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GENDER EQUALITY IN LAW CAMPAIGN



Gender Equality in Law Campaign at the African Union

VOICES IN DIALOGUE: A CALL TO ACTION

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Institute for African Women in Law
in collaboration with
African Union - Office of the Legal Counsel
&
The Office of Former Chief Justice Meaza Ashenafi



Gender Equality in Law Campaign (GELC)

Regional Consultative & Stakeholder Engagement

Speakers

Moderators



Prof. Hajer Gueldich
Legal Counsel
African Union



Meaza Ashenafi
Former Chief Justice
Federal Supreme Court of Ethiopia



J. Jarpa Dawuni, Ph.D.
Founder and Executive
Director, IAWL



H.E. Amb. Fathallah Sijilmassi
Director General of the
African Union Commission



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School of Law



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL), in collaboration with the African Union –Office of the Legal Counsel (AUOLC) and the Office of the Former Chief Justice of Ethiopia, Justice Meaza Ashenafi, hosted a [regional consultative and stakeholder engagement](#) on Tuesday, October 15, 2024. The event was held at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The consultative engagement with the AU followed the July 5, 2024 Accra launch of IAWL's [Gender Equality in Law Campaign \(GELC\)](#), a strategic Pan-African initiative premised on three goals: Awareness, Advocacy and Activation.

The event commenced with welcome remarks by Professor Hajer Gueldich, the Legal Counsel of the African Union, before segueing into a message on behalf of IAWL, delivered by the Founder and Executive Director of the Institute, Professor J. Jarpa Dawuni. She commented on the progress, challenges, and prospects for achieving gender equality across Africa's legal profession. Dr. Maame Efua Addadzi-Koom, the Director of Training at IAWL, presented the highlights of the [Gender Equality research report](#) and the [Gender Equality in Law Model Policy](#) - two of the significant outputs of GELC. After her presentation, Prof. Dawuni presented copies of the research report and Model Policy to Professor Gueldich, underscoring the crucial role of the African Union in this initiative. To conclude the first part of the event, Amb. Dr. Namira Negm, Director for the African Migration Observatory, shared her solidarity message virtually with the audience.

The Former Chief Justice of Ethiopia, Justice Meaza Ashenafi, and the Executive Director of IAWL ushered in the second part of the event with the launch of IAWL's flagship training program, the Women's Excellence in Law and Leadership Academy (WELLA) - Ethiopia Chapter. WELLA seeks to strengthen and support the capacity of women in law through training and leadership development. Justice Ashenafi shared her goodwill message with the audience, emphasizing the potential impact of WELLA on Ethiopia's legal profession. Representing the voices of women judges in Ethiopia, Supreme Court Justice Hitmet Assefa commented on the contributions of women judges to gender equality and called on the government to assign more women to the legal arena.

Finally, Professor Hajer Gueldich's closing remarks issued a call to action, emphasizing the importance of supporting gender equality in the legal profession across the continent. The details of what was said at the event are provided in this compendium of speeches, including the written message to the audience by H.E. Ambassador Fathallah Sijilmassi, Director General of the African Union Commission.

WELCOME REMARKS¹

PROF. HAJER GUELDICH, LEGAL COUNSEL, AFRICAN UNION



Honorable Government and Judicial Dignitaries,
Honorable Ambassadors, Honorable guests,
Esteemed Colleagues, Distinguished speakers,
and Participants,

It is with great honor and deep appreciation that I welcome you all to this significant gathering, where we unite to discuss and celebrate the pivotal role of African women in law and leadership.



Today is not just an opportunity for dialogue; it represents a crucial milestone in our collective journey to advance gender equality within the legal profession across our continent.



As we stand at this juncture, we are reminded that this gathering is both a celebration of the progress we have made and a renewed commitment to the work that still lies ahead.

I would like to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to the Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL) for their unwavering dedication, and especially to Prof. J. Jarpa Dawuni and her incredible team, who, within such a short period of time, have managed to pull together this wonderful event. Their tireless efforts and commitment have brought this vital discussion to life. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my own OLC staff, particularly Ms. Manthatsi Machepha and the team, for their hard work and support.

