

**Organisation of African First Ladies
Against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA)**

Opening Statement

16th Ordinary General Assembly

Addis Ababa, 31 January 2016

**Our gracious host, Excellency First Lady of the Federal
Republic of Ethiopia,
Chairperson of OAFLA, Excellency First Lady of Ghana,
Excellencies dearest sisters,
Excellency Commissioner for Social Affairs of the African
Union,
Executive Director of UNAIDS,
Distinguished representatives of civil society organisations,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Good morning.

It is a great pleasure being with you on this day, as we convene for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of OAFLA. Being here today allows us to assess, and share progress made through our various health interventions. We have answered the call of protecting the lives of our precious little ones and as such, we must strategically plan the partnerships we join, if we are going to successfully bring an end to this pandemic.

Esteemed audience,

I also believe that our position forces us to do this self-evaluation exercise, to acknowledge what end goals do we set for ourselves, and how do we advocate for a bigger and lasting impact so that members of our communities can fully benefit from a health system, that has well thought-out policies that govern efficiently its procedures?

A system that indeed allows us to benefit from rights, such as prenatal consultations, involvement of trained community health workers, competent services to prevent and effectively contain these infectious diseases when they occur.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

We are dealing with a mutating virus we thought we could control, but recent studies have shown an alarming widespread resistance to the most effective anti-HIV drug, in low and middle-income countries.

How are our health systems preparing us to meeting this health challenge of us taming the transmission of a virus, that is resistant to ART treatment? Our efforts over the years are now at risk of being reversed, hence putting us again in danger of not fulfilling our vision for the eradication of this virus.

This serves as another wake-up call for us to double our energies in strengthening our systems.

Those are key points to reflect upon before we can honestly determine which partnerships we want for ourselves, after they are proven to be fit to help us reach our destination.

We need to reflect on procedures that allow us to quickly anticipate, prevent, track, and treat, when confronted with infectious diseases.

We should strive for predictable systems that virtually operate in auto-pilot mode, and evolve from our current situations of doing more of fire-fighting activities, attempting to stop what is crippling the wellbeing of our people.

If we know that we are entitled to this end goal of fully functioning systems that have the vital interests of the people at the core, then our next step needs to be the evaluation and understanding of our contextual realities, before we can draw the path that will take us there.

We must force ourselves to take a harsh look at our own expectations, and this must be accompanied by the right mindset; one that sees where we stand in relation to where we need to be. A mindset that will push us all, to act on this sense of urgency, to find a solution, so we can see the fruits of our labour in our lifetime.

For us to have successful partnerships with either the civil society and/or development partners, we need to assess how our work as advocates, and mobilisers, for the advancement of our government's national priorities, will influence policy-making, by thinking beyond the series of interventions we carry out.

Like a mosaic of separate, but perfectly organised, pieces which make a complete picture, let us embrace the power in us to help coordinate the equally important components, to reach our end

goal of establishing well-performing systems. Systems that rely on competent human resources, policies based on proven approaches, and the right type of infrastructure.

Let us seek partnerships that will strengthen our health sector, while seizing the opportunity to learn from successes happening elsewhere and apply it to our local context.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to reiterate that together, we hold the power to create sustainable, healthier futures for our little ones and our youth.

The successful projects realised thus far, through the commitment of governmental and non-governmental bodies, prove that if we sustain the right knowledge and linkages, the child of an HIV+ woman will be born free of the virus; the young infected or discordant couples will live longer; and the availing of youth-friendly services, will cause young people to seek the empowering information to make good decisions about their reproductive health.

Together, we must make use of this strength to turn the tides of the AIDS epidemic, once and for all.

I thank you for your kind attention.