

AFRICAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION

African Common Position for the Advancement of Women

*Adopted at the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women,
Dakar, Senegal, 16 - 23 November 1994*

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ADDIS ABABA DECLARATION ON THE DAKAR AFRICAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION ON WOMEN

We, the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, meeting in our Thirty-first Ordinary Session in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 26 - 28 June, 1995,

Having undertaken a critical review of the Dakar African Platform for Action : Africa's common position for the advancement of women, in the light of the grave concern for the overall peaceful, political, social and economic development of our continent,

Committed to the principles and objectives of the Charter of the Organization of African

Unity, the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Vienna Declaration on Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child as well as the Declaration on the Right to Development and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and all other conventions, declarations and resolutions relating to affirmative actions to improve the status of African women,

Guided by the relevant provisions of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, in particular Article 57 on Women and Development, and the primary objectives of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000 as a framework for action to promote greater opportunity for women based on the principles of Equality, Development and Peace,

Noting with satisfaction that the African Platform for Action is a positive synthesis of our national perspectives and priorities which provides an indispensable Women and Development strategy for committed and concerted action at the national, sub-regional, regional, continental and international levels for the accelerated achievement of our development targets in the 1990s and beyond,

Reaffirming that the implementation of the African Platform for Action and the objectives of the Cairo Agenda for Action on Relaunching Africa's Economic and Social Development is the Primary responsibility of African governments and peoples,

Gravely concerned that the situation of our Continent remains precarious in spite of the courageous reforms instituted by our States in both the political and economic fields to achieve self-reliant and human-centred sustainable development based on social justice and collective self-reliance,

Conscious that the commitment to promote popular participation cannot be realized without the total and active participation of women, who actually make up over half of the population,

Appreciative of the vital and crucial role of women in an interdependent world.

1. Affirm our collective conviction that freedom, justice, peace, equality, and dignity are legitimate aspiration of the African women in their right to be effective partners in all spheres of human endeavour for the development progress and peaceful evolution of our continent ;

2. Are convinced that in spite of our individual and collective efforts towards the peaceful resolution of all conflicts and civil strife on our continent, as well as our commitment to the democratic process of our societies, there are however still some critical areas of concern in the development spectrum that call for urgent action to promote the role of African Women

and their full participation in development and involvement in the peace process;

3. Call for immediate consideration of all the critical areas of concern as stipulated in the African Platform for Action for Women; namely :

- (a) Women's poverty, insufficient food security and lack of economic empowerment;
- (b) Inadequate access to education, training, science and technology;
- (c) Women's vital role in culture, the family and socialization;
- (d) Improvement of women's health including family planning and population related programmes;
- (e) Women's relationship and linkages to environment and natural resource management;
- (f) Involvement of women in the peace process;
- (g) The political empowerment of women;
- (h) Women's legal and human rights;
- (i) Mainstreaming of gender-disaggregated data;
- (j) Women, communication, information and arts;
- (k) The girl-child.

4. Strongly resolved to chart a future based on equality, development and peace, and declare our solemn commitment to the principles, objectives and priorities enshrined in African Platform for Action.

5. Call for regional and international cooperation and solidarity in order to transform the present inequitable systems and commit ourselves to work in concert by reactivating South/South and North/South dialogue, so as to institute together a more equitable international system which should also promote the advancement of the African woman.

6. Renew our gratitude to donor countries, the United Nations and other International organizations including Non-Governmental Organizations for the invaluable assistance they provided to African countries in the preparation and organization of the Fifth Regional Conference on African women, and we appeal to them to increase their technical and financial assistance for the implementation of the Platform.

7. Express our gratitude to the Government and people of Senegal for having accepted to host the African Regional Conference on Women in Dakar from 11 to 23 November 1994.

8. Invite the Secretary-General of our Organization in cooperation with the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the President of the African Development Bank to closely monitor the implementation of the Platform and to submit periodic reports thereon to the Council of Ministers and to our Conference.