THE PURPOSE OF THE EVENT

Today's event brings us together for a pivotal moment in the journey toward gender equality within the legal profession across Africa. The Gender Equality in Law Campaign (GELC) represents a collaborative effort between the IAWL and the OLC to create lasting change in how women are represented, supported, and empowered in law.

Our purpose today is to foster dialogue, share research findings, and build momentum toward the adoption of policies that advance gender parity. This consultative engagement aims to raise awareness, advocate for institutional reforms, and activate strategies to ensure that African women in law can thrive and lead.



Together, we are not only challenging the structural barriers but also promoting actionable solutions that align with the AU's commitments to gender equality under frameworks such as the Maputo Protocol, formally known as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.



As we proceed, let us collectively envision a future where gender equality in law is not just an aspiration but a realized and sustained reality across the continent.

¹ The welcome remarks are the full unedited speech read by Prof. Gueldich at the event.

OVERVIEW OF THE OLC'S MANDATE TOWARD GENDER EQUALITY

As the legal guardian of the AU's legal instruments, the OLC plays a critical role in ensuring the enforcement, promotion, and advocacy of key frameworks such as the Maputo Protocol, a cornerstone in the fight for gender equality in Africa. The Maputo Protocol is a landmark treaty that lays out comprehensive rights for African women, including protection from violence (Article 4), political participation (Article 9), and economic empowerment (Article 13).

The OLC is indeed committed to the domestication of the Maputo Protocol in all AU Member States. While our Member States have signed and ratified the Protocol, we continue to advocate for its full implementation at the national level. Ratification is only the first step; domestication—the process of incorporating these commitments into national laws and policies—is essential for real change. Without it, the transformative potential of the Protocol remains unfulfilled.



The Protocol mandates that states eliminate discrimination against women and promote gender parity across all sectors, directly aligning with the objectives of today's event, the Gender Equality in Law Campaign (GELC).



For example, Article 2 requires states to enact legislative measures to combat discrimination, while Article 9 emphasizes the importance of women's representation in decision-making processes—a key challenge we're addressing today in the legal profession.

Through our work, the OLC ensures that instruments like the Maputo Protocol are not just symbolic but become living, enforceable laws that protect the rights of women across Africa. This commitment to gender equality is central to our mandate, and it is my personal view that events like this bring us one step closer to building a legal environment where African women not only participate but lead.

OVERVIEW OF THE OLC'S MANDATE AND ITS CONNECTION TO IAWL'S GENDER EQUALITY IN LAW CAMPAIGN

The OLC is not only the legal guardian of the AU's legal frameworks but also a key advocate for gender equality across the continent. Central to our mandate is ensuring the effective implementation of AU instruments like the Maputo Protocol, which lays a legal foundation for protecting and advancing the rights of women in Africa. This responsibility goes hand in hand with IAWL's Gender Equality in Law Campaign (GELC), making our collaboration crucial. The GELC focuses on three core pillars: Awareness, Advocacy, and Activation, which aligns closely with the OLC's efforts.

Awareness: As part of our mandate, the OLC raises awareness about AU legal instruments, particularly those that promote gender equality. The Maputo Protocol, for instance, mandates the elimination of discrimination against women and the promotion of equal opportunities (Article 2), areas that are central to both the OLC's work and the GELC. By raising awareness about these commitments, we push for a legal culture that values and protects women's rights.

Advocacy: The OLC advocates for the ratification and domestication of critical gender-focused treaties like the Maputo Protocol in all Member States. This advocacy directly supports GELC's efforts to reform institutional policies and practices within the legal profession, ensuring that legal frameworks are inclusive of women's rights and empowerment. Our combined advocacy strengthens the call for reforms, particularly within legal institutions, and enhances accountability.

Activation: The third step in the OLC’s mandate is ensuring that these legal instruments are not just ratified but effectively implemented. I believe this is where the OLC and the GELC’s goals converge through collaborative efforts to activate real change on the ground. Whether through promoting gender-sensitive workplaces in the legal profession or pushing for more women in leadership roles (as mandated by Article 9 of the Maputo Protocol), the OLC and IAWL work together to ensure that African women lawyers have the structures and opportunities they need to thrive and lead.

