



Organization of African Unity

**STATEMENT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY
AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE SIXTH
AFRICAN CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**

**ECA Conference Hall
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

November 26, 1999

**STATEMENT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY AT THE
CLOSING SESSION OF THE SIXTH AFRICAN
CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**

- **Madame Chairperson,**
- **Madame Ben Barka,
Deputy Executive Secretary of ECA,**
- **Madame Angela King,
Assistant Secretary General of the UN**
- **Madame Gertrude Mongela,
Secretary General of the 4th Beijing Conference,**
- **Distinguished Guests,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**
- **Excellencies,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to have the opportunity, finally, of participating in this closing session of the Sixth African Conference on Women. My frantic efforts to join you, at least on the second day of this meeting, were foiled when the plane I was travelling on from Abidjan, where I had a previous important commitment, developed a technical problem and I, together with some participants of the conference, were compelled to spend a day in Lome, Togo. On arrival in Addis Ababa, I had to travel immediately to

immediately to Djibouti to participate at the Summit of the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), which took place today. I am grateful to President Omar Guelleh of the Republic of Djibouti who availed me a special aircraft, which enabled me to arrive half an hour ago, at least to be in time for this closing session.

I wish to congratulate you for the success of this conference whose objectives and timing underscore the seriousness and commitment of African women in pursuing the cause of our people's development. I wish also to pay tribute to the Economic Commission for Africa and its Executive Secretary, Mr. K.Y. Amoako ably assisted by the Deputy Executive Secretary of the ECA Madame Lalla Ben Barka, together with the Director of the ECA Centre for Women, Madame Joseph Ouedraogo, for creating the propitious conditions for the success of this important conference. I also wish to add my own appreciation to the Government and People of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for the warm reception and cordial hospitality extended to all the participants. Holding this conference just at the dawn of a new century, and devoting it to conducting an appraisal of the progress made in the implementation of previous commitments is an indication of your determination to enter the new millennium more prepared, and with increased vigour.

I wish to add also, that the presence of more than 1000 women representing different constituencies of our Continent, who have been able to sit and deliberate at length, and who finally came out with a consensus position on matters pertaining to the destiny of the Peoples of this Continent, is in itself an outstanding achievement. In fact, the process that has taken place here for the last 5 days indeed revitalizes the force for change in the Continent.

The success of this conference has been significantly enhanced by the close partnership and coordination of initiatives that has been demonstrated by having representations from NGOs, the private sector, as well as national Governments at this conference. I hope that this spirit

of partnership and solidarity among the various constituencies will be consolidated in pursuing all our development endeavours.

I have been kept abreast by my colleagues on your deliberations during the past 5 days. We are gratified not only by the impressive presence and participation of women from all over the Continent, but also by the quality of the discussion and the contributions made by the different representatives throughout the conference. I wish to join you in appreciating the achievements that have been registered in the last five years. Clearly, much has been achieved which reflects the political commitment of African leaders to the advancement of the African women. Just as clearly, however, a lot still remains to be done – in particular, in combating poverty which affects mostly women, in promoting the involvement of women in socio-economic management including managing our micro and macro institutions, in dealing with the scourge of conflicts which has taken a heavy toll on women, and in combating the pandemic of AIDS, which today, is the single most devastating and indiscriminate killer of our people.

Madame Chairperson,

We in the OAU recognize that without durable peace there cannot be sustainable development and without sustainable development there cannot be durable peace. That is why we have made the issue of conflict prevention, management and resolution the priority on our Agenda. In this regard, we have established the African Women Committee on Peace and Development thus, ensuring that women participate fully and effectively in decision-making and in promoting peace and a culture of tolerance.

I fully share your call for stakeholders in Africa's development to move from pledges to concrete action by taking practical measures to accelerate the implementation of the two platforms. Similarly, the areas addressed in the plan of Action will significantly enhance the implementation of the Continental agenda for development as we enter the third millennium.

Madame Chairperson,

Another area of concern to the OAU is that the many armed conflicts besetting our Continent generate the highest number of refugees and internally displaced persons – the majority of whom are women and children. As you all know, Africa is paying a high cost on account of these massive population displacements – in terms of human suffering, in tearing apart the social fabric, and in destroying infrastructural development.

In this regard, the OAU has already put in place, a mechanism to address this issue. The OAU Convention on the specific problems of refugees in Africa – which also deals with internally displaced persons and returnees is the most progressive legislative instrument on the issue. In addition, the OAU has elaborated a Plan of Action which is designed to ensure the inclusion of refugee, returnee and internally displaced women and children in post-conflict re-integration, reconstruction and peace-building.

In so far as women's economic empowerment and increased integration into economic processes on the Continent is concerned, the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community focused on the specific issue of women in the economic sector, and calls upon Member States to work towards enhancing women's full and effective integration in continental economic initiatives and development processes.

The Sirte decision calling for the establishment of the Union of African States and the acceleration of the implementation of the Abuja Treaty provides further impetus for pursuing the economic empowerment of women.

Madame Chairperson,

What has emerged from this conference is the clear recognition of the vital importance of ensuring the overall participation of African women in the socio-economic and political domains of our societies if our Continent is to enter the new millennium, better equipped and prepared to face the enormous challenges before us. It is true, that in many respects there has been progress in the liberation of the African woman. But it is equally true that there remain many obstacles – indeed in many cases, formidable obstacles – left in the way of the total emancipation of the African woman. It is a truism that unless the obstacles are overcome and unless the African woman is able to play her full role in the spheres of governance, social and economic development and the strengthening and consolidation of our cultural values, Africa will continue to lag behind the rest of the world. We cannot afford to allow this to happen.

In calling for the total emancipation of the African women, we are actually calling for the emancipation of our own societies. In the same way as we keep stressing that no society can live half-free and half-enslaved, I wish to assert that the liberation of women means the liberation of men. And we owe it to ourselves, our Continent and the future generations of our peoples, to recognize not only this reality, but to strive to translate the same into concrete, practical action.

It is my hope that this conference, which has not only made evaluation of the Beijing Platform, has also prepared Africa's input for the forthcoming conference in June, next year, at the United Nations Headquarters, has assisted in taking some steps towards our common endeavours. Above all, I believe that the Plan of Action you have

adopted will be followed up and thus making a major contribution in Africa's collective efforts for a better tomorrow.

Madame Chairperson,

As we stand on the brink of the Third Millennium, we must have the courage of our conviction to take those hard decisions that will make it possible for us to move from strategy to action. We must establish those partnerships and networks that will facilitate and further our common goal of improving the conditions of life and work of the woman of Africa.

We at the OAU welcome the Draft Declaration and the African Plan of Action of this conference and will extend our support for their implementation.

I thank you for your attention.