



Republic of Kenya



Republic of South Africa



African Union | Union Africaine

**COMMUNIQUE OF THE TELECONFERENCE OF AFRICA'S WOMEN MINISTERS OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS ON ENHANCING WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN COVID-19 RESPONSES**

Held on

Thursday, 7 May 2020

1. **We**, African Women Foreign Affairs, International Relations and Cooperation Ministers of Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Sao Tomé et Príncipe, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Sudan, under the Co-Chairpersonship of H.E. Dr. Naledi Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, and H.E. Amb. Raychelle Awuor Omamo, Cabinet Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kenya held a teleconference on Thursday, 7 May 2020, facilitated by the African Union Commission (AUC), to deliberate on Africa's response to the COVID-19 pandemic with the objective of putting special focus on women's leadership.
2. **Centred** our deliberations around four thematic areas, namely leveraging on lessons from the past to ensure the social, political and economic empowerment of African women in the post COVID-19 world; engendering the AU COVID-19 Strategy; Response to the Peace, Security and Humanitarian Impact and Defining the Leadership role, mechanisms for inclusion and collaboration; **and adopted the following:**
3. **Salute** AU Heads of State and Government, who, in the spirit of solidarity, unity and collaboration, mobilized swiftly around a continental strategy, under the leadership of H.E. Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa and Chairperson of the African Union, pay tribute to H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, AUC Chairperson for leading its operationalization and are honored by his presence, along with other AU Commissioners.
4. **Recognize** the immense support provided by the United Nations System and welcome the participation and contribution of Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary General and other UN senior officials in this meeting.
5. **Appreciate** the briefings by the African Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) on the situation of COVID-19 in Africa, as well as the background provided by the AUC Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security.

6. **Emphasize** that preserving and strengthening the values of multilateralism, continental and international cooperation as well as global solidarity is essential in addressing COVID-19.
7. **Express** deep concern that around the world, the pandemic is having a devastating impact on health systems, peace and stability, economies and the lives, livelihood and wellbeing of all, particularly women and girls and note with sadness the many lives that have been lost.
8. **Acknowledge** that during this crisis, women are at the forefront, caring for their families and communities and working in both the formal and informal sector, providing essential services and placing their own lives and health at risk. The pandemic is widely predicted to exacerbate existing financial inequality between men and women. Globally, women are more likely to hold precarious or vulnerable jobs, which are often the first to be lost during financial shocks.
9. **Underscore** that the deficits in women leadership that we are witnessing in the response to COVID-19 and the rise of women at the frontlines of COVID-19, demand a profound paradigm shift. Business cannot and should not continue as usual.
10. **Stand** in full solidarity with each other and the People of our continent and applaud strategies and mechanisms put in place by AU to coordinate the fight against this pandemic, namely the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19, the Continental Anti-COVID-19 Response Fund; the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing (PACT); and the AU Special Envoys to mobilise international economic support.
11. **Welcome** the development of the AU Guidelines on Gender-Responsive Responses to COVID-19, under the leadership of African Ministers in charge of Gender and Women Affairs, to enhance the AU's strategies.
12. **Acknowledge** that AU Member States have also put in place emergency measures, policies and strategies to address and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 at the national level, and stress that they should also ensure that policies and strategies to combat COVID-19 take into account the specific needs of all women and girls.

13. **Call on** AU Member states and all stakeholders to implement, in addition to other interventions, the following focused measures:

- a) **Request** that gender perspectives be mainstreamed into all AU strategies and that women leadership is strengthened in all mechanisms.
- b) **Invest** in more gender responsive health systems, including strengthening preventive and community based health infrastructures as well as building capacity for the production of medicines and medical equipment.
- c) **Request** specific measures focusing on women and girls to ensure that their safety, rights and wellbeing are protected, including access to Personal Protection Equipment.
- d) **Learn** from the resilience of women and girls in the forefront of innovation, community-based strategies, inclusive decision-making, partnerships and resource mobilization in the push back against the vagaries of HIV/AIDS and Ebola and ensure that Women participate equally in decision-making processes and their organizations be supported in all COVID-19 responses and post COVID-19 recovery.
- e) **Prioritise** the collection of accurate and complete age and sex-disaggregated data to understand how COVID-19 impact individuals differently, in terms of prevalence, trends, and other important information to inform decision-making.
- f) **Ensure** that all women and girls have equal access to health services, including quality and affordable medicines and vaccines, and that attention is given to sexual, reproductive and maternal health, especially in rural and marginalised communities.
- g) **Provide** practical support to parents, including, how to manage their mental health and tools to help support their children's learning. Additional measures could be adopted to help household caregivers, elderly women and women and girls with disabilities.
- h) **Include** women and girls' needs and priorities in social assistance, address care work and unpaid care and ensure that economic stimulus and budgets target women-specific livelihoods.