9. Hereby endorse the Dakar Platform for Action on Women, and affirm that it constitutes the ideal framework for the effective promotion and advancement of African Women.

*Adopted at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
28 June 1995*

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DECLARATION

We, the Ministers and representatives of African Governments participating at the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women held in Dakar (Senegal) from 16 to 23 November 1994, for consideration and adoption of the African Platform for Action, in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995,

Having reviewed and appraised the regional implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000,

Appreciative of the fact that there has been an overall sensitization of African leaders, policy makers, development agencies and women regarding the need to incorporate a gender perspective in all activities of the development process,

Conscious that in spite of the progress made, obstacles still remain in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies,

Reaffirming our commitment to the realization of the Nairobi Forward- looking Strategies for the promotion and advancement of women through accelerated action for equality, development and peace,

Realizing that equality is not only the absence of discrimination but also the equal enjoyment of rights, responsibilities and opportunities by women and men,

Recognizing that there can be no equality and development without peace and that peace can only be achieved with the full involvement of women as equal partners with men at all levels of decision-making, diplomacy and mechanisms for peace and conflict resolution and reconciliation,

Aware that since the adoption of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, some African

countries have undergone a series of crises which combined with several other internal and external factors to impede the effective implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, especially political instability related in particular to religious extremism, lack of resolute political will and commitment, lack of resources, poor economic performance due to unfavourable terms of trade and ineffective policies, effects of structural adjustment programmes and heavy debt burden, frequent natural disasters such as droughts and famines and the absence of women in decision-making levels,

Recalling the "Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development: The Role of Women in Africa in the 1990s" which assessed the current situation of women in Africa within the context of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and which noted that the condition of African women has in most cases deteriorated particularly in the field of higher and technical education, health, employment, decision-making and economic empowerment,

Recognizing the crucial roles that women play in the critical areas that enhance their advancement particularly in culture, the family and in the socialization process; ensuring their reproductive rights and improving their health status; in the protection and management of the environment and natural resources; in the quest for peace and in conflict prevention, resolution and management; in their political empowerment and in the realization of their legal and human rights particularly women with special needs,

Determined to implement recommendations for the accelerated advancement of women and the girl-child emanating from recent world conferences, inter alia, the World Conference on Children, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the World Conference on Human Rights and the International Conference on Population and Development,

Aware of the recent major political changes in Africa, particularly the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa as well as other processes of democratization taking place in the continent,

Aware also of the fact that African women have become more active participants in the development process in various capacities,

Determined to support women fully so that they can contribute to and participate more effectively in all the political and economic changes now taking place in Africa,

1. Declare our commitment to forge a new ethic for sustainable development based on the equal and active participation of women, men and youth as agents of change at family, community, national and international levels;

2. Commit ourselves to integrating women's concerns in:

(a) Balancing political, economic, cultural and social policy options;

(b) Harmonizing and reconciling economic growth with social equity;

(c) Emphasizing the interdependence and partnership of women, men and youth of Africa, in

an atmosphere of peace and well-being;

3. Recognize that women have great potential which if mobilized and harnessed will make it possible to overcome the obstacles which have impeded the full and effective implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies since 1985;

4. Uphold the fact that the African Platform for Action is the outcome of a regional country-based review of the progress of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, and broad consultations at national, subregional and regional levels, with inputs from grass-roots communities;

5. Recognize that the African Platform for Action provides the African Common Position on the advancement of women, as well as a framework for committed and concerted action at regional, subregional and national levels for the accelerated achievement of the objectives of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies during the rest of the 1990s and into the twenty-first century; 6.

6. Adopt the African Platform for Action as a renewed commitment by African Governments and as a blueprint to further accelerate the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies in line with the Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development; The Role of Women in Africa in the 1990s, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and declarations at international and regional levels;

7. Calls upon the United Nations institutions and international development partners and NGOs to commit themselves to the successful implementation of the African Platform for Action.

