

Remarks

By

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At

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Minister Ulla Tornaes, Chairperson of this session, Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, Ministers, Mr. Mucavele and NEPAD officials, representatives of international organizations, officials of governments, distinguished participants.

I am delighted to be here with you all - partners, colleagues, old friends and new - at this 8th Meeting of the Africa Partnership Forum. Let me extend a big thank you to President Kohler, Chancellor Merkel, and Minister Wieczorek-Zeul for hosting and coordinating this event. And equally warm thanks go to you Mr. Mucavele for inviting me.

I bring you warm fraternal greetings from the people of Liberia who wish for the fullest of success in these deliberations in the interest of Africa.

The theme of this Forum: "Gender and Economic Empowerment in Africa" brings us once again to the realization that there is still a missing ingredient in our quest and our effort to accelerate growth and development in our continent.

We all know the continent is rich in natural resources and in human capital. There is absolutely no reason why we should be so poor. But we also know that we here faced and continue to face many challenges:

- The challenge of leadership - promoting throughout all levels of society leadership that has a vision, that can inspire, motivate, and by example mobilize the society toward the achievement of clearly defined goals.
- The challenge of capacity - promoting through education, training, and knowledge transfer the development of human resources and institution building in wide areas of discipline.
- The challenge of good governance - respecting the rights and dignity of all citizens, ensuring accountability and transparency in government operations, promoting an effective role for civil society and strong mechanisms for popular participation and decision making.
- The challenge of stability - unifying and consolidating collective efforts to resolve and to build preemptive responses to conflict.

The records are clear on the significant progress that Africa has made on all of these fronts, that together with sound economic policies has led to a restoration of growth that for sub-Saharan Africa has averaged 5 percent over the past five years, with per capita

growth exceeding 3 percent. Private investment has increased sharply, albeit for the most part in extractive industries such as oil. The same can be said for political progress, with 26 countries having acceded to the African Peer Review Mechanism.

The progress in Africa has yet to impact in a meaningful way the 52 percent of the population who are women. Although women have lagged behind men the world over, in Africa the poorest people are women and we have yet to muster the political will to adapt the mechanisms to reverse the social inequalities and lack of opportunities which they face.

Let us review some of the statistics to illustrate the point:

- The study undertaken by you, the Africa Partnership Forum, shows that among the 3 billion people in the world living on less than \$2 a day, about half of them are in Africa and the bulk of these are women.
- In sub-Saharan Africa women have approximately 60 percent of the resources available to men. Women have access to only 1 percent of agricultural credit, although they account for 60-80 percent of the agricultural labor force and are responsible for 70-80 percent of food production.
- In education, the key to empowerment, primary education of females stands at 67 percent. Among females above the age of 15, only 51 percent are able to read and write, compared to 67 percent of men.
- Women's political participation is low, averaging only 6 percent in national legislatures and 2 percent in Cabinets.

The past two decades have however witnessed a substantial increase in the participation of African women in the market economy. This trend however coincides with a corresponding increase in their domestic work loads, including the exclusive responsibility of child rearing and elderly care, cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, general farm work, just to name a few. Moreover, the African Woman remains predominantly employed in the agricultural sector, with minimal participation in the industrial sector.

Today we can point to several commitments, protocols, and interventions adopted in the past three decades at both international and continental levels that promise a better future for African Women. They include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women of 1979; the Millennium Declaration in 2000 from which the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were carved out, especially the MDG3 on gender

equality and the empowerment of women; the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), which reinforces a commitment to promote an active, visible policy of gender mainstreaming of governments; the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the first groundbreaking initiative to make clear linkages between gender equality and women's health and education; and the commitment of G-8 Leaders at Gleneagles in 2005 to support African initiatives to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In addition to these monumental accomplishments, the African Union (AU) has adopted a protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, a supplementary protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights. It has also adopted the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA), through which Heads of State and Government commit themselves to report annually on progress towards gender equality; the UN Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA's) African Women's Progress Scorecard (AWPs), which measures government policy performance regarding women's advancement and empowerment and tracks government progress in ratifying, implementing and monitoring relevant conventions and documents on Gender Equality and Women's Rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

These instruments have largely defined the current global policy agenda on gender equality and empowerment and have inspired the acceptance of these two principles as vital catalysts for human development and poverty reduction in Africa. The problem is that these commitments have remained just that - commitments and promises with very little implementation.

What new action or ideas can this meeting take to address this long standing problem? The background documentation suggests several priorities.

- Land and property rights for women. Surely we as African governments can do this. Surely we can ensure that women have access to land which in turn would enhance access to agricultural credit. Surely we can pass ownership and inheritance laws where they are missing.
- Gender budgeting. Surely we have means for ensuring gender equality in public finance and surely we have the ability to disaggregate public finance in such a way as to track and show the budget resources that actually go to women.
- Credit to support women entrepreneurs. Surely more can be done to expand the level of support from financial institutions through targeted support from governments. Much is being done in this regard through the many micro credit schemes that are being promoted. Women need more than this - they need more access to markets,

more access to technology, and more management training to scale up their trading activities and potential.

Yesterday I received a note from Graca Marcel making the following suggestions for me to table at this meeting.

- Provide stronger support for those countries which have actualized policies and progress within the framework of the Beijing Platform of Action, the Protocol on the Rights of Women, and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.
- Establish a fund to support well-established African civil society organizations that are specifically working on supporting women access to leadership positions.

This is no doubt a bold suggestion, but one which several of us have been working on as a means of mobilizing support that would lead to an increase in the number of women in decision-making positions, particularly high-level political office.

Just think - since 1900 only 46 women have served as Heads of State. Currently women are serving as Heads of Government in just fifteen countries and elected presidents in just nine.

I think you will agree with me that a critical mass is required to ensure the equity and equal opportunity which are sought in these conventions and protocols that I mentioned earlier.

Perhaps some of you may have read the book "Women, War, Peace" which resulted from a UNIFEM study undertaken by former Defence Minister of Finland Elisabeth Rehn and me. One of the recommendations of that report was an enhancement in the salaries and pitifully low level of resources for UNIFEM, the United Nations specialised agency for women. This recommendation is as urgent today as it was in 2001 when the report was released.

The same can be said for the Women, Gender, and Development Directorate of the NEPAD Secretariat. I suggest that there is a need for more knowledge and more participation of women in the NEPAD agenda. There may be a need for a gender analysis of the broader NEPAD framework for development.

In closing, let me once again thank all of those who have made my presence and participation possible. In Germany, women have excelled in giving opportunity for the highest political decision making role to a woman. In Liberia, women have excelled in giving opportunity for the highest political decision making role to a woman.

We know that we will be called upon to make a difference and to establish a legacy that will broaden the opportunities for other women the world over.

I believe that is our challenge, and I believe that we will rise to that challenge individually and collectively.

Thank you for your kind attention.