



## DECLARATION OF MRS. JEANINE BANDU BAHATI TO THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

### SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS OF THE NORTH KIVU PROVINCE AND ESPECIALLY THE ONES LIVING IN A RURAL ENVIRONMENT EAST OF DR Congo

Monday March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Mr. President, your Excellencies,

Good morning. I would like to begin by thanking the Kingdom of the Netherlands for inviting me to this very important meeting on the political and humanitarian situation of women and girls of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Because the voice of rural women is not often listened to.

I am a rural woman and the coordinator of the local women's NGO called EFIM, "Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages vulnérables" (Support to Indigenous Women and Vulnerable Households), based in Goma, North Kivu Province in Eastern DR Congo. Today I speak as a rural woman, a grassroots woman, a displaced woman, a woman affected by conflict and especially armed conflict.

My organization EFIM intervenes in the promotion of peace, gender and development, in the prevention of armed and community conflicts, and in the protection of women and girls victims of violence. Our vision is to strengthen community mechanisms, which protect children and women and promote human rights, focusing on peaceful coexistence among communities, the promotion of peace and the sustainable development of my Province.

This morning, there are three items I would like to share with you: the security and humanitarian situation of women; the deterioration of the socio-economic situation of women and girls; and finally, the political participation of women.

#### The security and humanitarian situation of women

First, the security and humanitarian situation of women in DR Congo is increasingly degrading. It is dramatic, catastrophic and chaotic: the majority of those affected are traumatized and live without hope for the future, especially those living in rural areas where we intervene. The situation has been getting worse every year for more than two decades.

Here are the forms of violations constituting the highlights of what negatively affects and weakens populations, and which are particularly experienced by women and girls in DR Congo, especially in the East:

- Massacres, carnages, murders and killings;
- Displacement and permanent movements;
- Rape and sexual exploitation;
- Kidnappings for ransoms;
- Human trafficking;
- Houses being burnt down;



- Activism and proliferation of local and foreign armed groups;
- Looting of natural resources; especially mining and agriculture from which they could benefit;
- Restriction to field activities;
- Insufficient incentive strategies to facilitate the emergence and schooling of women and girls;
- Illegal possession of weapons by several people;
- The humanitarian disaster.

These have the following consequences:

Increased poverty, unemployment, relentless vulnerability, rural exodus, trauma, weapons proliferation, and so on. This is a ticking time bomb for the massacre, extermination of women and girls and the entire population if there are no effective measures to prevent, protect and support women and girls at the grassroots level.

As an illustration:

Last month, 54-year-old Ms. MAOMBI, displaced and very vulnerable, with nine children in charge, was assaulted and shot by armed men when she went to her field for harvest. Her daughter, who was under 18 and who was with her, was abducted, raped, and only returned a few days later.

Another woman by the name of Dorothée, testified and I quote: "I was in my field, the attackers came and looted goods, burned houses and killed women and men in my presence, they took away 4 children, two boys and two girls, and I stayed with a baby who is now in my charge, ...".

It should be noted that international aid workers in our areas of intervention are not spared either.

#### The deterioration of the socio-economic situation of women and girls

Secondly, the deterioration of the socio-economic situation of women and girls is also one of the major consequences of this humanitarian crisis, stemming from the multiple tensions linked to this chronic insecurity. I am talking about North Kivu here, but I should point out that the whole DR Congo is affected and almost engulfed by this scourge.

With less than a dollar a day, it is almost impossible to live in other places, but this has been intolerably possible for women and girls. Worse, it happens that they spend entire days without eating. This situation of extreme poverty deprives them (without sparing men and boys) of prospects and opportunities, which leads some young people to join the armed groups and practice other abuses.

I know a widowed woman who, before this war, used to go sell her goods in several markets. She was well-off economically, but due to the insecurity, she was robbed and became very poor and vulnerable; she cannot feed her children and take care of her family anymore. This is an example among others.

#### Political participation of women

Finally, the political participation of women in DR Congo is still low for several reasons, among them:



- The new electoral law does not favor the emergence of women and girls;
- Few political parties created by women; and
- Low appointment to lead positions in decision-making bodies for women, especially on the territorial level. For North Kivu, on 6 Territories and 3 Cities, there are no women in charge.

Despite all current and past efforts, women's voices are silenced.

Here is, in a few words, Mr. President and your Excellencies, the ordeal that women and girls in DR Congo are facing.

Beyond the issues listed above, I assure you that we have brave, intelligent, capable, and competent women. Just support them, assist them and help them, and see what they can do and produce. That is why we are requesting international opinion to support these women. Not to mention these young girls and boys without jobs, doomed to unemployment.

Finally, on behalf of my organization EFIM and the women of the DRC we recommend that the Security Council, the UN and the Member States:

- Quickly assess all security and protection, socio-economic and political strategies for women and girls, and the general population of the DRC;
- Efficiently redefine indicators that can lead to positive change;
- Act promptly and positively to fight impunity and launch an investigation to punish those guilty of the revolting acts that are spreading throughout my country;
- Bring safety to women so that they can work well and live their lives safely;
- Help and support women and women's organizations working at the grassroots level to find good results in order to improve their humanitarian, socio-political and economic situation.

I thank you once again for this honor to speak as a rural woman going through the ordeal described above. Overall, the women of DR Congo want to be taken into consideration, protected, brought to safety and supported. They want to live with dignity and decently, to have the hope to thrive tomorrow; they want you to respond quickly to their cry of alarm and distress.

Thank you.