

**Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security – 29 October 2008**  
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**AFRICAN UNION**

**Mrs. Ratsifandrihamanana** (*spoke in French*): Woman, by her very essence, is the source of life and thus a source of peace. Woman, by her very nature, is made of compassion, humanity and sensitivity. She labours for peace. She gives birth in great pain, and she deserves peace.

By providing us with a platform for discussion on a topic that is close to the hearts of the African Union, you, Mr. President, enjoy our full appreciation and support. We are also grateful to all the other members of the Council and all those who have defended peace and security for women, by women and with women. I pay special tribute to the very valuable contributions of my two sisters present here — Rachel Mayanja and Inés Alberdi.

With respect to peace and security for women, in Africa, women are the first victims of war, conflict, violence, rape, forced marriage, slavery and human trafficking. The African Union is not indifferent and has developed a significant number of political and legal instruments on the protection and empowerment of women. These efforts today benefit from improved coordination for their effective implementation. The African Union, *inter alia*, has been developing a project on the rehabilitation of girl soldiers since December 2007, by focusing on the specific case of the countries of the Great Lakes region.

This year, zero tolerance for cases of violence, rape, sexism and abuse of women is the African Union's watchword within the framework of its strategic policy on gender, based on respect for human dignity. Special focus is placed on sanctions against the perpetrators of such acts. Among other initiatives, a training manual was developed for African Union peacekeepers, in order to raise their awareness regarding human rights.

I turn next to peace and security by women. The African Union is striving to strengthen the role of women in peace processes, especially in countries in conflict and those emerging from conflict. It has rightly created an African Women's Committee on Peace and Development, a very active advisory structure for advocacy in the field of women's rights. It is also preparing a conference planned for 2009 on the role of women in post-conflict reconstruction and development. With regard to peace and security with women, lasting peace and security require the man-woman tandem and the balanced contribution of all of society's stakeholders.

In the African Union, the Continental Peace and Security Architecture, which has been operational since 2004, is the foundation of all actions in the field of peace and security. The current challenge lies in mainstreaming the gender component in our actions and in structures such as the Peace and Security Council, the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System and the African Standby Force. A memorandum of understanding between the African Union and the regional mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution, concluded in January 2008, will provide, *inter alia*, for enhancing the coherence of actions for peace and security on the continent. The African Union also possesses a number of instruments, including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the Framework for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development, adopted in 2006, which

highlights the gender aspect.

The African Union welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2008/622). It reiterates its support for their effective implementation in Africa by mainstreaming gender in peace policies, programmes and activities. The African Union also calls for the use of internationally agreed principles, such as the Paris Principles and guidelines, as the basis for interventions in Africa, which should incorporate measures to prevent sexual abuse and discrimination against women and to promote their equal status in society. The African Union also seeks to mobilize women leaders to participate in peacekeeping operations at all levels, in peace mediation and as special envoys. The African Union seeks to work with the relevant United Nations bodies on measures to address all forms of violence against women perpetrated in various ways, such as human trafficking, child labour, prostitution and abuse.

We have been greatly honoured by the growing contributions of women in recent peace processes in Africa, such as those in Mozambique, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone as well as in the ongoing efforts for lasting peace and security in the Sudan and Somalia. I should like, however, to underscore the need to strengthen the involvement of women in such processes. Indeed, the international community's efforts on the implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) have brought about a deeper understanding of the centrality of the gender perspective in the maintenance of international peace and security.

The specific challenges of women in armed conflict situations, sexual slavery and abuse are now well known and cannot be tolerated any longer. We must take concrete actions to ensure that the knowledge gained thus far is fully integrated into the framework of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations for the maintenance of international peace and security.