

## Women's Day Celebration at the ACP Secretariat: Statement by the Secretary-General

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Friday 8th March 2013, ACP House

Chairman of the Committee of Ambassadors, Your Excellencies, ACP Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,

It is my pleasure to welcome you personally to the ACP House on this special day for Women. I would like to welcome most cordially all the women here present and also thank them, on behalf of the men here in the audience, for their indispensable role in our daily life and in our respective environments. The Education Experts will not contradict me. Some of them have observed that education and culture is first passed on more effectively from mother to child. Several in-depth studies arrive at the same conclusions that good habits regarding eating, health, listening to others, compassion and team spirit are passed on from mother to child. In politics, women in power promote democracy. They would instead demystify power and move into action. There is an afghan proverb that says « the work of one woman is worth more than the speech of hundred men ». It is superfluous to underscore their contribution in the family where « they provide the strength and the continuity of the real ».

It has been decided to celebrate women writers this year, at the ACP Secretariat. Many are the women in our countries who are entirely devoted to writing, with such an intense passion, unwavering self-denial and a fierce desire. According to Marguerite Duras, « the woman writer has two lives: one, the superficial side, which makes her speak, act, day after day; and the other, which is the true side that follows her everywhere, giving her no rest ».

The women of Africa who have distinguished themselves by their remarkable contributions in the political, social and cultural circles are also the subject of an itinerant exhibition that we have the pleasure to host by courtesy of the ASBL (a non-profit making organisation) known as *Coopération pour la Culture et le Développement*.

The choice to highlight ACP women in literature does not preclude the urgency that prompted the UN in 1977 to officially proclaim an international Day for the rights of Women whose living conditions must be substantially improved. From their claim of political citizenship, voting rights, among other things, one can tell from their victories and progress that a lot remains to be done. The list of claims is still long but with reflection and will on their part, women can achieve their aims and ideals. Fortunately, many people love justice, peace, truth and progress and many are those who want to ensure that 8 March becomes a moment of celebration, tribute paying and not of merely flying over a nest of injustices. Unfortunately, injustices

done to women are still too numerous and there is need to mobilise ourselves to protest against the last tentacles still holding them down in a world of pain and suffering undermining thereby their dignity. I feel that the rampant discriminations, intimidations, persecutions, and trials, must cease. They should no longer be the direct or collateral victims of conflicts not caused by them.

The theme retained by the United Nations to celebrate this 2013 edition is a reminder to us: **“A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women”**. This sobering, scary theme echoes the call for mobilisation by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, who in his statement on 25 November, said the countries of the world had undertaken to end violence against women which is **« a scourge that affects millions of women and girls worldwide »**. He also observed that **“Up to 70 per cent of women experience physical or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime (and) as many as a quarter of all pregnant women are affected,”** adding that: **“Millions of women and girls around the world are assaulted, beaten, raped, mutilated or even murdered in what constitutes appalling violations of their human rights,”** I add my voice with force and conviction to that of the UN Women Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet, when she said in a statement delivered this week in New York during the fifth annual women’s empowerment principles event: **“Enough is enough”**, she thundered, inspiring thereby a clarion call to rise up boldly against the barbaric acts and also to ensure that the nations who have freely undertaken to declare this just war against the violence perpetrated against women will live up to their word.

I believe that we should pool our resources together to put an end to the brutal and aggressive acts and the mechanisms of exclusion. Everything can change!!! Everything can change!!!

In this regard, obviously it is a difficult and arduous task but with devotion and unbreakable will, we will be able to overcome together this international and human problem affecting our societies. I would like to paraphrase this African proverb: « he who planted a tree in lifetime did not live a useless life » by saying that « he who contributed to restoring the dignity of battered, raped and abused women did not live a purposeless life».

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The United Nations also wanted to pay tribute on this day 8 March 2013 to the three Mirabal Sisters, Dominican political activists assassinated on 25 November 1960. This announcement was made on 25 November last year which was declared the International Day for the elimination of violence against women. The Mirabal Sisters are sadly remembered as having resisted the dictatorship regime of that era as citizens and women. Thanks to the voice and the music of their fellow countrywoman, Milly Quezada, we will remember and pay them a glowing tribute. Meanwhile, at the UN Headquarters, during the opening ceremony of the International Women’s Day which begins almost at the same time as ours, twenty-five female artistes, several of whom are from ACP countries, will sing a song specially written for the occasion: *One Woman. We are One Woman*. If our equipment does not fail us, you will be able to listen to the song before the programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While working towards the imminent elimination of all forms of injustices done to women and the attainment of all their rights, I propose that this day will not only be considered a day of activities, but also as a day celebration.

Upon this note, I wish all the women present here as well as the ACP women and women all over the world a Happy Women’s Day .

I will also like to say to the men « happy women’s day from the women to you men ». for when a woman is happy she makes all the people around her also happy: sons, husbands and friends, for when a woman is fulfilled it affects her environment.

Thank you for your attention.

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