Together, the OLC’s legal mandate and IAWL’s campaign work to embed gender equality in the legal profession, fostering a more equitable future for women in law across Africa.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CAMPAIGN’S INITIATIVE IN EMPOWERING WOMEN LEADERS IN LAW

The Gender Equality in Law Campaign (GELC) is pivotal in empowering women leaders in law by addressing the systemic barriers that hinder their advancement. Through its focus on Awareness, Advocacy, and Activation, the campaign not only raises critical awareness about the underrepresentation of women in legal leadership but also advocates for institutional reforms that promote gender-inclusive policies. This initiative provides a platform for women to access leadership roles while simultaneously pushing for the adoption and implementation of frameworks like the Maputo Protocol.



I believe that by fostering a supportive environment where women in law can thrive and lead, the GELC helps to cultivate a new generation of African women leaders who are equipped to drive transformative legal and societal change across the continent.



CLOSING

It has truly been a pleasure to organize this event in collaboration with the Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL), bringing together passionate individuals dedicated to advancing gender equality in law. This partnership has allowed us to highlight the importance of removing barriers and creating spaces where women can thrive and lead.

As we move forward today, I encourage each of you to listen actively, with a sense of purpose, and with the intention to take action.



Gender equality in law is not just a women’s issue; it is a societal imperative.



Let our discussions today inspire bold collaboration and a commitment to transforming our legal profession. Step by step, we will make gender equality in law a lived reality.

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to this cause. Together, we will get there. Once again, welcome, and thank you for being part of this transformative movement.

MESSAGE FROM IAWL²

PROFESSOR J. JARPA DAWUNI, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE



Good morning, ladies and gentlemen; as introduced, my name is Professor Jarpa Dawuni. I am an Associate Professor of Political Science in my day time and in my passion time, I am the Executive Director of the Institute for African Women in Law. I would like to, first of all, stand on the existing protocols and begin with my special thanks to Ambassador Sijilmassi, who is not here with us yet, and to Her Excellency Prof. Hajer Gueldich and her excellent team at the Office of the Legal Counsel for working with us to bring this event to fruition. My special thanks also go to Ms. Meaza Ashenafi and her office for embracing our call and collaborating with us to organize this event.

I would like to remind all of you today that, as eloquently captured by Professor Gueldich, we have much to celebrate across Africa. Women have made a lot of progress across all sectors in our societies.



As a professor and a researcher who studies women in the legal professions across Africa, I can tell you without a doubt that research shows that Africa leads the world in the number of women chief justices compared to anywhere else. Yet, we came to the legal profession relatively later.



The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, based in Arusha, Tanzania, reached the highest number of women in any international court before several long-established international courts and tribunals achieved that milestone. Across the continent, we have judiciaries increasing the number of women represented as judges and law firms that have also had many women rising up into leadership positions as managing partners and partners.

With all this said, we must also congratulate the African Union for the instruments that have been put in place to protect women, to provide their rights and to guarantee those rights. Once again, in reference to Professor Gueldich's speech, we need to make sure that we enforce those laws. And it is not just on states; it's on us as individuals, men and women; together, we can achieve equality because when we achieve equality, it works for the good of all of us.

In conclusion, once again, I give heartfelt thanks to the African Union, especially to the Office of the Legal Counsel and to the Office of Ms. Meaza Ashenafi for coming together to bring the Gender Equality in Law Campaign (GELC) from Accra to Addis, and this is just the beginning.



Join the movement. Be part of the change. Sign up. Be a part of the Institute. Be a part of the Women's Excellence in Law and Legal Academy (WELLA) we are about to launch, and let's create change because we know that when women stand together, mountains move. Women in law, men in law, let's move mountains. Let's create systems that allow women to flourish, lead and change systems.



Thank you so much for coming, and have a wonderful session. Thank you.

² This is the full unedited speech given by Prof. Dawuni at the event.

SOLIDARITY MESSAGE ³

AMBASSADOR DR. NAMIRA NEGM, DIRECTOR FOR THE AFRICAN MIGRATION OBSERVATORY

Good day, everybody, and thank you for listening to my message today. At the outset, I would like to thank Professor Hajer Gueldich, the Legal Counsel of the African Union, and Professor Jarpa Dawuni of the Institute for African Women in Law for inviting me today. When we speak about gender equality in law, we cannot forget to thank the former Chief Justice of Ethiopia, Meaza Ashenafi, for supporting the initiative.

