



**Statement by H.E. Mrs Roman Tesfaye,
First Lady of the Federal Democratic of Ethiopia
4th World Coffee Conference
Panel 6: Promoting gender equality for a sustainable coffee sector
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 8 March 2016**

Your Excellency Mr Robério Oliveira Silva, Executive Director of the International Coffee Organization;
Most valued coffee sectors specialists and stakeholders;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and gentlemen;

I warmly welcome you to Ethiopia, the country that gave the gift of coffee to the world! It is a great pleasure to be in this panel where gender equality and coffee; the two topics that are too close to home are discussed.

For centuries, Coffee has been an integral part the Ethiopian culture and identity. Today coffee is the country's most valued export commodity and a very special part of our social fabric. It is a means of livelihood for about 20 million Ethiopians out of which the majority are women.

In the Ethiopian tradition coffee with its colourful ceremony has always been closely related to women. And no discrimination lies among men and women in their right to enjoy a cup of coffee. But as coffee evolved from being a centre of a simple social ceremony to an economic good; the inequalities between men and women in their right to enjoy the benefits from coffee grew disproportionately. The situation is not very different in many of the developing countries where coffee is primarily produced by small holder farmers in which women represent the majority of the labour force.

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen;

Assuming the level of enlightenment and civilization the world has embarked on today, it is easy to think that the job of convincing everyone on the importance of empowering women economically, socially and politically is already done. But then; in this era of unparalleled global wealth why are millions of women still confined in poverty, with their unmatched contribution to the global economy not recognised, let alone fairly rewarded?

Why did we not succeed beyond promises and plans to ensure that women have equally and actively present in all the business and political spheres where decisions that affect them and their families are taken?

By asking these questions I am not diminishing or reducing the fact that there are visible improvements in the living conditions and economic status of women everywhere. We do live in a richer world today than we did 15 years ago. And many developing countries including my country Ethiopia made significant strides towards meeting the millennium development goals most importantly in areas of poverty reduction, healthcare and education. However, I firmly believe that if the general consensus “investing in women is key to the betterment of society” was truly manifested in all of our policies, strategies and investment priorities the women poverty analysis of our world today would have been much less solemn. So, the job of convincing everyone in the importance of gender equality and women economic empowerment is not finished yet. And it will not be finished until we overcome the social, political and economic exclusion of women everywhere. The condition of women in the coffee sector is a clear example of how much more needs to be done in order to provide women with equal opportunities as well as the means to grasp and utilise these opportunities effectively.

Women represent the significant share of the workforce in the coffee value chain. However, they are not equal beneficiaries of the gains from the global coffee market which is worth more than 20 billion US dollars. For example according to the 2015 study of the African Development Bank, in Ethiopia women make up 75% of the coffee-industry workforce, but only control 43% of the revenue.

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen;

Changing this situation and making women enjoy the benefits of their hard work calls for a multidimensional and coordinated effort where governments, non-state actors, development partners and most importantly the women themselves take a central part.

Creating an enabling environment for women to become the primarily beneficiaries of the coffee sector as well as all other economic and social spheres is the foundation of a transformative change towards women economic empowerment. This means orienting all of our policies and strategies from gender perspectives; and better yet, ensuring that women are active contributors of the policy making and strategy development process. This also means providing women with equal access to agricultural extension services, financing as well as access to land.

In Ethiopia the establishment of the Ethiopia Commodity Exchange ECX was one of the measure taken towards creating an enabling environment. ECX a created an organised market place, where coffee buyers and sellers come together to trade and thus eliminate unjustifiably large number of intermediators between coffee growers, collectors, wholesalers and exporters. This was a significant positive step towards increasing the benefits of women that represent a significant share of coffee growers and collectors. These and other supportive regulatory structures enabled Ethiopia not only to maintain its place in the global coffee business but also to increase productivity by more than 6% even when Africa's coffee share to the world market declined.

We also need to invest in capacity development of women in coffee as in all other economic sectors. Entrepreneurship, leadership and sector specific skill development trainings are very important to enable women in the coffee sector to improve the quantity and quality of the coffee they grow, process or export.

Equally important to the policy and capacity building dimensions is the need to establish cooperation and networks among women in the coffee sector. This will give women in coffee a platform where they can find common solutions to their problems. This also gives them a strong voice and negotiating capacity to influence policies, strategies and market trends in their favour. Organising and networking women in coffee allows women to support and learn from each other. Most notably it also creates favourable conditions for the rise of largescale women-owned coffee-processing businesses that are capable of engaging in high-value activities of the coffee value chain including processing, roasting and exporting.

Another concrete measure towards ensuring gender equality in the coffee sector is access to wide and diversified markets. Linking women in coffee with international and local markets as well as other players in the value chain is important to increase their competitiveness and economic benefit. However the effort to create market links needs to be backed with measures that enable women to meet the international market demands. These includes increasing yield to ensure consists supply and improving and sustaining the quality of coffee produced. What needs a particular focus is also the effort to increase the share of processed coffee in the export market. In addition to increasing the value of sales in the global market this also creates more local jobs in the coffee value chain.

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen;

These are only a few among many measures that need to be taken in order to enable equal benefit of women in the coffee sector. I hope this panel will deliberate on the most important aspects of gender equality in the coffee sector. I am confident that the panel will

also forward concrete recommendations that are backed with authentic evidences and experiences from the primarily stakeholders of the industry. We are very keen to take back and use these recommendations to review and improve our operations.

Before I conducted I would like to emphasize the importance of a joint and genuine effort of governments, non-state actors and development partners that is informed and led by women themselves in order to bring visible results in women economic empowerment. Because gender equality is a result of an all rounded and gradual process we need to address the core problems surrounding the issue from all possible angles and engage all stakeholders and partners in the process. A persistent advocacy and reminder on the importance of empowering women need to continue until we see a world where women are recognised, appreciated and rewarded for their social, economic and political role that they play without limitations and barriers. The return of our investments on women has the power to transform economies and societies and thus bringing us closer to the world we all aspire to see.

Finally, I remind you not to miss the chance of enjoying a fresh cup of Ethiopia's finest coffee with its pleasant and welcoming ceremony. Only then you have been part of a truly Ethiopian coffee experience.

Thank you!