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Division of Communication and Information

## PRESS RELEASE

### CONTINENTAL CONFERENCE BEGINS WITH MINISTER CALLING FOR “LOCALLY PRODUCED, LOCALLY PROCESSED AND LOCALLY CONSUMED PRODUCTS, THROUGH THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN”

**Lilongwe, Malawi 17 March 2008-** The Continental Conference on the Economic Empowerment of African Women successfully opened today in the Malawian capital, with speakers at the official opening ceremony calling for concerted effort to action all the plans that have been made to integrate women into the socio economic development of the continent. Over 100 participants from more than 20 AU Member States attended the opening ceremony, including 3 Ministers, 3 Deputy Ministers, Members of Parliament, Ambassadors, and civil society.



H.E Kachinko

The main speaker was the Malawi Minister of Women and Child Development, H.E Anna Kachinko MP who cited various agreements and instruments currently in place to promote women’s development such as the Protocol on the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA), and the Beijing and Dakar Declarations as important instruments that needed to be translated into action.

Minister Kachinko highlighted the oft quoted fact that Africa is lagging behind in attaining the Millennium Development Goals and is at risk of not attaining them by the target date of 2015. She however said, that despite this, gender equality remains important for development and poverty reduction.

The Minister further went on to advocate for what she called “locally produced, locally processed and locally consumed products, through the participation of women in economic development”.

Minister Kachinko also acknowledged some of the positive steps that are being taken to empower women. For example, she pointed to the World Bank as having initiatives that promote gender equality. She also paid tribute to the efforts of Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika’s government in ensuring women’s participation in decision making positions in Malawi.

The continental conference underway seeks to come up with strategies to address the challenges faced in the economic empowerment of women. It also seeks to affirm findings from evidence that indicate lack of inclusive financing and build rationale for the creation of an African Trust Fund for Women. Addressing this issue, the Malawian Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E Joyce Banda M.P. appealed for more financial support for women seeking to enter parliament, from where they can

influence decisions that affect other women and whole nations. “African women know what to do, but they don’t have the resources”, she said, in a direct appeal to all Africans and development partners to assist women seeking political office.



Speaking on the same point of economically empowering women, AU Commission Director of Women, Gender and Development, Mrs. Litha Musyimi Ogana reminded the delegates that the meeting is being held to fulfil the requirement of African Heads of State who, in their decision AU/ Dec.134-164, requested the AU Commission to organize a conference on the Economic Empowerment of Women, adding that the conference would adopt a hands on approach to ensure that it comes up with an actionable way forward. She discussed the moves under way to set up an Africa Fund for Women in order to give them more access to finance. The fund will be a tool to mobilise financial resources to support African women, as well as to document and disseminate information on their activities.

In the same vein, the representative of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Ms. Emelang Leteane called for Africa to have more sex and gender disaggregated data in its quest to empower women. She observed that underlying the collaboration between ECA and AU is the support of AU priority areas.

Earlier the meeting had heard from the AU Regional Delegate to SADC Professor Omotayo Olaniyan, who thanked the Malawian government for graciously hosting the conference.

Today’s opening session of the conference was punctuated by traditional Malawian dances provided by the Kwacha Cultural Troupe. After the session, the two Ministers and the rest of the conference delegates were taken on a tour of an exhibition of products made by Malawian women.

The meeting continues tomorrow and ends on Wednesday. Among other things, it will propose mechanisms for the creation and operation of the Women’s Trust Fund and a roll out framework for the fund, in accordance with Assembly decision AU/ Dec.134-164.

*For more information go to [www.africa-union.org](http://www.africa-union.org) or telephone 265 4135939.*



Group photograph of the heads of delegations to the conference