

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security October 2014, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Shava, Permanent Mission of Zimbabwe to the United Nations

Let me begin by thanking you, Madam President, for convening this open debate on such an important matter. On behalf of the 15 member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), I wish to express appreciation to you, Madam, for providing us with an insightful concept note (S/2014/731, annex) to guide today's discussion. I also would like to thank the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Edmond Mulet, for their comprehensive and informative briefings.

In recent years, the world has witnessed a multiplicity of conflicts leading to an unprecedented increase in the scale of refugees and displaced persons. The increase in violence, mass displacement and humanitarian catastrophes has had a disproportionate impact on women and children. There is growing recognition that newly emerging unconventional threats to peace and security associated with the proliferation of militias, armed groups, jihadists and terrorists linked to violent extremism affect women and girls more than their male counterparts.

It is estimated that three quarters of the refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) population are women and children. Displacement and statelessness exacerbate existing gender inequalities, amplifying the discrimination and hardships borne by both women and girls. In that regard, women refugees and IDPs constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in armed conflict, as well as post-conflict situations. Displacement causes women's heightened risk of poverty, human trafficking, sexual exploitation and child, early and forced marriages and the lack of access to basic resources, such as education and health services. The majority of the world's refugees originate from Africa, with new displacements from intensifying conflicts in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Mali and Somalia.

In the year 2000, the Security Council laid the foundation for the women and peace and security agenda in the landmark resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions calling for the special protection and full participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution, as well as in post-conflict and peacebuilding processes. In the 14 years since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), significant steps have been taken to address the plight of women and girls and to improve international, regional and national responses to the protection of women and girls. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law, complemented by regional instruments, have gone a long way in addressing the challenges both prior and during the process of displacement. Today the narrative on conflict prevention and resolution reflects our collective commitment to prevent sexual violence in conflict and address its disastrous and far-reaching consequences.

As we continue intensifying our engagement on the matter, SADC believes that States have the primary responsibility to protect their women and girls from all forms of gender-based discrimination and abuse, including in conflict situations where those are often aggravated. While international cooperation and assistance are important, they should not replace the central role of

the State in the protection of women and girls. We also believe that women's economic empowerment and full participation are essential to any prevention and protection response.

The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, signed in August 2008, seeks to harmonize the various commitments made by SADC member States in regional, global and continental instruments to achieving gender equality. Articles 20 to 25 of the Protocol provide for the implementation of a variety of strategies, including enacting, reviewing, reforming and enforcing laws aimed at eliminating all forms of gender-based violence and trafficking. Article 28 provides for women's equal representation and participation in key decision-making positions in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes, as well as for the integration of a gender perspective into the resolution of conflicts in the region, in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. Constitutional and legal rights, education, health, productive resources and economic empowerment are some of the other areas the Protocol covers. And it promotes women's empowerment through the development and implementation of gender-responsive legislation, policies, programmes and projects.

SADC fully subscribes to continental-level programmes such as the five-year Gender, Peace and Security Programme of the African Union (AU), launched on 2 June in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and designed to serve as a framework for developing effective strategies and mechanisms for increasing women's participation in promoting peace and security. It is also designed to enhance the protection of women in conflict and post-conflict situations in Africa. The AU Commission Chairperson's appointment on 30 January of Ms. Bineta Diop as its Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security attests to Africa's commitment to firmly addressing issues affecting women and children in conflict.

While considerable progress has been made since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), gaps still remain in our efforts to achieve sustained change and overall peace and security. There is a growing consensus that a peace process that does not include women is flawed. It is our firm belief that women's economic, cultural, political and social rights underpin democracy, stability and lasting peace.

It is unacceptable that in spite of the existence of legal and normative frameworks, displaced women and girls continue to suffer. SADC is concerned about the continuing gross abuses, sexual exploitation and abduction of women in areas of conflict. Other gaps exist in, for example, the exclusion of female refugees and IDPs from decision-making at all levels, and their restricted access to basic services. Women and girls who are the heads of households, young mothers, and girls with disabilities are the most likely to encounter major barriers to accessing services and participating in community life and decision-making.

SADC urges the entire international community to unite in responding effectively to the problems women IDPs and refugees face, taking a holistic approach that combines proactive strategies, responses and solutions. That entails addressing the root causes of conflict and strengthening national infrastructures for peace and reconciliation. We need to do more work on deterring new crimes by holding perpetrators accountable. More attention should be given to women's role as leaders and their participation in decision-making, which must be meaningful if we are to realize opportunities for positive change. Women should be viewed not merely as victims and survivors but also as a great resource for their communities and countries, capable of contributing significantly to

peace and security. We know that women's participation is essential to building sustainable peace, and it is therefore important to ensure that the agenda on women and peace and security is duly reflected in all engagements relating to international peace and security.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm SADC's continued strong support for the agenda on women and peace and security.