

MESSAGE FROM AAWORD

It is always a pleasure for AAWORD to say a few words on the occasion of the International Women's Day in order to renew its attachment to the rights of women and the improvement of their status. On that occasion, AAWORD would like to join its voice to the ones of all activists and militants of women's rights and wish a Happy Women's Day to women worldwide.

This year, the Day dedicated to women coincides with the 54th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, placed under the topic of the Evaluation of the Beijing Platform of Action.

The ongoing evaluation of the platform shows once again that pressing disparities are still prevailing in the twelve areas perceived as critical for the attainment of Gender Equality.

Indeed, as Ban Ki-moon outlined it "no country in the world has been successful in achieving equality in law and in practice between men and women".

It is in this vein that in the fight against women's poverty, the gains made in Africa are today seriously jeopardized by the economic crisis with related job losses, especially as regards women's employment and their lack of living conditions security.

As regards education, in spite of the efforts made regarding access to primary education, the greater part African countries still record high female drop-out rates in secondary and higher education.

In the area of health, the programs of access to basic healthcare launched by the African Governments are today under threat because of poor quality services. To this, we should add feminization of AIDS which exposes women to opportunistic diseases which unfortunately do not benefit from any medical care. Africa is, according to UNAIDS, the AIDS most affected continent. Sub-Saharan Africa hardly hosts 10% of the world's population but has over 60% of all people living with the HIV (approximately 25.4 people). Eighty five per cent of the cases of AIDS-caused deaths in the world are in Africa South of the Sahara.

Maternal mortality is still high in Africa with frightening figures. According to UNICEF, women in poor countries are 300 times more exposed to maternal mortality than their counterparts in the developed countries.

Violence against women remains also an issue of major concern for women organizations and development partners, despite the existence, since 1979, of the Fundamental Charter on Women, the CEDEF (Convention on All Forms of Violence Against Women) and national laws on the protection of women's physical and moral integrity.

Gender-based violence is, today, a weapon of war in some countries in conflict situation.

In the field of economic empowerment, despite the laws on equal access and opportunities to employment and social protection, women continue to be the victims of sexist policies of the labor market and the difficult compatibility between professional occupation and family responsibility. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 8 women out of 10 are in a situation of vulnerability.

Even the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) launched in 2000 by the United Nations have not really eased the difficulties of women in Africa. The three MDGs which affect directly women, in particular MDG2, which targets universal education by 2015 for all boys and girls, MDG3, which seeks to promote gender equality and the economic empowerment of women and MDG5, which aims to improve maternal health, bump against the economic crisis, poor governance and enabling national policies in order enforce the conventions and measures which commit African countries.

We are then compelled to admit that the solution to the above listed issues is intrinsically linked to the promotion of the role and place of women in our societies.

As a fact, the issue of governance which is central to all countries' policies and programs cannot be understood while ignoring the contribution that half the population, represented by women, could bring as regards decision-making. Women's political participation, since Beijing 1995, has not met the Civil Society's expectations.

In spite of the democratic regimes established in Africa since independence, women continue to be largely under-represented, and this, almost at all levels of the administration and the decision-making bodies. .

In political parties, their massive presence barely enable them to access political power (they are often absent from the decision –making bodies). Within the legislative bodies, the quota of 30% recommended since Beijing 95 has not yet been reached. Only three countries have been successful in enforcing an institutional quota: these are Burkina Faso, Burundi and Tunisia.

Hence the width of the gap that exists between the commitments taken by the States at the community level and the realities prevailing in each State.

The issue of parity, in spite of the 2003 Maputo Protocol, reinforced by the 2004 Solemn Declaration of the African Heads of States in favor of Genre equality, has not materialized into constitutional laws and still bumps against non harmonization with the national laws of the African Union Member Countries; some countries having a tendency to view women's rights as non mandatory.

Quantitative representation of women in political decision-making recommends a synergy from the States, the political stakeholder and the civil society to lift the obstacles which impede their involvement in the political arena.

However, for women's interests to be better taken into account, there is need for quantitative representation to put up with qualitative representation to widen the egalitarian prospects in the public policies and programs.

That is why, it is urgent to take appropriate measures at the level of governments, organizations of the civil society and the media to ensure greater commitment, but above all concrete actions in favor of women.

Hence this Declaration (see copy below) on "Women and Political Participation in Africa" which AAWORD would like to share with all concerned actors.

Happy Women's Day!!

March 8th, 2010
On behalf of AAWORD
Odile Ndoumbé FAYE, Executive Secretary