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### **African Countries Send Representatives to the Summit of Mount Kilimanjaro as part of the UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign**

**Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, 5 March 2012** – Today, 75 men, women and youth commenced their three day trek to the top of Africa's highest mountain – Mt. Kilimanjaro, standing at 5,895m or 19,341-ft above sea level with an extraordinary humanitarian objective. The 75 climbers representing 36 African countries, 14 United Nations agencies, businesses, women's rights activists and civil society organisations are participating in a continent-wide campaign to end violence against women and girls. This initiative is part of Africa UNiTE, the Africa component of the United Nations Secretary-General's global campaign *UNiTE to End Violence against Women*. The Climb under the theme 'Speak Out, Climb Up' aims to:

- Raise awareness and the visibility of violence against women and girls as a key issue for development, peace and security in Africa; and
- Mobilize national commitments from African governments civil society organisations, the private sector and development partners to take action to prevent violence against women, provide services to survivors, and end impunity by perpetrators of the violence by 2015.

Violence against women and girls remains a serious human rights abuse and a major development challenge around the world with devastating impacts on women and girls, families and costs that deter development and progress of societies at large. It is estimated that 40 to 60 per cent of known sexual assaults within the family are committed against girls aged 15 years and younger; female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is practiced in 28 countries in Africa and accounts for 90% of FGM in the world, with rates as high as 99% in some countries, and in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo women and girls continue to be victims of horrendous sexual violence – used as a weapon of war.

At Marangu Gate, H.E. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, president of the Republic of Tanzania flagged off the climbers who are expected to reach the summit on March 8, International Women's Day.

As he sent them off, the President Kikwete told the climbers *“I want you to **Climb Up and Shout out** at the top of your voices when you reach the summit. Let the echo of your voices reverberate back to us so that we hear you from the heights above. Indeed, silence can no longer be tolerated.”* The President decried the prevalence of violence against women and girls and its negative impacts, asserting that violence against women is undermining Africa’s efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. He observed that at the regional level, Africa has the policy framework necessary to achieve the goal of ending violence against women and called on all governments to ensure that they take concrete actions to implement existing commitments including by ensuring that ending violence against women and girls is reflected in national planning frameworks and that adequate funding is provided for sustained actions.

Speaking on behalf of the UN organizations participating in the Africa UNiTE, John Hendra, Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women said *“In the spirit of Julius Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania, we all have a responsibility to keep the candle burning bright to end violence against women and girls – both at the top of Mount Kilimanjaro and all around the world”*

He also highlighted the fact that violence against women and girls is a heavy burden for all countries around the world with devastating costs and consequences, not only to the human rights and lives of those affected but also to societies and economies as a whole. Such violence translates into millions of dollars of lost wages and productivity and additional health, counseling, police and legal costs to already overstretched public budgets every year.

*“Reaching the summit of Kilimanjaro is a metaphor for overcoming life’s adversities and during these next few days, underlines the importance of creating positive, social change,”* said three-time climber Michael J. Connery, Jr. president/CEO of United Nations Federal Credit Union (UNFCU), a longtime Kilimanjaro Initiative and UN Women partner. UNFCU, a member-owned, New York City-based financial cooperative, contributed towards the provisioning of the climb, as well as insurance coverage for the climbers through high-risk provider Clements Worldwide.

The same message was also echoed by the climbers themselves. *“The climb will be rigorous and painful, but I will get to the peak. So is our fight for emancipation as women, it might be long and painful, but we will get there”*, said a smiling 29-year-old Flight Lieutenant Betty Ncube from Harare, Zimbabwe.

The Climb was organized by the UN System in collaboration with the African Union Commission, Nairobi-based NGO Kilimanjaro Initiative, U.S. nonprofit GlobalBike Inc. with support from other partners.

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### **About Africa UNiTE**

Africa-UNiTE is the regional component of the United Nations Secretary-General's global campaign *UNiTE to End Violence against Women*. The overall objective of the campaign is to mobilize and support governments in fulfilling their commitments to end violence against women and girls. Africa UNiTE was launched by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Jean Ping on 30 January 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Africa UNiTE is an inter-UN Agency initiative bringing together over 11 UN organizations including UN Women, UNFPA, UNECA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, OHCHR, WFP, ILO, DPKO and UN Habitat in support of the African Union and African countries to undertake coordinated substantial and sustained actions to eliminate violence against women and girls. The campaign is coordinated by UN Women and UNFPA. Learn more about the climb and Africa UNiTE at [africaunitecampaign.org](http://africaunitecampaign.org). Follow @SayNO\_UNiTE #KiliUNiTE on Twitter.

### **About Kilimanjaro Initiative (KI)**

Nairobi, Kenya-based NGO Kilimanjaro Initiative, as its name indicates, is inspired by Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa. Every year, KI organizes an ascent to the rooftop of Africa, bringing together youth and community stakeholders from around the world. The annual climb is a way of raising awareness of some of the social issues confronted by young persons, as well as encouraging cross-cultural dialogue. To-date, more than 150 young climbers from disadvantaged areas in East Africa, including the Kibera Slum, as well as Brazil have made the ascent and become leaders in their respective communities. Follow the climb on [ki.org/facebook](http://ki.org/facebook) or on Twitter @TChallenKI

### **About United Nations Federal Credit Union (UNFCU)**

UNFCU offers a wide array of flexible savings, loan, investment and insurance products, as well as advisory services and a culture of corporate social responsibility. Membership is open to staff of the United Nations, its specialized agencies, retirees and their families. UNFCU members reside in more than 200 countries and territories. Headquartered and with branches in New York City, UNFCU has representative offices in Geneva, Switzerland; Vienna, Austria; Nairobi, Kenya, and Rome, Italy. For more information, please visit its website at [www.unfcu.org](http://www.unfcu.org). Follow news about the climb and UNFCU social responsibility activities on facebook at [unfcu.org/facebook](http://unfcu.org/facebook).

### **About Globalbike, Inc.**

Ride. Transform. 2012 is a project of Globalbike, Inc, an all-volunteer 501c3 nonprofit based in the Upstate of South Carolina with a mission to use the transformative power of bikes to create positive social change in the developing world. Founded in 2007, globalbike now has over 700 bikes on the ground in eight different countries and on two continents. Globalbike locally sources all bikes and works with local agencies in each community to identify bike recipients who are already engaged in good works and who will benefit their community most by receiving the bike. Follow the tour @globalbike.