

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at the Gala Dinner Launching the Autobiography
of H.E. Rev. Pastor Denise Bucumi-Nkuruniza
Titled “Denise: The Power of Hope”
The Hippique Circle
Bujumbura, Burundi
August 9, 2013**

President Nkuruniza;
First Lady Denise Nkuruniza;
Officials of Government;
Special Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you, President Nkuruniza, for the invitation to visit your beautiful country. This has afforded me the opportunity to be here on this historic occasion, for the launch of a powerful memoir by your partner, and Burundi’s First Lady, Her Excellency Denise Bucumi-Nkuruniza. I am equally delighted to have been invited to play a small part, by contributing the Foreword to “*Denise: La Force d’Esperer*,” (“*Denise: The Power of Hope.*”)

This is the story of a woman of hope; a woman of courage during the war years; a woman with the strong will and determination to survive. But above all, it is a story of faith and trust in the Almighty God to see her through trials and tribulations. This perseverance inevitably led to her rise to become the First Lady of Burundi, and to answer to a higher calling, as an ordained Reverend Pastor of the Word of God.

, spreading His message through caring for the stems from her ability overcome the hate and scorn meted out to her by both sides in Burundi's ethnic crisis, because of who she was. Her story is that of a woman who nevertheless kept her focus, while forgiving of those who wronged her.

In my Foreword to the book, I commended Madame Denise Bucumi-Nkuruniza for her courage in recounting unspeakable truths about the most difficult period of her life and that of her country, and noted how, with resilience, she persevered and made it through those most trying times.

Hers is an excellent testimony of her transformative journey, and I reiterate my hope that this memoir will encourage and empower more women to believe in themselves and in the power of hope!

As the First Lady, she leads, by example, and by definitive action rather than words, for the empowerment of women through education, mentoring, offering comfort to the sick and infirmed, promoting vaccination campaigns for children. She has mobilized Burundians in rebuilding their devastated country through community works and beautification projects. Her Buntu Foundation aims at restoring hope to the disadvantaged, among them, orphans, widows, the elderly, returnees and people living in abject poverty.

Madame Nkuruniza is doing her part in transforming Burundi. I can truly say that it is because the First Lady invited me to make a contribution to her book, that I am here today on a State Visit that has resulted in the strengthening of bilateral relations between Liberia and Burundi, most immediately through the signing of an Agreement that [does XYZ].

A strong and effective woman leader, she is making her mark not only in her native Burundi, but also on the international scene. Let me applaud her for being the recipient of this year's Millennium Development Goals Women's Progress Award at the United Nations, where she was recognized for being a woman of quality leadership at the service of disadvantaged people. As you know, we recently concluded the Report of the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which among other things, calls for countries to continue to work towards the achievement of the MDGs by its termination date.

Goal 2 of the High-Level Panel's Report, titled "Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality," would prevent and eliminate 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.

For Africa to prosper, its women – one half of the world's population – must be placed at the center of development. The Panel concluded with this simple message: "Women who are safe, healthy, educated, and fully empowered to realize their potential, transform their families, their communities, their economies and their societies. We must create the conditions so they can do so."

In all that she is working to accomplish for her country, the First Lady has the strong backing, support and encouragement of her husband, the President, who encourages women to succeed.

Throughout your region of central and southern Africa, women are assuming leadership positions. [STATS]

... steps to transform the lives of women, as well as for women's empowerment.

The number of Burundian women holding elective office, especially in parliament

strong and efficient women leaders are emerging all over Africa,

There has been a lot of talk in Africa about how to get more women into the top echelon of political appointments.

This is a compelling book that I highly recommend, not only to the people of Burundi, but to the world

...true model for the many young women – even young men – who will want to follow in her footsteps to become leaders.

I now have the singular honor to launch this excellent work, “*Denise: La Force d’Esperer.*”

I thank you.

**Opening Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at the Celebration of Pan-African Women’s Day
at the International Women’s Conference
The Royal Palace Hotel
Bujumbura, Burundi
Friday, August 9, 2013**

[check Protocol]

President Nkuruniza;

First Lady Denise Nkuruniza;

Officials of Government;

Representatives of Women’s Organizations;

Special Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to be here in Bujumbura, and with to thank all Burundians for the very warm welcome my delegation has received since our arrival in your Capital, Bujumbura. [add **something about country**]

I am equally delighted to participate in the celebration of Pan-African Women's Day at this International Women's Conference.

Pan-African Women's Day is a special occasion to honor the tremendous achievements of African women, and also to advocate for greater gender equality on the continent.

