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STATEMENT

BY

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KENYA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

ON BEHALF OF

**THE AFRICAN GROUP
AT THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE
OF THE 66TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**ON THE AGENDA ITEM 28:
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN**

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Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Group. As this is the first time the African Group is taking the floor we extend our warm congratulations to you and to the other bureau members on assuming your roles in this committee and pledge the support of the group.

The African Group aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished Representative of Argentina on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

We commend the Secretary General for his illuminating reports under this agenda item which highlight the efforts made by member States, the United Nations system and other stakeholders to address the obstacles that hinder the empowerment of women and their effective contribution to development. We also commend the Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships Bureau, UN Women, the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women for the intuitive dialogue with this committee.

Women are an important segment of the population. Enhancing gender equality and facilitating the enjoyment of their rights is key to unlocking their full potential to contribute to development and eradication of poverty. Over the years, international actors continue to commit themselves to challenges facing women. While noting the progress made in improving the situation of women, we are concerned that it remains very slow in relation to women in rural areas. This is in spite of the appreciation that rural women have a critical role to play in the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals. We therefore welcome the decision of the Commission on the Status of Women to consider "Empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges" as its priority theme during its fifty-sixth session in 2012.

Mr. Chairman,

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Africa has made great strides in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. Most recently, in 2009, the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union adopted the African Union Gender Policy. This document together with the comprehensive Action Plan is a guide for the implementation of decisions and Declarations of the African Union on gender and women's empowerment. In line with the policy and Action Plan, the African Union officially launched the African Women's Decade (2010-2020) in October, 2010, in Nairobi. The objective of the African Women's Decade is to accelerate the realisation of regional and global commitments to the empowerment of women through a top down and bottom up approach which is inclusive of grassroots participation. The fund for African Women was also recently launched. The purpose of the Fund is to finance project proposals from the agreed priority themes of the African Women's Decade. Thus, while the African countries have shown great

commitment and leadership in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, the magnitude of implementation challenges due to weak institutional capacities at national and regional levels is not lost on us. We invite the United Nations and the international community to work together with us to make African Union Women's Decade a success.

Mr. Chairman,

In a continent whose population is highly dependent on the agricultural sector for their livelihood, women in rural areas bear the largest responsibility for cultivating food crops for subsistence use and income generation. In the recent months we have seen the Horn of Africa hit by the most severe food crisis in decades. Thus, the crucial role of women in rural areas in the translation of agricultural production into food and nutritional security cannot be over stated. The situation demands that more efforts be directed towards their empowerment in order to help rural women to contribute meaningfully and effectively to sustainable development and food security. This should include improving women's access to, control and ownership of land, training on appropriate improved farming methods and related technology transfer and access to finance and credit facilities to enable them initiate, sustain and expand agricultural production.

The role of rural women in Africa is central to social and economic development. It is therefore difficult to achieve societal transformation without their productive participation. As pointed out in the Secretary General's report, agriculture alone cannot reduce rural poverty. There is need to diversify household income through off-farm employment opportunities. This requires expanding women's access to formal education and providing access to training on marketing, rural entrepreneurship, farm and household management among others. This is essential if they are to develop livelihood strategies that build on opportunities created by globalization. We therefore encourage UN Women and other UN entities to bolster the efforts of States in this regard.

While the disease burden is greatest in Africa, this situation is worse in rural areas where access to health facilities and health professionals remains a challenge for most women in rural areas. Reflecting on the MDGs report of 2011 launched by the UN Secretary General in July, this year, and in view of the fact that 2015 is fast approaching, MDG 5 on maternal health remains elusive. While we appreciate the role played by WHO and UNFPA together with respective governments in increasing access to health facilities and services, these efforts need to be stepped up. There is an urgent need for cooperation among all stakeholders in order to avail the facilities, professionals and services required for the realisation of the right to the highest attainable standard of health for women.

Mr. Chairman,

The adoption of gender-policies and measures that support the empowerment of women in rural areas is critical for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Gender responsive policies require the participation of women in decision making in order to ensure their rights and priorities are sufficiently addressed in legal frameworks, national

and local policies and investment strategies. Rural women continue to face numerous challenges which hamper their ability to participate in formal and informal decision making. This is due to their onerous responsibilities and household tasks that limit their time and opportunities to be actively involved. Discriminatory and stereotypical attitudes also limit opportunities for women to participate. The lack of economic resources in electoral processes is a bigger challenge for women than men. While women's presence in the political arena is on the rise in some countries in Africa, there is need to increase women's political participation through out the continent. The challenges surrounding the empowerment of women cannot be successfully addressed without the full commitment of all stakeholders. Such commitment and a strong partnership is fundamental for the realisation of goals and objectives underlying the relevant policies and strategies.

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to violence against women, we welcome the Decision of the Heads of States and Governments of the African Union adopted during the 17th Summit in Malabo in favour of the adoption of a Resolution to ban the practice of Female Genital Mutilation during the 66th session of the General Assembly. Violence against women in all its forms and manifestations undermines their dignity and ultimately affects their ability to contribute to development. Women migrant workers often suffer double jeopardy, that of being women and foreigners. When violence is visited upon them, their situation only becomes worse. We are therefore greatly encouraged by efforts made by States and UN entities in order to intensify the implementation of laws, policies and plans on elimination of violence against women, including migrant workers.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, the scaling up of efforts towards the empowerment of women and realising a gender neutral society continues to be a challenge for all. This calls for concerted efforts at the national, regional and international levels to support the full implementation of legal provisions, policies and programmes that address these challenges. We view UN Women as a partner in the empowerment of women. In this regard, the African Group is encouraged by the successful take-off of the Entity, under the leadership of the President of its Executive Board, Ambassador Joy Ogwu of Nigeria, and its Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet and look forward to greater progress in the coming years.

I thank you.

