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**To:**

**Mrs Mahawa Kaba Wheeler, Director WGDD, African Union Commission  
Malawi, Chair of the STC on Gender**

**RE: Call for Consideration of ALL Women's Rights as Priorities in the AU Gender Strategy**

We gladly welcomed the invitation of young women to the African Union (AU) Gender Policy and Gender strategy validation and consider this a great step by the AU gender division to take young people's voices seriously in policy planning.

We the young women from different constituencies of different African countries that attended the consultation meeting on AU Gender Policy and Gender strategy validation strongly call for serious consideration of all young women's rights as priorities in the AU Gender strategy 2018-2027.

As the opening remarks of the Director of WGDD called for participants at the consultative meeting to be "bold", in the 2 days meeting, we participated actively and gave comments to the strategy deriving from our own expertise, lived realities and those of the young African women and girls that we represent.

Since young women are not participating in the Special Technical committee and ministerial meetings that will validate the strategy, we are extremely concerned that young women's issues presented to you might not be given the serious consideration that they deserve.

We realize the negative impact that persistence of conservative patriarchal and heteronormative values have on women's rights. Without women's freedom of bodily autonomy and integrity on all matters relating to their lives, other rights are difficult to realize. We thus call for this strategy to be a step in addressing these and ensure transformative change.

As you said in your closing remarks "Young people's issues can no longer be ignored". We the young women of Africa are ready to play our full role in shaping and implementing our countries' roadmaps. We are capable of bringing energy and the knowledge needed at the decision table to successfully take the commitments to action and lead to transformative change in our daily lives.

**We therefore call upon you and all the supporting partners in the development of this strategy to take serious consideration of all young women's priorities as submitted to you and as summarized below:-**

## **YOUNG WOMEN'S PRIORITIES FOR AU GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND RIGHTS STRATEGY 2018-2027**

**1. Sexual and Reproductive Justice:** Ensure strategy addresses all sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially for young women and girls in all their diversity by ensuring youth friendly, affordable and holistic SRH services that is free from stigma, discrimination, coercion, violence and that take into account social, environmental economic aspects for accessibility based on human rights and justice approach. We also call for reform and repealing of discriminatory laws and policies that inhibit protection from all forms of sex based exploitation, discriminations and full realization of all rights for all young women and girls in all their diversity.

**2. Comprehensive sexuality education:** We call for initiation and sustaining comprehensive, objective, and evidence based sexuality education and information that is grounded on Human Rights and promote gender equality, agency, bodily integrity and that is free from discrimination stigma and gender stereotypes; and is accessible for all children and youth in and out of schools and are respectful of children's and adolescents' evolving capacities to make choices about their sexual and reproductive lives.

**3. Ending harmful traditional, practices and norms:** Harmful traditions and practices including early and forced "marriage" and Female Genital Mutilation and cutting violate young women and girls rights and hinder their full development to attain full potential. We call for challenging social discriminatory norms that continue to hinder adolescent girls and young women from enjoying their fundamental rights and freedoms and call for reforming and repealing of laws and policies and adopt holistic services that shift from criminalization-only approaches but also address social, economic and environmental aspects at root of harmful practices

**4. Protection from Sexual Exploitation:** Sexual violence against young women is widespread and needs urgent attention. We call for protection against cyber bullying, exploitative pornography, sex tourism and sex trafficking which have huge impact on the lives of many young girls while perpetrators make billions of dollars annually from the sex trade of young girls. Invest in comprehensive programs that prosecute abusers and offer reintegration of victims including financial support to enjoy a life free from violence.

**5. Protection of All Human Rights:** We call for a strategy that calls for accountability for respect and protection of all rights without exception including to ensure nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender Identity and expression. We call for addition of Lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex among groups that need special consideration under intersectionality and throughout the strategy.

**6. Economic empowerment and justice:** We call for equitable redistribution of productive resources by young women and girls and request for repealing of gender based discriminatory laws and policies on land, special funds and investment programs for young women led businesses, property and inheritance rights that puts women and girls at the margins; ensure decent jobs and recognition, and redistribution of unpaid care work in line with international labour standards. We challenge macroeconomic policies that are not gendered and lead to unequal distribution of wealth and power between and within states and continue to edge women and girls out of participation. We call for consideration of the impact of the 4<sup>th</sup> industrialization which will be centered on artificial intelligence and will have gendered impact on

women in the coming years. The growing inequalities between the wealthy and the marginalized need to be addressed as they persist gender inequalities.

**7. Education and skills development:** We call for Gender responsive school education and skills development curriculum and school environment that is cognizant of young women and girls' needs, call for investing in quality public education and skills development programs and decent infrastructures, qualified teachers/tutors and adequate school materials according to defined international standards and that is context specific and addresses employability challenges

**8. Power, leadership and decisions making:** We call for ensuring women's and young people's participation in all decision making by calling for the removal of all structural, legal, and social barriers to the enjoyment of these rights including those based on age, sex, class, sexual orientation and gender Identity and expression in the public and private sectors. We call for gender responsive and youth friendly political infrastructure and adopting capacity building programs for early leadership skills development. Female inclusion in sports .

**9. Peace and security:** We call on laws and policies that ensure women's effective and meaningful participation and decision making in matters relating to peace and security and address structural causes of conflict

**10. Climate justice:** We recognize that women and girls often bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change. We call for equitable access to natural resources while safeguarding our continent's ecosystems, recognize and are concerned with the geopolitical imbalance in taking responsibility and making commitment to address climate change and role of corporations. We call for implementation of agro-ecological systems approach to food production that are resilient and mitigate against climate change and effective participation of women in matters concerning climate change processes and decisions at all levels.

**11. Media:** We call for adoption of strategic efforts to engage and form partnerships with media houses and companies and educate media practitioners, film makers, script writers, directors, content creators, editors, bloggers and online publishers about Global and continental Gender equality and women's rights principles to ensure better alignment of broadcast content. We call for putting in place laws and policies to eliminate and punish objectification of women and girls' bodies as sex objects in all forms of media products which reinforce negative gender stereotypes and attitudes.

**12. Funding for Gender equality and women and girls' rights:** National development planning and budgeting continue to deprioritize issues of gender equality and women and girls rights and empowerment. In efforts to increase domestic revenue, states are increasingly seeking for private public partnership. We call for a partnership that is grounded in Human and women's Rights principles and seek for private sector' accountability. In addition, we call on decision makers to initiate progressive tax systems on wealth, scale up Gender responsive budgeting, adherence to commitments set out in the Abuja Declaration for financing for health and in aspects of universal healthcare, increase financing for national gender machineries, women/girls and Feminists organizations, curb Illicit financial flows to protect states' tax base, and in turn increase domestic revenue that can be invested in social and Gender responsive interventions.