

Speech

UN Women Deputy Executive Director and Assistant Secretary General

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Dear Minister of Social and Community Services Gender, Child Development and Community Development of Malawi,

Other Ministers of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment,

Dr. Carlos Lopes, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, who is a champion and a stellar partner in the GEWE agenda in Africa,

Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, AU Chair, who is here in spirit and is animating African Union's leadership and drive on GEWE,

Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Special Envoy of Gender at the AfDB, who is championing enhanced and dedicated resource allocation to gender in the Bank,

Mama Mongella, Mama Beijing, who steered the BPfA and Beijing Declaration twenty years ago,

Veterans and young women civil society leaders,

On behalf of UN Women I salute all of you, distinguished participants, for everything that you do for the success of what we consider to be the 'Greatest Project for Humanity' – the project that aims at fully realizing the power, potential and human rights of the neglected half of humanity – women and girls.

Historic Opportunity Momeent

We meet at a historic conjunction and a big opportunity moment. Apart from commemorating the 20th anniversary of the BPfA we are also in the process of globally shaping the world's first universal, comprehensive and transformative development agenda and the sustainable development goals. This process coincides with the global climate change compact and the global review of the implementation of UNSCR 1325 - the women, peace and security commitments as well as Africa's own agenda setting on peace and security, sustainable development and humanitarian action. All of these draw upon and should contribute to the implementation of the BPfA and Declaration.

Why Africa is important for the Global GEWE Agenda

UN Women attaches highest priority to this regional review of Beijing+20 because we consider Africa to be one of the biggest and most important theatres for the gender equality and women's empowerment project. Africa also has one of the most evloved and impressive arrays of pan-african institutions - especially the African Union- that have in the past 50 years forged regional normative frameworks, agendas and the Deacde for Women as well as 2015 " the Year of Women" . These regional agendas enrich and draw upon national and global frameworks, including the CEDAW and BPfA. Africa also can be proud of a robust women's movement and civil society activism that inspired, global solidarity movements and are still shiny examples of grassroots activism. We must also realize that what Africa achieves and the challenges it faces affect how the world succeeds or fails in this project.

Africa Overcomes Challenges and GEWE

Whilst African sustainable development, peace and security, humanitarian action and human rights related achievements are many, the continent also faces unprecedented challenges and multiple crisis that impact disproportionately on women and girls. Natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies, recrudescence of conflict, endemic poverty, Africa's own brand of patriarchy and structural barriers to gender equality, health issues such as the Ebola epidemic and harmful traditional and cultural practices and social norms challenge not only African actors but also the

international community. We therefore have to harness women's agency and empowerment to overcome these challenges and build resilience.

Significance of the BPfA

Twenty years ago Africa played a key role – their governments and the women's movement – in shaping the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which until today and for some time to come will remain a visionary and a landmark document - ahead of its time. An agenda with strategic objectives in twelve critical areas as relevant today as it was twenty years ago; with practical actions identified and committed to by governments. So, as we commemorate 20 years of this gold standard of GEWE commitments you are not here to renegotiate the text but to:

- Recommit to the Beijing Declaration and BPfA
- Review and appraise the implementation of the BPfA
- Seek to identify critical accelerators, game changers, and force multipliers to drive effective and accelerated implementation
- Within and beyond the 12 critical sectors of Beijing emphasize and give an impulse to critical sectors, issues, actors, instruments, institutions, investments that will act as game changers.
- These include youth- for Africa which has a huge potential for a youth dividend. Igniting the leadership and agency of young women is nothing short of a game changer.
- Similarly building on what Beijing said on the engagement, role and responsibility of men and boys is to be emphasized.
- Push for innovation – in social, economic, governance and other areas – can and will make a difference
- All that has been achieved and its success stories in Africa and elsewhere need to be recognized, scaled up and replicated.
- Leverage the role of technology - including frugal technology and ICTs to address key infrastructure and services of women related solutions.
- Push for sensitive constitutions, laws, policies and measures to be adopted and implemented at the national, sub-national and local levels.
- Raise the scale, scope and targeting of funding for GEWE as underinvestment is a key reason for lack of implementation
- Commit and prioritize GEWE both as enabler and beneficiary of its development efforts.

- Hold governments accountable and establish mechanisms
- Join hands as civil society and the women's movement and the men engagement
- Create a data and knowledge revolution to make an ever more credible case that GEWE is not only achievable, but that it has enormous benefits not only for women and girls but the family, community, society, nation and humanity as a whole.

National and Regional Reviews

Let me congratulate all of you for setting a shining example and a record in reviewing and appraising the implementation of the BPFA with 51 out of the 54 African countries having submitted their national reports and civil society having also provided its inputs. Distilling these national reports and carrying out a regional review we see a mixed picture.

