

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Women’s participation must increase, not just numbers but quality of contributions to peace and security in the Great Lakes Region.

The African Union (AU) recognizes that women’s participation and leadership must be considered a primary element in the quest for peace and security on the continent. In recognition of the importance of women as equal partners in peace, security, governance and sustainable development, the African Union through the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security is facilitating a High-Level Regional Forum of Women of the Great Lakes Region focused on the ongoing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region.

Hosted by H.E. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, the President of the Republic of Angola and Facilitator of the Luanda Peace Process for the Democratic Republic of Congo, the forum will focus on strengthening women’s participation and leadership in peace and security processes in DR Congo and the Great Lakes Region. The two-day forum from the 18 – 19 October 2024 in Luanda, Angola, is a significant move towards fostering dialogue and collaboration and is critical to achieving a holistic and effective implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda by fully integrating gender perspectives into peace and security policies and programs in the region.

The security situation in the Great Lakes region has had devastating effects on women and girls, highlighting the need to strengthen women's participation and the integration of a gender perspective in ongoing regional peace processes. Delegates will assess women's contribution to peace-making initiatives, identify gaps and opportunities for women's meaningful participation, develop strategies to improve women's involvement and leadership in ongoing regional peace initiatives and identify ways in which women can support the Luanda peace process. The discussions will focus on peace, security and humanitarian situation in the Eastern DR Congo and its impact on women, and the participation of women in the peace and security processes.

The outcomes of the forum will be key in informing avenues to enhance a systematic, holistic and cohesive approach to gender issues in all security situations. The Women, Peace and Security Agenda presents a comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming in peace and security to ensure women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. It also preserves women's rights in conflict situations and promotes their participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts.

H.E. Bineta Diop, Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security underscores the African Union's commitment to ensure the voices of women are heard clearly and taken into consideration in conflict prevention and peacebuilding adding that "the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is a gender-mainstreaming approach aimed at promoting women's inclusion as active participants in maintaining peace and ensuring their protection and the integration of gender perspectives into the peace and security agenda at national, regional and continental levels. We laud the African women and women-led organizations on the continent who have continued to demonstrate once more the strong resilience, solidarity and leadership that are determinant in crises and post-crisis responses and reminding us that peace is a right that women must access rather than an act of tokenism in line with Maputo protocol article 10."

The forum will bring together around delegates from 12 Member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), including Heads of State and Government, Gender Ministers or their representatives, Members of the African Women Leaders Network (WPS pillar leaders), FemWise Africa Members, WPS (Women, Peace and Security) Advisory Board, Representatives of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace Security, Regional Economic Communities, especially the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Society (SADC), representatives of agencies of the United Nations system, Heads of Diplomatic Missions, Representatives of religious institutions and academics, among others.

The Third High-Level African Forum on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) held in December 2023, recommended, among other aspects, greater attention to the crises in

the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes region, and requested the African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security to support initiatives aimed at promoting the role of women in regional peace building initiatives.

This call was further reemphasized in the various peace platforms in 2023, including a request by the women of DRC to the AUC Chairperson in February 2023 at the margin of the Felix Houphouet- Boigny- UNESCO peace Prize in Yamoussokro, Cote d'Ivoire and at the 11th Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region, held in Bujumbura, Burundi on May 06, 2023.

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