



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

STATEMENT BY Ms. DIANA OFWONA, UN WOMEN REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA DURING THE HIGH LEVEL INTERACTIVE MEETING FOR THE ECOWAS DELEGATIONS TO THE 60TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATION'S COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN AT THE AFRICAN UNION PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION IN NEW YORK, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ON WEDNESDAY, 16 MARCH 2016

Chair – Minister of Women's Affairs, Cote d'Ivoire

Vice President of the Gambia

Honourable ministers

Commission of Social Affairs and Gender, of the ECOWAS Commission

Special Representative of the President of the ECOWAS Commission

Excellencies, Ambassadors

Colleagues of the United Nations System

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Permit me to start by commending Her Excellency Commission Dr. Fatimata Dia Sow for organizing this High Level Interactive Meeting for the ECOWAS delegations to the 60th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and for the initiative **"Zero Hunger in the ECOWAS Region."** I am humbled by the opportunity accorded to UN Women, and me personally, to share with you UN Women's work in the ECOWAS region. Let me also commend ECOWAS work in promoting women's participation in politics and in peace building processes, as well as tackling the scourge of trafficking in persons, especially women and children. UN Women appreciates and seeks to continue supporting those countries that developed a national action plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies

Within the ECOWAS region, UN Women has presence in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and in Sierra Leone. In all these countries, UN Women works to support governments'

programmes that aim to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, as part of the overall UN System support. In each country we work in close partnership with the Ministers responsible for gender and women affairs and other relevant government agencies and institutions including national parliaments.

One of UN Women's priority areas in the region is promoting women's participation in politics and leadership positions. My organization has worked with ministries of gender, the UN System and civil society organizations, for instance to support aspirants for parliament and local governments across all political parties in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone during the respective general elections. We supported the national elections management bodies, and contributed to efforts to promote peaceful elections through the Women's Situation Room – a strategy that was first used in Liberia with IN Women support and which has been recognized as a good practice that has been replicated and adapted in other regions including Kenya, Malawi and Uganda. Once the elections are over, UN Women continues to support the elected women, and parliament through training and technical assistance. The support aims to enhance their effectiveness in advocating for gender equality legal reforms, and allocation of resources to policies and programmes that promote women's rights and empowerment.

Another priority area of our work is women's economic empowerment. There are however a number of challenges to women's economic empowerment and we encourage ECOWAS and its member states to partner with UN Women to invest more innovative strategies that move women beyond micro-credit, micro-income generating activities in the informal sector. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission H.E Dr. Dlamini-Zuma has challenged all of us to do more if Agenda 2063 is to be realized. For instance, she has declared that the Hoe must go! What are we doing to ensure that within the next 10 years' women will have the technology to increase productivity and create wealth? UN Women in 2014 organized a Sharefair on innovative rural agricultural technologies and has formed a broad partnership with several institutions to promote replication and upscaling of the winning entries. I invite ECOWAS to take the lead and to partner with UN Women for a similar initiative in the region. In Cote d'Ivoire, UN Women's work is designed to stimulate equal opportunities for women entrepreneurs by ensuring that their voices, agency and capacities of women association are strengthened. UN Women is developing a regional initiative – the Sahel Women Economic Resilience programme in partnership with OSES, ECAS, ECOWAS, G5 and Government of five countries.

We also intend to strengthen our flagship programme on Women's financial inclusion with an innovative approach to deepening women's economic independence and financial acumen through the establishment of an equity fund for women; a series of capacity enhancement seminars in financial literacy; and advocacy for women's leadership of financial institutions.

UN Women also supports national efforts to eliminate violence against women. We commend Nigeria for enacting the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Bill which was passed in March 2015 after more than 14 years of advocacy by a national Legislative Advocacy Coalition on violence against women. To ensure effective implementation of the law, UN Women Nigeria will collaborate with key stakeholders to create awareness and implementation of the VAPP Acts.

We've partnered with your countries and sister UN Agencies to respond to emergencies, whether they arose from natural disasters, armed conflict or diseases particularly Ebola. In Liberia for instance, UN Women identified five key priority areas to ensure the plan addresses the differentiated and specific needs of women and girls:

1. Deployment of social safety nets, including the provision of cash transfers to support the households most affected by EVD epidemic, with a special consideration to women on children affected by the virus;
2. Implementation of economic stimulus programs including loan schemes, housing construction projects for low income earners, with special consideration to various categories of women whose economic livelihoods were adversely affected by EVD;
3. Financing the revised 7-year Health Investment Plan over the next two fiscal years to prioritize maternal and child health (given that Liberia has one of the highest maternal mortality rates at 1072 per 100,000lbs); support to SGBV response systems; and strengthening the mental health support and psychosocial support systems;
4. Meeting resided education investment priorities in response to the crisis to ensure a gender responsive educational system, promoting the dignity and protection of the girl child from risks of SGBV, provision of incentive measurers to ensure retention of girls and boys in school and support to Ebola orphans; and
5. WASH Ebola response and recovery implementation plan must be inclusive of gender friendly WASH facilities in schools

UN Women is encouraging the Government of Liberia to allocate 15% of the overall ERSP for Gender equality, in accordance with the Seven Point Action Plan of the UN Secretary General.

We also support the gender ministries to fulfil their roles in mainstreaming gender in national plans, budgets, and statistics frameworks, as well as reporting obligations under CEDAW and participation in forums such as the Commission on the Status of Women.

In the area of peace and security, the two key components of the UN Women regional approach stress: a) facilitating women's contributions to efforts aimed at countering the violent extremism and conflict prevention in the Sahel and other countries of West Africa (especially through peace huts, situation rooms and other innovations); b) peace consolidation efforts in the Mano River Union and other post-conflict countries; and c) training of security and justice sector as well as gender-responsive peace keeping pre-deployment. In Nigeria specific focus has been given to the partnership between UN Women and ECOWAS especially the Directorates of Social Affairs and Gender, Political Affairs, and Peace and Security. This partnership is guided by a Regional Strategic Plan developed by the Regional Office.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies

The areas of focus in UN Women's work are aligned to national priorities, to the priorities that you identified during the Beijing+20 review, as well as the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

(SDGs). I would like to end my remarks by focusing on the challenges facing us as advocates gender equality and women's empowerment. Following successful advocacy, the 2030 Agenda has a stand-alone goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. There are also gender-related targets and indicators in the other SDGs. As countries begin the process of reviewing their development plans to align them with the SDGs and Agenda 2063, we must work hard right from the beginning to ensure that SDG 5 is a priority for our countries. I commend you Honourable ministers for the key messages that you agreed to during the pre-CSW meeting in Addis Ababa. They are critical to the localization, implementation and monitoring of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the SDGs.

Finally, I would wish to put on record the tremendous support that UN Women receives from you all in our work at country level and in New York during the CSW. Many of you have even moved your governments to support the Organisation financially, for indeed UN Women remains severely underfunded. We look forward to your continued support.

Thank you very much.