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**GENDER PRE-FORUM TO THE 11TH HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS,
AND GOVERNANCE: TRENDS, PROSPECTS, AND CHALLENGES**

THEME:

***WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AS AN ANTIDOTE FOR UNCONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES
OF GOVERNMENT***

CONCEPT NOTE

**20 - 21 NOVEMBER 2022
COTONOU, BENIN**

A. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Military takeovers and constitutional amendments to either reinforce executive powers or extend presidential terms have been and continue to be a common phenomenon in Africa's political landscape. From 1950–2010, the continent witnessed a total of 92 successful coups¹. The recent experiences of Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCG) in Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Guinea add to the list of other countries that have grappled with UCGs over the last decades. In recognition of this threat, the AU Heads of State and Government adopted a common position on UCG at the 1997 Harare summit. This paved way for further efforts at the continental level in addressing the challenges of UCG through normative frameworks, which include the 2000 Lomé Declaration, ACDEG 2007, the Accra Declaration of 2022 and the Malabo Decisions from the AU extraordinary on Unconstitutional Changes of Government and Terrorism in May 2022, which addressed issues surrounding UCG. However, despite these initiatives and efforts, the challenges of UCG continue to persist.

After decades of the push for the consolidation of democratic norms on the continent, the recurrence of Unconstitutional Changes of Government and their associated challenges are becoming a worrying trend which pose serious threats to governance, peace and stability on the continent. Complexities surrounding the end, extension and transfer of power in African countries have been a notable feature of the continent's state-building process. However, despite the democratic gains through electoral processes in many African countries, the rise in coups d'état, intense political contestations, third terms and constitutional amendments have plunged a number of countries into social, economic and political instability. Moreover, these issues have eroded the legitimacy of sitting governments, leading to protests and contestations over the legitimacy of governments in many countries.

Despite the responses designed and strategies employed at the continental, regional and national levels of governance, the management of UCG still remains a significant hurdle to continental stability. The resurgence of Unconstitutional Changes of Government with new dimensions continues to plague the continent, resulting in a huge setback in the continent's governance and democratic gains. The responses and enforcement measures undertaken by the AU and the RECs highlight both strategic, operational and technical deficits, which include lapses in relevant normative instruments; lack of conceptual clarity on UCG; varying application of sanctions and their chequered outcomes; lack of a structured continental early warning mechanism for UCG; weak early response; and poor coordination between the AU and the Regional Economic Communities amongst others.

As regional and continental institutions battle with solutions to handle and manage UCG, it is worth noting that other actors need to be involved in the fight against UCG. To achieve a better and effective outcome, there needs to be a deeper interrogation of UCG, nature of responses, and gaps that need to be addressed as well as highlighting the role of women which cannot be undermined or overlooked.

B. RATIONALE

¹ Powell, Jonathan & Clayton Thyne. 2011. Global Instances of Coups from 1950-Present (Dataset. *Journal of Peace Research* 48[2]: 249-259)

Women make up to 50% of Africa's population² and take a central role in strengthening democratic governance which is key to a peaceful and prosperous Africa. Often, women are only identified as victims and caregivers during violent conflicts, political unrest, military takeovers and coups in the continent. During violent conflicts and periods of insecurity, women are targeted and stripped of their rights of participating in decision-making and political processes, which directly affects the progress of the African Continent.

Moreover, recognizing and bolstering women's role in breaking this cycle of UCG is critical as it is the missing piece to the puzzle. Women are excellent leaders, mediators and have been found to be effective in ending and preventing violent conflict that have led to bloodshed. Although their contribution has often been less recognised, women played a significant role in liberation struggles and have fought wars against colonization and slavery. The women warriors of Dahomey Amazons from modern-day Republic of Benin are a stark illustration of women's contribution to our Continent in the fight against colonialism.

Women continue to contribute in many ways to the progress of the African continent, but this contribution is usually not recognised. Women have been in the front lines and have occupied spaces that have challenged military rule and have protested against coups³. Women were and are still working in the background to challenge the status quo and lead efforts to make peace across communities and countries. However, the stories of women have always been overlooked, hijacked or not provided due attention they deserve. Women are problem solvers, and having them contribute to the conversation on how to resolve issues of UCG in the continent is paramount. Women are not leading coups but they are suffering from the consequences⁴—they have a vested interest in creating an Africa where UCG are a thing of the past.

