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## Side Event at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Ex-Press Bar, General Assembly Building, United Nations Headquarters, New York  
Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019, 4:45pm - 6:00pm,

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### Theme: “Making Social Protection, Public Services and Infrastructure Inclusive and Meaningful for Women and Girls in Africa”

#### Concept Note

#### 1. Introduction

The sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63) will address the priority theme of “social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”. In line with this overarching priority theme for CSW63, the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA), UN-Women, the African Union Commission (AUC) and their partners listed in section 8 below will co-organize a side event to highlight the Africa regional dimension and advocate for the priorities of African women and girls. The side event will address the theme, “**Making Social Protection, Public Services and Infrastructure Inclusive and Meaningful for Women and Girls in Africa**” and is scheduled to take place on **Friday, 15 March 2019, at 4:45pm, in the Ex-Press Bar of the General Assembly Building.**

#### 2. Context

The three components of the overarching priority theme for CSW63 and this side event: ‘Social protection’, ‘public services’ and ‘sustainable infrastructure’ have huge potential for “transforming our world” and achieving “the Africa We Want”. All three are interlinked and integral to the realization of the goals and aspirations respectively contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

While Africa has made tremendous investments and progress on social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure over the past two decades, challenges remain, including in ensuring their provision does not exacerbate inequalities, but rather contribute to reducing poverty, vulnerabilities and insecurity for all. In spite of Africa’s economic growth, the number of Africans living in absolute poverty remains constant at about 390 million in 2018<sup>1</sup>. The non-inclusive growth is insufficient to achieve the Goal of eradicating poverty and further contributes to widening inequities in access to social protection systems and public services, especially for those employed in the informal sector where women are disproportionately represented at about 74 percent. This is evidenced in the fact that of the 45 percent of

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<sup>1</sup> Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Report, E/ECA/COE/38/2, of 28 December 2018

the world's population that is effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, only 18 percent is in Africa<sup>2</sup>.

Other factors such as poor rural development, violent conflicts, climate change and migration further contribute to create and exacerbate specific forms of vulnerabilities, which impact on women, men, girls and boys differently. As the continent strives to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 as well as implement existing policies on social protection, public services delivery and infrastructure development, it is imperative for African governments and private enterprises alike to extend social protection floors, access to public services and infrastructure to the most vulnerable groups of African populations such as the aged, disabled, children and women.

### **3. Ensuring a Gender Perspective by 'Including, Not Leaving, Women and Girls Behind'**

Social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure have immense potentials to narrow existing gender gaps and promote gender equality. As such, gender considerations must be an integral part of both public and private sector policy and programme design, financing, implementation and evaluation in these areas, as to ensure it addresses the underlying causes of women's vulnerabilities and exclusion, and do not hinder women's access or aggravate the barriers and inequalities they face.

Africa has made immense progress towards achieving gender parity and empowering women in various sectors. However, more is still required to achieve comprehensive social protection for all, extend public services to and invest in safe and reliable infrastructure (electricity, water and sanitation, transport, child-care, health, education, telecommunications, etc) for especially women and girls in rural and marginalized urban areas.

The case for a gender-responsive approach to social protection, public services and infrastructure in Africa is quite compelling. African women are in dire need for social protection because of their lack of access of income and assets and disproportionate unpaid care work. Public services delivery in Africa mirror existing discriminations in society and also do not adequately address the disproportionate impact of women's care and domestic work. Likewise, inappropriate infrastructure increases the time burden and unpaid domestic work of women, while also jeopardizing their safety and security, in particularly conflict situations. All of which necessitates accelerated actions towards redressing the vulnerabilities and promoting the rights of African women and girls in the provision of social protection, public services and infrastructure development in order to achieve the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

### **4. The Side Event: Objectives**

In light of the above, this side event aims to advocate for the priorities of African women and girls with respect to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. It builds on the outcomes of two interrelated processes: (i) the Africa Ministerial Pre-CSW meeting that took place on 3-6 February 2019 in Cairo, Egypt, and (ii) the 33<sup>rd</sup> Pre-Summit Consultative Meeting on Gender Mainstreaming in the African Union that took place under the auspices of Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) on 3-4 February 2019 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Specifically, the side event will pursue the following four objectives:

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<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization, World Social Protection Report (2017-2019)

- (i) Identify biases and challenges to, as well as priorities for, promoting women's rights, agency, voice and participation, as well as accountability for gender equality in social protection, public services and infrastructure in Africa.
- (ii) Highlight and share good practices and initiatives from Africa in developing and implementing gender-responsive social protection, public services and infrastructure that contribute to addressing gender inequalities and empowering women and girls pre, during and post conflicts.
- (iii) Explore synergies in the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 that could be utilized in advocacy to accelerate the design, financing, implementation and evaluation of gender-responsive social protection systems, public services delivery and infrastructure development in Africa.
- (iv) Propose concrete action-oriented recommendations to support the implementation of gender-responsive social protection systems, public services delivery and infrastructure development in Africa.

## **5. Expected Outcome(s)**

The side event will generate a set of recommendations that would be disseminated to a wide range of stakeholders, including Member States, intergovernmental organizations, private sector representatives and civil society, as well as published on the OSAA, UN-Women and AUC websites. The recommendations will be utilized in advocacy to support implementation of global commitments and outcomes of key United Nations conferences, including the CSW 63, the 25<sup>th</sup> review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSC resolution 1325 and the 2019 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

## **6. Format**

The side event is structured to be highly interactive to allow for the active participation of the audience. In this respect, it will feature opening and closing remarks preceding and following moderated brief statements and interventions/inputs from the audience. **The event is open to all.**

## **7. Participants**

Participants at the side event will include African Ministers of Gender/Women Affairs and their counterparts from other regions, Representatives of African regional and subregional organizations -- including the Africa Union and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Permanent Representatives to the United Nations, development partners, and representatives of the private sector, civil society organizations and United Nations system.

## **8. Organizing partners**

The side event will be jointly organized by the following: (a) United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA), (b) United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), (c) Government of the Republic of Egypt in its capacity as Chairperson of the African Union for 2019, (d) Office of the Special Envoy on Women Peace and Security at the African Union Commission (AUC), (d) Government of Finland, and (e) the United Nations Global Compact.