



Mozambican women:

Recognizing and harnessing her innate virtues for the benefit of society

**Address by HE Armando Emílio Guebuza, President of the Republic of
Mozambique, at the reception of the 2009 African Gender Award**

Dakar, 3 April 2010

1. Saluting Senegal's jubilee

It gives us immense pleasure to be, once again, in this fascinating city of Dakar, the home of the African Gender Award, the land blessed with a rich cultural heritage and noble traditions. The unfailing care and courtesies, for which Senegal is so rightly famed, are making our stay a truly unforgettable experience.

We are greatly honoured, Mr. President Wade, to join you, the People and Government of Senegal in the celebrations of the golden jubilee of your beautiful country. We applaud the progress that Senegal has attained in social and economic domains and for the calibre of inspiring leaders the country has had for half a century and for your hardworking people whose skills are also at the service of Africa and the entire World.

Mr. President, you epitomize, very aptly, these characteristics and achievements:

- ❖ You are a visionary politician;
- ❖ A distinguished intellectual;
- ❖ An enlightened diplomat;
- ❖ A wise leader; and
- ❖ A generous citizen.

The African Renaissance Monument you have conceived and told us about at the last African Union Conference, in Addis Ababa, and which today we had the opportunity to visit and marvel at, stands tall as yet another testimony of your virtues and qualities. At the same time it pays a glowing homage to our determination as African countries to unite and transform our societies for the wellbeing of our people.

2. The meaning of the African Gender Award

It is a great honour for us to receive the 2009 African Gender Award. We would like to express our gratitude, for this recognition, to Femmes Africa Solidarité, its Pan African Centre for Peace and Development and to the selection committee of the Gender Award under the leadership of Honourable Gertrude Mongella.

This award adds more responsibilities on our portfolio and induces new expectations for the role we have to play in the process of deepening and consolidating the

emancipation of Mozambican women which, incidentally, takes place within the context of the specific agenda the Nation is pursuing at a given time in our History.

Admittedly, Mozambican, and by extension, African women have innate attributes and skills and play a multiplicity of highly meaningful roles that serve society very well. For instance, they are masters of human care which they dispense with, for nine months for the unborn child and later on provide the first experience of tender love to the baby.

Furthermore, they initiate the child into linguistic sounds, hence the expression “mother tongue”, and introduce the child to the value system that are transmitted through this language.

Women are also known to deploy their diplomatic skills to prevent and manage conflicts and bring harmony within the home and the neighbourhood and, by extension, to society at large. With their entrepreneurship and managerial expertise they run the affairs of the home with great skill, anticipate how to provide for the next meal to the family and ensure that the home is kept tidy and the children taken care of, while, simultaneously, inculcating, at tender age, the acceptable norms, habits and routines to the new generations that become crucial in their adult lives.

In summary, one can say that women, more often care more about the welfare of other people than about themselves with dedication and have a sense of duty with attention to detail that are so valuable to society, but sometimes are not fully appreciated. Clearly they have a great role to play in shaping the future of our Nations.

We are doing our best for Mozambican society to give more recognition and help our women sharpen these abilities and skills for the benefit of creating a harmonious and prosperous Nation that we all aspire to build.

In turn, as professionals and decision-makers, women draw heavily on these innate attributes to improve the quality of management and leadership we have in our country. That is to say, they are not assigned those responsibilities or promoted to certain positions simply because they are women and, one would say that we appreciate fully the additional value they have brought into those positions drawing on their innate characteristics. That is why we interrogate ourselves, from time to time,

to ascertain the changes that our women have brought into the institutions and realize that the impact of their actions is considerable.

In Mozambique, ladies and gentlemen, women took an active part in the Struggle for our National Liberation, during which both women and men began to realize that there were prevailing stereotypes preventing them from seeing the merits in each other. They fought and died alongside their male compatriots on the frontline, performed the most heroic acts and endured great sacrifices thus laying their lives for the liberation of the country and brought the freedom we all enjoy today.

It was this process that, on the hand, produced the breed of members of the underground cells and that of female guerrilla commanders and political commissars, teachers and nurses. On the other, it marked the dawn of a new awareness about the role of gender in our movement that changed the perceptions of men and women and has endured to this day.

Their innate skills came into play to advance our struggle. Therefore, the Struggle for National Liberation created the opportunities. The women exploited them to the fullest.

The attainment of national Independence widened the opportunities for our women to intervene in a greater variety of domains of the life of the Mozambican Nation and make their skills available in every sphere of the Motherland. For example:

- ❖ As teachers or professors;
- ❖ As nurses or doctors;
- ❖ As civil servants or heads of department;
- ❖ As members or officers of the defence and security forces;
- ❖ As businesswomen or celebrities in the social and cultural fields

these women have come to be role models for the girl child to admire and aspire to emulate.

To help the girl child realize her dream to be like her role model, her heroine, we place great emphasis on education. We have expanded the educational network such that the distance the girl child has to walk to reach a primary or a secondary school has reduced considerably.

This development encourages more of them to enter and remain in the school and complete more and more advanced levels. From one university at Independence, 35 years ago, we have now reached the peak of 38 institutions of high learning. The female students have responded to this expansion of higher education.

Women are also prominent in the decision making bodies. Our lady Speaker manages a parliament where 39% of the Members of Parliament are ladies and 3 out of 8 parliamentary commissions are headed by women. In the Executive, lady Ministers stand at 28% coupled with 27% of Provincial Governors.

A process is also underway to conform more and more of our legal instruments with the international treaties of which we are party. The adoption of the Family Law and the Law Against Violence on Women are to be seen in the context of the permanent endeavour to eliminate all forms of discrimination and enhance the emancipation of women in Mozambique. These advances are also made possible thanks to the active participation of our national partners. Two of them, Natividade Bule, of ECOSIDA, and Graça Samo, of Forum for Women, thus representing the private sector and the civil society, respectively, received recognition for the work they do towards the emancipation of the Mozambican women. We congratulate them for this achievement.

3. The flame of Unity

This year, we celebrate our 35 years of Independence. On the Mozambican Woman's Day, 7 April, we are going to light the Flame of Unity which will travel from Northern Mozambique, passing from one Mozambican hand to the other, throughout the country, for more than 70 days. The Flame of Unity will reach Maputo, our capital city, about 3 000 kilometres away from the point of departure, on the 25th June, our Independence Day. The choice of the Mozambican Women's Day to start this movement is designed to crystallize the role women play for their own emancipation and in the struggle against poverty, our current agenda.

Once again we want to thank Femmes Africa Solidarité for this Award which we dedicate to the women and men of Mozambique. We commend the work Femme Africa Solidarité does to empower women in all spheres of life and particularly the

work with countries that have experienced conflicts. The Pan Africa Centre, a Centre of Excellence, which provides training for women on leadership skills and on gender and peace building should be supported and replicated throughout our Mother Africa.

We reiterate our gratitude to President Wade for the kind invitation for us to be here tonight and to witness first-hand the African Renaissance festivities tomorrow.

We thank you all for your kind attention