

Open Session on Urbanisation, Women, Peace and Security Nexus

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Tomorrow (8 February) the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) will convene its 1063rd session on 'Urbanization, Women, Peace and Security in Africa'. The meeting will be held at ministerial level.

Following the opening remarks of Raychelle Omamo, Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Kenya and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of February 2022, Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security is expected to make a statement. Bineta Diop – AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security and President of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), Maimunah Mohd Sharif – the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and Mabigue Ngom – Senior Advisor to the Executive Director and Director of the UNFPA Representation Office to AU and UNECA are expected to deliver presentations.

The session is convened as part of PSC's standing theme on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). However it is for the first time that the PSC is considering the WPS agenda in relation to urbanization. In this context the session is expected to reflect on the effects of urbanization on the safety and wellbeing of women. Urbanization is often times associated with development, notably both Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 recognize urbanization as a driver of sustainable growth and transformation. However, there is also an increasing trend of instability due to the lack of proper management and planning of urbanization and urban spaces.

Africa is urbanizing rapidly. The rate of urbanization is

projected to reach 60% in 2050. Similarly urban population in the continent is expected to triple in the coming decades. However rapid and unplanned urbanization has led to the formation of informal settlements, the expansion of slums as well as insecurity in these spaces. Urban violence in Africa has spiked to 41% in the second decade of 2000 despite the fact that Africa's urbanization has remained limited as compared to other parts of the world. The adverse effects of urbanization have been particularly grave on women. Gender inequality and the lack of protection mechanisms has particularly exposed women to specific sets of challenges. Women are particularly affected by growing urban insecurity and its consequences in the form of sexual and gender based violence and forced eviction. Discriminatory inheritance laws and legal limitations over women's land ownership has led to their arbitrary eviction and displacement. These legal gaps and the lack of protection of women's basic human rights has deprived their access to livelihood and compelled them to live in a perpetual cycle of economic dependence and uncertainty .

Governments are grappling with managing the rising expectations of citizens that emanate from rapid urbanization and delayed socio-economic transformation that is expected to uplift people from poverty. The unmet expectations of people have contributed to growing frustration and particularly the youth have expressed their discontent through protest and even riots demanding for better socio-economic opportunities and prospect.

The other aspect of instability related to urbanization is the increasing trend of conflicts taking place in cities. Warfare in the continent is increasingly taking an urban dimension. Fighting and terrorist attacks are taking place in populated cities and targeting civilian population. In addition to the violence which women experience in times of conflicts, the destruction of vital infrastructure deprives their access to life saving and health care services, which is already weak in

pre-conflict period. Women also constitute the majority of displaced population. Hence creating another layer of complexity for women in urban humanitarian settings.

According to the concept note, the open session aims to provide a platform for participants to discuss, highlight and explore the nexus between urbanization and women, peace and security in Africa. It also aims to explore the role that sustainable urbanization and effective cities and local governments can play in preventing the escalation of conflicts and preventing humanitarian crisis. The session is based on the need to examine the current situation of women across urban spaces and cities in the continent particularly in relation to peace and stability. Hence this session with a distinctive theme on urbanization and its impact on women is crucial to broaden the WPS agenda to also integrate emerging challenges related to the unique insecurities experienced by women in cities. Hence, the PSC may outline key policy recommendations and approaches to link the implementation of the WPS agenda with urbanization and conflicts in urban settings.

Tomorrow's session is also an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of investing in infrastructure to support the continent's inclusive development that is also able to address the underlying root causes of inequalities. In this aspect the nexus between peace and development is crucial in the prevention of conflicts and the creation of peaceful societies. During its 1055th session PSC has underlined the importance of 'creating inclusive societies and ensuring participation of women and youth in decision making processes related to peace, security and development'. Hence gender equality and the empowerment of women remain fundamental components of sustainable peace and development.

The expected outcome is a communique. The PSC may urge member states to ratify, domesticate and implement relevant international and regional frameworks on the urban agenda. The

Council may also reiterate its call to Member States to adopt national action plans (NAPs) for the proper implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 for members that have not yet done so and reflect in the NAPs mechanisms to advance the rights and protection of women in urban settings. The council may also urge for the development of the guidelines on mainstreaming women peace and security issues in the urban development and planning policies. The PSC may reiterate its previous call for member states to collect disaggregated data including impacts of urbanization to ensure that women's needs and experiences in fragile context inform policies. PSC may urge members states to address the safety and security of women and adopt policies that secure their ownership to land and resources to ensure the eventual realization of their economic independence. The PSC may also note the increasingly urban nature of crises, and the need to adapt the approaches to peace support operations that can respond to these specific challenges.