



15th – 20th March 2010

With the support of: UNOWA

Financed by: UNIFEM, Urgent Action Fund and the AWDF



Guinea Solidarity Mission 15th -20th March Executive Summary

On September 28th 2009, brutal military force was used to suppress a peaceful demonstration organized by the *Forces Vives* comprising of Political Parties, Civil Society Organizations, and trade unions in the Conakry Stadium in Guinea. According to the report issued by the International Commission of Inquiry a total of 156 persons were killed, 109 women subjected to rape and other sexual violations and an unknown number of persons went missing. This act has been widely condemned at both national and international levels.

At the appeal of the Guinean women, the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) Working Group on Women Peace and Security requested a Solidarity Mission to show support to the victims of the bloody event of September 28th.

This appeal was reiterated at the 8th African regional meeting on women (Beijing +15) and the meeting of the African Union's Women, Gender and Development Directorate in Banjul as well as at the 54th meeting of the United Nations on the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, including the High Level Panel on 1325 established by the Secretary General of the United Nations and co-chaired by Mary Robinson, former High Commissioner for the United Nations on Human Rights and Bineta Diop, Executive Director of FAS and.

Against this backdrop, a consensus emerged among West African Women Civil Society Organizations to conduct a Solidarity Mission to show support to the Women of Guinea. With supports from UNOWA, UNIFEM, Urgent Action Fund and AWDF, a Solidarity Mission under the leadership of FAS visited the women of Guinea from 15th – 21th March 2010. The Mission consisted of representatives of Women Civil Society Organizations, Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), the Pan African Women Organization (PAWO), the Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-Africa), the Network of Women, Peace and Security of ECOWAS (NOPSWECO), the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP) and its Women in Peacebuilding Programme (WIPNET), and a representative of the Female Caucus of the Parliament of Sierra Leone.

The Solidarity Mission greatly benefited from the results of the earlier inquiry and findings of the International Commission of Inquiry mandated by the UN Secretary General as well as the one undertaken by the International Criminal Court. Thus, in order to complement the work earlier done, the Mission was specifically targeted at the women of Guinea and demonstrated the spirit of 'sisterhood' both within Africa and across the World. In this light, the Mission was aimed at assessing the current situation and the impact that it has on the Guinean women in order to propose sustainable solutions and mechanisms for monitoring all aspects of the crisis resolution and democratization process during the current transition phase and beyond.

The Mission focused on women's participation in the peace building process, the protection they should enjoy under such circumstances, prevention of such acts, and the promotion of women through respect for their rights and principles contained in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions (1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889), the provisions of the Protocol on the African Union Women's Rights, the Solemn Declaration of Heads of States and Governments on Gender Parity, as well as the issue of prosecution of perpetrators of violence in a court of justice so that impunity does not continue.

While in Guinea, the Solidarity Mission held sessions with top Government Officials in the transnational Government, including the Interim President, the Prime Minister and Ministers of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Youth and the Minister of National Solidarity, Promotion of Women and Children who hosted the delegation. Sessions were also held with Women's Civil Society Organizations, religious leaders, political party leaders, Women and Youth groups and the victims of the September 28th.

From the discussions, the Mission realized the deep nature of the massive violence committed upon the defenseless people, including women and children. These victims were subjected to various forms of sexual violence, many of them are still missing and some are refusing to return to work or school due to stigmatization. The human rights abuses were enormous and many of the victims still live with anger and trauma.

It was recognized that some efforts have been made by non-governmental organizations, the international community, the Government and the women themselves in providing support to the victims, particularly the women and children. The Mission welcomed the decision by the Acting President of Guinea to conduct a study on the reform of the Army and the Justice systems. The Mission is advocating with the government to incorporate gender issues in the new laws that will govern these two major sectors. The Mission also congratulated the National Council of Transition, which is now headed by a woman and insisted that the new Constitution takes into account the relevant human rights instruments.

Initiatives are ongoing in the areas of medical, educational, and psychological support and counseling to the victims. However, these efforts are uncoordinated and lack the potential of realizing the desired effects. The capacities of the Women's groups and the Ministry of National Solidarity, Promotion of Women and Children are weak. The women themselves are fragmented as a result of deep rooted political polarization, regionalization, and ethnicity.

There is a huge problem of insecurity as the security apparatuses (both police and army) seem more inclined to protect their political masters rather than the people. The army is taking on the roles of the police, leaving the population in a state of confusion and fear. The women feel unprotected as their security is not ensured. There are still strong elements of fear in the

general population. Thus, they are apprehensive about their active participation in the forthcoming general elections.

Discussions also revealed that access to justice is very limited. Successive governments have not prosecuted perpetrators of violence and human rights abuses in the past. The aftermath of the September 28th event caused a lack of confidence and distrust in the national judicial system and the National Commission of Inquiry. The victims rather preferred the ICC intervention. The report of the National Commission of Inquiry refused to acknowledge that there was rape on September 28th, which continues to bother the victims as they do not know whether they will ever get justice.

In spite of the above findings, the Mission acknowledges that the events of September 28 offer huge opportunity for positive changes to be made that would restore the dignity of women, promotion of their rights, enhance their full and meaningful participation in decision making even at the highest level, ensure their protection under the law and prevent crimes and violation against them.

In the furtherance of these, the Mission makes the following key recommendations. These are targeted at a variety of actors who should:

- Strengthen and expand victim support programs in the short term and the development of a long term reparation program;
- Undertake capacity building measures to strengthen relevant ministries and law enforcement agencies so that they can take the lead in handling the issues of women's rights and empowerment and women's participation in leadership and decision making;
- Develop and implement a National Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions pertaining to the participation and protection of women in armed conflict as well as the prevention of gendered-based human rights violations as upheld by UNSCR 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889;
- Include the gender aspect in all spheres of the government and political agenda;
- Engage in policy dialogues and carry out meaningful reforms in the Justice and Security Sectors to promote women's security, protect and access to justice;
- Conduct comprehensive sensitization campaigns and civil education efforts focused on improving the participation of women in leadership, political activities and decision making at all levels.

The Solidarity Mission is committed to advocate for the implementation of these recommendations.