

First Meeting of Women Parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab World:

1.0 The First Meeting of Women Parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab world, organized by the Association of Senates, Shoora and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab world (ASSECAA), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was held at the International Conference Centre, Abuja, Nigeria from 6th to 7th October 2009. The meeting was declared open by H.E the President of Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Senator David Mark (GCON) represented by distinguished Senator Zainab Kure.

2.0 Delegates from the following countries attended the meeting:

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|-----------------------|----------------|
| (a) Algeria | (n) Mauritania |
| (b) Swaziland | (o) Liberia |
| (c) Morocco | (p) Sudan |
| (d) Togo | (q) Iraq |
| (e) Egypt | (r) Congo D.R |
| (f) Ethiopia | (s) Namibia |
| (g) Uganda | (t) Senegal |
| (h) Gabon | (u) Nigeria |
| (i) Malawi | (v) Tchad |
| (j) Equatorial Guinea | (w) Burundi |
| (k) Guinea Bissau | (x) Cameroon |

(l) Sierra Leone

(y) Benin Republic

(m) Yemen

3.0 The following organizations participated:

i) Arab League

ii) UNDP, NDI Consultant

iii) The Honourable Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mrs. Salamatu Suleiman addressed the meeting.

4.0 SPEECHES BY HEADS OF DELEGATIONS

At the commencement of the meeting, the Secretary-General of ASSECAA, H.E Mr. Livinus I. Osuji delivered the welcome speech. The Chairman of ASSSECAA and Speaker of the States Council of Sudan, H.E Yahiya Ali Abdallah delivered the keynote address. Heads of delegations delivered heartwarming speeches in which, in total accord, they expressed gratitude to the Association of Senates, Shooraa and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab world (ASSECAA) for the initiative of convening the First Meeting of Women Parliamentarians in the region. They expressed optimism that the forum would create regular interaction among African and Arab female parliamentarians and provide a veritable opportunity for strengthening women empowerment in the region and galvanizing the women to contribute to national development.

5.0 PRESENTATIONS

Resource persons made presentations on the following topics:

i. iKNOWPolitics by M/S Mariam Diallo UNDP, NDI Consultant

ii. The Rise of Women leaders on Social, Economic and Political platforms in Africa and the Arab world – Prospects and Challenges by Prof. Anthony Oye Cukurah of Faculty of law, University of Abuja

iii. Empowerment of Women in Africa and the Arab world – Merits, Prospects and Challenges by Professor Kabir Mato, Faculty of Political Science, University of Abuja, Nigeria.

iv. Comparative Study of the Contributions of Women to National Development in other regions and the African and Arab Scenario by Prof. Uwakwe Abugo, Faculty of Law, University of Abuja

v. Traditional Rights of Women determined by Customs, Family Patterns, National Socio-Political Organization and the Participation of Women – Arab and African case study by Prof. K.M Waziri, Faculty of Law, University of Abuja, Nigeria.

6.0 The meeting deliberated on these presentations exhaustively and expressed appreciation to the sound and illuminating propositions by the renowned scholars.

7.0 COMMITTEES

After general discussions on the presentations, the meeting resolved into four committees that deliberated on the following issues which emanated from the presentations and the contributions of delegates:

- i. Committee One – Proposals to encourage women leadership in social, economic and political platforms.

- ii. Committee Two - Removal of obstacles on the process of the empowerment of women.

- iii. Committee Three - Enhancement of the contribution of women to national development.

- iv. Committee Four - Infrastructure and the organ for continued interaction of women parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab world.

8.0 COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEES

8.1 Committee One comprised the following countries:

- a. Benin Republic

- b. Burundi

- c. Cameroun

- d. Egypt

e. Equitorial Guinea

f. Tchad

8.2 Committee Two comprised the following countries:

a. Ethiopia

b. Gabon

c. Liberia

d. Malawi

e. Mauritania

f. Congo D.R

8.3 Committee Three comprised the following countries:

a. Morocco

b. Namibia

c. Nigeria

d. Togo

e. Swaziland

f. Guinea Bissau

8.4 Committee Four comprised the following countries:

a. Senegal

b. Sierra Leone

c. Sudan

d. Uganda

e. Yemen

f. Algeria

g. Iraq

9.0 COMMITTEE REPORTS

9.1. Committee One was chaired by Hon. AFFO DJOBO OLOUDE, head of delegation from the Republic of Benin. The Committee recommended as follows:

Political Front:

- a. Political education of women on their rights to participate in the political process in their various countries.

