

UN women chief calls for more women participation in peacebuilding

UN Women chief Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka on Monday emphasized the consistent, dependable and universal commitment of women to conflict prevention, and called for greater efforts to reach the goal of allocating at least 15 percent of peacebuilding resources to gender equality and women's empowerment.

"Women need to be resourced so that they can do more," said Mlambo-Ngcuka, executive director of UN Women, at an open debate of the UN Security Council on the role of women in conflict prevention in Africa.

"The commitment to allocate at least 15 percent of peacebuilding funds to gender equality and women's empowerment, must become a reality," she said. "This must be extended to all efforts aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism."

Meanwhile, the UN Women chief also stressed that women's organizations must receive the political and financial support needed to engage in violence prevention, mediation and diplomacy, as investing in gender equality as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development "is the best recipe for structural, long-term prevention."

The 2030 Agenda, approved by world leaders in September 2015, serves as the blueprint for the global development efforts for the next 15 years.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT PREVENTION

However, the role of women in conflict prevention is often missing in highest-level discussions about peace and security, she noted, welcoming the open debate on the relationship between the need to focus on prevention of violence and paying attention to the critical importance of gender equality.

Mlambo-Ngcuka cited specific examples of conflict prevention led by women in Africa, including the “Women’s Situation Rooms,” a monitoring mechanism to support women candidates and fight discrimination of women in electoral processes and gender-based electoral violence and harassment.

Over the last five years, the mechanism has been established in Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda, and the model is being replicated in a growing list of countries across Africa with UN Women’s support.

“Our research also shows that women play a key role in de-escalating tensions and preventing radicalization in their families,” she said. “In Mali, the most important influence for the successful re-integration of many ex-combatants has been the women in their families and communities.”

In the Sahel region, the income, status and resilience of women has been boosted by programs that address the gender gap in access to land and other productive assets, she said.

In poor areas of Kenya, women’s organizations are using mothers to identify and prevent the spread of radicalization, and in Burundi, hundreds of women mediators are working tirelessly to address local conflicts, she said.

According to the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security, countries with lower levels of gender inequality are less likely to resort to the use of force; security of women is one of the most reliable indicators of the peacefulness of a State; and women’s different spending patterns contribute directly to post-conflict social recovery, she noted.

The UN Women chief also proposed that UN's prevention work should include more frequent deliberations by the Security Council informed by the perspective and analyses of women on the ground.

The practice of hearing from civil society should be extended to consultations on country-specific situations, to the work of the 15-nation body's subsidiary organs, including the Counterterrorism Committee, as well as the Council's visiting missions, she added.

Security Council members should also demand a robust gender analysis in reports and in all atrocity-prevention efforts, she said, noting that UN Women serves as the Secretariat for the new Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, which held its first meeting last month on Mali.

This mechanism is an important step in ensuring consistent and quality information flows to the Council, she added.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CONFLICT MEDIATION

Also briefing the 15-nation Security Council was Taye-Brook Zerihoun, the UN assistant-secretary-general for political affairs, who said promoting women's effective participation in conflict mediation and addressing their specific needs in peacemaking efforts had been a priority of the UN Department of Political Affairs since 2010, when its conflict-prevention work had become increasingly inclusive.

Since 2012, all UN mediation support teams had included women, and women made up half of the participants in the UN Department's high-level mediation skills training, which focused on enhancing gender parity and the future character and configuration of international peacemaking.

He said the Department also continued to implement, with UN Women, its Joint Strategy on Gender and Mediation, which helped to build mediation capacity for

envoys and mediation teams by providing gender expertise and training, while UN Women strengthened the capacity of regional, national and local women leaders and peace coalitions, and supported access opportunities for women in peace negotiations.

Nevertheless, unequal access and opportunities for women's participation in political decision-making processes persisted worldwide. "Prioritizing prevention and inclusive political solutions has never been more urgent," he emphasized.

GENDER-FOCUSED STRATEGY

Macharia Kamau, chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, said women remain a resource that has not been effectively utilized, citing such obstacles as cynical cultural practices that maintained patriarchal attitudes; insufficient political will to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security; militarized approaches to conflict resolution that crowded out organic initiatives; and the absence of gender-sensitive economic recovery.

As such, the Commission had outlined its first gender strategy, which it expected to adopt before July, he said, adding that it set out recommendations on strengthening the integration of gender perspectives in all country-specific and strategic engagements. Going forward, the Commission would use its unique leverage to advocate for technical expertise on gender equality and peacebuilding, as well as funding, he continued.

The combination of commitment on the part of senior leadership, specialized expertise and dedicated financial resources would make a real difference, as had been seen in Burundi, where UN-Women supported a network of 534 women mediators across all municipalities, he said.

Placing a personal emphasis on the gender issue, he said he had seen the ruin that 100 years of colonial and post-colonial policies had wreaked upon women in the culture and society of his homeland, Kenya.

"Women remain firmly at the bottom of the rungs of social progress and empowerment," he said, underlining that a more inclusive future would require that countries respond forcefully to the condition of women in their midst.

Source: Xinhua

Original post can be found here: <http://www.newsghana.com.gh/un-women-chief-calls-for-more-women-participation-in-peacebuilding/>