- i) **Seek** debt relief/debt cancellation and ensure that these funds are targeted to lift the disproportionate poverty burden carried by women as a prerequisite for women's empowerment and gender equality in a post-COVID-19 world, at a time when the Continent observes a new African Women's Decade of Financial and Economic Inclusion and the launch of the African Women Leadership Fund (AWLF).
- j) **Provide** economic grants to women entrepreneurs and facilities to women cross-border traders with the view to transitioning them into the formal economy and include women in increased manufacturing of medical and protective equipment.
- k) **Provide** women farmers and women in the agriculture value chains with seed, fertilizers, transportation, technology and other supplies to avoid detrimental impact on their livelihoods and exacerbation of food insecurity.
- l) **Prioritise** the continuity of child-centred services, with a particular focus on equity of access – particularly in relation to schooling, nutrition programmes, immunisation and other maternal and neo-natal care, and community-based child protection programmes.
- m) **Put in place** measures to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse, and ensure that missing girls are reported to authorities.
- n) **Ensure** that women and girls are not left behind and have access to technology, science and innovation that will be used increasingly in education in the post COVID-19 era.
- o) **Provide** access to justice to sexual and gender-based violence survivors and allocate resources to domestic violence shelters.
- p) **Call for** targeted funding and support for peace, security and humanitarian aid; access to humanitarian services; and in establishing humanitarian corridors.
- q) **Make** deliberate efforts to protect Women and girls in conflict situations, Refugee and IDPs camps across Africa, in line with the AU Year to “silence the guns” on the Continent, to avert the very real risk of COVID-19 spreading fast within and outside these settings where measures such as social distancing and washing of hands pose challenges.

- r) **Appeal** to Governments to adopt appropriate measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the electioneering processes, noting that over twenty elections are set to be held within the continent during the year 2020.
- s) **Strengthen** the leadership and meaningful participation of women in governance in communities, Civil Society Organisations, business sector, media, research community and academia in all decision-making processes to ensure ownership of solutions and outcomes.
- t) **Strengthen** the platforms such as the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN), and the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise) to address the gaps that lead to invisibility and disenfranchisement of women, girls, youth and children. Such mechanisms will enable them to promote continental and global collaboration and partnership for the visibility and advancement of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.
- u) **Commit** to advocate for the implementation of these recommendations at all levels and decide to submit this Statement/Communique to the Chair of the Executive Council, to present it to the Bureau of the Executive Council at its (...) meeting, to take appropriate action.
- v) **Remain seized on the matter.**

Thus adopted/issued/ done on this day Wednesday May 7th, 2020 via teleconference.

By all participating African Women Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers of International Relations and Cooperation (in alphabetical order):

1. GUINEA-BISSAU

Her Excellency

Ms. Suzi Carla Barbosa

Ministra dos Negocios Estrangeiros

da la Cooperacao Internacional e das Comunidades,

Républica de Guinea-Bissau

2. KENYA

Her Excellency

Amb. Raychelle Awuor Omamo, SC, EGH

Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Republic of Kenya

3. MOZAMBIQUE

Her Excellency

Ms. Verónica Nataniel Macamo Dlhovo

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

Republic of Mozambique

4. NAMIBIA

Her Excellency

Ms. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for
International Relations and Cooperation

Republic of Namibia

5. SAO TOMÉ ET PRINCIPE

Her Excellency

Ms. Elsa Maria Neto d'Alva Teixeira de Barros Pinto

Ministre des Affaires étrangères et des Communautés

République démocratique de Sao Tomé et Principe

6. SIERRA LEONE

Her Excellency

Mrs. Nabeela F. Tunis

Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Republic of Sierra Leone

7. SOUTH AFRICA

Her Excellency

Mrs. Naledi Pandor (Dr.)

Minister for International Relations and Cooperation

Republic of South Africa

8. SUDAN

Her Excellency

Ms. Asma Mohamed Abdalla

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Republic of the Sudan