Speech of M. Bertin Babadoudou, First Counselor, Permanent Representation of Benin to the United Nations

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High Level Parallel Event

A Worldwide Ban on Female Genital Mutilation: from the Decision of the African Union to a United Nations General Assembly Resolution

New York, 27 February 2012

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a privilege for the Delegation of Benin to participate in this event, of which we appreciate the value. For my Delegation, the Decision taken by the Heads of States is a historic one\(^1\), because it pushes the international community to take an additional step forward in the fight against this practice that we have been engaged in for several years already.

At the level of the Experts (of the Third Committee and members of the African Group) here in New York, when we learned of the decision, a decision that – I repeat - we welcome, we started to activate the mechanisms necessary for its application. We have received instructions from our Heads of State, so debate isn’t needed. We need instead to understand how we can implement this decision, taking into consideration the context: what already exists, what has already been done and what is happening now. In this context, we have had the occasion as Experts -- and several countries took part in this process -- to meet a certain number of stakeholders, of partners, to figure out how to proceed.

Concerning the Decision of our Heads of State, maybe this is not the right place to discuss it, but the issue was to determine how to implement it. We already have a process at the Commission on the Status of Women, where every two years we have a Resolution which explicitly refers to the issue. When the Heads of States announced “we now want a Resolution at the General Assembly of the United Nations” we wondered how we should proceed. How to harmonize these two processes? How could the process at the Commission on the Status of Women be merged with the Decision of the Heads of State? We were confronted with a dilemma, wondering whether we should have two parallel processes, one at the Commission on the Status of Women, and also one at the General Assembly. We decided that we needed to form a working group to study the issue and then propose to the African Group plenary how to proceed with the Resolution. Furthermore, we met various partners, among

\(^1\) Decision in support of a United Nations General Assembly Resolution to ban female genital mutilation, adopted by African Heads of State at the Summit of the African Union in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea on 1 July 2011
which the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices and other partners in this field and as a result of these meetings and discussions we were able to draw some conclusions.

In the first place, an element that is very important for Africans is to have the ownership of the process, it is really important for the group, for Africans, and for all the members of the Third Committee. For us, it is out of question for an initiative to be taken in this domain without the involvement of the African Group. It is in the first place a matter for the African group, because we have already taken initiative at the Commission on the Status of Women, and we are ready to contribute whatever can be done in this domain, we are ready to work on it. But it is really our issue? There has been some distrust in this regard, and this is the reason why we have delayed before really putting ourselves in the dance.

So we put in place a working group. We also though that we needed [to wait for the release of] the Secretary General’s report on the matter, to give us indications and recommendations on the way to proceed. Now what we have is the path towards the Resolution. The Commission on the Status of Women is probably going to adopt a draft decision which will channel the dossier towards the General Assembly, by transferring it from the Commission on the Status of Women to the General Assembly, as we cannot put in place two simultaneous processes, we cannot have a Resolution both at the Commission on the Status of Women and at General Assembly, therefore we had to put in place a process which would let both emerge.

Where are we now? We have this decision which will be adopted and the working group has started to reflect on the content of a strong Resolution. We want a Resolution which will take into consideration all inputs, contributions, from all partners, and we have been in contact with many partners and received a number of proposals already. So this is where we are and I believe it can help the discussion but we will have a Resolution before the end of this year 2012, a Resolution that is sufficiently strong dedicated to this issue.

Thank you.