

**Opening Remarks by the Chairperson, H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at the Opening Ceremony of the GlobalPOWER Women Network Africa
2nd High-Level Meeting
Abuja, Nigeria
Thursday, June 27, 2013**

**President Goodluck Jonathan;
President Joyce Banda;
The Outgoing and Incoming Presidents of GlobalPOWER Women Network Africa;
Dr. Michel Sidibe, Executive Director of UNAIDS;
Governors, Legislators, Ministers and Other Officials of Government;
Representatives of International, Regional, Non-Governmental and Civil Society
Organizations and Institutions;
Politicians, Educators, Artists, Entertainers;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:**

It is a pleasure to be a part of this 2nd High-Level Meeting of the GlobalPOWER Women Network Africa, organized by the Government of Nigeria, in collaboration with the African Union and with support of UNAIDS.

Allow me, on behalf of organizers and participants, to thank you, my Brother, President Goodluck Jonathan, the government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for this invitation and the warm hospitality extended to us.

It is an honor for me to Chair this opening session, to join the many women decision-makers from Africa represented here, in this network of women leaders and parliamentarians united to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, to take action on HIV/AIDS, and to address the issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Africa.

We are here to review and identify strategies to accelerate the implementation of the global and regional agenda for women and girls, gender equality and HIV/AIDS in Africa. We will also consider the adoption of key post-2015 priorities – areas that are addressed in the Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

That Report recognizes that there have been remarkable achievements under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): half a billion fewer people in extreme poverty; 3 million children's lives saved each year; four out of five children now get vaccinated for a range of diseases; maternal mortality gets the focus and attention it deserves; deaths from malaria have fallen by one-quarter; contracting HIV is no longer an automatic death sentence; and in 2011, 590 million children in developing countries attended primary schools.

Yet, there is much unfinished business from the MDGs. Women and girls, in particular, need protection of their property rights, their access to land, and to have a voice to participate in economic and political life. They want a global focus on ending violence against women and discrimination at work, at school and in the law.

The agenda for addressing the topics before us is comprehensive and rich, and I look forward to our deliberations on how we can advance the objectives that have been established. We will, no doubt, hear some disturbing statistics, but they should galvanize and motivate us towards the achievement of our goals.

The issues before this gathering are very much reflected in the Report of the High-Level Panel. Two of those Goals, particularly, pertain to those topics that will be discussed.

Goal 2, “Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality,” would prevent all forms of violence against girls and women; end child marriage; ensure the equal right of women to own and inherit property, sign a contract, register a business and open a bank account; and eliminate discrimination against women in political, economic and public life.

Goal 4, “Ensure Healthy Lives,” would end preventable infant and under-5 deaths; increase the proportion of children, adolescents, at-risk adults and older people that need to be fully vaccinated; continue to decrease the maternal mortality ratio; ensure universal sexual and reproductive health and rights; and reduce the burden of disease from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases and priority non-communicable diseases.

The national targets set under these two Goals are clearly in sync with the objectives – your objectives – of the GlobalPOWER Women Network Africa. It is therefore up to us – women leaders, the GlobalPower Women Network Africa, women organizations, women decision-makers, women everywhere – to become the advocates, the promoters, the facilitators to ensure that these Goals are fully adopted and implemented.

The time is now! If not now, when? If not us, who?

I now invite the President of the GlobalPOWER Women Network Africa, Her Excellency Thokazani Khupe, Deputy Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, to make the opening statement.