I have been involved in this initiative [GELC] from the beginning, and I assure you it is so important. I believe it will be highly effective in getting more equality for women in Africa when we speak about women in law. We start with women in law because we are fighting for the rights of women around the continent. We have been increasing in the legal profession, in international organizations, in governments, as well as in the private sector.



Yet, we [women] still face harassment, we still sometimes face unequal pay, and we still have problems in gaining the confidence of our clients. This initiative will prove successful in ensuring a healthy working environment for women.



This event you are hosting in Addis and moderating today will bring these issues to the attention of many decision-makers and ensure equality for women in the legal profession and all the women in Africa.

Again, thank you very much for listening to my message today.



³ The solidarity message is the full unedited and video recorded speech played at the event.

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS AND MODEL POLICY, DR. MAAME EFUA ADDADZI-KOOM, DIRECTOR OF TRAINING AT IAWL



During Dr. Addadzi-Koom's presentation, she noted that the [Gender Equality research report](#) and the [Gender Equality in Law Model Policy](#) are the two resource outputs of the GELC. She explained that the research report was based on a survey of 590 legal professionals from multiple African countries, which focused on four critical areas: sexual harassment, unequal pay, inequitable promotion and gender bias and stereotypes.

The findings of the research report show a trend of four:

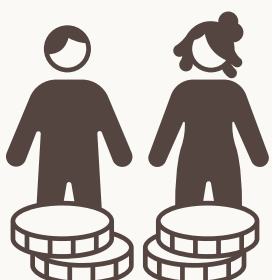


Have you ever been sexually harassed in your workplace?

4 out of 10 said yes

Are women and men at your workplace assigned tasks equally?

6 out of 10 said yes



Women and men at my workplace are paid equally for equal work done.

6 out of 10 agree

My male co-workers are aware of the gender inequality in my workplace.

4 out of 10 agree



The statistics depict a glass-half-full situation, demonstrating more work must be done to make the legal profession across the continent gender equitable. Part of the work that needs to be done is to create gender equality policies as a normative framework for the legal workplace. Hence, the Gender Equality in Law Model Policy is readily available on IAWL's website. The Model Policy is well-curated, resulting from legal and gender expert consultations and stakeholder engagements across the continent. The Model Policy covers sexual harassment prohibition, equal pay for equal work, equitable hiring and promotion, and prohibition of gender bias and stereotypes. It is a flexible document that can be adopted wholly or partly by any legal or non-legal institution toward creating a gender-equitable work environment. I strongly recommend that all institutions represented at the event consider adopting or adapting the model policy.



We acknowledge policies are the floor, not the ceiling. So beyond adoption, institutions, legal and non-legal, activate it by effectively implementing and enforcing the policy in the workplace.



GOODWILL MESSAGE ⁴

JUSTICE MEAZA ASHENAFI, FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE OF ETHIOPIA



Your Excellencies, Ambassadors, African Union Officials, Honorable Judicial leaders and Judges, Former Colleagues, Thank you very much for honoring our invitation. Let me also thank the AU for hosting us in this inspiring hall named after none other than Nelson Mandela. I would also like to thank Ambassador Ervin Massinga, US Ambassador to Ethiopia, for sponsoring this event. Also, I am grateful to the Ambassador's team.

Ladies and gentlemen, recently, I was at a certain Embassy for a breakfast meeting. At the Embassy, I was introduced to the Ambassador's mother, and I was introduced as 'The Former Chief Justice.' The gentle-looking lady did not waste time asking me a question. She asked, 'What do former Chief Justices do?' That was a profound question. Let me try to answer that question since many people are curious as well.

After a year and a half of traveling, speaking engagements and, most importantly, reflection, my heart told me I should continue with community engagement at different levels. This is how I started a conversation with Professor Jarpa. I find the Institute for African Women in Law to be a very professional group. Thank you, Jarpa, for your leadership. This Institute is committed to advancing gender equality in law, and that is our shared vision.