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I. STATEMENT OF MISSION

1. The African Platform for Action is a synthesis of regional perspectives and priorities and a framework for action for the formulation of policies and implementation of concrete and sustainable programmes for the advancement of women. It is developed in consonance with the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, the Abuja Declaration and the Kampala Action Plan. The Platform for Action aims to accelerate the social, economic and political empowerment of all women at all levels and at all stages of their lives under the guidance of the following principles:

(a) The operating principle of the African Platform for Action is the integration of the gender perspective in all policies, plans and actions directed towards the achievement of equality, development and peace. The underlying assumption is that international instruments that have been developed for human rights should be applicable to all sectors of society. To this

end, this African Platform for Action aims to establish/strengthen sustainable mechanisms including information systems at all levels for the promotion of legal literacy and the advancement of women;

(b) Equal partnership between women and men is the ultimate goal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and all other relevant regional and international policy instruments on human and women's rights;

(c) To this end, it is important to ensure a fuller and more active participation of women in policy formulation and decision-making processes of government;

(d) There is need to achieve/accelerate the economic, social and political empowerment of women at all levels, enabling them as citizens, on an equal footing with men, to participate at the level of decision-making, becoming active contributors to and beneficiaries of all aspects of national development;

e) The imperative of a successful search for peace which is crucial for the African region cannot be overemphasized. Women and children are the major victims of ethnic and civil strife including religious extremism and in the ongoing process of conflict prevention, management and resolution, women should be closely and actively involved and consulted at the national, subregional and regional levels;

(f) Priority action should be taken for protecting the human rights of girls and ensuring that they get nurture, care, education and opportunities for achieving their full potentials equally with their brothers.

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II. GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

A. Global perspective

2. In accordance with the proclamation of the United Nations General Assembly, 1975 was designated as International Women's Year (IWY), when the first intergovernmental Conference on Women was convened in Mexico City with the themes of Equality, Development and Peace. The Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace and the World Plan of Action for the implementation of the objectives of International Women's Year were the major outcomes of the Conference. Since the 1970s, all United Nations agencies have been mandated by their governing bodies to incorporate a gender perspective and gender responsible policies and plans as a priority area in their programmes. The United Nations declared 1976-1985 as a Decade for Women to be devoted to effective and sustained national, regional and international action to implement the World Plan of Action and related resolutions. In 1979,

the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In July 1980, the second World Conference on Women was convened in Copenhagen to assess the progress made since the first World Conference and to outline actions to be taken during the second half of the Decade for Women. Three sub-themes were added to the theme of equality, development and peace, namely education, employment and health. To mark the end of the Women's Decade, the United Nations convened the third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in July 1985. The Nairobi Conference adopted the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women up to the year 2000.

3. Since the adoption of Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women in 1985, major political, economic, social and cultural changes have taken place. These have had both positive and negative effects on women and it is against the backdrop of the impact of these global changes on the African region that this Platform for Action has been formulated.

4. The gender perspective and its incorporation in all policy decisions is of paramount importance in engendering equality, development and peace. Overall, many Governments have globally adopted strategies for the enhancement of women's status and skills, their mainstreaming and their involvement in key decision-making. However, what is still lacking in most countries, is the total political commitment and the necessary resource allocation without which the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies will remain unfulfilled aspirations.

5. The expectations for greater global security and a just, equitable and non-discriminatory international economic order have not been realized. In addition, international financial institutions and new world trade arrangements and agreements have assumed larger roles in global affairs and have failed to halt the economic decline in many African countries. There has been a reduction in external assistance flow and the depressed demand for African primary commodities have significantly reduced export earnings. In addition, the heavy debt burden has exacerbated the already depressed economic situation. Regrettably, the interdependent world economy continues to be marked by uncertainty, imbalance, recessions and eventually this has led to the continuing marginalization of developing countries. Numerous interrelated global factors therefore impinge on the lives of women in Africa, affecting both their productive and reproductive roles. The emergence of the political democratization process has ushered in competitive multi-party system whose positive impact on women is yet to be felt.

