

AFRICAN WOMEN'S CAUCUS STATEMENT

59TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

African Women's Rights Organizations have been and will continue to be at the forefront of shaping the global agenda for women's rights. From the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and beyond, they have continued to ensure that women's rights instruments, including the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA) reflect priorities of African women and girls.

Over the past two decades, Africa has made tremendous strides in developing progressive policy frameworks to advance the rights of women on the Continent as evidenced from the adoption of the gender parity principle in the African Union's (AU) Constitutive Act of 2002, the AU Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa of 2003, and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa of 2004, to mention a few. Despite these achievements, the 20 year review of the BDPfA comes within a social, political and economic environment in which many of the gains made in 1995 are facing serious threats.

The African Women's Caucus of the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59) is deeply concerned by the weak Political Declaration that was adopted by Member States, which falls far short of the transformative and progressive objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We were surprised and disappointed that the Political Declaration was negotiated prior to CSW59 and devoid of civil society consultation.

We are also concerned that civil society organizations were also left out of the Working Methods process and that the Working Methods Resolution did not strongly emphasize the critical role of civil society organizations, especially women's rights and feminist organizations, as part and parcel of the decision-making process on issues that directly affect the lives of women and girls. Furthermore, the Working Methods Resolution did not incorporate stronger language on commitment to human rights for women and girls.

2015 has been dedicated as the Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063 by the African Union. We also recall the numerous regional inter-governmental consultations held in 2014 and during the January 2015 African Union Summit where Member States committed to accelerated implementation of women's rights instruments without renegotiating their content. Thus, we are deeply concerned that the African Group position in the negotiations of both the Political Declaration and the Working Methods Resolution at the global level was not fully in line with the agreements and promises made by African Governments both at the continental, regional and national levels.

Going forward, as women's organizations, feminist organizations, individual activists and citizens of African Countries that work at different levels to achieve gender equality, empowerment and the full realization of the human rights of women and girls, we call upon our governments to:

1. Commit towards full realization of gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of women and girls without renegotiating already agreed upon commitments made by our governments at national, regional, continental and global levels.
2. Ensure continuity and consistency in negotiations on commitments to women's human rights and empowerment in country positions at all levels – national, regional, continental and global, as well as while negotiating as a bloc.
3. Commit to accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, along with the outcomes of the 23rd United Nations General Assembly Special Session, the Beijing+10 and Beijing+15 political declarations, the agreed conclusions and resolutions of the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as the women's rights regional instruments highlighted above.
4. Recognize the critical and unequivocal role that African women's organizations, feminist organizations and women human rights defenders have played in advancing gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of women and girls.
5. Commit to create an enabling and conducive environment that allows women's rights organizations, feminist organizations and other CSOs to participate fully in the CSW sessions.
6. Recognize and commit to address the emerging challenges that are setbacks on gains made for gender equality and the realization of the human rights of all women and girls.
7. Affirm the strong linkages between the BDPfA and the Sustainable Development Goals. Realizing gender equality, empowerment and the human rights of women and girls will be critical for the success of the post-2015 development agenda.
8. Strongly recognize, in future processes, including the CSW, the links between the human rights of women and girls and development, particularly as women and girls are disproportionately affected by the consequences of under-development.

We cannot have true development if more than half the population is left behind.