



Femmes Africa Solidarité

Talking Points Bineta Diop - 131st IPU Assembly. Geneva, 15th October 2014

Open session of the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law on
Ensuring respect for women's rights in situations of conflict

1. Introduction

I am delighted to participate in this panel as President of FAS and African Union Commission Chairperson's for Women Peace and Security and I would like to thank the Inter-Parliamentary Union for inviting me to share this podium with distinguished experts on "Ensuring respect for women's rights in situations of conflict".

With Femmes Africa Solidarité, the NGO that I have founded here in Geneva in 1996, I have been working on the issues related to women, peace and security for more than 20 years to promote women participation in peace processes in Africa, women's empowerment and gender equality.

The IPU, the international organization of Parliaments, created in 1989, has been ever since working restlessly to bring together parliamentarians from the entire world for the sake of peace, cooperation between the peoples and the consolidation of representative democracy. I would take this opportunity to commend the work that the IPU has been doing in promoting and protecting human rights, as well as the particular focus on the issue of gender and women's political participation.

2. Current situation: women, first victims of war

- African conflicts, (DRC, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Somalia) remain a matter of concern, and the most vulnerable represent the majority of the victims of war: in Juba for example, according **to the UN**, 80 % of displaced people are women and children.

- Women are the **primary targets who suffer from sexual violence during conflict**. Thus, the rape of a woman is considered a weapon of war, and their bodies, a battlefield. Secondly, women are the most **impacted and affected by the humanitarian consequences**: they become displaced, refugees, suffer of famine and poor health.

3. Women as leaders in the transformation of societies

- The persisting representation of women during times of conflicts must not, however, remain focused on the image of **victims**.

- Women **play a key role in rebuilding communities and are crucial to build peace**. The role played by women must be recognized as such.

- We must not dwell on whether women CAN make a change by taking an active leadership role in peace processes: **this has already been proven**, by their involvement and contribution to the peace process and reconstruction **in Liberia, Rwanda** for example.

- Despite the achievement of certain essential milestones for **the issue of women's participation**, like the adoption of **UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security** which guide FAS work, progress has been slow to show.

According to UN Women, in 31 peace processes between 1992 and 2011, **only 4 % of women were signatories to the final agreements**.

- Resolutions 1820, 1888 and 2022 **of the Security Council** and other international instruments that defend the rights of women in conflict are still in need **of implementation**. Regional and national frameworks need to be put in practice and implemented. **Out of 46 countries that have developed a National Action Plan 13 are in Africa**. However, at the implementation level, efforts remain to be done.

4. How to effectively implement it: best practices and effective strategies

- Situation Room

Allying women's forces and their leadership in mediation, the Situation Room model, organized by FAS during election processes under the umbrella of the Women Platform for peaceful elections is an example of **effective women participation in conflict prevention**.

It's an innovative gender sensitive approach to peace based on what I call the Triple M Factor **Mobilization** of women; **Mediation** between the conflicting parties including the women in the political parties, to sign a no-violence agreement, which **encourages cross-party politics**; and **Monitoring** of elections using online social media, mobile phones, and the media channels.

Initiated during the 2011 elections in Liberia, successful Women's Situation Rooms have been set up during elections in **Senegal (2012)**, **Sierra Leone (2012)**, **Mali (2013)**, in **Kenya (2013)**, and we are engaged in partnerships with WILPF to take part in the situation room experience of Nigeria in 2015.

The situation room also promotes the participation of women – in elections: as voters and as leader candidates on the electoral lists. Promoting women's participation in politics has long been a major **objective for the IPU** as well; also, it is the parliamentarians who have the power of influencing the direct participation of women as candidates.

We encourage them to **vote electoral legislation that creates an incentive for women to take part and get involved in politics**; also, a legislation which **supports women as voters**, with measures as simple as giving priority to women voters coming to the election centers carrying their babies, could be a good measure of encouragement.

We encourage the Parliamentarians to support initiatives such as the Situation room, and build alliances with the women who act as elections monitor.

- **UNSC Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions (1820, 1888 and 2022)**

- During FAS work in Burundi and the DRC for the establishment of **National Action Plans** for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325, we have noticed how important the involvement and support of Parliament representatives can be.

- The Parliament is the main institution working for the implementation of this resolution and the subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security: through **legislation and budget allocation**, but equally through **monitoring of the implementation, accomplishing its oversight role**.

- We recommend to Parliamentarians to ensure they advocate for the implementation of the Resolution, as well as for the establishment of a quota system to follow-up on the Beijing process.

- Within the **African Union, the parity principle** as well as the **Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa** (SDGEA) are positive examples for mainstreaming women's participation;

- **Growing women political representation positive examples in Africa:**

Africa is leading globally in terms of women's representation in the legislative branch, thanks to the impressive achievements of Rwanda, with 63% women in the Lower House and 38% in the Upper House. South Africa, Senegal and Mozambique are also starring amongst the top countries from this particular standpoint. Rwanda is also leading among other African States in terms of women holding a ministerial portfolio, with 11 of the total of 28 ministries being held by women in 2014, followed closely by South Africa, Tanzania, Burundi and Kenya. **(According to IPU Women in National Parliaments – World Classification)**

5. Recommendations to States and Parliamentarians

- During my work, I could notice that one of the persisting challenges faced by States today is **access to conflict area**. I have been going on missions in the field in some of the most atrocious conflicts of the past years, DRC, CAR, South Sudan, and the reality of the ground, must be fully understood by states, legislators, governments in order that effective solutions are found. For this reason – cooperation with NGO and CSO and local grassroots networks and associations is a key **for gaining access, transparent information and accurate facts**.

- The **NGO and CSO working on women's rights and participation** must be fully involved, as they are a watchdog, ensuring accountability as well as a reliable partner connected to the field and the real issues going on, giving voice to the victims and those in need and thus ensuring effective measures are adopted.

- **Partnerships** between legislators and States, and CSOs should be reinforced, for purposes of access, accountability, transparency and connection to the field. FAS has always sought to **build alliances** with parliamentarians, as it was the case when the Mano River Women Peace Network was created.

- In order to ensure women's rights during and after conflicts are respected, **appropriate policy change and legislation, including electoral laws**, must be adopted and implemented – notably as a follow-up to the UN resolutions dealing with these issues (again, 1325, 1820, 1888 and 2022).
- **Accountability** is crucial, making sure that once these pieces of legislation are on paper, they are translated into reality by efficient actions. You have an important role to play to end the culture of impunity especially in regards of gender-based violence.
- **Budget allocation** focused on women issues is also important: allocated funds for education, for peace and security, capacity building and vocational training for women, including female peace keepers.
- Support women's **representation in the Parliament** and other key political positions, through adequate legislation and eventually quotas. (As Senegal for example, where the legislation enacted by the former President Abdoulaye Wade, enshrining the principle of parity in politics opened the doors to women participation).