

DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

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### **African Union advocates for Gender-Responsive Responses to COVID-19.**

The African Union has intensified efforts to strengthen integration of gender perspectives by Member States in their response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Ministers in charge of gender and women affairs and the African Union Commission Women and Gender Development Directorate (WGDD), observed that gender inequalities have the potential to exacerbate the pandemic, and responses that do not incorporate gender analysis may worsen inequalities.

COVID-19 has multi-dimensional impacts on women including young women and girls. Women are likely to be disproportionately affected by the impact of the pandemic, which if not properly addressed, has the potential to reverse some of the gains made in the advancement of gender equality, women's empowerment and women's rights in the continent. This has underscored the importance for all AU responses towards the prevention, containment, management and eradication of COVID-19, to take into account gender equality and women's empowerment.

Chaired by H.E. Beatrice Lometa Atilite, State Minister of Gender, Family and Child of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chairperson of the Bureau of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (STC on GEWE), the ministers deliberated on the continental initiatives to emphasize gender-responsive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring that COVID-19 will disproportionately affect women, including young women and girls, particularly the vulnerable and those living in crises and conflict affected countries. They also shared experiences of the various initiatives being undertaken at the national, and in collaboration with the different stakeholders.

In her opening statement, H.E. Atilite recalled the importance of the virtual meeting in the current context where Africa and the world at large are fighting COVID-19, and underscored the need to ensure that women and girls are not left behind. The meeting provided an opportunity for Member States to share information and experience on measures taken at the national level to integrate gender equality and women empowerment and to protect women, including young women and girls in the COVID-19

response. Further, the ministers deliberated on the continental guidelines developed by WGDD for gender responsive responses to COVID-19 and agreed that special funds established for COVID-19 responses should incorporate a gender component to address gender-related COVID-19 concerns.

Addressing the meeting, the African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), Bineta Diop, speaking on behalf of African Union Commission Chairperson, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, called for combined efforts and resources towards defeating the common enemy posed by the pandemic. She stated, "As the virus continues to hold the world in its grip, there is growing evidence that women and girls are at risk in specific, gendered ways. The COVID-19 crisis is a security threat that calls for our utmost mobilization and solidarity, especially in conflict zones", she added.

Presenting the framework document developed to increase awareness about the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality and women empowerment, the Acting Director of WGDD, Victoria Maloka, emphasised the importance of sex-disaggregated data in COVID-19 responses as a guide to policymakers and programme designers to track, assess and develop timely gender analysis, which will support more effective and equitable response plans and actions. She said: "The impact of COVID-19 on women is multi-dimensional and, therefore, the responses have to be appropriate to meet the differential and multiple ways in which women may be affected.

The guidelines for gender-responsive interventions to COVID-19 in Africa will complement the existing African Union responses under the coordination and leadership of the Africa Centres for Disease Prevention and Control (Africa CDC). It will address the impact of the pandemic in different sectors, among others, the economy; food security and agriculture; healthcare; access to education; physical and psychological integrity; participation in decision-making; peace and security; legal protection; and access to information.

Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda and Ms. Juliet Kimotho, representing the Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) Network, shared the civil society experiences and recommendations on gendered responses and women's rights protection based on lessons learned from the Ebola and HIV pandemics in the Continent.

The African Union Commission Women, Gender and Development Directorate will continue to guide and propose action plans and concrete measures to all stakeholders, to support the effective integration of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in COVID-19 responses in Africa.

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