Research and practice have provided a clear linkage between the need for women's political participation and their positive impact on civil-military relations and reducing confrontations that lead to conflict. Strong empirical evidence has demonstrated that female leaders act less militaristically internationally and in interstate relations⁵. Hence a strong linkage exists between promoting higher numbers of female representation in politics, in parliament and leadership positions and reducing the risk of coups.

Creating a platform for conversations that attend to the realities of African women and register their contributions as well as recommendations for reversing UCG is critical. Due to the re-emergence of UCG in the African Continent, interlinked with security issues like the proliferation of terrorism, the enhancement of women's participation in politics and decision-making processes is not only an assurance of Africa's commitment to progress but can be a mechanism of de-escalating possible security challenges and reversing UCG in the Continent.

It is in light of this rationale that the African Union Organs and Institutions that form the African Governance Platform through the AGA —APSA Secretariat are organizing the annual Gender Pre-Forum to the 11th High-Level Dialogue under the theme of "WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AS ANTIDOTE FOR UNCONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT" from 20 to 21 November 2022 in Cotonou, Benin.

² World Bank Report, Data on African's Population; <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=ZG>. Accessed Sept 2022

³ Amid Coup, Sudan's women fight to keep hard-won rights, brown, Ryan Leneora, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2021/1028/Amid-coup-Sudan-s-women-fight-to-keep-hard-won-rights> , Accessed Sept 2022.

⁴ Men's Coups, Women's Troubles, Yesim Arat, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/648037/pdf>

⁵ Right "Mana" for the job? the influence of Gender on Civil-Military Friction, Theresa Schroeder and Jonathan Powell, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48609255#metadata_info_tab_contents, Accessed Sept 2022

The discussions held during the Gender-Pre forum will be feeding into the 11th HLD. The forum is designed to provide a space for women of all spheres to deliberate about the recent developments on our Continent, lay the building blocks of the Africa we want and develop innovative solutions.

C. THEMATIC FOCUS

The Gender Pre forum will generally focus on the phenomenon of Unconstitutional Changes of Government, with sub-thematic areas that will guide the discussions on addressing the Gender angle to UCG. Discussions will give prominence to the historical, legal and normative context, take a deep dive into specific thematic areas that are Gender specific to draw lessons, craft solutions and a pathway for an inclusive implementation that identifies gender at the center.

- 1. RESURGENCE OF UNCONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT: A SETBACK FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA:** Women have made considerable contributions to democratic governance practices on the Continent. Recent Resurgence of UCG has undoubtedly been a setback to the progress that has been made on women's human rights on the Continent. This session will explore these setbacks, the use of Gender-based violence as a weapon of war and studies the current state of women's rights by making specific reference to ongoing political crises on the Continent.
- 2. ANALYSIS OF AU AND RECS' NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS DURING UCG:** This thematic area will provide an opportunity to explore the normative and legal framework of the African Union and the RECs specifically focusing on the pre-existing dispositions for women's rights and their protection in times of coups and political crisis. By sharing experiences and drawing lessons from the past, the panel and the public will discuss solutions to enhance the protection of women's fundamental rights in times of conflicts.
- 3. WOMEN AT THE HELM: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONTRIBUTING TO PEACEFUL POLITICAL TRANSITIONS AND NORMALIZING CIVIL AND MILITARY RELATIONSHIPS:** Historically, women have been considered primarily as victims of political transitions. However, women have been at the centre of resistance movements before colonisation and during the fight for independence. This session will discuss the historical role women played fighting against colonialism, independence but also the role they are playing for peaceful transitions of power as mediators, facilitators or peacekeepers thereby breaking the hyper-masculinity and patriarchal social norms.
- 4. STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMATION: STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AS ANTIDOTE TO UCG:** Studies have shown that there is a positive political benefit to increasing women's presence in politics, as the benefits of women holding political office outweighs any challenges. This session will allow speakers and discussants to explore women's active political participation as an antidote to UCG to better understand the impact of women on politics and identify factors that influence domestic politics and international relations broadly.
- 5. INCLUSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACCRA AND MALABO DECLARATION AGAINST UCG** : This section sets to build on the practicalities of the implementation of the Accra and Malabo declaration against UCG. Panellists will discuss and make proposals on how women can be at the forefront of the roadmap for implementation. This session will discuss the role of the Member States, AU, Organs and RECs, CSOs and other stakeholders in taking practical steps in the implementation of the Accra and Malabo Declaration.

6. **AFRICA TALKS:** This session is designed as an intergenerational conversation to allow the exchange of experiences and showcase women's contributions to democratic values and against UCG, through their resilience and power.
7. **INTERLUDE:** Interludes between sessions will be provided through creative means by sharing inspiring and relevant performances of culture, music, and videos that are meant to inspire participants.