Many more African women and girls than ever before have come out of poverty, maternal mortality has gone down, many women and girls are now literate and moved to secondary education, women are participating in the economy and in the workforce and have access to essential health service, including SRHR services. Many more women are visibly participating in power and decision making, in public life, the private sector and are participating in social media. Efforts have been ongoing to prevent, protect and respond to VAW, and to ensure women's human rights, gender mainstreaming and GRB are gaining traction. Many discriminatory laws, constitutions, policies and measures have been removed or amended and special enactments and measures have been undertaken for GEWE. There is some engagement of women in conflict and post conflict countries, in peace making and peace building.

But none of this is enough and the pace of change is too slow. In none of the critical areas of concern of the BPfA a critical mass of progress has been achieved. The majority of Africa's women still are poor, illiterate and lack training, skills and education to secure decent work. Women are still relegated to the informal and vulnerable sectors and face inadequate access to health and sexual and reproductive rights and services. Women still face human rights violations based on their gender and VAW is reaching pandemic proportions. Whether it is as Heads of States or members of Ministries, parliaments and

local governance institutions, judiciary and law enforcement institutions – women are still grossly underrepresented. This is not only the case in the political arena but equally true in the private sector where women are rare as CEOs. Moreover, women bear the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work which is not recognized or redistributed, while women’s access to social protection is well below what is needed. Women are not influential enough in the media or in shaping the gender narrative.

Beijing to Post 2015 Agenda

This Beijing+20 Review Conference not only looks back in introspection but also encourages us to look ahead and to influence the post 2015 development agenda. Africa has a vital role to play and enormous influence in the post 2015 discussions. Between now and next September inter-governmental negotiations will take place to finalize and adopt a post 2015 development framework and SDGs see the BPfA as a normative motherboard to inform the gender equality and women’s empowerment agenda in the post 2015 development agenda. The package which will form the basis of this agenda contains a reference to the Beijing Platform for Action in the chapeau and stand-alone goal on achieving GEWE for all women and girls. This goal has transformative and comprehensive targets including, for the first time, targets on EVAW; economic empowerment and rights of women; sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as well as recognizing and redistributing unpaid care work of women and the participation and leadership of women in all aspects of economic, social and political life, amongst others. Africa needs to continue to strongly insist on confirming and strengthening this goal whilst also seeking to have gender sensitive targets and indicators in all other goals, like food security; agriculture and water; energy; employment; health; education; etc. We also need to make sure that we influence the Financing for Development Conference being held here in Addis from 13 – 16 July 2015 and its outcome so that development assistance and cooperation promotes and targets financing for GEWE.

Global Movement of Solidarity

Africa’s example of driving movements for change and solidarity are inspirational and instructive. Its struggle against colonialism and apartheid

were based on provoking outrage against blatant injustice, exploitation and the denial and violation of people's human rights. We need such a global movement of solidarity based on moral outrage against inequality, discrimination and violence directed at half of humanity. We need another global movement including everybody whether in government, the private sectors and citizenry, drawing on the mantle of activism for GEWE. That is why it is important that our advocacy campaigns like "He for She", "Empowering Women, Empower Humanity - Picture it" or the "Unite Campaign to EVAW" and the "Africa Rising Platform" are by, for and of Africa and are crucial in galvanizing this solidarity movement here and in the rest of the world. So I urge you, in Africa, to set an example, to own and to roll out these campaigns and join them with your own national and regional ones.

Mama Mongella and many other Beijing visionaries no doubt saw the BPfA as a baby that represents their dreams and aspirations for the women and girls of the world. We all must join forces to see that these dreams are realized. Given that Africa is a youthful continent, the 20 year olds and other young women now need to take the baton of Beijing forward and must be enabled to lead in their own right the gender equality and women's empowerment revolution in Africa.

In Africa and globally different target dates for achieving GEWE are being set including in the context of Africa 2063 or the Africa Women's Decade.

But it is clear that if we do business as usual and don't put extraordinary efforts in place, by way of highest levels of prioritization and of social, political, knowledge and resource mobilization, it is estimated that globally it will take until 2081 to achieve GE. In Africa it may well take even longer. I must, therefore, underline the urgency of making a big leap and using the post 2015 development framework to set 2030 as the expiry date for gender inequality, discrimination and any form of violence against women. We do not want another 20 years to pass and still look back with anguish and disappointment at the BPfA aspirations of billions of women and girls being unrealized. We do not want another 20 years of unfulfilled hopes to achieve development, peace, security and human rights goals of all countries and of humanity itself which GEWE would enable.