- b. Enactment of gender friendly legislation that create the enabling environment for women to participate in political process in their countries.

- c. Civil society should play a greater role in enhancing the participation of women in the political process.

- d. The political parties should encourage women to participate in politics through the provision of quotas based on the UN recommendation of 30%.

- e. Families should encourage and ensure that the girl child attends and completes school.

- f. Governments of Afro-Arab states should put in place a mechanism for implementing all protocols and treaties on gender parity ratified by individual countries.

- g. Strategies for the promotion of the participation of women should be adopted in all African and Arab countries.

Economic Front:

a. Policies to enable the access of women to credit facilities to enhance their participation in the economic process of their countries should be adopted.

b. Special agencies should be established by African and Arab governments to assist women establish small and medium scale enterprises.

c. Equal employment opportunities as well as equal remunerations for equal work in both the private and public sectors of the economy for men and women should be adopted.

d. Women should have equal access to land for agricultural and other economic purposes.

Social Front:

a. Customs that inhibit inheritance rights of girls or women should be abrogated.

b. Women should imbibe the culture of solidarity rather than that of unhealthy rivalry.

- c. Customs and practices that impede the self development of women should be reviewed.

- d. Creation of social safety nets as insurance, maternity leave and other social security programmes should be put in place for women.

- e. Governments should put in place mechanisms to reduce high maternal and infant mortality rate.

- f. Free health care for pregnant women and children from 0 – 5 years should be established in all African and Arab countries.

- g. States should intensify the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

9.2. Committee Two discussed the removal of obstacles on the process of the empowerment of women in Africa and the Arab world. The Committee was chaired by Olive Chikankheni, head of delegation from Malawi. The Committee recommended as follows:

Obstacle (1) - Illiteracy

Solution – (a) Member countries should enact laws that make basic literacy compulsory, e.g., Early Childhood Development Programme and Adult Education Programme.

(b) Free and Compulsory Education up to secondary school level.

Obstacle (2) - Cultural/Religious/Traditional Practices.

Solution - Women parliamentarians should use their outreach programmes to educate their constituents on the negative effects of certain cultural/religious/traditional practices.

Obstacle (3) - Discriminatory laws:

Solution - There should be a review of constitutional and legal provisions that discriminate against women.

Obstacle (4) - Low Political will.

Solution – Governments should ensure at least 30% representation and participation of women in all branches of government (social, political, economic etc.)

Obstacle (5) – Lack of Resources

Solution – (a) Governments should provide micro finance schemes to the less privileged in the society.

b) Governments should encourage Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that focus on the less privileged.

Obstacle (6) – Inappropriate attitude of Women (Mindset, lack of confidence, fear of failure, jealousy etc.)

Solution – (a) Cooperation among women should be encouraged.

(b) Mothers and fathers should make deliberate efforts to motivate their girl child.

Obstacle (7) – Inadequate budgetary allocation.

Solution – Governments should ensure that budgetary provisions are made for essential aspects of the nation with special attention to matters affecting women.

CONCLUSION:

Time has come for the African and Arab women to stand up as one, to bring down the negative image of the women.

9.3 Committee Three was chaired by Hon. AMEGANVI M. Isabelle, head of delegation from the National Assembly of Togo. The Committee recommended as follows:

- a. The enhancement of women and girl child education, to enable women contribute positively towards national development.
- b. Entrenchment of Social Security System through legislation, and where it exists, it should be enforced.
- c. Poverty eradication policies/programmes to be put in place, e.g. women empowerment programmes, skills acquisition programmes, access to credits by women through micro financing institutions that offer lower rates and less cumbersome procedures should be encouraged.

d. The domestication of the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by all countries.

e. Forums for the discussion on national development plans should include women.

f. Good governance at all levels should be enhanced, strengthening transparency, accountability and elimination of corruption.