Pan-Africanism is an ideology and movement that encourages the solidarity of Africans worldwide.^[1] It is based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social, and political progress and aims to “unify and uplift” [people of African descent](#).^[2]

The ideology asserts that the fates of all African peoples and countries are intertwined. At its core Pan-Africanism is “a belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the Diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny”.^[3]

The largest Pan-African organization is the [African Union](#).^[4]

Anthen of the Pan African Women Organisation:

"Mothers and women of Africa hand in hand let's unite around the Pan-African Women's Organization our sole organ of struggle. Let's lift up our flag so high seen by the whole world let's ensure to our future generation a new, free and prosperous Africa Competency and dignity should be from now on our motto because we have a holy duty holy duty like that of men".

A brief history of PAWO

The Pan African Women's Organisation (PAWO) is a women's organization that was founded in 1962 (in Tanzania), a year before the founding of the Organization of African Unity (this means that PAWO is one year older than the AU) to bring together African women's organizations in a single platform for sharing good practices and for joint action to promote human rights and gender equality. PAWO has enabled substantial progress to be made concerning women's rights and recognition of their role in society, working with other international women's organizations.

After independence of African countries, despite the artificial barriers of languages, political opinions, prevailing all contradictions, African Women decided to unite, to form one association to better get to know each other in order to share their experiences, combine their effort for the emancipation of African Women in view of their integration in the future of the African continent. Mrs. Assetou Koite is the current Present of the Pan African Women's Organisation

The aim of the Pan African Women's Organisation is to Unite all African women's organizations to allow an exchange of points of view and to undertake joint action; promote human rights with a view to eliminating any form of discrimination, irrespective of birth, race, religion or sex; support political, economic and social liberation of the African Continent in order to contribute to the progress of its peoples through a conscious, real and constant action; ensure full integration of women in economic and social development, so as to accelerate the promotion of African women so they can achieve full development; promote through friendship, understanding and cooperation an effective unity between African states; establish lasting relations of friendship and cooperation between women in Africa and throughout the world; fight against poverty and disease, especially HIV/AIDS.

Pan-African Women's Day (PAWD) is held annually across the world to celebrate the first Pan-African Women's Conference and the creation of the Pan-African Women's Organization (PAWO) in 1962 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

African women make up 51% of the African family world-wide and we know that they have been responsible for many victories throughout the years against our oppressors, as the foundation for raising families and have served as the bedrock for entire communities. With this being the case, we believe that it is important that we celebrate the lives and victories of African/Black women worldwide on Pan-African Women's Day.

In a related development, at programs marking the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the Pan African Women Organization, President Sirleaf received the 2013 Year of Pan Africanism and African Renaissance African Union Award for her Pan African service.

Also honored at the ceremony were: the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma; the United Nations Secretary-General Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, Asha Rose Migiro; United Nations Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, Amina Mohammed; and of the Establishment Coordinator of the Angie Brooks International Centre for Women Empowerment, Leadership Development and International Peace and Security, Cllr. Yvette Chesson-Wureh.

The Pan African Women Organization (PAWO) was established in 1962, a year before the founding of the Organization of African Unity, now the African Union. "On the 50th Anniversary of Africa's quest for strength in common purpose, we celebrate distinguished women leaders who have contributed to the African Renaissance, Pan African service and committed to peace and development," the organizers declared.

The program was graced by a group of chosen patrons, including the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Dr. Carlos Lopes; the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the African Union, Mr. Zachary Muburi-Muita; the UN Resident

and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Eugene Owusu; and the Chairperson of the UN Liaison Team with the African Union, Jeanine Cooper.

Speaking at the occasion, the Liberian leader thanked PAWO for the honor and urged women of the continent to unite for more leadership roles. She acknowledged that it was a difficult task to be a first female President on the continent, the first post-conflict woman President and a Nobel Laureate President, adding that one must think once, twice and thrice before seeking to fit in the listed categories.

During the ceremony, the Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA) launched its Membership Directory 2013-2014. The group believes that African women in government, private corporations, civil society and intergovernmental institutions are the new partnership for action. African women, according to the organization, are managing solutions to protect their households, their communities, countries, regions, and are focused on safety and security, assets protection, income generation and improving the quality of life.

Pan African Women's Organisation

PAWO is a women's organization that was founded in 1962 (in Tanzania), a year before the founding of the Organization of African Unity (**OAU**). This means that PAWO is one year older than the **OAU**.

