

**STATEMENT TO MARK INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2018 -
HON. DEPUTY MAJORITY LEADER AND HAIRPERSON OF THE
WOMEN CAUCUS OF PARLIAMENT**

Thank you Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

I rise to make a Statement to mark this year's International Women's Day which falls on Thursday, 8th March, 2018.

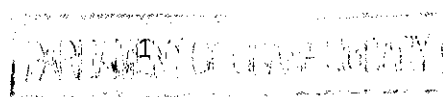
Declared by the United Nations as International Women's Day, the 8th of March, every year, is observed around the world to take stock of the struggles and progress made towards gender equality. On this day, ordinary women who have played extraordinary roles in the history of their countries and communities are also celebrated.

Mr. Speaker, the theme chosen by the United Nations to commemorate this year's International Women's Day is "Time is Now: Rural and Urban Activists Transforming Women's Lives". By this theme, the United Nations is calling on all citizens of the world to join activists in all settings, rural and urban, around the world to seize the moment, celebrate, take action and transform women's lives everywhere.

Citizens are also called upon to use the occasion to consider how to accelerate the 2030 Agenda and build momentum for the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially goal number 5: to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; and number 4: to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

Mr. Speaker, throughout history, women have played and continue to play significant roles in the development of many nations, yet, women's progress continues to be undermined by inequalities that exist in our homes, workplaces and places of worship, among others.

Ghana's democracy has come of age but the voices of our women still remains faint or virtually missing in our national discourse despite constituting about 51% of Ghana's population. Ghana has won the vote not the voice. As aptly stated by Mr. Kofi Annan, the former UN



Secretary General at the World Education Forum in 2000; “No development strategy is better than the one that involves women as central players”.

We need to work harder to improve women’s representation at all levels of governance in this country. The current thirty-seven (37) women out the two hundred and seventy-five (275) elected Members of Parliament, representing 13% of the total membership of Parliament, is woefully inadequate and far below the internationally agreed target of at least 30%.

The District Assemblies and Political Parties play significant roles to develop the confidence, skills and the political acumen required to climb with ease their political ladder. Many of our Members of Parliament, both past and present, have at one stage or the other held leadership positions in their respective political affiliations or been Members of the Assemblies.

The leadership elections of the various Political Parties which has already begun in earnest and the impending District Assemblies’ elections present an opportunity to elect more women and to prepare them for other national leadership positions.

In this regard, I appeal to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to collaborate with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Donor Agencies and Corporate Ghana to revitalise and expand the scope of the “Women in Local Governance Fund” to support women political activities at the local level.

Mr. Speaker, in recent times, sexual harassment, violence and discrimination against women have captured headlines and public discourse. Issues of rape and child marriages continue to be on the rise. Just last week, this August House in a question to the Hon. Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection deliberated on issue of a rape case involving two minors.

Rt. Hon. Speaker, as I speak the West-African sub-region is yet to account for the over 200 girls abducted in Chibok, Nigeria. While

efforts are being made to rescue the girls, the abduction of girls has become a daily phenomenon, including another one hundred that took place in Nigeria again, only last week.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot wait any longer while the perpetrators continue to have their field day. We must not shield them either or shut up on such violence against women and girls. Justice must be seen done in these matters. We must fight against all forms of harmful traditional practices performed on our girl-child who is being exposed daily to pornography through the internet and other forms of social media, and spousal abuse.

Mr. Speaker, the economic empowerment of women remains one of the surest way of addressing gender disparity in this country. Besides, empowering women leads to immediate gains for nutrition, health, savings, and reinvestment at the family, community, and ultimately, national level.

We must therefore continue to retool our women with entrepreneurial skills and also support them grow their business. According to the World Bank, nearly 70 per cent of women-owned SMEs in developing countries including Ghana are either shut out by financial institutions or are unable to receive financial services on adequate terms to meet their needs.

This means that access to financial services is a critical obstacle to the growth of women-led enterprises or start-ups by women. Government and the private sector activism to deal with this challenge is very crucial.

Mr. Speaker, just a few weeks ago, the Ministry of Private Sector Development announced a GH¢10million Fund for women entrepreneurs in this country. The Fund which is expected to be rolled out in April of this year, would be disbursed at low interests rate of less than 10% across all regions. I call on my fellow countrywomen to take advantage of this golden opportunity to improve on their lot. I also appeal to the private sector to come up with similar initiatives to complement the efforts of the government.

Mr. Speaker, if you would indulge me I would like to commend the few women in high offices such as the Chief Justice, Chief of Staff, Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, the Minister of Gender and Children, the Minister of Communications, the Minister of Aviation, the Minister of Tourism, as well as the many women Deputy Ministers, the Deputy Majority Leader in Parliament and all our gallant gender activists out there: ABANTU for Development, WILDAF, AWLA, etc.

Our special commendation goes to His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo, the “AU Gender Champion” for 2017, for his leadership and activism to ensure gender equality in Ghana and on the continent of Africa. We call for more support for him so that he can initiate progressive legislations and social intervention programmes to ensure gender equality through the promotion of the welfare system and protection of children.

We also urge our colleague, the Hon. Minister for Gender and Social Protection to assist H.E the President to bring to this august House for passage the Affirmative Action Bill and related Bills into laws to address gender inequality and to empower women at all levels of society. I speak in particular about the much delayed Spousal Right Bill as well as the Intestate Succession Bill.

Mr Speaker, in dedicating today to gender activists around the world and in particular Ghana, we must say “Ayeeko!” to our gallant women who wake up early to go and sell for the children to eat; and the women in the villages who have to go to the farms daily to pay the school fees of their children and walk far in search of water for the entire family.

Mr. Speaker, we must not forget our women who are languishing in “Witches camps”, just because they are suspected to cause someone’s illness, barrenness or death in the communities in which they live. We must not aslo forget women who passed on to eternity in the process of bringing forth another life to this world. These women are the heroic

and true activists. The time to intensify our activism through educational campaigns and increased resource support is now.

In celebrating this year's International Women's Day, Mr. Speaker, let us recommit ourselves to working harder for gender equality and women's empowerment, together as women, men, youth and leaders of this nation. Each one of us can be an activist within our own spheres of influence and commit to take pragmatic action to accelerate gender parity.

On this note, I thank you Mr. Speaker and colleagues for your attention.

