



**Remarks by Ms Emma Kaliya, Acting Director Malawi Human Rights
Resource Centre and Chairperson of FEMNET**

**At the closing ceremony of the Africa Regional Conference on
Abortion: From Research to Policy**

Friday: 2 December 2016

Hilton Hotel

Addis Ababa-Ethiopia

**Theme: "Amplifying Women's Voices; Promoting Choice voice and
Control.**

**The Conference Chairperson, Ambassador Dr. Eunice Brookman-
Amissah, Former Ipas Vice President and Former Minister of Health
of Ghana.**

The Representative of the Federal Ministry of Health of Ethiopia

**The Director for Women, Gender and Development, African Union
Commission, Madam Kaba Wheeler**

Excellencies

Organisers of the Conference

Co- Sponsors of the Conference

Distinguished Delegates

All protocols Observed

On behalf of the African Women's Development and Communication Network-FEMNET and indeed on my own behalf, I feel very privileged and greatly honoured to to be here.

Let me start by saying:“What is not counted does not count.” Many of the same barriers and constraints to equality and development that were recognized 21 years ago by the Beijing Platform for Action signatories are still in force globally. There are bright highlights where progress has been made. But no country has fully achieved gender equality.

We must look beyond the “averages” to monitor the impacts and results of laws and policies for women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Listening to presentations for the past three days, one thing that has been very common in almost all presentations is the need to transform discriminatory laws, policies, social norms and gender stereotypes.

This must be a priority for accelerating the implementation of Maputo Protocol in the case of Africa and for effectively moving towards gender equality, women’s empowerment and the realization of

women's and girls' human rights. Governments have to stop backtracking on SRHR gains. The Maputo protocol, which set high standards for SRHR, is not a foreign agenda. It is an African agenda.

And let us not be daunted by the issue of morality being propagated by some religious and cultural leaders. Their ideas of what is right and what is wrong surely do not trump human rights. It is time to stop judging women and those associated with abortion.

Men and boys must also challenge discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes and work toward gender equality, non-violence and respect.

The backsliding trends of some governments and the threats by religious fundamentalists have resulted in shrinking civic spaces that makes it difficult to advance SRHR agenda nationally, regionally and globally. But we must persist in our efforts to break down the barriers that are holding back progress for women and girls, including: persistent discrimination in law and practice; unacceptably high levels of violence against women and girls; and denial of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights across the lifecycle.

Actions for Member States:

Governments must meet their obligations as duty bearers for women and girls to be empowered to claim and fully realise their human rights.

They must:

- Repeal laws that criminalise abortion and penalise innocent women and girls
- Make abortion care & contraceptive technologies available and accessible.
- Support the Campaign on Decriminalizing Abortion in Africa, launched by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights as well as adopt the health and well-being frameworks for women and girls
- Increase resources for national gender equality mechanisms and local, national, regional and global women's organizations
- Stand strong in the face of the challenges that will surely be brought by the newly elected US president

Madam Chair, the immediate focus of our attention today is **celebrating a decade of progress and building the agenda for the future of abortion research to policy Action** with Voice, choice and control for

women as key watchwords. In our nations, around Africa and the world over, we are still grappling with tendencies where women and the girl child are still regarded as second class citizens. When women can make their own decisions about their reproductive health, about when and whether to have children, they will step out the shadows. To all of you here who work so hard to create the evidence and political environment where this can happen, I thank you.

As women and men of good will, we have a reason enough to rise up and speak out for change. Progress of a nation requires the contribution of all and continuing to allow women and girls to suffer injury or death from unsafe abortion is the worst thing a caring Government would want to see pass. Women are key actors in Africa's development and future.

Allow me to echo Nelson Mandela who said, **WE MUST USE TIME WISELY AND FOREVER REALIZE THAT THE TIME IS ALWAYS RIPE TO DO RIGHT.**

The countdown to 2030 and 2063 has already started and therefore this conference has been crucial as it provides us with a platform to strategize and reprioritise as we get back to our respective countries.

As I wrap up, let me use Thomas Sankara’s words – undoubtedly an inspiration for Burkina Faso’s popular uprising: **“there is no true social revolution without the liberation of women. May my eyes never see and my feet never take me to a society where half the people are held in silence. I hear the roar of women’s silence. I sense the rumble of their storm and feel the fury of their revolt.”** May we never be silenced, and may our storms be ones that advance our causes of justice, dignity and equality for all”.

I thank you for your kind attention and God Bless our nations

