

## Statement by Africa-Europe Foundation's Women Leaders Network

*Sometimes the world looks dark, especially after the Russian war started but we should keep in mind the words of Indigenous activist Jade Begay who invites us to dream – “what if our best days are still ahead of us?”.*

Surrounded by the rolling hills of Kigali, the Africa-Europe Foundation's Women Leaders Network (WLN)<sup>1</sup> held its first in-person meeting on the sidelines of the Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) Forum. We reviewed progress on SDG7, given that there remain 760 million people lacking access to electricity worldwide, and over 2.6 billion lacking access to clean cooking solutions. The majority of those without are in Africa, where 600 million people still lack access to electricity and 900 million are without access to clean cooking solutions.

The Forum offered a great opportunity to learn from each other and to advance a common vision for a just and equitable energy transition that is people-centred.

We are mid-way into the SDGs 2015-2030 delivery, and six months ahead of an international landmark for climate action in Africa, COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt while a regional war with global ramifications wages on.

In these times, the Africa-Europe Foundation's Women Leaders Network believes:

- Clean energy can act as a pillar for the delivery for peace, development, food and energy security, which are the foundations of climate resilience.
- Significant finance must be urgently deployed to expand clean energy technology both in Europe and Africa as the symbol of solidarity, rather than the cutting of aid and continued market capture of African resources.
- Investment in the localization of clean energy supply chains, from mineral extraction, to production, manufacturing and assembly, in ways that do not exploit people or planet, can rapidly deliver low-cost energy and jobs for Africa, and is fundamental to truly sustainable global energy transitions.
- Women's networks and youth movements which are the fabric of community action and social enterprise are core constituents in the delivery of solutions, and thus require financial support for their local and global engagement.
- These immediate investments in clean energy, local supply chains, women and youth mobilisation, are solutions to fill the immense trust deficit between the Global North and South, and thus are our truest tools in the fight for peace.

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<sup>1</sup> The Women Leaders Network, co-chaired by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Mary Robinson, was established by the Africa Europe Foundation in 2021. It provides a platform for dialogue between women from Africa and Europe on key issues linking our two continents. Meetings have been held virtually to date – hence our meeting in Kigali May 19<sup>th</sup> 2022 is the first time we have all met in person.

The Ukraine crisis has brought horror and suffering to both the European and African continents, unleashing a huge price surge for food, fuel, fertiliser and finance. The crisis has also pushed the European Union into reviewing its energy transition. While its latest plans countenance a short-term increase in use of coal, the focus is now to “fast forward the green transition”.

**We urge an ever-faster acceleration out of fossil fuels, as the crisis must not slow climate action.** However, some European countries are cutting funds going to Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), and diverting resources to weapons. We challenge this narrow interpretation of what constitutes “human security” and argue for further investment in renewable energy as the foundation for peace. Spending on military hardware and failures in diplomacy cannot substitute for meeting basic human needs. It is urgent to stop Russia’s war in Ukraine, and bring peace to the multiple conflicts in Africa.

**The WLN recognizes that while Africa and Europe might share a final destination in terms of low carbon energy and a stable climate, each continent will follow very different transition pathways.** The “energy transition” in many African countries involves moving from little or no electricity access to reach a modern energy minimum for basic tasks and productive activity, estimated at 1,000kWh/person<sup>2</sup> annually.

The Ukraine crisis has led to a big increase in demand from Europe for Africa’s energy resources, in an extractive manner which takes little notice of Africa’s own energy needs. Africa’s gas is being sold to Europe, because they can pay higher prices, and the same strong market pull is happening for fertilisers. But this unjust market power, built on decades of uneven investment, means the big gap between domestic demand and supply in Africa widens further, and those without market power miss out. **We call for an approach based on solidarity, so that a proportion of the gas being taken by Europe be invested in situ in African countries,** for example in LPG for clean cooking.

While African Ministers are calling for large scale investment in gas as a transition fuel, many now judge that African countries face little or no time to build the infrastructure to bring gas on-line, before the global shift to net-zero renders it obsolete. While pro-gas lobbyists argue for gas pipelines being easily re-purposed for hydrogen, great caution is needed to avoid large-scale investment in stranded assets. There is no way of getting round this fundamental injustice, which generates a consequent urgent need for a big push to fund renewables and sustainable alternatives for industrial heat, power, and feedstocks.

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<sup>2</sup> As compared with an average/person/year of 2,500kWh in middle income and 6,000kWh in high income nations.

For most African countries, if the funds were available, renewables would be the first choice. But there are now growing shortages of solar and other renewable energy components, especially given the economic slowdown and logistics problems associated with China's battle against Covid. This provides a further push towards achieving greater strategic autonomy and building local capacity. Thus, **if African countries are to roll-out large-scale renewable energy programmes, investment is essential today in the renewable energy value chain, including clean cooking, and the manufacture and assembly of solar and wind-power systems in Africa**, along the model being followed for vaccine manufacture<sup>3</sup>. Investment in research and development in African institutions is needed to underpin this drive for renewables.

We believe the messaging from Europe to Africa must shift from “we will provide no finance to fossil fuels”, toward “we will urgently provide the needed support for renewables”.

There is a big trust deficit between Africa and Europe, and loss of momentum since 2015 on SDGs and COP21. Some speak of Europe as “preaching water, drinking wine,” too ready to tell others what to do, but not following the same precepts. **The WLN wants to help rebuild the trust which is so badly needed to achieve progress at COP27 and beyond, especially for climate adaptation and building resilience.** Women's networks and youth activism still retain large measures of trust, so we should use these as a foundation. Europe urgently needs to plug a big credibility gap, put money where its mouth is, and follow through with actions.

**The WLN recognises that peace, clean energy, food security and development make up a seamless whole.** Yet increased funding and targets for access to energy, while essential, do not always result in better lives, jobs and opportunities for women and their communities. How money is spent matters as much as the total sum so, if women's empowerment, youth employment and decentralised power are to be achieved, they must be built in from the start.

We face an unprecedented combination of crises – climate, food, energy, and debt – now magnified many-fold by conflict in both Europe and Africa. People, communities, nations and entire regions are under ever-greater stress. **Only working together in close partnership, can we create the radical collaboration from which solidarity will flourish and the foundations of peace, development and a resilient climate future be built.**

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<sup>3</sup> See for example the proposal for the DRC's battery and EV value chain, see [www.uneca.org](http://www.uneca.org).