After independence of African countries, despite the artificial barriers of languages, political opinions, prevailing all contradictions, African Women decided to unite, to form one association to better get to know each other in order to share their experiences, combine their effort for the emancipation of African Women in view of their integration in the future of the African continent.

The total liberation of the African continent, the elimination of apartheid, and the institution of a joint justice as human beings became their priority. Thus, on the **31st July 1962, the Conference of African Women (CAF)** was created at Dar es Salaam in Tanganyika now known as Tanzania, the first African Women Organization which became "Pan - African Women's Organization" (PAWO) after the congress of Dakar (Senegal) in July 1974 where the 31st July was designated *African Women Day*.

AFRICAN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Dear Sisters;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

The topic of today's Seminar, "African Women and Political Participation," is one on which I can speak with some authority – as an African, as a woman, and as a politician.

Every woman here knows, or has experienced, the difficulty in bringing women into the fold of political participation across our continent – from the grassroots up to the highest office in the land.

You are here this evening because you believe that women's full political participation can and must happen, not only in Rwanda, South Africa or Mozambique, but in all corners of this vast continent that is our home. In overcoming the multiple challenges which we as African women confront, it is vital that there be trailblazers such as the AWDF which are striving determinedly for all our women to be empowered.

We are seeing progress in African women's participation in politics, no doubt, although not at the levels we demand. The job of full equality and total empowerment is incomplete. Let us remember that in the fight to empower women, we can accept no frontiers, only breakthroughs.

Governance cuts across all spheres of representation and decision-making, from the community to national levels. Full political participation will become a reality for us, as women, when quotas and set-asides become a relic of the past; when our access in participatory institutions at all levels is considered a right; and when we no longer feel compelled to wage campaigns and stage protests in order to have a say in the decisions that affect our lives – be it at the peace table or in the political and economic arenas.

There is power in numbers. The lone female voices one encounters in political circles, including in Africa, are insufficient to effect the changes that are so important to women. As a tiny minority in governance, women could be subjected to pressures, and their capacities as representatives, policy makers and decision takers are constrained by

their numbers. We still need those numbers in critical mass to make those decisions and make them stick. In such low numbers, and with insufficient clout, women ministers tend to be relegated to, and concentrated in, social areas rather than legal, economic, political and technical functions of government.

It goes without saying that when women are represented in critical numbers in parliaments, as well as at the grassroots level, their perspectives and interests will be taken into account and their concerns given higher priority. Greater political participation will also allow women to make a meaningful impact on democracy, and to sustain the effort for the empowerment and representation of women.

A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

Dear Friends: The low political participation by women is not limited to Africa; it is global, with the Nordic countries being among the notable exceptions.

Today, out of 192 United Nations Member States, there are only 18 women, either elected or appointed, in the highest positions of government. That figure inched up by one with the election, just last week, of Dilma Rousseff as the first female Head of State of Brazil. When she takes office in January 2011, she will preside over the largest country in Latin America, with a population of over 192 million, 45 percent of which are people of African descent. We welcome her to our tiny circle.

Globally, women's representation in parliaments stands at 18.2 percent – the highest it has ever been, but still not high enough. Today only 22 countries have achieved a critical mass of 30 percent or higher women representation in their national parliaments, mainly as a result of constitutional quotas written into law and requiring that a certain percentage of political positions be occupied by women.

Of that number, six are African countries: Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. These countries succeeded because they recognized the importance of equity between women and men in decision-making and they instituted changes in their electoral and parliamentary processes.

The world applauds Rwanda as having the highest number of women parliamentarians, at 56.3 percent, followed by Sweden, at 47 percent. Rwanda succeeded by implementing a gender quota system. With a population of 70 percent female following the 1994 genocide, women had to assume traditional male roles. Able, finally, to participate in the drafting of a new constitution and new legislative structures, they pushed for greater equality in politics through such

initiatives as a constitutional quota and election law quotas to ensure women's place at the political table. Rwanda serves as a case study, an example for other countries seeking a more equal representation of women in politics.

Let us also recognize South Africa, which leapt from 17th to 3rd place, behind Rwanda and Sweden, in the global ranking. That country has experienced an 11 percent increase in women's political representation, from 34 percent to 45 percent. Prior to democratic elections held there in 1994, there following the elections and has been growing ever since. We applaud the enlightened male leaders who played key roles in this success.

My country, Liberia, is a strong advocate of the seminal UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which seeks greater representation of women at all decision-making levels in politics and in crisis management activities. We are only at 12 percent – the highest it has ever been in Liberia – yet far below an acceptable percentage of women in our National Legislature or in other leadership areas.

