

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security – 5 October 2009
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African Union

Mr. Antonio (African Union): Mr. President, on behalf of the African Union, I wish to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council, and I join previous speakers in commending you for organizing this open debate. Our appreciation also goes to Ambassador Rice for the excellent work she has done during the month of September. We are also grateful to the various speakers who briefed the Council this morning.

As I am participating in a Council meeting for the first time in my new capacity as Acting Permanent Observer of the African Union, I would like to take this opportunity to state our gratitude to the Council for the support and cooperation accorded my predecessor, Mrs. Lila Ratsif Andrihamanana. The African Union also deeply appreciates the attention this Council continues to devote to issues of concern to Africa, and I look forward to working with the Council.

The African Union welcomes open meetings such as the one we are holding today, since this enables us to share information on successes, opportunities and lessons learned and to reflect together on the new synergies needed to improve the content and delivery of concrete action in the field. In this connection and in support of the earlier statement by the Netherlands, the African Union welcomes as a major step forward General Assembly resolution 63/311 authorizing the establishment of a composite agency on gender equality to be headed by an Under-Secretary-General, and urges the Security Council to lend its full support to the Secretary-General's efforts in this area in the coming period.

We are also pleased that next year's tenth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000) coincides with the start of the African Women's Decade, 2010-2020, declared by the Assembly of the African Union in January 2009, and which we hope will also open other avenues for further strengthening cooperation between our two organizations in working toward greater gender equality. Turning to the specific topic of today's debate, the African Union has continued to develop specific policies and institutional capacity for addressing the challenges women face during conflict and its aftermath. Key measures taken include the strengthening of the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development and the adoption of the African Union Gender Policy by the Assembly of the Union in January this year. The Policy stresses the need to reinforce respect, equality and the human dignity of men and women in all areas, and to enforce zero tolerance for gender-based violence, sexual harassment, assault, rape, gender stereotyping, sexism and abusive language, in particular in situations of conflict. It further stresses the need to ensure adequate sanction and punishment for such acts, and underscores the need for the full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). It also stresses that the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups should be used as the basis for programmatic interventions in Africa, which must include measures to prevent sexual abuse as a weapon in armed conflict.

The African Union Gender Policy also calls for the mobilization of women leaders to participate in peace mediation and related processes, an objective that has been mentioned by many speakers in this open debate. The African Union is further committed under the Policy to working to address human and drug trafficking and to articulate gender perspectives relating to child labour, prostitution and abuse.

I should now like to focus on the opportunities and challenges which lie on the path ahead, in particular from the perspective of peace and security. First, we have been greatly honoured by the leadership and important contributions of women in Member States such as Mozambique, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Networks of women have also been involved in the northern Uganda peace talks in Juba and in ongoing efforts for lasting peace and security in the Sudan and Somalia. However, I should like to underscore the need to strengthen the involvement of women in such processes. Concrete actions must be taken to ensure that the lessons learnt thus far are fully integrated into the cooperative efforts being made by the United Nations and regional organizations for the maintenance of international peace and security. This includes the participation of women in peacekeeping operations at all levels.

Secondly, we in the African Union face the challenge of ensuring that our emerging peace and security architecture — which includes the African Standby Force, the Continental Early Warning System, the Panel of the Wise and our subregional arrangements for peace and security — adequately reflect our vision for women and peace and security. We are determined to address this challenge, and continue to count on the support of the Security Council and our international partners in this respect. Finally, as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen the mobilization of resources and support peacekeeping operations conducted by regional organizations such as the African Union, we would like to underscore the importance of ensuring that efforts centred on women and peace and security are adequately covered in the strategies to be developed. With these few remarks, I wish to reaffirm our commitment to cooperation with the United Nations and our international partners on this matter and other questions of common interest.