



African campaigners seek better livelihood for women

Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt (PANA) - African gender rights campaigners meeting in the Egyptian resort city of Sharm El Sheikh, Saturday called on leaders to show political commitment to the implementation of the African Union's (AU) gender goals.

The meeting, convened by the continent's leading voice on gender issues - the Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), brought together gender rights campaigners from across the continent, to undertake a kind of 'check' on the implementation of a wide range of goals.

Speaking at the opening of the talks, FAS Executive Director Bineta Diop said the women leaders were looking forward to increased political attention from the African leaders in their efforts to improve the welfare of the womenfolk.

The focus of the meeting is to provide an analysis of the efforts so far made to implement the landmark accord on improving the lives of women, known as the Solemn Declaration on Gender and Equality in Africa, which advocates for non-violence against women.

Its key goals are achieving gender equality in the distribution of jobs, improved welfare of women at the workplace, fair access to resources, health care, the protection of women during conflict and their economic empowerment, which featured Sharm el-Sheikh talks.

The three-day meeting, a curtain raiser to the 11th Ordinary Session of the AU heads of state and governments assembly, also examined a number of measures aimed at improving the lives of women across Africa, which would eventually reduce poverty.

This year, FAS is pioneering a bold effort to take the gender debate further, by urging the African leaders to consider the adoption of a new initiative to enable the women in small-scale businesses to turn-around their businesses into large - scale business ventures.

"We are trying to move women from small-scale businesses to macro-level businesses. We are trying to integrate women in businesses at the highest level," said Rosalie Lo, the FAS Regional Programme Officer.

The FAS conference is also supported by the First Lady of Egypt, Suzanne Mubarak, through the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement, which seeks a peaceful and just society.

The Egyptian First Lady was expected to officially open the women agenda talks Saturday.

The women leaders at the conference noted that although some efforts have been put in the implementation of the landmark accord on women's empowerment, several countries needed to show political will in the implementation of the gender declaration.

FAS has been leading the campaigns for better health care for women since July 2004 when African leaders adopted the agenda, calling for better legislation to improve the lives of women.

Analysts at the Sharm el-Sheikh talks noted the continent required a detailed look into the gender agenda, especially its aspects dealing with the rights of women in conflict.

They said it should be aligned with the United Nations Security Council resolutions on the deployment of peace-keeping troops and the AU Peace and Security Council policies.

"The greatest problem facing the African countries in the achievement of its goals on the Solemn Declaration is that most people do not know about the existence of such policies," Lo said.

Sharm el-Sheikh - 21/06/2008