Speech of Mr Robert De Raeve, Head of the Political Section, at the Opening Ceremony of the Annual National Conference for Female Political Leaders, 20/10/2017

Opening Ceremony

Annual National Conference for Female Political Leaders

20 October 2017

Speech by Mr. Robert De Raeve, Head of the Political Section, Delegation of the European Union to Zambia and COMESA

Her Excellency Mrs. Inonge Wina, Vice President of the Republic of Zambia

Honourable Victoria Kalima, Minister of Gender

Honourable Members of Parliament

Honourable Mayors

Honourable Councillors

Representatives of Political Parties

Senior Government Officials

Representatives of Civil Society

Representatives of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, allow me to express my gratitude to the Zambia National Women’s Lobby for the invitation to today's opening ceremony for the Annual National Conference for Female Political Leaders under the theme "50/50 Gender Representation: Enhancing female leaders' effective participation and representation in Zambia".

In Zambia, as in many countries around the world, girls and women too often have too little room to say or control over decisions that affect them, be it in their households, communities and societies as a whole. Globally, women participate less in formal politics than men and are still underrepresented at most levels of decision-making; in particular in the upper levels of government. Worldwide, only 22% of parliamentary seats are held by women. Women make up 8% of the world’s executives and 95% of countries have a male head of state.

Ensuring that girls and women, boys and men, have a voice at all levels of society, that they are able to effectively participate and have a say over decisions that affect their lives, is therefore central to the EU's approach. It is right that girls and women participate equally, their participation contributes to more inclusive, balanced and representative societies and moreover, they act as important agents for peace.

As the EU itself, we have taken the commitment in the 2016 Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy to systematically mainstream human rights and gender issues across policy sectors and institutions. The EU's 2016-2020 Gender Action Plan further reflects our recognition of the importance of women's equal political and civil rights, and has committed the European Union specifically to support enabling legislation and policies that remove obstacles for women and girls’ participation in line with international commitments such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Plan of Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Zambian government's recent signature of the SADC Gender Protocol is an important step in this context and a highly welcome development. We therefore congratulate the Zambia National Women's Lobby for the selection of the very timely theme of this year's Annual Conference for Female Political Leaders that will focus on the SADC Gender Protocol and 50/50 gender representation. We congratulate the Vice President for her political leadership which is highly regarded and we take this opportunity to congratulate all female ministers, Members of Parliament, Mayors and local councillors for their daily contributions to their country.

I wish to commend all stakeholders present here today that you have taken time off your busy schedules and travel from all over the country to come together and work on pertinent issues affecting women's effective political participation and representation in Zambia. The Conference will certainly make important contributions towards the SADC Protocol's domestication and full implementation in Zambia, and the EU - together with DFID and other partners here present – is pleased to be supporting the organisation of such an important event.

I would further like to use this opportunity to inform the distinguished guests here present that the participation of women was an important feature in the final report of the EU Election Observation Mission published in November 2016.

In particular, one specific recommendation of the EU election observers relates to the promotion of greater participation of women in political life. It was suggested that the political parties’ legislation -
namely the Political Parties Bill which is currently being drafted - should incorporate legal requirements, such as mandatory quotas, for the parties to apply affirmative action with regard to gender policies - both in terms of integrating women into party structures and of selecting women as party candidates.

Distinguished guests, I would like to reconfirm the appreciation of the European Union for the opportunity to participate in today's opening ceremony. We wish you all two very good and productive days in the interest of your country and the people of Zambia, and look forward to the deliberations and conclusions of the Conference.

Thank you for your attention, Zikomo Kwambiri.

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