

## DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

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### **Inclusion of women in strengthening democratic governance for sustainable peace and development is inevitable.**

Despite several existing policies, mechanisms and platforms to advance the inclusion of women in the democratic governance and peacebuilding processes, the number and level of women involvement in these processes remain worryingly negligible. The Gender Pre-forum preceding the 9<sup>th</sup> High-Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance convened for two days to deliberate on the existing and emerging challenges as well as opportunities to advance the role and presence of women in governance and peacebuilding processes. Convened under the auspices of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Women Engagement Strategy (AGA-WES), the meeting interrogated practical steps to actualize the realization of the African Union theme of the year 2020, "Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development". The meeting also addressed the emerging threats on democracy and security on the continent, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Men and women experience conflict differently. Women are very often absent from the circles that take the decisions to go to war and those that negotiate peace settlements. Yet, over the years, women continue to mobilise internationally to achieve global peace and security. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, amongst others, has reaffirmed over the last two decades, the important role women play in preventing conflict and sustaining peace.

The meeting held under the theme, "Magnifying Women's Role in Conflict Prevention and Silencing the Guns", proposed strong recommendations that if fully implemented, will move the gender agenda forward. The recommendations, include among other key actionable points, the need for African Union member states to demonstrate high level political commitments to accelerate and scale up actions to ensure that women leadership in peace processes is fully recognized and acted upon. This should combine support for institutional reforms with focus on strengthening women's socio-economic and political capacities and addressing discriminatory social norms.

The need to enhance synergies and support women groups and networks which operate at the local and national levels, and also provide opportunities for strengthening women's participation in conflict prevention was restated. To boost the effectiveness of women, linkages must be built for their contributions to feed into the formal peacebuilding processes. Expanding the digital platform and access for women was also underscored as a major element to enhance access to information; opportunity to market products; form networks and community of practice. Strengthening inter-generational engagements is critical to empower a new generation of young African women leaders and experts to serve Africa and the world in designing and implementing development programmes in the context of Africa's Agenda 2063 and the global SDGs.

The realities of women that have been displaced or forced to migrate is often times indescribable. Even with temporary shelters made available for refugees and displaced women, the uncertainty, food insecurity, and poor living conditions remain an unfortunate part of the lives of women that have been displaced by conflict. Additionally, the women and girls are susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation and are more likely to be trafficked and engage in sexual transactions for humanitarian favours. Conflicts have often resulted in higher levels of sexual violence against women and girls which includes arbitrary killings, torture, femicide, the and often led into forced marriage.

African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs Minata Samate Cessouma revisited the existing challenges conflicts have on development on the continent, noting that, this continues to remain a stumbling block to the full realization of Agenda 2063. She observed that the greatest impact of conflicts is on women and children and in many situations, the gender perspectives of conflict are often side-lined with far-reaching negative impact on realizing sustainable solutions to security challenges. "We need to talk more about having women in leadership processes, in mediation, in governance and in politics. A continent where women are considered as equal contributors is a continent on a path to sustainable peace", she noted.

UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa Director, Ahunna Eziakonwa called for more support and relying on their ability to negotiate transformative change. "Women's rights are human rights and the ratification, domestication and implementation of key gender responsive global and regional human rights instruments should be prioritised. We need to act with a common purpose, shared urgency, and with bold steps to translate and bring the promises from these instruments to women's lived reality. Through various interventions, we are strengthening the capacity of Regional Institutions and

Member States for women and girls to further enjoy their rights in a bid to bring the much-needed transformation”, she stated.

In acknowledging the role of civil society organizations in advocacy for democracy and peace, African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop noted that women Civil Society Organizations play a vital role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding but are often subject to scrutiny and threats in conflict situations. When participating in peace processes women led organizations are often subjected to intimidation and harassments. “We must provide them with our political support and also technical and financial support to ensure that these leaders have the resources necessary to drive action. Outside formal structures, promoting peace by women often take place in informal systems. In many communities in conflict, women have had the courage to come together, breaking barriers and striving to heal wounds. In many instances, grassroot advocacy has been instrumental in building relationships and finding mutual understanding. A conversation that looks at the horizon must explore the institutional framework as well as explore critical, but often ignored structures”, she said.

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the African Union, and Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union, Hanna Tetteh noted that while there are several policies and platforms to advance women’s inclusion on democratic governance, peacebuilding and development, the missing link remains the level of implementation of these instruments. She underscored the need to enhance mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the commitments to African women, adding that adequate technical and financial resources as well as functional institutional frameworks should be prioritized. She added, “if we actively measure women’s participation in governance and actively hold governments accountable, then we should be able to make progress.”

Rich perspectives and practical recommendations were shared in the two-day deliberations and the outcome report will be shared at the 9<sup>th</sup> High Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance to influence the policy decisions and actions on the continent and globally. The forum was equally timely to give momentum to the African Union theme of the Year on [Silencing the Guns](#) in Africa; the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution [1325](#); the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action; and the related assurances to the women and girls of Africa with 2020 as the year for the universal ratification of the [Maputo Protocol](#) on women’s rights.

For more information, visit, the [9<sup>th</sup> High Level Dialogue](#).

**For further information please contact:**

Doreen Apollos, Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission | E-mail: [ApollosD@africa-union.org](mailto:ApollosD@africa-union.org) | [www.au.int](http://www.au.int) | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia

**Directorate of Information and Communication** | African Union Commission,  
**E-mail:** [DIC@african-union.org](mailto:DIC@african-union.org) | **Website:** [www.au.africa](http://www.au.africa) | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia  
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