

Remarks by Yvonne O'Neal on behalf of Africa Development Interchange Network to UN Women Executive Board Meeting, 17 September 2013

Thank you, Mr. President. Africa Development Interchange Network joins friends and colleagues in welcoming Madam Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka to her new positions as the Executive Director of UN Women. We are excited about her collaborative style, in working with all stakeholders – member states, civil society, private sector, and the various UN entities. It is very important for governments to work collaboratively with Civil Society and the private sector to end violence against women and girls. Africa Development Interchange Network is an NGO that specializes in development, poverty alleviation and people's rights in a safe environment.

Fundamental to our work is the empowerment of women.

We applaud UN Women for all that it is doing to end violence against women and girls. This problem is never a "women's issue". It is a human rights issue encompassing chosen behaviors by one individual to another which could lead to oppress, injure, diminish, damage and kill women. These chosen behaviors kill in body, mind, heart and soul – sometimes in an instant, sometimes over years. We are all involved. We are all responsible in one form or the other – as passive onlookers or as active participants.

No country, no state, no community is immune from violence against women. It occurs across all ages, racial, ethnic, social and religious demographics. Despite UN Women's advances and expanding access to services in preventing violence against women, it seems that as we take one step forward, we make two steps backwards. It certainly seems so from the news we hear about every day.

In today's New York Times, there is a report of an unpublished UN report on female police officers in Afghanistan that found accounts of pervasive sexual violence and harassment by their male colleagues. Also, NBC News reported that Nigar, the senior female policewoman in Afghanistan was gunned down, months after her predecessor met the same fate.

But not to pick on any one country or region, this violence against women and girls is very pervasive. The recent UN study of 10,000 men in Asia-Pacific is quite telling. We have heard about the high incidence of violence against women in the United States Military. Honor killings in some countries. And not just violence against women, but overall interpersonal violence seems to be increasing. Yesterday, there was another mass killing in the United States, in Washington, D.C. at the Navy Yard.

In South Africa, *Thursdays in Black* is a campaign in advocacy and solidarity against all forms of gender and sexual based violence, asking people to pledge towards a world without rape and violence. Its website has a ticker counter which shows how many rapes are being committed worldwide and in South Africa when you visit the homepage. Ladies and gentlemen, worldwide, the

counter goes very, very fast and it is chilling to imagine this ongoing level of rape and violence perpetrated against women and girls – and let's not forget that boys are also raped.

A question that we need to ask is what is the root cause of this level of violence? Why is there so much anger and violence? How can it be stopped? There are no easy answers, but we are glad that UN Woman is working to end this madness. We hope to work hand-in-hand with you.

As we move forward to implement the post 2015 agenda, let us not abandon the MDGs altogether. Let us put on a higher pedestal MDG 3 – to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. If this goal is achieved, we would have been closer to achieving all the other goals. Economic Empowerment of Women in developing countries in general, and Africa in particular, lies at the heart of effectively addressing the other issues such as maternal health, infant mortality, education for girls, involvement in peace negotiations, etc.

I thank you for the opportunity to address you. We must all work together, and as the Madam Executive Director said in her remarks yesterday, 'together we can be game-changers.' Together we can make a difference. Together can end violence against women and girls.