

**The 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women 2010**

Special event organized by members of the group of WILPF DRC

**The political implication of Congolese women in change and in promoting good governance in the DRC**

March 10, 2010

"The role and involvement of women in the Congolese peace process

Democratic Republic of Congo"

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Distinguished guests,  
Dear participants and  
Panelists,

Greeting from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and particularly from members of the WILPF DRC group. We thank WILPF International for their efforts to allow members of WILPF DRC group to hold this panel. We thank sponsors and supporters who have ensured our preparation and the holding of this event so that Congolese women can make their voices heard the international level.

Armed conflicts have devastated the Great Lakes Region of Africa since October 1991 and produced harmful consequences on all the plans. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), we have had fourteen years of bloody war, and huge loss in human life. This war has fundamentally distressed existing infrastructure, disturbed social cohesion within the communities, changed policies touching economic and social conditions of the country, caused exodus of populations and terrible trauma from various armed violence due to the illicit proliferation small arms and light weapons, as well as looting of the country's natural resources.

It is recognized that Men and women experience conflict differently. While men are often involved in the fighting on a voluntary basis or following a compulsory recruitment, women are most often left to bear the entire burden of ensuring the survival of their families despite the violence, especially sexual gender based violence. Sometimes women find themselves as sex slaves, cooks or carrying the burdens of war. According to a 2008 UN report on mortality, it is estimated that 67% of dead were women and children.

At the moment, the situation in eastern DRC is still worrying and can not leave the conscience of Congolese women indifferent. Armed conflicts continue to destabilize efforts to improve infrastructure, economic and social structures in place. The core of the family unit has been dismantled and new roles and values have appeared, therefore women had to adapt in order to survive. Faced with situations of extreme hardship as a result of war, women were brought to take on new responsibilities. Many women have chosen to continue to play a role in maintaining daily survival and to engage in conflict prevention and in the process of peace building at local, national, regional and international levels.

However, it is important to indicate that the involvement of Congolese women in the resolutions of conflicts of recent years stem from a long painful process because there were many sacrifices, including intimidation, death threats, killings, torture, humiliation, extortion and exclusion. Although not being signatory to any of the peace agreements, Congolese women were involved early in the multifaceted mobilization for a meaningful participation in the peace process in the DRC.

Despite the commitment of civil society and the willingness of Congolese women to wrest 30% of representation in the pre-dialogue, dialogue and other conferences on peace negotiations, as well as the commitment of the Congolese State to implement the recommendations of the Platform for Action of Beijing 1995, and the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and adoption of UN SC Resolution 1325, it is regrettable to note that the representation of women at the negotiating table remains insignificant.

Thanks to the efforts undertaken with the assistance of the international community to resolve those conflicts from where emerged the political agreements of Pretoria and Sun City in 2002 aiming at the installation of a new political order, Congolese women have been very active in the restoration of peace in the DRC.

With the support of the international partners, the initiatives of Congolese women have grown. They have established structures and most dynamic organizations to disseminate their ideas and mobilize the masses. The fundamental objective of these women's movements was the immediate end of wars, violence and the beginning of the negotiation for the pacification of

the country, the restoration of its unity, integrity and national sovereignty and the struggle for institutional and legal parity between men and women in the management of public affairs. In the political and community life, women took an active part in organizing themselves into associations, to NGOs for development and protection and the defense of human rights, etc..

Through their various peace marches, they have committed themselves to demand the cessation of hostilities and the beginning of political negotiations through certain cities of the country. These steps were accompanied by slogans, banners, clothing with inscriptions against the war. They were presented as those involving the lives and must protect them. They have held several sit-in in front of some embassies, especially from the European Union, the USA and South Africa to seek the effective involvement, real and sincere of these various respective governments. The same sit-ins were held outside the headquarters of various local political parties, ministries and DR C parliament, to react against sexual violence and killing of women in the East. They had an input in the formulation of the electoral law, the constitution, management of pre-and post-election

To mitigate their under representation, from Lusaka, Gaborone, Sun city and recently to Goma, Congolese women have followed and often pushed and gatecrash various processes for peacebuilding

- \* 1999: Lusaka agreement for a cease-fire in the DRC;
- \* 2001: Republican Pact Gaborone;
- \* 2002: the political negotiations with call for the Inter Congolese Dialogue in Sun City, resulting in the Global and Inclusive Agreement;
- \* 2003: Endorsement of the Global and Inclusive Agreement by all the delegates of the Inter Congolese Dialogue, the constitution and the establishment of the transitional Constitution;
- \* 2004: The regional conference of women in Kigali for the effective implementation and end to outbreaks of tension in the Great Lakes countries; The Declaration of Dar-Es-Salam adopted by Heads of State of the Great Lakes Region. The referendum of the Constitution of the 3rd Republic;
- \* 2006: the signing in Nairobi of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development; The good will mission with first ladies of some African countries to tranquilize the conduct of Presidential elections and the establishment of democratic institutions

\* 2008: Amani Agreement for Peace and Security in eastern DRC.

Taking you as witness, I raise the cry and sorrow of Congolese women, by saying that women should not be reduced to simple status of victims in times of conflict. As collective voices of Congolese women, we are sounding the alarm on objectives 5 of the Beijing Platform for Actions, on Women and Armed Conflict in the DRC, and on UN CS REC 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889, all on Women Peace and Security, calling on their implementation in the DRC.

Congolese women ask for their voices to be considered and request that:

- The 5 permanent members of Security Council United Nations demonstrate political will to support human security, human development and democracy in the Great Lakes region of Africa, particularly in the DRC.
- That the governments of the Great Lakes regions of Africa resolve conflicts through genuine dialogue involving women in accordance with UN SC Resolution 1325 and the solemn Declaration of Heads of African States.
- That women are recognized as actors and negotiators of peace and participate in all processes of prevention, management and peaceful resolution of conflicts and reconstruction of their countries;

We recommend that

- the special needs of women and girls in conflict zones to be taken into account by the government and international agencies;
  - that the elaboration the National Action Plan on implementation of Resolution 1325 be achieved in consultation with parliament, government and civil society
  - That women' s organizations be adequately institutionally supported during and after conflict to participate in the process of negotiations and intervention on peacebuilding;
- That international experience of exchange and sharing be carried out to weave the relations of solidarity between women of the countries in war or post conflict and those in the DRC;
- That post-conflict programs be designed and developed to promote gender equality in line with the Objective 3 of the MDG, which will lead to the development of RDC and to reduce poverty.

Congolese women are committed and engaged in the spirit of UN SC Resolution 1325 as well as the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals to promote human rights and particularly those of women in all its dimensions (civil political, economic, social and cultural) to ensure a better future for future generation.

Thank you for your attention