

STATEMENT OF THE AFRICAN WOMEN' CAUCUS AT THE 53rd SESSION ON THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Theme: *'The Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and Men including Care-giving in the Context of HIV/AIDS'*

Preamble:

We, the representatives of various civil society organizations composed as the Africa Women's Caucus attending the 53rd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in March 2009 and also representing the voices of millions of African women and girls;

Taking cognizance that the majority of women and girls in Africa are disadvantaged by gender inequalities and power imbalances that stem from political, social, economic and cultural factors which translate into unequal sharing of responsibilities at the global, national, family and community levels;

Acknowledging that governments have the primary responsibility to ensure that all citizens – men and women – equally enjoy their human rights as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and other international and regional human rights instruments including respect of women's sexual and reproductive rights;

Noting with great concern that the increasing vulnerability of women and girls to various forms of violence such as sexual abuse, trafficking of women and girls, forced and early marriages, female genital cutting is a root cause of increased HIV/AIDS infection among young women and girls;

And further noting that this situation is exacerbated by the disproportionate burden of care on women and girls at the household and community levels generally and more specifically caring for those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS;

Specifically urge Governments to:

1. Strengthen the capacities and mandates of institutional frameworks and accountability mechanisms, including of national machineries for the advancement of women, and ensure that they are continuously and adequately resourced and given the authority necessary to carry out their critical role in advocating for, supporting, monitoring and evaluating the integration of gender perspectives in all policy areas and the implementation of gender equality plans, programmes and legislation;
2. Domesticated and implement the international commitments to universal access, prevention, treatment, and care of HIV/AIDS by formulating gender-sensitive HIV/AIDS national response policies and programs and increasing budget allocations for the health sector including implementing best practices set by African governments in adopting the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Abuja Declaration of 2000 and the Maputo Declaration of 2003 to allocate 15% of national budgets to health expenditures;
3. More developed countries to meet the United Nations' agreed target of committing 0.7% of their GDP towards development assistance to enable the achievement of the MDGs and this commitment should be maintained even in the context of the current global financial and economic crisis so as not to experience a decrease in budgets social sectors including health and education among other.
4. Use innovative ways to mobilize men and boys to act as agents of change in challenging gender stereotypes, promoting women's rights including prevention of violence against women which is both a cause and consequence of HIV/AIDS;

5. Prioritize programs that aim to influence change in gender and power relations and promote equal sharing of responsibilities among women and men, boys and girls in building homes and communities that are free of HIV/AIDS and violence.
6. Support and accelerate the conclusion of the UN Gender Equality Architecture reforms to have a new, independent UN agency for the advancement of women which is well-resourced in comparison to the annual budgets of other stand-alone UN agencies, combines operational and normative functions, and has an effective regional and country presence with mechanisms to facilitate civil society participation.

Donors, multilateral and international financial institutions to ensure that:

7. Development assistance intended to support the implementation of National HIV/AIDS Response Plans and Strategies including care giving services should be provided in a timely and consistent manner, based on the assessed needs and priorities of the recipient country and should support the building of capacities of key national and regional institutions involved in designing, implementing and monitoring the impact of the interventions.

Civil Society Organizations and private sector institutions to:

8. Consistently monitor governments' implementation of the various commitments made at the national, regional and international levels to ensure that the rights of persons affected and infected by HIV/AIDS and those providing care giving services are fully recognized, respected and upheld.