

“Unite for Peace”, AUC Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security tells Women during Solidarity Mission to D.R. Congo

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H.E. Bineta Diop, the African Union Commission (AUC) Chairperson’s Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, carried out a solidarity mission to support the women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), from 20 to 26 November, 2016. Under the initiative of H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the AUC, she led a high-level delegation that comprised H.E. Ambassador Abdou Abarry, Special Representative and Head of the AU Office in the DRC and Ms. Hasna Barkat Daoud, former Minister of Gender of the Republic of Djibouti and member of the IGAD Women Peace Forum. The delegation was joined by Ms. Adama Coumba Ndao representing the Special Representative for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), and Ms. Lillehammer Giske Charlotte, representing the Embassy of Norway in the DRC.

During the one week mission, the delegation visited Kinshasa and parts of Eastern DRC, including; Bunia, Beni, Oicha and Goma, where they met with government representatives, the Facilitator for the national dialogue in the DRC, H.E. Edem Kodjo, the Special Representative for the DRC and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), H.E. Maman S. Sidikou, women leaders – ministers and former ministers, parliamentarians, members of political parties and of CSOs, peacekeeping and humanitarian agencies, women and girl survivors of sexual violence and abuse, and vulnerable populations deeply affected by insecurity in the Eastern DRC.

“H.E. Dlamini-Zuma is deeply concerned about the situation of women and the vulnerable in this country. She also wants to see more women participating in the upcoming transitional government, following the ongoing political dialogue”, H.E. Diop told women leaders in Kinshasa. She strongly urged the women of DRC to “Unite for peace”, reminding them of the gains that were made during the Sun City Agreement. “I am here to listen to you and to relay your messages to decision makers in the DRC, the Chairperson of the AUC, the AUC Commissioner for Peace and Security and the African Union Peace and Security Council”, she added, noting that, “Women’s effective participation, protection and the prevention of sexual and gender based violence are crucial for any progressive society.”

In Bunia, the delegation visited the Karibuni Wa Mama health centre, a project led by SOFEPADI (Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral), a women’s civil society organization, which supports affected populations and survivors of sexual violence in the DRC with healthcare, psychological and judicial assistance. They met with young girls between the ages of eight and fourteen, who had been physically and sexually abused by armed groups wreaking havoc in the Eastern DRC. In a bid to restore their dignity, these young girls have been enrolled back in schools and are being supported financially and emotionally to regain their sense of worth and to rebuild their lives and communities.

The Administrator of the Territory of Beni, Mr. Amisi Kalonda, told the AU-led delegation that, “Our main problem here is insecurity”. He argued that if armed groups operating in and around Beni were neutralized, women and men would be able to go back to their

farms and continue to support their families. In his words, “The people of Beni are hardworking. We are a proud people who do not want to be given food handouts. It is humiliating. The food shortage, poverty and all other problems here stem from insecurity. Solve it and everything else would fall in place.”

The delegation also visited a school in Oicha, on the outskirts of Beni, where fifty one children whose parents had died as a result of insecurity received scholarships and educational assistance. They also visited the General Hospital in Oicha, and its maternity wing, where they met with twenty-three young mothers who had been held back after delivery for owing medical bills. In solidarity, and with the support of the Oak Foundation, the delegation supported these young women who may now rejoin their families, some after three months in confinement at the hospital for lack of means.

The delegation also met with the pigmy populations displaced by insecurity from their natural habitats in parts of the forests in what is now locally described as the, “triangle of death”. The ongoing insecurity puts at risk this community’s lives and livelihoods, and their environment.

In Goma, the delegation met with the Senegalese contingent of the UN Peacekeeping mission to the DRC, MONUSCO, where H.E. Diop reminded the soldiers of their duties to protect citizens. She reiterated the AU’s zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and encouraged the soldiers to stay committed in their difficult task to keep the peace in the DRC.

The mission which was organized by the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security in partnership with SOFEPADI, was facilitated by MONUSCO and the UN Women Office in the DRC and supported by the Kingdom of Norway.

The Special Envoy’s solidarity mission to the women of DRC comes at a time when AU Member States have committed to silencing the guns by 2020 in keeping with Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 for a peaceful and secure Africa. It is thus an effort to ensure women’s agency in preserving peace and ensuring stability in the DRC especially following controversies surrounding the organization of elections in 2016. This mission is also well inscribed in Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 which advocates for the greater participation of women and youths in governance, for an end to violence and discrimination against women and girls, and for women’s empowerment especially this year, 2016, which is the AU Year of Human Rights with particular focus on the rights of women.

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