

*By Jeje Muhinde;*

Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Patricia Scotland has urged nations and leaders to do more to ensure that women and girls are central to the development of the nation.

Ms. Scotland made the remarks on Monday at the official opening of the two-day Commonwealth Women's Forum (CWF) meeting, convening together over 500 delegates from varied stakeholders groups, and leaders from all domains.

The first-ever Commonwealth Women's Forum in Africa, was officially opened by the First Lady, Mrs. Jeannette Kagame, under the theme "Delivering a Common Future: Transforming for Gender Equality"

She said, ""We must strive together to unleash the power of all women and girls in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Women's Forum is a golden opportunity to take decisive steps towards these goals and build a safer, more secure, more prosperous future for all,"

"By empowering women, and working for gender equality and inclusiveness, we are putting the 'common' into 'wealth', and the 'wealth' into the Commonwealth.

"Every hour, the Commonwealth is working together through exchange of knowledge and information to transform the lives of millions of people for women and girls for men and boys, the families and communities too," She added

"We must strive together to unleash the power of all women and girls in the Commonwealth," She said citing Rwanda as an example

Ms underlined, "I salute Rwanda's achievements in ensuring women and girls are central to the development of the nation. The political will and commitment to bring these achievements remain the exception and not the rule."

"When I became Secretary-General in 2016, I pledged that we would put the wealth back into the common but now I know we were determined to put the common back into wealth and that common demands that women should be at the table,"

"Gender empowerment and inclusiveness are central to that mission. I am so proud of what we have achieved together," she said, adding that gender equality is at the very heart of the Commonwealth's collective goals of social, and economic

development.

Scotland urged nations to collaborate through respect and understanding, support and express love for one another in order to achieve the efforts to transform the future of the girls and women across 54 Nations.

In her comments, the First Lady of Rwanda, Jeannette Kagame said, “It is my hope that this Women’s Forum goes down in memory as the catalyst of deep lasting transformation for women and girls in Commonwealth countries and beyond.”

“The term Global Reset resonates with me. How can we reset the button on women’s leadership, agency, and empowerment? For one woman’s dialogues must be in the mainstream of key decision-making processes.” H.E. Jeannette Kagame observed.

“As if the challenges of women are not hard enough, the world is today faced with a multitude of crises which only serve to further widen the gender gap and deepen the economic divide.”

The CWF’s mission is to assert massive support and promote top-level policies for gender equality and human rights, provide women with opportunities to interact with Heads of Government; and ensure the Commonwealth’s gender equality obligations are a concern for Heads of Government.

The forum featured several sessions, including “Women in Leadership: Beyond Numbers” which focused on what meaningful leadership is, and what it looks like. This focused on women playing a meaningful role in leadership and ensuring high levels of women’s representation in decision-making, among other areas.

Key speakers included Ms. Cherie Blair CBE, QC, Founder and Chair of Omnia Strategy LLP, and Founder of the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women.