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**ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF
WEST AFRICAN STATES**

**COMMUNAUTE ECONOMIQUE
DES ETATS DE L'AFRIQUE
DE L'OUEST**

**ADDRESS OF DR. ADRIENNE DIOP, COMMISSIONER, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
AND GENDER, ECOWAS COMMISSION, ABUJA, NIGERIA.**

AT

**THE FIFTY – SEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF
WOMEN, UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS IN NEW YORK, 4TH MARCH,
2013.**

1. Introduction

It gives me a great pleasure to address this gathering and I would like to begin by recalling the visit of the Executive Director, UN Women – Ms. Michelle Bachelet to the ECOWAS Commission, Abuja, Nigeria in January 2013. We thank you for your contributions to the dialogue on “Financing for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment”. I would also like to use this opportunity to recognize the good working relationship we have with the UN Women, and in 2012 the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja hosted the regional Africa-UNiTE Campaign to End Violence against Women and Girls.

The priority themes of the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women are in line with the strategic goals of the ECOWAS Commission's policies and programmes, and the Commission is pro-actively implementing actions to support the prevention and response to all forms violence against women in all spheres of its regional cooperation and development programmes.

I will devote my address to three important areas of ECOWAS intervention to ensure the elimination, prevention and response to violence against women and girls, namely in the areas of, (1) promotion of democracy, good governance, human rights, peace and security; (2) strengthening gender equality and economic empowerment of women; and (3) the promotion of equitable access to basic social services in the ECOWAS region, particularly health and education.

1. As you may all be aware ECOWAS has and continues to devote considerable attention to conflict prevention and resolution in the region, and has had a number success in promoting democracy, good governance, peace and security in the region. The experiences to date has shown that men in uniform alone are not enough to restore peace and ensure security, but that the engagement of women networks, pressure groups and civil society organizations are important in order to address issues of electoral violence, and women as victims, negotiators, mediators, and facilitators in all peace

processes. In this respect, we have developed a Regional Women Peace and Security Action Plan to strengthen the mainstreaming of gender into all security and peace processes, and also facilitated the set-up of a Regional Network on Peace and Security for Women in the ECOWAS Region (NOPSWECO).

With specific reference to the intervention in Mali, there are on-going efforts to mainstream gender into the African led International Support in Mali (AFISMA) Civilian Concept of Operations in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2085. We are also working with Humanitarian partners in Mali to ensure that women and girls who are sexually abused receive psycho-social support. In addition, ECOWAS supports the strengthening of the capacity of national stakeholders to address the issues of Trafficking in Persons.

2. As it has been said, one of the ways to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls is to educate and economically empower them. In this respect, ECOWAS has taken the following actions in line with accelerating efforts towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (in particular MDG 3 which is on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment). ECOWAS is implementing a number of activities for women entrepreneurs in the areas of agri-business, agro-processing, and handicrafts. In addition, our gender and trade programme is supporting women in informal trade including those involved in cross-border trade and small-scale enterprises. In this

respect, our project on Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE) being funded by the NEPAD-Spanish Fund for Africa deserves to be mentioned. The BIAWE concept is aimed at addressing the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in both formal and informal business activities.

3. With respect to strengthening access of women to basic social services such as education, health and other social programmes, the ECOWAS Commission has provided medical and financial support to women and girls suffering from obstetric fistula with the view to improving the reproductive and physical health of affected girls and women; Financial support to girls in specialised technical and vocational training schools through the provision of Scholarships of Excellence; and has held a Regional Consultative Meeting on Gender and HIV/AIDS, organised in collaboration with the West African Health Organisation (WAHO).

2. Conclusion

Investing in women can yield significant dividends not only to business but also towards enhancing welfare and sustainable development. ECOWAS leaders are fully aware that women's contributions are critical to the development and integration in West Africa. Thus, to enable women play their rightful roles, an ECOWAS Centre for the Development of Gender was established in Dakar and at the Commission in Abuja, a

Directorate in charge of Gender and Child. The ECOWAS Commission looks forward to sharing experiences and good practices from this annual meeting which we can use to enrich our resolve to promote gender equality and women empowerment in the region. I wish us all a very fruitful deliberation.