Women's groups are pressuring for 30 percent political representation. The Gender Equity in Politics Act 2010, sponsored by the Women Legislative Caucus, is now before the Legislature. It calls for no less than 30 percent representation of women in national elected offices and political parties. As you may well imagine, the proposed legislation is facing serious challenges from a male-dominated Legislature, whose members argue that competition, rather than gender, should be the criterion for representation. Since there is no mutual exclusivity here, you can be assured that our women are neither defeated nor are they backing down, and we will continue to push until this necessary objective is achieved.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE 1990s AND BEYOND

The gains in women's political participation in Africa did not happen overnight; they have been earned over decades by Sisters who dared to challenge the status quo. Prior to the 1990s, it was unthinkable – in my country, for sure – that a woman could run for the presidency in Africa. In 1997, I challenged that stereotype and ran for President of Liberia. I lost, bested by a well-financed military machine. I ran again, in 2003, for Chairman of the Interim Government right here in Accra during the peace talks. Although I received the highest vote from the participating civilian groups, the warring factions with regional backing placed the leadership in others hands, in retrospect, a blessing in disguise. Undeterred, I ran for President again in 2005, and this time the outcome was in my favor.

I am proud to be the first democratically elected female President in Africa. It is my fervent hope, and prayer, that what I accomplished will not be a one-off; that a woman running for President in Africa will become the norm, not the exception, for many more women across our continent.

I continue to be encouraged by the women with whom I interact across Africa. They see in my presidency a validation of something they have always believed, that “It is possible. We can make it happen.” You in this room have to work to make it happen. It is my great privilege to be a source of inspiration to you, the women of Africa, with aspirations to occupy the highest political positions in the land.

Other African women have dared to run for the highest office in their countries since my first attempt. Charity Ngilu and Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai ran in Kenya’s 1998 presidential election, and Ngilu ran again in 2002; Tanzania, Sierra Leone and more recently Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire have seen women compete. Dr. Sarah Jibril of Nigeria, for the fifth time, has thrown her hat into the race for the upcoming 2011 presidential elections. Despite their unsuccessful bids, these women, undaunted, set important precedents and several have assumed other important leadership roles. We have one right here with us today, the Vice President of Malawi. Africa needs more daring women to step forward.

Prior to the 1990s, the only female African Heads of State got there by virtue of being royalty – Zauditu, Empress of Ethiopia, who ruled between 1917 and 1930; and two who served for brief periods as Queen-regents of Swaziland in the 1980s. Africa’s first female Prime Minister was Elizabeth Domitien of the Central African Republic, who served in the 1970s.

In the 1990s, African women claimed national leadership visibility in noticeable numbers. Liberia’s Ruth Perry served on the six-member collective presidency, chairing the Council of State between 1996 and 1997. Uganda’s Wandera Specioza Kazibwe became the first female Vice President in 1994. From 1993 to 1994, women served as Prime Ministers of Burundi and of Rwanda, while Senegal claimed a female Vice President in 2001. Gambia continues to have a very active female Vice President and in like mode is our dear Sister from Malawi who is here with us today. Countries in East and Southern Africa have also had women as Speakers and Deputy Speakers of Parliament.

Africa, which had the lowest female participation in politics in the 1960s, is today seeing the fastest rates of growth of women in politics. A comparative analysis with other parts of the world would conclude that some African countries are doing relatively well, although none come close to proportionately representing women – Rwanda, again, being the exception. Women have

made important strides in terms of political participation and their rise to top-level economic and political management portfolios, but there is still a huge gender gap worldwide, and a long way to go before women can be treated as full equals and partners to their male counterparts.

At the same time, we are seeing the growth of groups that campaign for women's political leadership, press for legislative and constitutional changes, and conduct civic education. This divergence commenced in the 1990s when women began to form their own political parties because existing ones in the multiparty context did not adequately address women's concerns. Women founded the National Party in Zambia in 1991, the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats in 1999, Kopanang Basotho in Lesotho, as well as women-led parties in Kenya, the Central African Republic, and in Angola.

Let me recall some of the factors that account for African women's new visibility in the political arena as independent actors:

- The move towards multi-party politics which lessened the need for mass organizations linked to and directed by a single ruling party;
- Increased educational opportunities for girls and women which created a larger pool of capable women who were positioned to vie for political power;
- An increasing number of women experienced in creating and sustaining associations and social and economic networks;
- The availability of donor funds, channeled through international and local NGOs like the AWDF, religious groups, and foundations, which spurred the growth of national-level organizations that support women's participation in civic education, constitutional and legislative reform, leadership training and programs for women parliamentarians; and
- Stronger commitment to women's increased representation by a country's leadership, especially ones with female Heads of State.

