



PRESS RELEASE

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African Governments Challenged to Live-up to Commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action

Civil society organisations meeting at the Africa Women's NGO Consultative Meeting in the margins of the Eighth Africa Regional Conference on Women (Beijing+15) in Banjul, The Gambia, are calling on African Governments to urgently accelerate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Africa and the international and regional human rights instruments that reinforce its provisions in form of human rights guarantees.

Making her opening remarks at the opening session of the two days meeting the Executive Director of FEMNET, Ms. Norah Matovu Winyi mentioned that women's creativity, perseverance, productivity and commitment which sustain life in African societies is a resource that government cannot to leave untapped if Africa is to develop. "The loss of life by many young girls, women and children in Africa due to preventable causes like malaria, poor medical services, comes at a very high cost to the continent and must be prevented by every action possible. We therefore owe it to the women who are not in Banjul to make our voices clearly heard so that the leaders in Africa know that they have an obligation to promote, protect and fulfil all the human rights of women. Things must change for the better in the lives of majority of women in Africa" said Ms. Winyi. She ended her remarks by appreciating the hospitality of the government of The Gambia and its people who have used every resource possible to ensure that the civil society experts coming from all parts of Africa have a fruitful meeting.

The Vice President and Secretary of State for women's Affairs Hon. Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy, was the chief guest at the opening of the Consultative meeting. She appreciated the women of Africa who braved the long journeys to be present at this historical meeting reviewing the 15 years' progress since the Beijing Conference on Women held in 1995. "I am excited on the one hand that a lot is happening to change the status and the situation of women in Africa in terms of their power, leadership, education, access to health services and information, access to land, credit and employment opportunities, and having more freedom to participate in public affairs. On the other hand it is truly challenging that the progress is so slow. We have to do more. We have to remain committed. We cannot afford to remain complacent. Sustainable change is our goal" said the Vice President. She recognised the need for government to strengthen its partnerships with civil society and the private sector in the development process so that our more coherent and well coordinated efforts lead to the change we desired to see in the realities of the lives of the African woman and girl child.

The 100 African women at the meeting, drawn from 15 countries in the region, expressed their great concern that 15 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, progress by Governments in implementing the agreed Platform for Action has been slow and fragmented, and has failed to result in fundamental changes in the lives of many African women.

The women assembled urged African Governments to ensure implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action over the next 5 years with urgency as the next five years are the last in the block of 20 years

which were envisioned within which to move the commitments to transformative actions. It will be in the same year 2015 within which the Millennium Development Goals and their various targets must have been realized or surpassed. The civil society experts on gender issues emphasized the urgent need for governments in Africa to take actions including the following to accelerate progress in the promotion, protection and fulfilment of women's rights:

- ❖ Ensure that structures established to lead the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda have adequate resources as an indication of African states' political commitment to women's advancement;
- ❖ Aim to achieve universal ratification of the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance by end of 2011 and harmonize the electoral laws and democratic structures with its provisions;
- ❖ Consistently implement the African Union gender parity commitments at national and local governance levels by 2015.
- ❖ Take urgent measures at the African Union, Regional economic blocs and national levels to address the burning issue of impunity in Africa with regard to violations of human rights of African citizens, particularly violence against women and children in conflict situations; and
- ❖ Ensure that member states prioritise women's health as a human rights issue, particularly maternal, sexual and reproductive health, as a critical component of sustainable development in Africa, and intensify actions to reduce the feminisation of HIV/AIDS;

Civil society also called on African governments to meet their reporting requirements on progress made towards gender equality in Africa and where there is non compliance further called upon the African Union to institute additional mechanisms for ensuring accountability under the Protocol on the Rights of women (2003) and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004).

Note to Editors

The key messages are based on the draft Beijing +15 Africa NGO Shadow Report deliberated by representatives of civil society organisations addressing women's and human rights issues across Africa, meeting **in the margins of the 8th Africa Regional Conference on Women (Beijing +15) from November 16-20, 2009 in Banjul, Gambia** to deliberate on the progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Africa since the last review (Beijing +10). The Africa Regional NGO Shadow Report on Beijing +15 incorporates national and sub-regional reviews from women's civil society organisations and networks. For Background information on the Beijing Platform for Action visit the FEMNET Website: www.femnet.or.ke

For more information, please contact: Carlyn Hambuba FEMNET Communications Officer or Tel 254 20 2712971/2 Email: communication@femnet.or.ke or Naisola Likimani Advocacy Officer advocacy@femnet.or.ke Tel: +220 9024650 in Banjul, The Gambia.