B. Regional perspective

6. The first Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in Development was held in Nouakchott, Mauritania in 1977 to review progress made by African member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations operating in Africa in the

implementation of the Regional Plan of Action adopted at the World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975. The second Regional Conference for the Integration of Women in Development was held in Lusaka, Zambia in 1979 to review the progress made for the Integration of Women in Development and to prepare for the second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen, Denmark, in July 1980. The third Regional Conference on Women was held in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania in 1984 to review and appraise progress achieved and obstacles encountered in attaining the goals for women; to adopt forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women in Africa to the year 2000; and to arrive at a common African position for the forthcoming Nairobi World Conference on Women.

7. The fourth Regional Conference on Women was held in Abuja, Nigeria, in November 1989 to provide a forum for a thorough review and assessment of the extent of implementation of the Arusha Strategies by Governments, United Nations bodies, NGOs, etc.; consider emerging socio-economic problems that are affecting the lives of African women, and to reassess the priorities stated in the Arusha Strategies and make appropriate recommendations for the future. It adopted the Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development: The Role of Women in Africa in the 1990s whose objectives aimed at defined targets to be achieved in various sectors by the year 2000 in the areas of education, science and technology, agriculture and food production, environment, decision-making and mainstreaming, population issues, women and culture, etc.

8. Other regional milestones that have impacted upon the political, socio-economic and cultural status of women in Africa have included, inter alia:

- (a) The Lagos Plan of Action and Final Act of Lagos (1980);
- (b) The Kilimanjaro Programme of Action on Population and Self-Reliant Development (1984);
- (c) The African Charter on Popular Participation and Transformation (1990);
- (d) The Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (1991);
- (e) The Dakar/Ngor Declaration on Population, Family and Sustainable Development (1992);
- (f) The Ouagadougou Declaration on the Education of Girls (1993);
- (g) The Regional Conference on Women and Peace, and the Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace (1993) which was adopted by the Council of Ministers of OAU at its sixtieth session held in Tunis in June 1994;
- (h) Resolution CM/Res. 1550 (LX) on the preparation of the fourth World Conference on Women adopted by the Council of Ministers of OAU at its sixtieth session held in Tunis in June 1994;

(i) Resolution CM/Res. 1551 (LX) on population and development adopted by the Council of Ministers of OAU in July 1994.

9. In most of Africa, technological backwardness, natural disasters especially drought, disruptions from civil wars and political conflicts have contributed to the depressed economic activity and growth resulting in low per capita incomes. As a result, more countries have been pushed into the least developed country (LDC) category with extremely low income levels. Economic growth has also been constrained by external debt which at the end of 1993 stood at US\$ 285.4 billion, with interest on arrears representing nearly 40 per cent. The debt structure has hardly changed over the last five years. The impact on economic growth has been mixed due to the inadequacy of external support and internal conflicts which have derailed the attainment of these objectives, resulting in their failure to reflect long-term development goals and the neglect of regional planning. This has adversely affected income levels and distribution and the capacity to deliver basic services.

10. These recurrent crises have affected the tempo and level of all economic development of Africa. Women more than men tend to bear the disproportionate burden of such crises, and they become greatly disadvantaged in participating effectively in any development ventures because of some negative practices emanating from traditional, cultural, religious and attitudinal constraints. Women, who make up more than 50 per cent of the populations affected by these crises, must contribute effectively to solving the numerous problems posed by these adverse conditions.

11. Indications of the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations which were finally concluded in December 1993 and adopted and signed in April 1994 are that it will have negative effects on Africa's economic performance, depending on the region's ability to manage change and optimize technology for more efficient use of factors of production in an effort to raise its competitive status in international markets. It is also certain that agricultural subsidies will increase the food import bills of African countries. This will greatly affect the socio-economic status of women because of their total involvement with agricultural sector activities. The emergence of trade blocs and regional markets could also make it more difficult for the African region to maintain its traditional relationships with its European partners for much-needed resources. Accordingly, it is imperative that African Governments develop and adopt strategies to address this situation.