The emergence of these independent associations means that for the first time many women's movements could select their own leaders and set their own agendas.

CHALLENGES IN THE POLITICAL ARENA

Despite the advances I have cited, women have yet to see enormous payoffs in being elected into office and receiving political appointments. An important reason is that women often lack the resources, political experience, education and political connections to run for office. Popular perceptions are that a woman's place is in the home, and in the kitchen, rather than in politics and corporate boardrooms. Cultural attitudes which constrain women's involvement in politics persist among men and women. These are oftentimes reflected in voting patterns, media

coverage of female politicians, as well as attempts to suppress women's assertion of their political rights and views.

Such attitudes are not helped by the fact that women themselves are many times reluctant to run for office, stemming from cultural prohibitions on women being seen and speaking in public in front of men or challenging them. Where these prohibitions are strong, men do not listen to women who take the podium or are active in politics.

Campaigning and being a leader often involves travel and time away from home, all of which put women politicians at risk and at a disadvantage due to gender bias. Would-be female politicians may find themselves and their families under attack or the subject of malicious gossip. Some husbands forbid their wives from engaging in politics, fearing that they will interact with other men, or worrying that their spouse's political preoccupations will divert her attention from the home.

How, then, can we address and overcome the hurdles placed in women's path towards political participation and representation? It is one thing to legislate that women be represented at all decision-making levels; it is quite another to change the attitudes and mind-set of those who would obstruct that access. With men making up the other half of the world's 6.8 billion people, it is imperative that we reach out to them if we are to succeed in our overall goals and objectives. We have to work harder.

Together with efforts to persuade men of the need to allow women political space and access, grassroots action is also essential in order to groom future women political leaders. That will require advocates to: develop rosters of viable female candidates to participate fully in the political arena; encourage women to register to vote and educate them about the electoral processes; teach female aspirants how to run effective campaigns; and enhance their leadership capacity. Female aspirants will also require training in how to seek elective offices, to articulate the issues, and how to acquire funding in order to run successful campaigns. Unless we can train and prepare women to compete for political office at all levels, their representation and participation in political bodies will remain low until such time that legislation setting gender quotas are enacted into law.

AFRICA'S FUTURE: ITS WOMEN

Africa faces many challenges, all of them highlighted in the Millennium Development Goals – poverty, high illiteracy, sexual violence, high infant and maternal mortality rates, HIV/AIDS, the effects of climate change, and a litany of other woes. In such a landscape, let us not make the mistake of not harnessing the potential of one-half of Africa's population – its women.

Africa's history is replete with incidences of the marginalization and exclusion of women. That history likewise shows the incredible potential of women to persevere, to lead, to resolve conflict, and to move a country from chaos onto the path of social and economic development.

I can recall in Liberia's own experience that it was the women, notably the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET), the Liberia Women Initiative, among others, who labored and advocated for peace. I pledged, upon assuming office, that my Administration would endeavor to give Liberian women prominence in all affairs of our country; to empower them in all areas of our national life; to support and expand the laws to restore women's dignity and deal drastically with crimes that dehumanized them; to encourage families to educate the girl child; and to provide programs to enable our women to participate in our nation's economic revitalization.

To ensure that in the Liberia of tomorrow, women will have full equality with men, special focus is being directed at educating, capacitating and empowering girls and young women who, despite certain gains, continue to lag behind the men in access to education, resources and opportunities. The glaring reality, in Liberia and elsewhere, is that, from the beginning of their lives, female children get less attention, less education, less of everything. Girls' education and, in some places, girls' lives, are treated as less valuable, thereby establishing a pattern that constrains women their entire lives, affecting their ability to make decisions at all levels of their societies.

We are therefore training our people to understand the vitality of girls' education, to appreciate that when you educate a girl, you educate a family, a nation. At the same time, we are emphasizing the important role that can be played by women in the informal sector – those whose sweat and blood keep our economy vibrant in difficult times. Literacy and skills training for our market and grass-roots women are a must for women's advancement.

I think it is prophetic that, less than a week after a speech in the United States about "Africa and Its Place in the World," I am here discussing a related topic. I told the audience in Richmond, Virginia, that despite significant gains, much remains to be done about the place of women in African society, and that Africa's future as an engine of global economic growth will be directly

linked to the status of women on the continent. For in the long run, Ladies and Gentlemen, this continent will rise when women take roles as educated and equal partners in society. There is no doubt in my mind that women are the future of Africa, and its leaders must invest in women's development if they want their country, and our continent, to advance in the 21st century and beyond.

