

Mr. António:

On behalf of the Commission of the African Union, allow me, Madam President, to start by commending you for convening this timely and very important debate, and also to thank you for this opportunity to brief the Security Council and share our views on a matter of great importance to the African Union. Your presence here to preside over today's discussion highlights the critical importance of this debate and bears witness to your personal commitment and that of the Republic of Angola to the fundamental purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. It also serves to highlight Angola's determination to make a substantial contribution to the work of the Security Council. I also thank the previous speakers for their insightful presentations.

Today's debate provides an excellent opportunity that we must seize in order to demonstrate our commitment to take forward the ambitious recommendations emerging from the recent United Nations policy reviews on peace and security issues. The role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts must be made a reality, rather than allowed to remain a mere statement that dates back several decades. Our discourse on this issue must include no longer looking at women merely as victims, but rather recognize and encourage their demonstrated capacities to be part of peace and development efforts.

The experiences of many countries have clearly shown that lasting peace cannot be achieved, and reconstruction will never succeed, with half the population excluded and marginalized. To cite an example, members may recall the decisive role played by the women of Liberia in the signing of the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement through the efforts of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace. Africa cannot afford to ignore the role of women if we are to realize the vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent. The Republic of Angola, which you represent today, Madam, is another example. Angolan women not only played a critical role in the liberation of the country from colonialism, but they also stood for peace and demonstrated pan-Africanism in the early years of the country's independence. In fact, we all remember that the country that you represent today, Madam, hosted the headquarters of the Pan-African Women's Organization in the early years of independence.

The issue of women and peace and security remains a priority, both on the agenda of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government as well as on the agenda of the African Union Peace and Security Council. Indeed, the African Union declared 2010-2020 to be the African Women's Decade, with the overarching theme of gender equality and women's empowerment. The year 2015 was the Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Africa's Agenda 2063, while 2016 is the Year of Human Rights, with particular focus on the rights of women. By choosing to put women at the centre of the continent's deliberations, the African Union sought to reinforce the continent's resolve to bring down all types of barriers that impede the emancipation of women and girls in Africa and to strengthen their agency and rights, especially in priority areas such as education, health, participation in decision-making at all levels, economic empowerment and peace and security.

In January 2014, the African Union became the first continental organization to appoint a Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, with the specific mandate to ensure that the voices of women and children, particularly those affected by conflict, are heard and to advocate at the

highest levels for the rightful participation and contribution of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

To enhance the protection of women's rights, the AU seeks to promote international and regional commitments on peace and security, as well as to strengthen women's participation in peace and security efforts through the AU Peace and Security Department, the Peace and Security Council and the Panel of the Wise.

Starting with the leadership of its own paramount continental institution, Africa adopted the principle of parity and acted on it. Indeed, the AU Commission has achieved parity in its leadership and is now moving towards 50/50 workforce parity, in line with the AU gender policy adopted in 2009.

Furthermore, to enhance the role of women in peace and security, the African Union Commission launched a five-year gender, peace and security programme. The programme is designed to serve as a framework for the development of effective strategies and mechanisms for the increased participation of women in the promotion of peace and security. It also aims to enhance the protection of women in conflict and post-conflict situations in Africa.

The African Union has also conducted training with Member States on women peace mediators, women election observers and gender advisers, and it has succeeded in deploying female peacekeepers and female police in peace-support operations such as the African Union Mission in Somalia.

Despite the progress made so far, a great deal remains to be done to ensure women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution as well as in post-conflict peacebuilding. Policies are plentiful; where we fall short is in their implementation. It is from this perspective that the African Union is developing a continental results framework to strengthen the monitoring of the implementation by Member States of their commitments on the women and peace and security agenda.

In our view, more efforts are needed from both the United Nations and the African Union in the following areas.

First, the proportion of the women in the police component of peace operations must be increased.

Secondly, we must ensure that the terms of reference of mediation and peacebuilding processes have a clear component of women's participation as the basis of their delivery and accountability towards the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda.

Thirdly, training programmes on women and peace and security must be made mandatory. The AU has already begun to integrate such training into its African Standby Force programme.

And, fourthly, we must invest more in conflict prevention and in women's prevention initiatives.

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