

**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**



**STATEMENT**

**BY:**

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CABINET SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE,  
YOUTH AND GENDER**

**AT THE**

**OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 12<sup>TH</sup> COMMONWEALTH  
WOMEN'S AFFAIRS MINISTERS MEETING**

**19<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2019,**

**MOVENPICK HOTEL, WESTLANDS, NAIROBI.**

**Our Chief Guest, Ambassador Amina Mohammed Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Sports, Culture and Heritage- Kenya**

**Your Royal Highness, Countess of Wessex**

**Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland, Secretary General, Commonwealth,**

**Under Secretary General of the United Nations and the Executive Director – UNFPA- Dr. Dr. Natalia Kanem**

**Distinguished Ministers in-charge of Gender & Women Affairs from the Commonwealth nations**

**My colleagues Cabinet Secretaries from Kenya**

**Excellences and High Commissioners Present**

**Development Partners**

**Government Officials**

**Civil Society Present**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to extend a warm welcome to you all gathered here today and appreciate you for honoring us with your presence. A special appreciation to the member of the Royal Family and the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat for deeming it fit to be part of the deliberations on matters touching on women's empowerment and attainment of gender equality.

I wish to take this opportunity to recognize Honorable Ministers from, Bangladesh, Gambia, Fiji, Lesotho, Jamaica, Namibia, Uganda, Rwanda, Seychelles, St.Kitts&Nevis, Tanzania and Zambia. Deputy Minister from Malawi and Heads of delegates from Bahamas, Botswana, Canada, South Africa, Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Trinidad &Tobago.

Allow me to particularly thank our Government through the Leadership of the His Excellency the President of the Republic of Kenya, Hon. Uhuru Kenyatta for allocating the necessary resources for a successful 12WAMM. This is indeed a demonstration of commitment that matters of gender

equality and women's empowerment remain at the center of the national development agenda of Kenya.

**Distinguished delegates from the Commonwealth family and our invited guests,**

Kenya is deeply honored to host the 12<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Women Affairs Ministers Meeting in keeping with our government's commitment at the 11WAMM held in Apia, Samoa in 2016.

As a country, we are privileged to host this Ministerial meeting once again given that 34 years ago, Commonwealth Gender Ministers converged in this very city in 1985 for the first WAMM, during the United Nations Third World Conference on Women. The opportunity conferred on us to host such important meetings has been invaluable to our country. It has served as a platform for sharing ideas and learning from other member states innovative strategies in promoting our common goal of achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

The 12<sup>th</sup> WAMM is being held at a very important point in time in history:

**First:** the 25-year review on progress made towards implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in readiness for the anniversary. The 12 Critical areas of concern identified in 1995 remain relevant and resonate with the Commonwealth Gender priorities. As a country, we have undertaken a comprehensive national review on the Beijing Declaration and prepared a report that captures the status of Kenya in advancing gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

**Second:** The 12WAMM takes place as Kenya hosts the 25th anniversary of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and programme for Action in November this year. This is an equally important meeting that will give us an opportunity to critically reflect on the Promise of Cairo. It is therefore gratifying that one of the key areas of our deliberations during the 12WAMM is **Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights – the Demographic Dividend.**

Kenya subscribes to target 5.6 of Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda that aims to “Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

In doing so, we also recognize that harnessing the demographic dividend requires not only the availability of education and training but also opportunities for decent work for young people, the availability of family planning as well as policies and programmes for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

**Third-** The 4 gender priorities of the Commonwealth: Women in leadership; Women’s economic empowerment; Ending violence against women and girls; and gender and climate change are very relevant. These priorities are aligned to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, and global, regional and national commitments on gender equality and overall empowerment of women. We acknowledge and firmly believe that these global human rights frameworks serve as vital enablers for the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The priorities are also consistent with Kenya’s priorities on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment as articulated in our supreme law, the Constitution of Kenya, our Vision 2030, the Government Big Four Agenda, Africa Agenda 2063 especially goal number 17 on Full gender equality on all spheres of life and aspiration 6 which seeks to have development which is people driven, unleashing the potential of its women and youth

Similarly, we are also driven by the outcome statement of the Commonwealth Women’s Forum held in April 2018 that emphasized on the need for collective efforts to accelerate the advancement of gender equality for sustainable development, prosperity and peace for all women and girls in the Commonwealth.

Building on the outcomes of the 11WAMM and reflecting on what has transpired since the first WAMM in 1985, this forum provides a platform for the cross learning among Commonwealth countries by show casing best

practices and innovative programmes and approaches that are empowering women and accelerating achievement of gender equality.

### **Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We are still journeying towards gender equality with much to share along the gender priorities:

Backed by a progressive constitution, Kenya has developed critical policies and legislation to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination. We have also reviewed our National Policy on Gender and Development and the National Policy for the Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation both of which have been approved by Cabinet.

With regard to economic empowerment of women, we continue to make significance in improving the economic status of women. This has been through the Government catalytic funds such as the Women's Enterprise Fund, the Youth Enterprise Fund and the Uwezo (empowerment) Fund, National Government Affirmative Action Fund.

Women have been able to access funds for starting or growing their business ventures without burdensome conditions. Enactment of procurement laws which provide that 30 percent of Government tenders to be allocated to women, the youth and persons with disability has transformed the lives of these special groups.

We have also established various girls' empowerment initiatives such as provision of free sanitary towels programme that has greatly addressed absenteeism of girls from schools as well as transition to higher levels of education.

On women's leadership, we continue to make progress but are yet to fully realize the provision of our constitution. I believe it is a problem we share with other countries, which of ensuring equal representation of women and men especially in political leadership. It is a situation that can largely be attributed to gendered norms that have spurred discrimination against women in political and public life leading to their underrepresentation.

In its efforts to end violence against women the Government has developed robust, policies and laws that seek to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV), The Protection Against Domestic Violence Act, 2015, Sexual Offences (Medical Treatment) Regulations (2012); and the Sexual Offences Rules of Court (2014). Together with our strategic non state actors, we are implementing a joint programme on preventing and responding to gender-based violence and working with the Judiciary on strengthening access to justice. Also established is a special unit at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to handle FGM and other gender-based violence-related cases.

We have created a national information system to capture sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) data in a number of sectors such as: health, National Police Service, Office of Director of Public Prosecution and the Judiciary.

**Lastly, on gender and climate change,** we have in place the Climate Change Act, 2016 that provides for the formulation of a national gender and intergenerational responsive public education and awareness strategy on climate change to ensure women participation. We are also implementing the National Adaptation Plan of 2016 and promoting women's inventions that seek to save energy and adapt to the disastrous effects of climate change among other measures.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

What I have shared with you are some of the initiatives we are undertaking as a commitment to our gender obligations. We look forward to the discussions ahead of us and outcomes that will enhance our efforts to accelerate women's empowerment and gender equality in the political, social and economic spheres.

As a country we remain committed to the full realization of the Commonwealth gender priorities, Sustainable development goals in particular Goal 5, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

The Journey is far from over, let's keep walking. I end by quoting inspiring words of the late Prof. Wangare Maathai:

**"We cannot tire or give up. We owe it to the present and future generations of all species to rise up and walk."**

I look forward to a productive 12WAMM

THANK YOU