

Good morning, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, and a particular welcome to sisters in the struggle for gender equality and empowerment of women.

Speech on behalf of Ms Letty Chiwara, UN Women Representative to Ethiopia, African Union Commission and ECA who is unfortunately unable to join us this morning as she is receiving the Deputy Executive Director and ASG who arrived this morning and be joining us later, and on behalf of UN Women globally.

It is unbelievable that we are gathering again to celebrate nearly 20 years since the historic Beijing 4th World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Who could ever forget the heady days when women of the world,, came together, devoid of divisions, in solidarity, to celebrate the not only the achievements of women and the strides women had made over the decades but more importantly to reflect and chart a new course of action? The Beijing Platform for Action remains a revolutionary piece of document following the Conference - charting the way forward and visualizing how we as women would like to see ourselves as well as our societies in the future.

It has been a long 20 years, and years filled with incredible progress, not only for all women in the world but in particular for women in Africa. Since Beijing in 1995, we have in Africa got our first elected President, we have seen incredible women win Noble Peace Prize for their incredible work in

ending conflict in Africa, and we have for the first time, a female Chairperson of the African Union Commission. Through the amazing work of women advocates around the world, the UN created an agency for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, UN Women. Women in Africa have since Beijing in 1995 made incredible progress in all fields - in technology, in business, in the private sector and women continue to work for peace and to influence policies and governance in different ways. Most discriminatory laws and policies have been deleted, and progressively having Constitutions that recognize the equality of persons and non-discrimination based on sex/gender. Today we have more girls in secondary schools and in universities, and an almost universal consensus that achieving gender equality is critical to the wellbeing of individuals, families, households and societies. All these prove that concerted international efforts and assistance, with leadership from women, the gender gaps and inequalities can be eradicated.

It is however not all glossy. Even as we celebrate the progress, there are still many challenges ahead. Violence against women including sexual violence continue to rise and women's bodies continue to be used as battlefields in conflict. Women continue to lose out in political/elected leadership/political positions, and women are still poorer, less visible, with less access and opportunities than men in all fields. Emerging security threats and terrorism to Africa continue to make our governments spend more money on

security, diverting critical funds that would go to socio-economic development that would benefit both women and men, threatening our livelihoods. We are seeing emerging public health threats like Ebola that shows not just our governments inability to cope, but also an unequal impact on women because of their traditional care giving roles. We stand today in solidarity with all women and men who have been affected, those who have died and with the governments of our sister countries struggling to contain this epidemic.

Even with challenges, there are opportunities. As women and advocates, we must ensure that our governments push for a Post 2015 development agenda that includes a standalone goal for gender equality and clear gender targets and indicators in all other goals to continue to prioritize gender equality, re-commit to the implementation of the existing gaps of the Beijing Platform for Action, ensure violence against women, including sexual violence is treated with priority and seriousness and that an enabling environment created for women to go to school, to work, to own land, to govern and influence national, regional and global policies and be treated equally with attendant rights.

Thank you very much for your attention.