The Women's Excellence in Law and Leadership (WELLA) by the Institute for African Women in Law, which has just been launched, will be one of the initiatives I would like to support.



In fact, over the past few months, I was consulting with a group of young lawyers, some of whom are here, as well as with civil society groups, such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), on the need to enhance the leadership capacities of young females in the legal profession. We decided to join our efforts when Prof. Dawuni informed me that the Institute was also incubating a similar idea.

Ladies and gentlemen, institutions such as EWLA played a key role in our country and continent. We need to celebrate these achievements. Their work in law reform advocacy, provision of free legal aid, and public education is truly remarkable.

At the level of embedding reform in public institutions, my colleagues and I, some of whom are here today, are proud of implementing the unpredicted reforms undertaken at the Judiciary during my tenure. We do not have time to speak about the overall reform but in the area of gender, we have adopted a gender equality policy, a policy on sexual harassment, established over ten benches educated to handle women and children related [cases], adopted bench books to guide judges dealing with cases on VAW, started a female law students fellowship program, and developed peer to peer training modules.

⁴ The goodwill message is the full unedited speech read by Justice Ashenafi at the event.



The launch of the Gender Equality in Law Campaign at the regional level is a milestone that consolidates our previous achievements. Furthermore, the objective is to give a vision, inspire and remind people what the problems are and what is possible. I congratulate IAWL for identifying the key pillars of the challenge, namely equitable hiring and promotion, equal pay for work of equal value, sexual harassment protection, gender bias and stereotypes. The model policy provides direction based on these pillars.



When it comes to the newly launched WELLA, under my patronage, the objective, in a nutshell, is to empower actors and frontline activists and cultivate future leaders to reach even greater heights. Recent presentations by female law students at Abeba University disclose the increasing number of female students, which was music to my ear since I was the only girl in the class of 50 boys in the mid-80s. Such positive news demonstrates that despite the challenges, the general direction of history is progressing to the extent that we can speak about the direction of history.

Unfortunately, the students' report was not all rosy. They also shared their disappointment regarding the need for more external engagement in extracurricular activities, networking opportunities, and mentoring. To use the students' words, "Our numbers are increasing, but we lack vigor." That makes me sad.

Indeed, this leadership initiative is timely. Knowledge/skill transfer should be a replication process that never stops.

Ladies and gentlemen, our role is to call upon the young girls and boys and ask them to engage, unlock their potential and, by doing so, unlock the potential of their communities. We all have an inherent caring, connecting capacity, so let us use this capacity to instill hope!

In closing, I would like to remind myself and all the seniors the greatest achievement in life is not what heights we reach but to recognize our power to live it. Thank You.



MESSAGE ON BEHALF OF ⁵ _____ ETHIOPIAN WOMEN JUDGES, JUSTICE HITMET ASSEFA



Thank you so much. First, I would like to thank Professor Jarpa, the Founder and Executive Director of this initiative. Then, I would like to thank Professor Hajer, the Legal Counsel of the African Union. I would also like to thank and appreciate the former Chief Justice of the Federal Supreme Court of Ethiopia, Meaza Ashenafi, for her remarkable achievements in ensuring women's equality in Ethiopia. The Iron Lady, Meaza Ashenafi, I would also like to thank you on behalf of Ethiopian women and on behalf of all judges of federal courts for your achievements, remarkable achievements in the Ethiopian judiciary, for your respect and value of women judges, for your efforts to uplift Ethiopian women.



Finally, it's not by might nor by power, by virtue of being born women or by virtue of being born female; we are capable, competent, diligent, and ethical. So, the government and society, for its own sake, should assign more women to the legal arena. Assigning more women within the legal arena ensures justice, and ensures peace and ensures harmony in the society.



So, I would like to call upon the participants of this important event, that we have to bring solidarity among us and establish special institutions according to our respective institutions. Thank you so much.

⁵ This message is the full unedited speech read by Justice Hitmet at the event.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL⁶ OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION, H.E. AMBASSADOR FATHALLAH SIJILMASSI



Honorable Government and Judicial Dignitaries,
Honorable Ambassadors, Esteemed Colleagues,
Distinguished Guests and Participants,

It is with immense pride that I stand before you today, at this pivotal moment, to join in an urgent call to action. A call that challenges us not only to speak about gender equality but to act decisively in ways that will reshape the legal profession and the very fabric of our societies.



