COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS (CWP)
AFRICA SUB-REGIONAL GENDER SENSITIZATION WORKSHOP
KAMPALA, UGANDA

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Theme: Mainstreaming Gender in Parliamentary Business

Speech given by Hon. Thoko Didiza, MP (South Africa)
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)
Africa Region Chairperson

- Program Directors,
- Her Excellency Rt Hon. Speaker of Parliament of Uganda, Former Chairperson of CWP International and current member of the CWP Uganda
- Hon. Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development of Uganda
- Chairperson of the Executive Committee, CPA Africa Region
- Deputy Treasurer of CPA Africa Region
- Regional Representative for East Africa, CPA Africa Region
- President, CPA Africa Region
- CWP Steering Committee Members, CPA Africa Region
- Chairperson, CPA Executive Committee Uganda Branch
- Chairperson, CWP Uganda Branch
- Chairperson Uganda Women Parliamentarians
Her Excellency, it is with honour and privilege that I am amongst you today here in East Africa and more particularly in Uganda to participate in your sub-regional workshop. We wish to thank the Ugandan CWP Chapter for having hosted this important workshop. On behalf of the delegates may I thank you for the hospitality that have been accorded to us since our arrival? *Ningadinwa nangomuso, nenze nje nakwabanye.* (May you remain generous and do the same for others in future)

Your Excellency as the Chairperson of the CWP Africa Region, I wish to thank you as the Speaker of Uganda for always being on side of women of Africa. Through your work you have been a pioneer and a role model for many women who wish to participate in politics and public life in general that it is possible to become a political leader as a woman and make a contribution in changing the lives of our people for the better.

Through you we remember other heroines who have lived before us and other who continue to walk side by side with us for their contributions in improving lives of women and girls in our society. South Africa this year marks the centenary of Mama Albertina Sisulu, an activist in her own right. A health worker who did not have comfort of her career but understood that no society will be healthy under the conditions of colonialism and apartheid which subjugated and threw majority of society into poverty.

She understood that no society will claim its freedom without according the same freedom for women. Her self-sacrifice and many of her generation were part of the continuous struggle for the attainment of gender equality in our society. Albertina mentored many of us through the values of selflessness, respect, integrity, service and love of our people.
Sisulu, through her life taught us the value of solidarity and working beyond race and class. She made us appreciate that we collectively are sisters beyond borders. As a parliamentarian herself she was part of that collective that drafted our country’s constitution which ensured that one of its principles is gender equality. Together with her women comrades she ensured that institutions that supports and promotes gender equality are enshrined in the country’s constitution. As a women parliamentarian, she fought for the increase of women representation in parliament and legislators.

As we remember Mama Sisulu, we remember women of Africa who were pioneers in building bridges across our nations through the formation of the Pan African Women’s Organisation (PAWO). It is through this movement that women took part in the struggle for liberation of our countries. As combatants, as activists, women undertook many campaigns that contributed to the struggle for our liberation.

Your Excellency, together with other sisters present and departed you have been at the helm of the struggle for gender equality in our Region and Internationally. It is you and your generation that continue encourage us as your sisters through meaningful empowerment that we too can be women leaders of note.

Today we are here as public representatives to reflect on how we can mainstream gender in the parliamentary business. We have moved beyond the arguments and ever asked questions about why we need women in parliament. As women we are part of the society whose challenges and concerns have shaped us. We are part of the cohort of activists and soldiers who fought for the liberation of countries from colonial rule.

We are part of this society that daily has to represent the concerns of our electorate from the constituencies that we represent. We are not just a mere fraction of this society, but we are part of the majority that comprise the population of our societies in our national territories, Continent and the world.

In being elected into public office as members of parliament we also carry an added responsibility of representing the womenfolk, who for many years were never part of the
decision-making institutions that govern them. Ellen Kuzwayo in her book call me women puts it brilliantly when she says, “This work is not for yourselves – kill that spirit of ‘self’ and do not live above your people but live with them. If you can rise, bring someone with you. Do away with that fearful animal of jealously-kill that spirit and love one another as brothers and sisters.”

In reflecting on how we can mainstream gender in parliament, it is because we want to bring many women in these institutions of power. We want to ensure that this Institutions in their architected and content reflect the whole of society, which is made up of women, men, youth and children.

As law makers, we want to ensure that these instruments which must protect and create an enabling environment for improving the lives of people address the concerns and aspirations of women. Our oversight mechanism themselves, must continuously ask the questions as to how in the delivery of services by our government, women and girls in particular are taken on board. It also means in the allocation of resources we have a gender lenses in which we evaluate such resources.

Program Directors, as these representatives gathered here, we will deliberate on the important topics and finally come up with resolutions that will ensure that as the CWP East Africa we mainstream gender in parliamentary business.

As I close, I wish to encourage you to be the best by drawing from the works of Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi when she says:

“One fine day I shall walk with my head held high
My back ever so straight
My strides long and purposeful
One fine day
As I take my walk
My hips will swing from left to right
With absolutely no thought of cellulite
My breasts will have a dose of sanity
And disobey the laws of gravity
I will carry a large bag
Full of everything I need
For work, for play and for looking good
Everything, that is, except money
But who cares?

For on this fine day
I will not be alone I will be walking with those who do not care about being a size four, fourteen or forty
About being eighteen, eighty or eighty nine
With those who are not bothered
About the difference between Somalia and Somaliland
Nor the distance between Cape Verde and Cape Town

Yet they know about dreams and visions
They know about hopes and aspirations
They know that if you work hard enough
Think big enough
And live long enough
Dreams do come true
And visions do come to life
And that we do not have to die
Before we go to heaven”

Programme Director, gathered here, we are those who believe that dreams do come true, and that visions do come to life, and that we do not have to die before we go to heaven that we ensure that women occupy these institutions of power where they can take decisions to improve the lives of their societies.

ENDS