SPEECH OF HON. MRS CHANTAL COMPAORE,
FIRST LADY OF BURKINA FASO
56th Session of the Commission of the Status of Women

New York, 27 February 2012

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ministers,
Your Excellency the Vice President of the Italian Senate,
Your Excellency the Executive Director of UN Women,
Your Excellency President of the Inter-African Committee,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

More than twenty years ago, I engaged in the protection, the advancement of women and children’s rights.

For this reason I accepted to be the Good Will Ambassador the for Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Harmful to Women and Girls (IAC) in view of the elimination of female genital mutilation in Africa and worldwide. The IAC developed the following strategies: outreach, advocacy, adoption and application of laws against this scourge, the conversion of practitioners as well as the care of victims which have resulted in a significant downward trend of the practice. Nevertheless, the fight
to change minds is always a long-term struggle necessitating a much investments at all levels.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main lesson learned from actions undertaken in this field during the last quarter century is that it is a mistake to summarize the phenomenon as simply an African tradition and an exclusively African problem.

As a flagrant violation of woman integrity, these practices are a matter of fundamental human rights. As a consequence, their elimination is a major challenge for all the community of nations.

I have had the distinct honour of coordinating and leading the International Campaign for a Worldwide Ban of FGM, launched in November 2009 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, by a coalition of non-governmental organisations including the IAC, No Peace Without Justice, Euronet FGM and la Palabre.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

At the Opening of the fifty-fifth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Permanent Mission of Burkina Faso organised, under my presidency and with the Coalition for a Worldwide Ban of FGM, an important meeting on the issue. We established a strategic calendar of activities to pursue as part of international action.

The fierce desire to see the rapid adoption of a Resolution by the General Assembly of the United Nations, led us to the conclusion that the starting point to obtain this international tool was without doubt in Africa.

Under my leadership, the Burkinabe Government accepted to lead the process by submitting a draft Decision at the Summit of the African Heads of States and Governments which adopted it on 1 July 2011 in Malabo, Guinea.

By doing so, leaders of the African continent denounced, once again, the harmfulness of these practices, reaffirming African States’ commitment against this scourge and urged the General Assembly of the United Nations to adopt, during the present Session, a Resolution banning female genital mutilation worldwide.

With a view to making the most of this important decision of African Heads of State, I continued advocating with my counterparts to raise their interest and secure their commitment to the cause.

In addition to this, in October 2011, the Coalition engaged in advocacy toward African Ambassadors to the United Nations, more specifically members of the Third Committee, providing technical support. Honourable guests,
The last Report of the Secretary General of the Organization of the United Nations, his Excellency Mr Ban Ki Moon, on female genital mutilation, is a precious document demonstrating, yet again, that the international community needs a common tool to accelerate the elimination of female genital mutilation.

We therefore need to continue to make the case to Representatives of all countries that the Resolution can save millions of women and girls, not only in Africa, but in the entire world.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

On behalf of the Coalition, I welcome the successes that we already achieved in this struggle and call on the dignitaries here present to redouble their efforts so that we can offer a universal tool in the defence of women’s rights to the activists working towards the elimination of female genital mutilation.

I reiterate my commitment to continue investing in this international campaign until we achieve our expected result.

I assure you of the availability of the Government of my country to continue in bringing together the efforts of all stakeholders.

I congratulate and encourage members of the Coalition for their perseverance.

I thank the non-African Governments which accompany this tough but exhilarating process.

I would mention particularly Italy and express my sincere gratitude to our friend and companion in arms, Ms. Emma Bonino, Vice President of the Italian Senate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I send my congratulations and my encouragements to their Excellencies the Ambassadors of African countries to the United Nations for the significant interest given to the drafting of the Resolution. I urge you to take all necessary measure to assure its adoption. It will be a great tool for the protection of the right to integrity for our sisters and daughters on our continent and elsewhere.

I fervently wish us to be united against this scourge and mobilised for the adoption of the Resolution here and now!

I thank you.