

Ministerial High-Level Meeting on Women, Peace and Security in Africa

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Date | 22 March 2024

Tomorrow (23 March), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene a ministerial high-level seminar on women, peace and security (WPS), with a specific focus on women's participation and leadership in peace processes in Africa.

Peya Mushelega, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of Namibia and Chairperson of the PSC for the month will deliver opening remarks followed by Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). Bineta Diop, Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on WPS and Hanna Tetteh, UN Secretary General Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa are expected to brief the Council on the progress made in the implementation of WPS Agenda in line with the relevant instruments of the AU and UN. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Special Representative of United Nations (UN) Secretary-General to the AU and Head of UN Office to AU (UNOAU) and representative of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are expected to make statements on the strategic objectives of the ministerial high-level PSC meeting. Other participants expected to contribute to the discussions include Shirley Botchwey, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Republic of Ghana and PSC member; Liberata Mulamula, Steering Committee of African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) and Member of the FemWise-Africa Network; Effie Owour, Co-Chair of FemWise-Africa and Member of the AU Panel of the Wise; Mpule Kgetsi, African Youth Ambassador for Peace for

Southern Africa and Renata Dalaqua, Head of Programme of Gender and Disarmament of UN Institute for Disarmament Research. Of particular significance is also the on the ground experience from women peace builders from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan.

Being convened within the framework of international women's day on the occasion of which the PSC annually convenes a meeting during the month of March, tomorrow's meeting, organised as a high-level ministerial seminar, is aimed at highlighting the 20th anniversary of the operationalization and official launch of PSC by taking stock of women's participation and leadership in peace processes in Africa. The last time the PSC discussed the WPS agenda at its [1187th](#) meeting, the AU Special Envoy for WPS was requested to conduct a comprehensive review of the status of women's involvement in peace processes and to propose recommendations for enhancing women's engagement in this respect. Tomorrow's ministerial session accordingly fits into and presents opportunity for discussing the work that the Special Envoy is undertaking in this respect.

As emphasised in the various outcome documents of PSC's sessions on this topic, women, who continue to be disproportionately impacted by armed conflicts and other forms of threats to peace security in the continent, are yet to be proportionately and meaningfully involved in decision-making and peace processes. This is despite the encouraging policy and normative level work that has been done by the AU, various Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) and member states.

At the continental level for example, the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and specifically the articulation under Article 10 of the Protocol granting women the 'right to participate in the promotion and

maintenance of peace' and imposing responsibility on member states to 'take all appropriate measures to ensure the increased participation of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding' has been a critical step. The institutionalisation of WPS as an agenda item of the PSC, the appointment of the AU Special Envoy for WPS, the establishment of FemWise-Africa, and the adoption of the Continental Results Framework (CRF) for tracking implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on WPS by member states constitute key milestones and institutional processes towards ensuring women's involvement in peace processes.

At the regional level as well, some RECs/RMs have adopted Regional Action Plans (RAPs) for the realisation of WPS agenda and are engaged in promoting the WPS through the adoption and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) by member states across their respective regions. Further to the development of NAPs by 34 countries as of December 2023, a number of member states have also taken the necessary steps for implementing their NAPs through the enactment of relevant policies.

Despite these efforts and achievements, most of the work done for the realisation of WPS agenda in Africa, particularly the meaningful participation of women in peace process remains restricted largely to the adoption of norms and principles. In terms of expanding the representation and participation of women in peace processes at various levels nationally and continentally, the progress remains far from satisfactory. This is not however for lack of women activism and mobilization for peace. Various women-led initiatives, particularly at the grassroots level, play a significant role in advancing conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding through the deployment of community focused dialogues, advocacy, joint calls for ceasefires, identification of women's priorities and specific experiences in conflict

settings and other critical contributions. Yet, the lack of their formal involvement suggests that the formal (track 1 peace processes) and similar platforms lack the flexibility and the tools to tap into and establish close working arrangements that ensure the channelling of the work of women groups at local levels into the formal processes. Indeed, it is not uncommon for local level women groups and movements to accuse such track 1 diplomacy processes for their elitism and hence exclusionary mode of organization and operation. Thus, such women-led peace initiatives in the so-called 'informal arena' do not get to have their members and engagements to directly shape policy and decision-making on matters relevant to continental peace and security, in the 'formal' settings.

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In terms of areas of peace processes for women participation, one important aspect of peace processes in which women are glaringly missing is in peace negotiations and mediation. In recent years, various peace talks and negotiations were initiated in a number of countries across the continent including in countries such as South Sudan and Ethiopia, and in the ongoing peace processes for Sudan such as on ceasefire,

women's role and participation was mostly lacking despite the fact that women have faced the brunt of conflicts and instability disproportionately. Regardless of their experience, involvement of women at the formal negotiation tables and in mediation processes in these and other African countries has been largely underwhelming, if not virtually missing.

Another key area within the scope of peace processes with respect to which women continue to be insufficiently engaged and involved in is the deployment of AU-led peace support operations and UN peacekeeping missions. Despite the existing rich normative framework for enhancing women's increased participation in the deployment of AU-led peace support operations, practice clearly demonstrates that gender is yet to be effectively mainstreamed in the recruitment and employment of female troop members deployed within this framework. Primarily, this is an issue to be tracked to troop contributing countries who need to set up gender quotas and take the necessary measures to increase enrolment of women troop members in various ranks. At the AU level, there is also need for developing specific guidelines to encourage recruitment of women personnel by troop contributing countries.

In UN peacekeeping missions deployed in Africa, some progress has been made in ensuring gender parity in the deployment of troops. While the experiences of women peacekeepers and their unique contributions to bridge cultural barriers in specific settings is a key practice demonstrating the critical nature of women's engagement in such capacity, UN peacekeeping missions also continue to confront challenges mainly associated with insufficient enrolment of women in national military and police forces, patriarchal perceptions of the roles of women and the absence of family-friendly policies, according to the 2018-2028 UN Peacekeeping Gender Parity Strategy.

Tomorrow's ministerial high-level PSC meeting offers an

opportunity to take stock of the various bottlenecks that continue to hamper representation and effective participation of women and chart avenues for addressing them. As the foregoing discussion illustrate, these challenges canvassed during the [4th High-Level Africa Forum on Women, Peace and Security](#) held at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa last December include 'a broader and more deeply ingrained resistance to women's participation, limitations within the existing framework of peace processes, isolated approaches that primarily focus on women's security in conflict situations, and a failure to recognize the continuum of violence that women face in both peace and conflict contexts.'

The expected outcome of tomorrow's meeting is a Communiqué. The PSC is expected to welcome the milestones achieved in the implementation of WPS in Africa since its establishment and most notably since it institutionalized WPS as a standing agenda in 2010. Noting the remaining work that needs to be done for the full realisation of UNSCR 1325 and WPS agenda in the continent, the PSC may underscore the need to enhance at the continental, regional and local levels, the meaningful participation and representation of women throughout all aspects of conflict prevention and resolution as well as peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. To this end, the PSC may call on the AU and its member states to create more flexible and women friendly mode of organization and operation of formal peace/political processes in order to effectively tap into women mobilization and work at the informal or grassroots levels. The PSC may also call on the AU and its member states to establish systems and incentives that facilitate the recruitment and appointment of women in the political, diplomatic and security fields as the foundation for expanding the pool that would increase women's representation and participation including in leadership roles in national, regional and continental peace processes. It may call on the AU, through the office of the Special Envoy for WPS and the Fem-Wise, to upscale efforts for enhanced

engagement of women in peace processes including in the deployment of preventive diplomacy, mediation and in peacekeeping missions as well as peace support operations.