

Open Session on the Role of Women in Conflict Prevention and Post Conflict Peace building

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Tomorrow (19 March) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will have an open session on 'The Role of Women in Conflict Prevention and Post Conflict Peace Building: the Contributions of Women Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Returnees'.

During this session, it is expected that Bineta Diop, the AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security will brief the PSC. The PSC Chair of the month, Catherine Mwangi Ambassador of Kenya and Smail Chergui, the Commissioner for Peace and Security, are also expected to make a statement. UNHCR representative will also make an intervention. Refugees are expected to share their experiences as well.

The main focus as indicated in the concept note is to highlight the role of women's participation in prevention, mediation and peace building efforts by particularly focusing on the experiences of displaced and refugee women. The session makes linkage to the annual 2019 AU theme on Refugees, IDPs and Returnees. Over a third of the world's forcibly displaced persons are found in Africa, including some 6.3 million refugees and 14.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). Conflicts account for more than two-third of the humanitarian crises inducing internal displacement and refugee flows.

While it is known that displacement and refugee flows in Africa disproportionately affect women and children, it remains unclear how far policy and humanitarian responses are

informed by this fact. Additionally, despite being the primary victims of combined effects of political and humanitarian crises, women continue to be excluded from having effective role in the policy and humanitarian response decision-making processes and in the peace agreement negotiations and mediations. This session offers the opportunity for the effective integration of women in the AU activities on the theme of the year.

The PSC at its 600 meeting highlighted the violence experienced by women and their exclusion from peace efforts by particularly making reference to the 'low levels of participation of women in a variety of official roles in formal peace processes and political settlements, weak support to women's economic recovery and empowerment in post-conflict settings'. Hence finding long-term solutions to conflicts requires addressing the multiple obstacles faced by women and facilitating their meaningful participation at all levels of peace processes.

This open session will build on the previous PSC session on women, peace and security held in October 2018. It is to be recalled that at that session the PSC underscored 'the importance of including women in decision-making positions and in all stages of peace processes.' There is also the need for supporting grassroots and community centered peacebuilding processes informed by the perspectives and needs of the primary affected populations, which improve ownership and effectiveness of peace processes. Ensuring that voices of displaced populations are considered in decision making will contribute towards a more responsive and sustainable peace process as well as post-conflict reconstruction.

The 2019 focus of the AU theme of the year has presented the opportunity to renew efforts to advocate for the increased respect of displaced women's rights. Most particularly, it serves as the occasion to raise critical issues around the experience of women and to systematically enhance their

participation in peacebuilding processes and in efforts to address the plight of IDPs and refugees.

As indicated in the AUC report 'Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa', published by the office of the Special Envoy in 2016, the continent has demonstrated leadership by establishing extensive body of instruments and policies which are relevant to the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda including the Protocol to the African Union Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA). And more specifically the AU Commission has put efforts towards operationalizing the UN Security Council resolution 1325. There is however poor implementation of these standards. To date only 25 countries have developed national action plans of the UNSC resolution 1325. Women's representation in the legislature, the security sector and peacekeeping forces and mediation remains low.

With the aim of enhancing implementation and monitoring the office of the Special Envoy has developed the Continental Results Framework (CRF) for Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The CRF was adopted in May 2018 by the PSC and was launched last month. The intervention by the Special Envoy may provide an overview of the framework in line with the pillars of the UNSCR 1325 namely prevention, protection, participation, relief and recovery focusing on the conditions of displaced and refugee women.

The concept note indicates that the outcome of the session is to mainstream the experiences of refugee and IDP women and girls in AU's relevant policy process. In line with this objective the session may examine how the experiences of refugees and IDPs can be used to inform policy making in the AU, including the PSC. In terms of the return or local integration or resettlement of IDPs or refugees, the issues

that this session could address include the safety, dignity and consent of displaced women, which should be at the core of any intervention towards durable solutions. The efforts towards sustainable peace and recovery cannot be disassociated from programs geared towards addressing the specific violations experienced by displaced women.

In humanitarian context particularly in protracted crises, displacement is often times cyclical. This exposes the overwhelming majority of displaced women to a continuous state of vulnerability. Hence, prolonged crises necessitate long term intervention that enhances displaced women's resilience and their role in decision making processes. In line with the objectives of durable solutions, lifesaving assistance and protection should be further complemented by a support that is more empowering and that increases displaced women's self-sufficiency, which will positively enhance their decision making role.

It is anticipated that the session makes reference to the ongoing commemorative events of the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention and the 2009 AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention). The discussion may elaborate on how the two instruments and the WPS agenda can mutually reinforce one another in ensuring that peace processes are informed by the needs of refugee and displaced women and explicitly aim at addressing their plights.

The expected outcome is a press statement. The Council may welcome the recently launched CRF and may call on member states and RECs to provide the necessary data and information for the completion of the annual report produced by the office of the Special Envoy. The statement may underscore the importance of UNSCR 1325 national and regional action plans. It may also address issues related to the systematic integration of the needs and perspectives of women refugees and IDPs in conflict management and peacebuilding processes as

well as humanitarian action. The PSC may call for the use of indicators that ensure the inclusion of women in all these efforts and underscore the need for renewed efforts in removing the obstacles that impede women's full participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.