South Africa welcomes the holding of the 58th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights

The declaration of 2015 as the "Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development Towards Africa Agenda 2063” and the declaration of 2016 as the "Year of Human Rights, with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women” are necessary but not sufficient to ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment; the conventions, declarations, protocols and policies adopted by the Heads of States must be implemented and periodically assessed to evaluate their impact on women.

The failure by member states to implement the African Women’s Decade (2010-2020) which provides a framework to advance gender equality through the acceleration of the implementation of global and regional decisions on gender equality and women’s empowerment, will impact negatively on the achievement of the aspirations articulated in Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development. Agenda 2063’s success is dependent
on the promotion of women’s human rights as much as it is
dependent on men’s.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, part I, para.
18 states that:

"The human rights of women and of the girl-child are an
inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human
rights. The full and equal participation of women in political,
civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national,
regional and international levels, and the eradication of all
forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority
objectives of the international community."

Therefore the advancement of men’s development is interwoven
with the advancement of women’s development, and all are
dependent on the promotion of human rights of all.
The advancement of women’s rights is not just a nice thing to
do for women, but it is critical for the development and
advancement of the country as a whole, as articulated in the
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women states that: "Equality is the cornerstone of every
democratic society which aspires to social justice and human
rights."

The AU has laid a firm policy and legislative foundation to
promote women’s empowerment and gender equality in Africa:
• The Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa
• The African Union Heads of States’ Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa 2004
• The AU decision that by 2020 all African countries must have achieved parity in women representation in decision making and participation in the economy. We welcome this decision that challenges patriarchy in Africa.
• Africa Agenda 2063 and its aim to destroy the economic and political glass ceiling that restricts women’s progress.

Despite all elaborate mechanisms established by the Heads of States, the African Union and other international bodies, and notwithstanding women and girls forming the majority of the population in Africa, there is still a huge deficit in the actual enjoyment of these rights by women. African women and girls still face a multitude of barriers to gender equality. These include, among others, economic exclusion and financial systems that perpetuate discrimination against women; limited participation in political and public life; lack of access to education and poor retention of girls in schools; gender-based violence, harmful cultural practices, and exclusion of women from peace tables either as lead mediators or part of negotiating teams of conflicting parties.

I was impressed on how Africa worked together and rallied around the SADC sponsored Resolution 60/2 on “Women, the
girl child and HIV and AIDS” which was subsequently adopted at the 60th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2016.

The Resolution “Calls upon governments, international partners and civil society to give full attention to the high levels of new HIV infections among young women and adolescent girls and its root causes, bearing in mind that women and girls are physiologically more vulnerable to HIV, especially at an earlier age, than men and boys, and that this is increased by discrimination and all forms of violence against women, girls and adolescents, including sexual exploitation and harmful practices.” Thus it is critically important in efforts towards eradication of VAW&C that the issue of the gendered impact of HIV and AIDS is also simultaneously addressed.

This explains why research shows that there are 2363 new infections per week among young women aged 15 and 24 years in the country. This is ranked highest among East and Southern African countries which accounts for a total of 5494 new infections per week out of the estimated 7000 new HIV infections weekly world-wide.

We have a challenge; the young women are in dire need for help in order to protect their human rights. How come that young women aged 15 and 24 are infected while their counterparts are
not? It is because of the plaques such as “Sugar Daddies” the “Blessers” and early and forced marriages.

In South Africa, 2016 marks the 60th anniversary of the 1956 Women’s march to the Union Building; the 40th anniversary of the 1976 Uprisings against apartheid where many young women played a pivotal role and laid their lives for their emancipation and liberation of South Africa. Further, 2016 marks the 20th anniversary of our world celebrated Constitution. Our Constitution incorporates a comprehensive and modern Bill of Rights that protects various universally accepted human rights and it specifically affirms the values of human dignity, equality, including gender equality and freedom. As a result, South Africa has made significant progress in the protection and promotion of civil and political rights as well as economic and social rights over the years since the dawn of democracy

Various legislative, policy and other measures have been implemented to ensure the substantive realisation of civil and political rights as well as socio-economic and cultural rights. In addition, our courts continue to deliver judgments and develop case law to enhance and protect these rights and to provide guidance on the interpretation of these rights.

However, despite all these efforts violence against women and children continues hence we have decided to rollout the national dialogues in order to authentically engage members of the
communities who experience violence daily as victims or members of the family of the victims, or as perpetrators, to understand the causes, extent and the solution thereof, as communities are capable of ending this plague.

Agenda 2063, amongst others, the AU commits itself to “Catalyse education and a skills revolution and actively promote science, technology, research and innovation, to build knowledge, human resources, capabilities and skills for the African century”.

I guess this is one area where in South Africa we are experiencing challenges, hence the “#FeesMustFall” campaign. The debate is, who do we extend fee free education to, rich or poor or all, is it sustainable?

I thank you all.