D. ABOUT THE GENDER PRE-FORUM

The Gender Pre-Forum to the 11th HLD will be convened under the auspices of the African Governance Platform (AGP), Women Engagement Strategy (AGP). The main focus of the Pre-Forum is to provide a safe space for women to contribute to the discourse of achieving durable solutions to UCG. Deliberations will contribute to policy discussions by AU Policy Organs. The Pre-Forum also aims to harness women's insights, capacities, and creativity to offer solutions to UCG through intergenerational and inter-regional exchanges.

In furtherance, the outcomes of the gender pre-forum will be part of the deliberations of the 11th High-Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human rights and Governance exploring trends, challenges and prospects. The Gender Pre-Forum will also contribute to and complement policy discussions on the 11th HDL theme.

E. GOAL

The overall goal of the Gender Pre-Forum to the 11th HLD is to provide a collaborative, open, and inclusive space to leverage and foster meaningful participation of women in policy deliberations reversing UCG in Africa.

F. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the Gender Pre-Forum are to:

1. To provide a platform for historical reflections on women in leadership and governance and create a collaborative space for ideas on how women can contribute to the current efforts against the re-emergence of UCG;
2. Increase the understanding of the AU Shared Values which are normative and institutional frameworks that exist at the national, regional, and continental levels of gender equality, particularly on leadership and governance;
3. To provide an opportunity for a focused discussion on the role of gender in political leadership and in the democratization of the Continent as an antidote to UCG .
4. Provide a space for women in leadership to share their experiences, challenges and lessons as they contribute to the discussions of women in governance, leadership and in the fight against the re-emergence of UCG; and encourage greater inclusion of women in political spaces as well as in policy dialogue and decision-making processes.

G. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The following outputs will be derived from the Gender Pre-Forum:

1. Increased understanding of the role of women in decision-making processes and reversing UCG ;
2. Increased understanding of the existing normative and institutional frameworks on gender equality, women in leadership and decision-making processes; and
3. Coordinate amplified voices of women on the issue of UCG.

H. EXPECTED OUTPUTS

1. An outcome statement of the conversations;
2. Proceedings report;
3. One (1) Policy Brief;
4. Press Releases and topical social media clips and sound bites; and
5. Excerpt and snapshots from Social Media Engagement (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram).

I. METHODOLOGY

The convening will be held physically and it will use a combination of methodologies to facilitate deliberation. Discussions will be conducted through several interactive strategies including:

1. Panel Discussions;
2. Deep dive conversations with high-profile individuals and experts;
3. Intergenerational conversations;
4. Africa Talks; and
5. Plenary forums.

The Panel Discussions will be designed to ensure an intergenerational exchange as well as a mix of policy and practitioner perspectives in the conversations along with showcasing practical initiatives. The Gender Pre-Forum will feature robust social media engagement, informative threads on sessions and sound bites and other innovative means to spur debate during, before, and after the meeting to engage a larger audience.

J. PARTICIPATION

Specifically, participants will be drawn from:

1. Gender-focused organizations working on democracy, governance, and Human Rights in general and specific thematic areas under consideration during this Pre-Forum;
2. AU Member States, including representatives of National Institutions, Agencies that focus on good governance, democracy, and Human Rights;
3. Selected Think Tanks and Academic Research Institutions with experience on issues of democratic governance, peace, and security;
4. Selected Media Practitioners;
5. Artist, Cultural, and Heritage organizations;
6. Representatives of the AGP;
7. International organizations, Development Partners, and UN Agencies; and
8. Diaspora.

K. DATES

The Gender Pre-Forum will be convened from **20 - 21 November 2022 in Cotonou, Benin.**

L. PARTNERSHIP, INSTITUTIONAL, AND MANAGEMENT

The Gender Pre-Forum to the HLD is an institutionalized initiative of the AGP aimed at facilitating women's participation in policy deliberations on democracy, governance, and human rights. The Pre-Forum will be supported by the Office of the Special Envoy on Women and Peace and Security with the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security leading the process through the AGA-APSA Secretariat.

M. DOCUMENTATION AND WORKING LANGUAGES

The documentation for the Pre-Forum will be shared electronically. All documents and news updates will be available on www.au.int/aga, **@AGA_Platform** on **#DGTrends**.

The Pre-Forum will be conducted in the **4 AU Languages** — Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese. Simultaneous interpretations are provided in all 4 languages while documentation will be provided in **French and English**.

N. CONTACT DETAILS

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