At my Inaugural, in January 2006, I addressed the women of Africa, Sisters all. I said, then, that I am one of you; that I know what you go through daily, confronting tremendous odds, for I have been there. I feel your enormous support in all that I am endeavoring to achieve, and I am keenly sensitive of your expectations from me. I promised not to disappoint you, not to let you down. I trust that I am keeping that promise.

I feel honored, to stand here, not only as a woman leader and representative of the people of Liberia, but also of women throughout Africa and the world, in our just and determined struggle to play a more prominent role in society.

I see myself as representing the aspirations and expectations of women everywhere. My success is your success, as it opens the door even wider to many other women who will step up. As women, there is a commonality in what we go through. For no matter where we come from, there is still a measure of discrimination to overcome because of our gender. It is imperative that we work together, and pull together, and be supportive of each other, in order to strengthen and uplift women everywhere.

Finally, let me again congratulate the African Women's Development Fund for reaching this milestone. I urge the many donors to continue their financial and in-kind support, and call upon the beneficiaries of these grants to ensure that they are well spent.

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As you may know, I recently had the honor to co-chair the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The Report

His invitation to visit with my Sisters from all over the continent...

It is heart-warming to see so many women decision-makers from Africa, and around the world, represented at this International Women's Conference, united to advance gender equality and women's it is obvious It is obvious, from the high-level participation here, that the promotion of women's leadership is an effective instrument in achieving progress in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in all areas of our lives.

****We do not require rocket science to see that when women are empowered, they can overcome gender inequalities and gender-based violence. We applaud the efforts of everyone involved in this noble endeavor, and in successfully bringing together people from all over Africa, and beyond, for this 2nd Meeting. We wish you great success in the years to come.

The agenda for addressing the topics before us is comprehensive and rich, and I look forward, over the next two days, to interacting with Sisters, and Brothers, as we deliberate on how we can advance gender equality and women's empowerment, and propose actions on HIV/AIDS, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights in Africa. We will, no doubt, hear some disturbing statistics, and clearly we have a lot to do. But I believe they will galvanize and motivate us into sustained action in surmounting these challenges.

As I noted earlier, the issues before this gathering are very much reflected in the Report of the High-Level Panel. Its Goals 2 and 4 are appropriately titled "Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality," and "Ensure Healthy Lives."

Goal 2 would prevent and eliminate 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.

The Panel concluded with this simple message: “Women who are safe, healthy, educated, and fully empowered to realize their potential, transform their families, their communities, their economies and their societies. We must create the conditions so they can do so.”

Goal 4 would end preventable infant and under-5 deaths; increase the proportion of children, adolescents, at-risk adults and older people that are fully vaccinated; 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 Report calls for a basic commitment to ensure equity in all the interconnected areas that contribute to health, and for steady progress in ensuring Universal Health Coverage and access to quality essential health services. Noting that universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is an essential component of a healthy society, the Report points out that there are 222 million women in the world who want to prevent pregnancy but lack modern methods of contraception, and that this results in 80 million unplanned pregnancies, 30 million unplanned births and 20 million unsafe abortions every year. It also informs us that some 340 million people a year are infected by sexually transmitted disease, but that access to SRHR is low and the quality of such services is generally poor. Its message is that governments must ensure that these rights benefit not only individuals, but broader communities.

You will agree that these two Goals and the national targets clearly demonstrate that the Report is in sync with the objectives of the GlobalPOWER Women Network Africa. We are pleased to have been part of this exercise which proposes five transformative shifts to end poverty through sustainable development.

The Panel's Report drew upon the opinions of people around the world, through a very rigorous consultative process, and which we believe is global, people-centered and planet-sensitive to address common challenges of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. At the same time, we all agreed that the global community should continue to work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and to carry them forward after 2015.

It is an honor, Dear Friends, for me to Chair this opening session. However, with so many experts in this hall to share with us their wisdom and experiences, my job as the Moderator/Anchor for this Opening Ceremony will be an easy one. After that, I will step aside, in order to listen and to learn from those who can guide us on the way forward on matters that are critical for us in Africa, and for our world.

And so, on with the program, and the Welcome Address by the Chairperson of the Local Organising Committee, Professor Viola Adaku Onwuliri. You have the floor.

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.