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**ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF  
WEST AFRICAN STATES**



**COMMUNAUTE ECONOMIQUE  
DES ETATS DE L'AFRIQUE  
DE L'OUEST**

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY JEAN-CLAUDE KASSI BROU  
PRESIDENT OF THE ECOWAS COMMISSION  
ON THE OCCASION OF 2020 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

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**AN EQUAL WORLD IS AN ENABLED WORLD**

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On the occasion of the celebration of this year's International Women's day, I would like to congratulate all women in the ECOWAS Region, the African continent and, indeed the entire world, for their role in making this world a better place and for their immense contribution to global peace, security and development in all spheres of human endeavor.

The theme of this year's event, "**An Equal World is an Enabled World**", epitomizes the various commitments that have over the years been made at the regional, continental and international levels to create a gender equal world, through collective action and a shared responsibility. It also underpins the collective achievements that women have made throughout the years as well as their daily struggles for survival and for space to be recognized as equal partners and bona fide citizens of this world.

This year's celebration coincides with the commemoration of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which is the most comprehensive global blueprint for the promotion of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE); as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

This very important Day is also being celebrated against the backdrop of three other major commitments made at the regional, continental and global levels, namely the ECOWAS Vision 2020, the African Union Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) otherwise referred to as the 2030 Agenda.

These commitments testify to the global consensus on the value that gender equality and women's empowerment bring to bear on the social, economic and political development of society.

Today is therefore a day for sober reflections on the factors that militate against the attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment at all levels of society, including the challenges that continue to confront women and girls, notably poverty, illiteracy, marginalization, discrimination, various forms of violence, HIV/AIDS and harmful practices such as FGM (Female Genital Mutilations) and negative widowhood rites, to mention a few. These factors continue to place many women at the bottom of the development ladder,



thereby perpetuating and deepening existing gender disparities, and thus undermining the development of our countries and our Community.

We are challenged this year to step up our efforts towards the creation of a world of equal opportunities that makes it possible to unlock the potentials inherent in all individuals to contribute to the development of their communities and to benefit equitably from the gains of development.

The ECOWAS Commission has placed the quest for gender equality and women's empowerment at the heart of its priorities. Through the adoption of the Supplementary Act on Equality of Rights between Women and Men for Sustainable Development in the ECOWAS Region as well as several action plans and programmes on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, the ECOWAS Commission has amply demonstrated its commitment to transform West Africa into a society, in which men and women have equal opportunities to participate, decide, control and benefit from all development initiatives.

These programmes include in particular the scholarships Excellence programme; the Women Economic Empowerment programme, including the 50 Million Women Speak Platform project, the Obstetric Fistula programme, and the setting up of mechanisms such as the West African Network of Young Women Leaders (ROAJELF) and the Network on Peace and Security for Women in the ECOWAS Region and the ECOWAS chapter of FEMWISE (Women Mediators).

The ECOWAS Commission has also organised two ECOWAS First Ladies' Summits, the last one at the margins of the AU summit June 2019, during which the First Ladies committed themselves to be champions of change, with full involvement and dedicated engagement in promoting and implementing the ECOWAS Child Policy with effective strategies to end child marriage, promote girl-child education and eradicate obstetric fistula in West Africa.

As we celebrate these achievements, we must remind ourselves that there is still more to be done. It is critical to continue to empower women socially, politically and economically by facilitating women's access to low-interest credit facilities and build their capacity to engage in entrepreneurship.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the unwavering commitment of ECOWAS to continue to ensure the mainstreaming of gender in all ECOWAS policies,



strategies and programmes, and to strengthen our resolve to make ECOWAS an equal opportunities organisation.

On this note, I wish all women in the ECOWAS Region a Happy International Women's Day.

**Jean-Claude Kassi BROU**   
President, ECOWAS Commission