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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

OPEN DEBATE ON THE ITEM

“WOMEN AND PEACE AND SECURITY”

STATEMENT

BY

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COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY
AFRICAN UNION**

NEW YORK, 18 JUNE 2008

Madame President:

On behalf of the Commission of the African Union, I wish to congratulate you for your assumption of the Presidency of the Security Council. I also would like to join previous speakers in commending you for organizing this open debate on the crucial question of women and peace and security. Since I had the privilege to interact recently with the Security Council delegation in Djibouti, I wish to state how honored I am to address a formal session of the Council, for the first time in my new capacity as the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security. I feel fortunate that I am taking up office in a climate of increasing cooperation between the African Union and United Nations, and with the Security Council in particular, and I am confident we will continue to strengthen our relations as we move forward.

Mme President:

The protection and empowerment of women is indeed one of the founding principles and of the African Union, and enshrined in our Constitutive Act, the Protocol on the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council and other instruments of the African Union. As you are aware, the Adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on People's and Human Rights on the Rights of Women and of the Declaration on Gender Equality following the historic Presidential Debate of the Assembly of the African Union in 2005 were important milestones in this respect. A clear vision and mandate on the issue of women and peace and security in the continent have thus been established in the African Union and stresses gender parity at all levels of our organization. We continue to develop necessary instruments and the operational environmental for its implementation, as an integral part of our overall vision for a peaceful, united and prosperous Africa.

Furthermore our Regional Economic Communities, and African women and civil society organizations have been the driving forces behind our efforts and achievements, and we are committed to continue

strengthening efforts towards addressing the well known range of challenges of peace and security for women and for our peoples as a whole. We therefore welcome the seriousness with which the Security Council continues to address this question, which also ranks highly on the list of priorities of the African Union. In this connection, we have launched the preparatory process for the convening of an important conference on gender in post conflict reconstruction and development, to be held in 2009.

I would now like to focus my intervention on the theme of today's debate on some of the opportunities and challenges which lie on the path ahead, from the peace and security perspective in particular.

Firstly, we have been greatly honored by the leadership and important contributions of women in recent peace processes in Africa, such as in Mozambique, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in on-going efforts for lasting peace and security in the Sudan and Somalia. I should however like to underscore the need to strengthen the involvement of women in such processes in the future. Indeed, the International community's efforts on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 and related instruments have enabled a deeper understanding of the centrality of the gender perspective of the maintenance of international peace and security. The wide range of the issues involved such as the specific challenges of women in armed conflict situations, and sexual slavery and abuse are now well known. We must now take concrete actions in ensuring that the knowledge gained thus far is fully integrated in the new and emerging era of closer cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations for the maintenance of international peace and security. This includes the participation of women in peace keeping operations at all levels and the coordination of efforts between the United Nations and the African union would be crucial.

Secondly, we in the African Union face the challenge of ensuring that our emerging peace and security architecture, which includes the

African Standby Force, the Continental Early Warning System, the Panel of the Wise and our sub-regional arrangements for peace and security adequately reflect our vision on women and peace and security. We are determined address this challenge, and continue to count on the support of the Security Council and our international partners in this respect.

Furthermore, the on-going efforts the reform of United Nations, and of Security Council in particular also offer a great opportunity to address this crucial question, through adequate representation and participation of regions, such as Africa, which are facing serious peace and security challenges for women and for their nations as a whole, due to the persistence of conflict situations. We also believe the elevation of the UN mandate on gender equality to the highest possible level within the Secretariat could be a major step towards addressing the issue of gender equality as a whole, and we call on the Security Council to encourage the efforts of the Secretary General on this question.

Finally, as part of on-going efforts toward strengthening the mobilization of resources and support for international peace and security, I would like to underscore the importance of ensuring efforts centered on women and peace and security are adequately supported by the international community.

With these few remarks, I wish to restate the commitment of the African Union to our cooperation with the United Nations and with our international partners on this matter, and other questions, and I wish every success for this timely and important open debate.

I thank you.