

Oral Statement by Survivors of Sexual Violence
PSC Second Open Session on Women and Children in Armed Conflicts
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, March 28, 2011

We women survivors of sexual violence during armed conflict from Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe appreciate the opportunity to address the AU Peace and Security Council during this important AU Decade on Women. We further appreciate the AU for putting in place the Livingstone Formula that enables Civil Society Organisations to interface with the Peace and Security Council to deliberate on the important issues of women and children in armed conflict in Africa. That this has been made into an annual event is greatly appreciated.

We hail the AU for the efforts made to implement some of the CSO recommendations during the March 2010 Open Session. Notable among these is the mainstreaming of gender in all the work of the Peace and Security Council, the planned deployment of gender officers in all the field offices, and ensuring that field officers implement relevant AU and UN Resolutions.

As survivors of sexual violence in the protracted conflicts in our countries, we acknowledge that we are only representatives of a larger group of women who have experienced the same horrendous violence of human rights. We feel privileged to address the AU Peace and Security Council, hoping that our voices are given serious attention, and efforts will be made to address the issues we are raising and the recommendations we are making.

We hail the AU for the commitment to promote gender parity, equality and the enhancement of women's participation through the adoption of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, and the Additional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa among others. We also note with appreciation the AU's commitment to the UN Security Council Resolutions (1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960) that have been put in place to address the human rights and protection needs of women in armed conflict and post conflict situations.

However, we are disappointed to note that, in spite of all the African Union and UN instruments, armed conflicts continue unabated and sexual violence against women in these situations is carried out by all parties to these conflicts with impunity. All of us present here bear the marks of the violence that is meted out on women in such

situations: the rape, gang rape, sexual slavery and torture, the mutilation of our genital parts to the extent that some of us no longer consider ourselves as women, the resulting HIV/AIDS that carries a stigma, making us unacceptable in our own homes, the loss of our spouses through rejection or death, and the rising poverty levels that have made us incapable of supporting ourselves and loved ones. Our dignity has been torn into shreds.

Despite all these scars on our lives, we are slowly recovering and taking charge of our lives. We hail the efforts of national, regional and international NGOs that have worked tirelessly with us to get us to where we are. We are especially grateful to Femmes Africa Solidarité, UN Women, Oxfam (GB), Urgent Action Fund-Africa, and Isis-WICCE, who made great efforts to ensure that we came to this session. Without them, we would not have been able to come. Unfortunately, their efforts are often hampered by the lack of resources. If our governments took more interest in our issues, this would go a long way towards addressing our plight.

We are also concerned that despite the active role women play to sustain communities during armed conflict, they are often marginalized and not included in different peace processes, including the peace negotiation tables. Women's involvement would help to put the issues of the survivors of sexual violence on the table, in order to find sustainable solutions. We are deeply saddened by the fact that our violators and their apologists are often seated on these tables deciding our fate. We are therefore not surprised that post conflict processes do not include the concerns and priorities of survivors of sexual violence. Instead, we are often urged to let bygones be bygones and look to the future. We cannot look to the future when we are hurting physically and psychologically, and are unable to pick up the pieces of our lives.

Recommendations

We call upon Member States to put in place mechanisms that will ensure full recovery of our bodies, minds and souls and involve us in planning, designing, and implementing the recovery and rehabilitation programmes.

We urge Member States to provide comprehensive medical care, including emergency surgery services, and trained medical workers on trauma management.

We strongly recommend Member States to increase their health budget for our sexual and reproductive health complications and trauma management. The budget should be set aside as a specific area of intervention and not mainstreamed within other health

programmes in order to focus on sexual and reproductive health and trauma management as priorities for our healing process.

We also call upon the AU to include on the peace support operations medical personnel with sufficient expertise to deal with our specific issues.

As part of early warning and in order to prevent the scourge of sexual violence, we call upon the AU and the Panel of the Wise to link up with grassroots women's organizations in order to get timely information and plan adequate early responses.

We further call upon Member States to ensure that national legislation acknowledges sexual violence as a crime against humanity and implement existing laws to bring about an end to impunity.

In line with UNSCR 1960, we further urge the AU to consider and adopt sexual violence as a disqualifying criterion for leadership.

We recommend a comprehensive approach to justice in order for us to participate in the social, economic and political recovery of our states.

We further recommend that the AU provides a recovery fund for us to get economic empowerment and develop targeted programmes for us to be financially independent and claim our rightful role in the post conflict reconstruction.

Finally, we urge the AU to consider holding this annual Open Session in different conflict areas, starting with Darfur. This will enable the Panel of the Wise to interact with more women survivors of sexual violence. We remain committed to participating in the activities aimed at finding sustainable peace in our countries. We look forward to being involved in the activities of the AU Decade for Women in order to ensure that positive changes are made to restore the dignity of women and children in armed conflicts, promote our rights, enhance our meaningful participation in decision making up to the highest level, ensure our protection under the law, prevent crimes and the violation of our bodily integrity, and ensure the prosecution of the perpetrators of atrocities.

We thank you for your kind attention.