12. Economic decline, recession and the resultant economic restructuring in the face of external debt have led Governments to focus on the more pressing and immediate problems often to the neglect of longer-term issues that have direct bearing on the advancement of women. At the same time, pre-existing conditions of inequality between men and women, inter alia, in health and nutrition, levels of literacy and training, access to education and economic opportunity, and in participation in decision-making, have sometimes been exacerbated both by the crises and by the policies adopted to cope with them. In other words, such policies have compounded further the already disadvantaged situation of the women because they do not take account of their specific roles and concerns. They will also impact most adversely, the younger generation of women who will inherit this legacy. The policies

do not effectively address the impact of restructuring on women and their multiple roles.

13. There is a democratization process sweeping the whole continent and women have been active participants as candidates for election, as voters and as observers of the election process in many countries. A good number of women have entered parliament through their own efforts, affirmative action and through the support of women and men, women's groups, non-governmental associations and organizations of women. Unfortunately, the number of African countries in political crisis, extremism and turmoil is on the increase. In addition, African Governments have yet to undertake comprehensive and concrete steps to promote pragmatically the integration of women as equal partners, particularly in politics, in popular participation and in key decision-making. There is need therefore to monitor the impact of democratization on women locally and nationally and to ensure that there are provisions for women's education and sensitization at all stages of their life, for more effective political participation.

14. Despite the commemoration of the International Year of the Family (IYF) in May 1994, the integrity of the African family is being seriously undermined by persistent socio-economic crises. The massive rural-urban migration and brain drain, consisting mostly of young men and women, has severely affected the socio-psychological and financial security of many families. In many African rural and urban communities, the number of female-headed households has steadily increased to a regional average of around 35 per cent. Rural-urban migration has also increased crime and violence, drug abuse, homelessness, unfavourable environmental conditions and sexual exploitation of women, young girls and boys.

15. Women's health and reproductive rights are central to the realization of their potential. The improvement of their health and their ability to exercise control over their fertility is a major step in enabling them to make the necessary choices in the other areas. African women's inability to control their own fertility is associated with the unacceptably high levels of infant, child and maternal mortality through a variety of appropriate, affordable and accessible services and the persistence of traditional mentalities hampering contraceptive practices.

16. African Governments are faced with new development challenges represented by the adolescent population. By the year 2000 there will be some 170 million youth - those aged 15-24 - in Africa. In some African countries, nearly two thirds of the cases of septic abortions come from the 15-19 age group. Adolescent sexuality and fertility is high risk from the health standpoint. It contributes significantly to girls' inability to attain high levels of education, and to unsafe abortion which leads to maternal mortality and morbidity. The hidden costs of adolescent sexuality and fertility are also enormous and they strain many health service delivery systems of many African Governments. This situation should be addressed urgently with appropriate policies and services.

17. The unprecedented increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons in the region is one of the major consequences of the protracted internal strife, civil wars and political instability in many countries of the region. According to UNHCR, the current

refugee population in Africa is estimated at 7 million out of a world total of 20 million most of whom are women and children and there are also 25 million internally displaced persons.

18. Women form a large percentage of refugees and displaced persons in the Continent. Refugee and displaced women are particularly vulnerable and special attention should be paid to their protection needs. They also represent a useful resource whose potential should be tapped in the search of durable solution to the refugee problems. The refugee women's and girl's access to health, education and shelter should not be affected as the result of their need to flee from the areas of conflict.

