

- **Dear Honorable Madam Mayor of the City of Graz;**
- **Dear Honorable Presidents and Representatives of the African and Austrian Local Authorities;**
- **Dear participants,**

I am Dr. Fatna El K-hiel, from the Kingdom of Morocco, Vice-President of the REFELA Network for North Africa, President of REFELA-Morocco national chapter, and President of the Communal Council of Arbaoua in my third term. I also had the honor of serving in the Government of His Majesty King Mohammed VI—May God Assist and Protect Him—and in the Parliament of my country.

I am honored to be with you today on behalf our REFELA President, Honorable Lord Mayor of the City of Banjul of the Gambia, Ms Roheye Lowe on mission to advocate for our rights in United Nations New York Headquarters, and who conveys her sincere greetings and encouragement to all of you.

We are also honored and delighted to be part of this Program initiated and designed by UCLG Africa through its ALGA Academy and the International Center for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Level under the auspices of UNESCO. Allow me in this regard to express our gratitude to both Mr Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, the Secretary General of UCLG Africa and Dr Klaus Starl, Director of the International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels under the auspices of UNESCO, as great supporters of women's rights.

This program, which focuses on promoting women's rights at the local level, is timely as we celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Commitments from the International Community.

While many battles have been won by women and girls, many milestones were achieved, there are still, at the global level, and especially at the local level, several manifestations and issues of inequality, discrimination, violence, and vulnerability that affect both women and girls everywhere, but in particular in Africa, and in particular at the local level.

In my country, under the vision, guidance, and leadership of His Majesty the King, women and girls benefit from a supportive, enabling environment that respects women's rights, mobilizing all the actors and levels of governance, based on inclusive and participatory approaches.

Several reforms, including the Constitution of 2011, have been undertaken at the political, legal, institutional, and technical levels to enable women to access leadership positions, gain access to power, and benefit from resources, support, and guidance in various forms, which have allowed the Kingdom of Morocco to be considered among the countries that respect women's rights.

**Dear all,**

At the level of UCLG Africa, the Constitution of this Panafrikan Organization considers as founding Values:

- The respect for human dignity, equality and promotion of human rights and liberties;
- The respect for the equality of people, without discrimination of race or beliefs;
- The Gender equality.

In this same Constitution (Article 16), the Network of African Women Local Elected Officials (REFELA) is considered as UCLG Africa Standing Committee on gender equality.

Indeed, REFELA Network, created in 2011 in Tangiers (Morocco), is a key lever to promote women's rights. So many advantages can be shared since then, let me name few:

1. REFELA is giving a space to women at subnational level to be visible (like today) and to rise their voice (our President these days in U.N. Headquarters);
2. It's a strategic lever to advocate for women and girls rights, in particular for the localization of the international commitments (the SDG 5 for example) and the national policies and strategies;
3. REFELA is advocating also for 3 main campaigns on:
  - a. Zero tolerance of violence against women and girls,
  - b. Economic empowerment of women and girls,
  - c. Zero tolerance of street children.

**4.** REFELA is also an important space to empower, skill, build and develop the capacities of women at the local level.

However, when it comes to the territorial and local dimension, women and girls are still facing several challenges and obstacles.

Before concluding, allow me to thank all the participants present with us today, and I wish our work and discussions a great success.

Thank you for your kind attention./.