9.4 Committee Four was chaired by the head of delegation from Senegal, Hajia Aissatou MBODJ. The Committee recommended as follows:

a. Women parliamentarians should be given higher posts in their parliaments and other parliamentary forums in the regions.

b. Every parliament in Africa and the Arab world should assume an obligation to send at least a woman as part of its delegation to every regional or international parliamentary meeting and conference.

c. Every parliament in Africa and the Arab world that has a second chamber should nominate representatives to ASSECAA and formalize its membership of the Association at the commencement of each parliamentary term.

d. All countries in Africa and the Arab world that are signatories to international conventions on women's rights should ratify and domesticate them. This will further enhance women's participation in the governance of the countries of the regions.

e. A committee that will regularly monitor regional and international developments, affecting the interests of women should be established in the structure of ASSECAA, like its Committee on Peace and Conflict Resolution.

f. The ASSECAA's council should adequately fund the activities relating to the promotion of women empowerment.

g. The Meeting of Women Parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab world should be held at least once in two years.

10.0 The meeting deliberated on the Committee Reports and adopted them mutatis mutandis.

11.0 OBSERVATIONS

Observing that:

a. there is need for Political education of women on their rights to participate in the political processes in their countries;

b. there is need for the enactment of gender friendly legislations that create suitable environment for women to participate in the political process, such as free education for children up to 16 years of age;

c. there is need for civil society organizations in Africa and the Arab world to play a better role in enhancing the participation of women in political process;

d. there is need for political parties in Africa and the Arab world to grant quotas based on U.N recommendation of 30% of political offices for women;

e. there is need for families to encourage their girl children to attend or complete their education in Africa and the Arab world;

f. there is need for governments in the regions of Africa and the Arab world to put in place mechanisms for implementing all protocols and treaties on gender parity ratified by individual countries;

g. there is need to formulate policies to enable women to have access to credit facilities;

h. there is need to assist women to establish small and medium enterprises;

i. there is need to create equal employment opportunities as well as equal remuneration in both the private and public sectors for men and women;

j. there is need to eliminate all discriminations against women in respect of access to land for agricultural and other economic purposes;

k. there is need to abrogate all customs that inhibit inheritance rights of girls/women throughout Africa and the Arab world;

l. there is need for the African and Arab women to imbibe the culture of solidarity instead of unhealthy rivalry;

m. there is need to create social safety nets that will reduce the high maternity and infant mortality rates in the regions;

n. there is need to establish free health care services for pregnant women and children from 0 – 5 years;

o. there is need to intensify the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other endemic diseases;

p. there is need to increase the level of transparency and accountability in governance in Africa and the Arab world;

considering the imperative for:

a. every parliament in Africa and the Arab world to send at least a woman as part of its delegation to all regional and international parliamentary meetings and conferences;

b. the General Secretariat of ASSECAA, to be well funded to enable it take very keen interest in matters concerning the empowerment of women in the regions of Africa and the Arab world;

c. holding the meeting of women parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab world at least once in two years;

d. women parliamentarians to use their outreach programmes to educate their constituents on the negative influence of certain cultural/ religious/traditional practices;

e. budgetary provisions in Africa and the Arab countries to reflect gender issues;

f. adult literacy programmes to be encouraged among women in Africa and the Arab countries;

12.0 RESOLUTIONS:

the meeting accordingly resolved that:

- a. parliaments in Africa and the Arab world should enact gender friendly legislations that facilitate the participation of women in political processes, through the provision of quota based on UN resolutions of 30% of political offices for women;
- b. governments in the regions of Africa and the Arab world should implement as a matter of urgency, all protocols and treaties on gender parity ratified by individual countries, formulate policies that enable women to have easy access to credit facilities, create equal employment opportunities and remunerations for both men and women;
- c. all parliaments should enact legislations to eliminate all customs and laws that inhibit women from inheritance and access to land for economic purposes;
- d. all governments in Africa and the Arab world should establish free health care services for pregnant women and children from 0 – 5 years of age, intensify the war against HIV/AIDS and other endemic diseases;
- e. the Meeting of Women Parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab should be held at least once in two years.

13.0 The Meeting of Women Parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab world calls on:

- a. all governments in Africa and the Arab world to improve the level of transparency and accountability in governance, in order to reduce the tension and strife in politics; and
- b. all women parliamentarians in the region to use their outreach programmes to educate their constituents on the negative influence of cultural, religious, and traditional practices that inhibit the development of women.

14.0 The meeting expresses abundant gratitude to the Council and Conference of ASSECAA for the initiative for this seminal Meeting of Women Parliamentarians in Africa and the Arab world, which will

be sustained to establish a veritable forum for exposing African and Arab women to the demands of modern nationhood and their inalienable rights and obligatory contributions towards the development of their countries.

ASSECAA Secretariat

7th October 2009