19. Women's health should be viewed within a global approach dealing with all the health problems affecting them in their life cycle. Mortality problems relating to malaria, malnutrition, anaemia, tuberculosis, maternal ailments and sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS, still remain preoccupying. World wide, AIDS is a health, social, economic and political issue. Africa is in the front line of the world-wide epidemic, with its younger generation being most at risk. The full dimensions of the epidemic in the region are still uncertain but it is already a grave problem in many countries in East, Central and Southern Africa. According to WHO, the number of new HIV infections among women in most African countries outnumber men by six to five, and more than 6 million women of child-bearing age have been infected. One out of every three pregnant women attending antenatal clinics in some major African urban centres is infected. Thus young women are being most seriously debilitated by the impact of the AIDS pandemic. The economic and social consequences of AIDS affect women the most with serious repercussions on the elderly women who are left to care for orphans when they are least capable. The subordinate position of women and adolescent girls, with younger women being the least empowered, and their lack of access to information, education and communication, health facilities, training, independent income, property and legal rights make them particularly vulnerable to the AIDS infection. They lack knowledge about the disease and the measures that have to be taken to protect themselves against HIV infection in spite of the key role they play and will continue to play in their response. Consequently, it is necessary to place emphasis on decreasing women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. The young of Africa not only face a bleak economic future, but are at present at risk from the spectre of the AIDS pandemic which continues to take a tremendous toll on those below 25 years of age. Education and information campaigns which target the sexual and reproductive health of the young must be increased and strengthened, made more accessible and culturally appropriate. However, besides HIV/AIDS, Africa continues to experience high mortality rates caused by other diseases such as malaria, sickle cell anaemia, tuberculosis, and ailments related to malnutrition.

20. During the last decade, African Governments have slowly started to show an increasing tendency to see the political and socio-economic participation of women as a key factor and catalyst in the processes and linkages that engender and encourage equality, health and development and peace for the accelerated advancement of women. In this respect, practically all Governments have established and given support to national machineries to discharge their responsibilities of coordinating and monitoring the incorporation of the gender perspective in overall national development activities. In addition, most African

countries have enacted legislation against discriminatory practices with regard to education, employment as well as legislation in favour of paid maternity leave for women. Very few countries have adopted relevant legislative framework to ensure fair share of family responsibilities between men and women as stipulated in International Labour Convention No. 156 on Workers with family responsibilities.

21. Overall therefore, despite regional and individual efforts made by member States, the international community and local and international NGOs to improve the status of African women, only modest progress has been made and critical gaps still exist in several areas. The more glaring gaps are in relation to, inter alia, gender disparity in access to education, employment, health services, access to - and control of - productive resources and technology; underrepresentation in particular in the higher political, economic, social and decision-making levels; inadequacy of national machineries, policy and programmes for the enrichment of the women's cause; lack of availability and use of gender-disaggregated data; de jure and de facto discrimination with respect to employment opportunities; marital and family status; lack of awareness on the part of both women and men regarding the issue of women's legal and human rights; and lack of understanding of the legal and administrative systems and mechanisms for redress. A more detailed analysis of these gaps is given in the following section.

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III. CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

22. In the regional review of the process and progress of implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, several gaps and critical areas of concern have been identified at the national and regional levels. Others have been identified through technical workshops convened at national, subregional and regional levels, with inputs from grass-roots communities, women and women's organizations, national and international NGOs, intergovernmental bodies and United Nations agencies. The intention is to reflect a broad-based consensus on the critical areas of concern as well as the criteria used in the process of identifying these areas. They constitute the core of the African Platform for Action, namely:

- (a) Women's poverty, insufficient food security and lack of economic empowerment;
- (b) Inadequate access to education, training, science and technology;
- (c) Women's vital role in culture, the family and socialization;
- (d) Improvement of women's health, reproductive health including family planning and population-related programmes;
- (e) Women's relationship and linkages to environment and natural resource management;

(f) Involvement of women in the peace process;

(g) The political empowerment of women;

(h) Women's legal and human rights;

(i) Mainstreaming of gender-disaggregated data;

(j) Women, communication, information and arts;

(k) The girl-child. It should be noted that these critical areas of concern are interdependent in terms of how they affect the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. Further, the order of presentation reflects the concerns of women in the African region but they are all of equal priority.

A. Women's poverty, insufficient food security and lack of economic empowerment

23. Poverty in Africa manifests itself in various forms and has its essential origin in lack of income, exclusion from the market and social and political life, unequal distribution of wealth and income from global, regional, subregional to local levels, economic recession, drought and other disasters, heavy debt burden, structural adjustment programmes that are incompatible with sustainable development, rapid population growth, armed conflicts and civil strife and these in turn are linked to the general political, economic and social conditions of a given country.