Today, we gather here for the Gender Equality in Law Campaign (GELC), an initiative that dares to imagine and create a future where women lead, thrive, and define the legal profession across Africa.



Gender equality is not a novel concept. In fact, it is one of the foundational principles upon which the African Union (AU) is built. However, while we have often spoken about gender equality and embedded it within our legal frameworks, we must confront the fact that progress has been uneven.

Women, particularly within the legal profession, continue to encounter systemic barriers that prevent them from ascending to leadership positions and participating fully as equal partners.

My sister, the Legal Counsel, Prof. Hajer, has discussed the topic, and I would like to emphasize: As we gather today, I ask each of you to reflect on the path we have traveled. The AU, through key frameworks such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, also known as the Maputo Protocol, and the AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment (GEWE) 2018-2028, has laid out an ambitious roadmap for gender parity. These frameworks are the legal backbone for the empowerment of women and girls across our continent. However, frameworks alone cannot drive change. Change comes from implementation, from sustained action, and from an unwavering commitment to the principles we uphold.

WHY GENDER EQUALITY IN LAW MATTERS

The legal profession is not just another sector; it is the engine that drives justice, equality, and fairness in our societies.



Lawyers, judges, and legal professionals have a unique responsibility to uphold and protect the rights of all citizens. And yet, paradoxically, within the very profession that champions justice, we find deep-rooted gender imbalances that persist.

It is here, within the walls of the law, that discrimination must first be dismantled. The GELC is an opportunity for us to confront these inequalities head-on.



⁶ This message is the full unedited speech written by H.E. Amb. Sijilmassi at the event.

It is a platform for Awareness, Advocacy, and, crucially, Activation. The research findings that we've explored today, presented through the report "Gender Equality in Law in Africa: Is the Glass Half Full?", give us not only a snapshot of where we stand but a clear mandate for where we need to go.

PROGRESS MADE, CHALLENGES AHEAD

Africa is no stranger to trailblazing women in law. African women have proven time and time again that they are not just participants in the legal profession; they are leaders, reformers, and catalysts for change. These women have shown that when given the opportunity to lead, women bring new perspectives, innovative solutions, and transformative leadership.

But the path to true equality is still marred with obstacles.



Many women in law continue to face unequal access to leadership, discriminatory practices, and a lack of institutional support. These challenges are not unique to the legal profession but are emblematic of the broader societal and structural barriers that women across Africa face.



We must ask ourselves: why do these barriers persist? What more can we do to ensure that every woman, whether she be a young law graduate or an experienced judge, can reach her full potential? The answers lie not only in our policies but in our actions, our practices, and our commitment to systemic change.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: A CALL FOR INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

This is where I issue a Call to Action to every institution, every government, and every stakeholder present here today. We must move from policy to practice. We must move from aspiration to action.

We need comprehensive institutional reforms across our legal systems. These reforms should address recruitment, promotion, and leadership pathways to ensure that women are not only present but are leading at all levels. We must challenge the deeply ingrained biases that prevent women from ascending to the highest ranks of the profession.

Additionally, we need accountability mechanisms.



It is not enough to commit to gender equality. We need to measure progress, hold institutions accountable, and create incentives for those that champion gender parity.



One idea is to establish regional Gender Equality Commissions tasked with assessing the progress of each Member State in implementing gender-sensitive legal practices.

A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY



Gender equality is not the responsibility of women alone. It is a societal imperative. As a male ally, I stand here recognizing the critical role that men, especially those in leadership, must play in this fight. Gender equality benefits everyone, and it is our shared responsibility to ensure that women have equal access to opportunities, especially within the legal profession.



I urge my male colleagues, whether you are in government, the private sector, civil society, or academia, to step forward as allies in this cause. It is not enough to be passive supporters. We must actively challenge the structures that perpetuate inequality. We must amplify the voices of women, support their leadership, and ensure that our institutions reflect the diversity and talent of all our people.

