Beijing Platform for Action has paved the way for some landmark international, regional and local commitments, which strengthened the implementation of the BPFA. These include the Millennium Development Goals, United Nations Security

Council resolution 1325 –and other related instruments- and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. We should not forget that Africa had already begun the process of legally recognizing women’s rights as enshrined in the **African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (1981)**.

- **Article 2** - Every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognised and guaranteed in the present Charter without distinction of any kind such as race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion, political or any other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or any status.
- **Article 18(3)** - The State shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the rights of women and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions.

This was later developed in Maputo in 2003 in the form of the Protocol to the African Charter to address the specific challenges faced by women. The process that led to the adoption of the Maputo Protocol was a result of the collective advocacy efforts of African women and serves as a reminder of the achievements that can be brought about when there is political will and coordinated effort.

As we know, the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is primarily the responsibility of governments, but for the sustainability of the Platform, there is need for an active, coordinated effort between governments, civil society, the private sector and the international community, if we are to achieve true success with the gender agenda.

And in Africa, since Beijing, there have been some notable achievements. Africa has its first female head of state, the Chair of this session, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia. Around the Continent there are women in key positions such as Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance, etc. The African Union Commission has a 50/50 gender representation and the Peace and Security Council now has an annual open session (Livingstone Formula) on women and children in armed conflicts. In Rwanda, the representation of women in Parliament stands at 56.3% and in South Africa at 47%. In Senegal, a parity law was recently passed. The question is how do we move beyond numbers; how do we quantify the contribution women in these positions made? What difference did the gender agenda had on ordinary citizens? Out of 53 African countries, however, only 4% have attained the 30% minimum representation target set in the Beijing Platform for Action and only 0.5% has achieved the 50/50 parity target set by the Africa Union.

The Beijing process has shown African people the plight of women from war torn countries and regions; from the Mano River, to the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa. 15 years after this phenomenon, the situation is even worse for women, with their bodies being considered as tactic of war. In this context, we should ask ourselves: how

do we restore the dignity of these women and young girls so that they can make a meaningful contribution to the development of Africa?

In advance of the 15-year review of the Beijing Platform (Beijing +15), an African regional review was held by UNECA in 2009 in Banjul, Gambia. The Africa Beijing +15 focused on:

The need for African governments to **invest more** in the reproductive health and rights of women, with emphasis on reduction of maternal mortality and the gendered impacts of HIV/AIDS, and on improving the economic and political status of African women.

Other areas of focus included the Millennium Declaration and the targets set under the Millennium Development Goals; United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889, which relate to women, peace and security; World Summits on the Information Society (2003 and 2005); and the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Women.

Out of the 47 African countries, for most of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern:

- Twenty-one (21) countries have enacted laws to guarantee equal access to employment opportunities and social protection benefit.
- Twenty-five (25) countries indicate that they have reallocated public spending in favour of programmes and projects aimed at empowering women.
- Twenty-five (25) countries are taking measures to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality. They specifically entail the prevention of unsafe abortions, ensuring that girls have continuing access to necessary health and nutrition information and services, and addressing traditional practices which impact negatively on the health of women and girls.
- An estimated thirteen (13) countries have reported on schedule to the Committee on CEDAW and a substantial number indicate the participation of civil society in the preparation of reports.

However, it was revealed that there was need to:

- Increase commitment and action towards the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality (2004) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007), which call for gender balance and equality in governance processes.
- Review existing legal frameworks protecting women's access to land with the view to removing discriminatory provisions, which work against their interests.
- Create awareness on Security Council Resolution 1325 at the national level, beyond countries in conflict or those emerging out of conflict and put plans of

action in place to effectively implement it.

- Review existing legal frameworks protecting women's access to land with the view to removing discriminatory provisions, which work against their interests.

We still have many challenges ahead before women's rights are fully realized. **Hillary Clinton** recently pointed out in June of this year that the women of Africa are the hardest working women in the world. She further went on to say, If all the women in Africa, from Cairo to Cape Town, decided they would stop working for a week, the economies of Africa would collapse. In addition, according to **Calestous Juma**, a professor at Harvard, if African women were given equal access as men to vocational training and technology, the continent's technology would expand by at least 40 percent.

It is clear that women are playing an active and indispensable role in our countries. From Sierra Leone to Liberia to South Africa to Burundi to Egypt to Tunisia, women in Africa are keeping our economies going and have been key figures in liberation struggles to end colonialism, apartheid, genocide, armed conflict and they have struggled for the realization of democracy. However, women do not effectively participate in decision-making; and their contribution is not fully integrated in mainstream economical, political and governmental areas.

We need to look at what we have done wrong not to make the same mistakes. Why has the process of implementing the gender agenda by governments been so slow? Is it because of cultural barriers? Are men part of the gender struggle? How can we get governments to include in their budget, priorities for women? Where do we go from here? Currently we are experiencing a youth revolution in Africa. The green revolution is currently underway. What about the women? Do we need a gender revolution to scale up our advocacy efforts? Where are women within the African Renaissance? I do hope this panel will provide us with key recommendations in the way forward.

Thank you.