24. More than a third of the people of Africa live in abject poverty and are unable to meet their most basic needs. In 1991, this number was estimated at about 250 million. Notably, the poor are usually associated with high levels of malnutrition, illiteracy, poor sanitation and limited participation in socio-economic activities. For example, in 1993, infant mortality rate in sub-saharan Africa averaged 103 per 1,000 live births as compared to 71 per 1,000 for all developing countries. In the same year, under-5 mortality rates were estimated at 160 per 1,000 live births in sub-Saharan Africa. Between 1985 and 1990, only 51 per cent of urban population in Africa had access to sanitation facilities compared to 16 per cent for the rural population. During the same period, access to safe water covered only 68 per cent in the urban areas and 26 per cent in the rural areas. For all Africa, calories per capita per day averaged 2,100 in 1993 while protein per capita per day was 53 grams compared to a world average of 2,600 calories and 71 grams respectively. The agricultural sector can contribute up to 50 per cent of the GDP, while the agricultural population can make up to 85 per cent of the total. There is also a big gap between urban and rural areas, as regards incomes, food intakes, etc.

25. The heavy burden of poverty falls disproportionately on women especially female-headed households whose proportion is increasing and is now around 35 per cent. Feminization of poverty has therefore become a reality. Although women constitute more

than half of the population, have limited access, ownership and co-ownership to land and housing, they nevertheless provide 60 to 80 per cent of the food supply.

26. In formal employment, they are concentrated in low pay, low grade sectors with poor promotion prospects. Women are the backbone of both cash crop and subsistence farming, yet their non-marketed productive and reproductive activities are neither marketable nor recognized as economic outputs. They are thus denied the tools and means of sustainability and still

27. confront considerable discrimination that constitute a major obstacle to increased productivity. 27. To compound all this, many African countries are also experiencing critical situations in terms of food security, accessibility and distribution. Once a net exporter of food, since the 1980s the region has become a net importer and hunger and malnutrition continue to be a critical issue, affecting women and children. Since 1960, the population in Africa has increased at an annual rate of 3 per cent while food production grew by only an average of 1.8 per cent with the food self-sufficiency ratio dropping from 100 per cent in 1960 to 81 per cent in the 1990s. Approximately 25 per cent of food requirements are imported including food aid, with the annual food imports being equivalent to roughly 30 per cent of Africa's agricultural export earnings. The scarce exported agricultural products are marketed at very low prices while the limited foreign exchange earnings accruing from such commodities are diverted from more important uses to pay for food imports. Security and self-sufficiency are therefore not related to food alone, but to the general and pervasive problem of poverty, unequal distribution of income, weaker purchasing power and unfavourable terms of trade as well as the burden of external debt servicing.

28. Women in Africa, as the main providers and traditional managers of food at the family and household level, can play a key role in the equitable distribution and redistribution of scarce resources. Strengthening of women's potential for management of food and food aid resources can ensure that women's priorities, and their families' well-being, are better served. This increased food security at household level would, in turn, contribute to the global aim of national food security.

29. Women in Africa must be empowered to participate in economic structures and policy formulation and in the productive process itself. It is now recognized that the contribution of rural women in Africa is critical in development. The African Platform for Action, in line with the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and the Abuja Declaration, emphasizes the economic empowerment of women through stimulating, consolidating and coordinating the entrepreneurial spirit and skills of African women and providing adequate access to both formal and informal sector resources. Women's empowerment will enhance their capacity to realistically alter the direction of change for their well-being as well as of society as a whole. It is also crucial to engage the younger generation of women as active partners for change. Consequently, strategies and actions are needed in order to move away from the current welfare orientation to address the economic empowerment of women, and in particular strengthen and support their participation in trade and industry; stem the growing disparity between rural and urban conditions; and move towards environmentally sustainable actions for poverty alleviation through sustainable development. The actions proposed by the

Platform are based on the recognition of women's own responses to increasingly difficult and changing productive and economic circumstances based on their know-how, initiatives and capacities.

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