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR MEANINGFUL CHANGE

To move forward, we need innovative solutions. If I may, here are some immediate steps we can collectively take:

Legal quotas: Introduce quotas in law firms, courts, and other legal institutions to ensure women are represented at all levels, particularly in leadership roles.



Capacity building programs: Establish mentorship and leadership training programs for young women lawyers, ensuring they have the support needed to rise through the ranks.



Monitoring and reporting: Develop regional monitoring systems to assess and track gender equality progress in the legal profession. We need transparent reporting on how each country is implementing the Maputo Protocol and AU Gender Policy.

Collaboration with the private sector: Gender equality is not only a public sector issue. The private sector must also commit to gender-sensitive practices and policies. Law firms, corporations, and private legal practitioners must play an active role in driving change.

CONCLUSION: A NEW ERA FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN LAW

In closing, let us be clear:



gender equality in law is not a distant dream—it is a present necessity.



As we look to the future, we must ensure that our legal systems reflect the ideals of fairness, equality, and justice that they are meant to uphold.



This Campaign is not just about women's rights—it is about building a legal profession that benefits us all.



Today, I challenge each of you to commit to this cause. Commit to turning our legal frameworks into real-world progress. Commit to building a future where gender does not determine one's opportunities or limit one's potential. Together, we can create a legal profession where all talent is nurtured, all voices are heard, and all people—regardless of gender—can lead.

I thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS ⁷

PROF. HAJER GUELDICH, LEGAL COUNSEL, AFRICAN UNION



Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, I would like to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to each and every one of you for taking the time to attend and actively participate in today's event. Your presence here is not only a testament to your commitment to gender equality in law but also a reminder of the importance of collective action. It is your voices, your ideas, and your engagement that make initiatives like this truly meaningful.

A heartfelt thank you goes to the Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL). Your leadership, collaboration, and vision have been instrumental in bringing this event to life. Together, we've built a platform that addresses the urgent need for gender parity in law, and this partnership has made today's discussions not only possible but impactful.

I would also like to extend my thanks to my incredible team at the OLC. Your dedication, hard work, and passion for the cause of gender equality are the driving force behind everything we have accomplished today.

A special thank you is also due to the Office of Former Chief Justice Meaza Ashenafi. Your presence and support today have been invaluable, and your trailblazing leadership continues to inspire generations of African women in law. We are honored by your involvement, and we appreciate the powerful legacy you continue to build.

To our esteemed speakers—thank you. Your insights, expertise, and passion for the issues of gender equality and justice have enriched today's discussions. From sharing research findings to offering personal experiences, your contributions have been thought-provoking and deeply motivating. We have been fortunate to have such a diverse and knowledgeable group of voices leading these conversations. I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the Embassy of the United States in Addis Ababa for sponsoring this important event. Your support demonstrates a shared commitment to advancing gender equality in law, and we are incredibly grateful for your investment in this critical cause.

As we conclude, I want to take a moment to reflect on the Gender Equality in Law Campaign (GELC).



This initiative holds incredible promise for shaping the future of the legal profession in Africa. It's more than just a campaign—it's a movement.



A movement toward a future where women's contributions in law are valued equally, where barriers to leadership are torn down, and where every woman has the opportunity to thrive. Today's discussions are a crucial step in that direction, and I am filled with optimism about the impact the GELC will have. The ripple effect of empowering women in law will extend beyond the legal profession, driving societal change across our continent. This campaign is the catalyst for a new era of gender parity, and I am confident that, together, we will turn this vision into a reality.

Finally, I want to end with a call to action.

⁷ The closing remarks are the full unedited speech read by Prof. Gueldich at the event.



Today, we have presented the Gender Equality in Law Model Policy, a comprehensive framework designed to create inclusive, equitable environments in the legal profession. This is more than just a document—it's a roadmap for change. I urge all of you to take it back to your institutions, adapt it where necessary, and, most importantly, adopt it.



Let's ensure that the principles we've discussed today are put into practice. The time for change is now, and we have the tools to make it happen. Let's commit to creating a legal profession that is truly reflective of the talent, diversity, and potential of African women.

Thank you once again, and I look forward to seeing the results of the seeds we have planted today.









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