



“The road to a lasting peace: Leveraging the power of young women and girls for peace and security”

Virtual Panel Discussion
12 August 2021, 2:00pm-4:00pm EAT

Report of the Meeting

Introduction

On 12 August 2021, International Youth Day, the African Union Commission, UN Women, Department of Peace Operations and the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) organized a virtual inter-generational policy dialogue under the theme “The road to a lasting peace: Leveraging the power of young women and girls for peace and security”.

The dialogue provided a forum for women in peace and security, members of Civil Society Organizations and AU Member States to discuss the contribution and challenges of young women taking part in peace processes. The meeting adopted key recommendations to stakeholders on enhancing the role of young women in peace process at all levels.

Opening Session:

Karen Ondwasi, Chairperson, GIMAC Youth Network started her remark with a word of appreciations to all the young women who, despite the challenges that came with the pandemic have continuously been persistent in advocating for peace, in their communities, countries and region. She emphasised the importance of addressing gender inequality and under representation of girls and young women in this sector. Karen noted that inequality starts early in schools, highlighting that education curriculums are often not tailored in a manner that supports women to pursue careers in peacebuilding. In addition, she stressed on the negative implication of retrogressive cultures that keep insisting women are too fragile to be involved in conflict resolution.

Beyond the challenges, Ms. Karen underlined some of the opportunities to leverage on, including the power of Youth, their numbers, expertise and skills which can be used to promote peaceful communities. She concluded by underlining that such policy dialogue platforms create a space to frame concrete strategies for addressing barriers to young women’s role in peace processes and accord the necessary support.

Ms. Fiona Lortan, Ag. Director of Conflict Management Directorate, Political Affairs, Peace and Security, African Union Commission delivered her remarks on behalf of His Excellency, Amb. Bankole Adeoye, the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security.

Ms. Fiona noted that the peculiar dangers women and girls face during conflict cycles is well established to include their vulnerabilities to Sexual and Gender Based Violence, their exploitation as sex slaves, forced marriages and conscription into armed groups, inadequate access to healthcare, amongst others. Nonetheless, young women and girls are rising above the odds and risks to contribute positively to Africa’s peace and security architecture.

She expressed that the recognition of the role of youth in peace and security is anchored in Article 17 of the AU Youth Charter (2006) and backed by UNSCR 2250 of December 2015, the 665th communique of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) of March 2017, which

endorsed the modalities for the operationalization of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise Africa) and called for the inclusion of youth in conflict prevention and mediation efforts, as well as UNSCR 2419 of 2018 respectively.

Ms. Fiona further noted that the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda has gained significant traction in Africa since September 2018 with the inauguration of the AU Youth for Peace Program. Moreover, the Continental Framework on YPS and its 10-year implementation plan, provides an overarching guideline to facilitate the meaningful participation of youth in all spectrums of peace and security as leaders, partners and beneficiaries and allocates roles and responsibilities to stakeholders such as inter-governmental institutions, development partners, youth and their networks amongst others.

She shared that FemWise-Africa is working assiduously with young women to transform through immense capacity building through trainings, mentorship and deployments.

Ms. Fiona concluded by emphasizing on the imperatives of appropriate and concerted actions to ensure the materialization of the Continental Framework on YPS, which was conceived and developed in close collaboration with young women and men.

SESSION I- SETTING THE SCENE: Leveraging the power of young women and girls for peace and security

Liz Lum: Adolescent Girl Advisor at Global Fund for Women and Generation Equality Champion stated that the Generation Equality Forum, the main worldwide turning point for Gender equality, might have come and gone but the echoes and call to action remain. She stated that the forum galvanized governments, companies and transformation managers from all around the world to design and promote ambitious investments and policies, young women and girls. She highlighted that young women are waiting anxiously to see the reality of intersectionality, feminist leadership and transformation.

She emphasized that young African women have always been major stakeholders in peacebuilding but have limited access to spaces where solutions for young women and girls are being proposed and described the issue as a structural and institutional violence and discrimination.

She stated that among the challenges that hinder women from taking part in peace process is the norm that considers women as vulnerable groups in need of protection rather than active agents. She further added that lack of technical and financial support for women to engage within official processes marginalizes them.

She called on all stakeholders especially governments, international bodies and the donor community to increase funding for youth-led initiatives for proper representation and participation; create joint committees that bridge existing generational gaps to issues of peace and security and put in place a monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to enable stakeholders consistently track the execution of the YPS agenda at the country level.

Dr Edward Addai: Representative of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to the AU and UNECA, outlined five key messages with stakeholders attending the dialogue. **First**, the mental health effects of conflicts tend to be lifelong particularly in the absence of mental health and psycho-social services and support. He stated that Africa cannot develop if the guns are not silenced. **Second**, children suffer from conflicts they have no role in creating. Conflicts expose children to violence, disrupts social services, and family systems, and families' ability to care for their children, all of which significantly and negatively affect children's development. **Third**, road to lasting peace in Africa has not been smooth and is not going to get better unless we do things differently. He stated the road to lasting peace should prioritize, prevention, early detection and rapid response and life- saving services and essential social services based on our core commitment to children in humanitarian situation. **Fourth**, he emphasized that there can be no peace without mutual respect and social justice and discussed on the need to invest in ensuring equitable access to opportunities and services. **Finally**, he noted that young people are and can be changemakers in bringing lasting peace in Africa. He concluded his statement with a message to duty bearers, "we have a duty and responsibility to nurture young people and create safe spaces for them to be included and engaged in peace and security activities."

Ms. Christine Odera, Global Coordinator, Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network appreciated the African Union for being an organization that spearheaded in creating frameworks for implementing resolution UN Resolution 1325 and 2250. She noted between 2010 and 2018 as per the Youth Development index developed by the Commonwealth, peace and security is a sector that has shown an improvement. Nonetheless, the finding of the report shows an increased gender parity gap noting that more women continue to feel unsafe. The report indicated that fewer lives are lost due to armed conflict noting Somalia and Eritrea as countries that showed the largest improvement in this regard. Christine emphasized that despite the progress, a lot remains to be done.

She also posed the question 'Are we really equal partners when it comes to implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) resolution?' noting the continuous challenge faced by youth when it comes to equal representation. She further underlined the lack of proper and lasting investment towards the implementation of the instruments as a major challenge of the sector. Ms. Christine finalized her remarks by requesting all duty bearers to support youth working on WPS agenda.

Lieutenant Gifty Kumbanyela, Peacekeeper, UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), shared her experience as a young African woman serving within a UN Peacekeeping mission. Lt. Gifty shared her background and how she joined the military, having grown up in a military family, she always had a desire to serve but saw the military as a male dominated profession. Seeing the growing number of women military personnel encouraged her to join the Ghana Armed Forces, and in September 2020 she was nominated to serve in the UNIFIL. She shared that this is her first peacekeeping deployment, and her duties involve leading foot and vehicle patrols and in-mission trainings and commanding various military parades. She shared that in her engagement with local communities, when local women see her, they feel more secure and empowered to contribute to discussions. Lt. Gifty noted that

male dominance in peace and decision-making processes often poses various challenges for women.

Lt. Gifty added that the impact of more women in peacekeeping can never be overemphasized, as women are essential in global peace and security and in post-conflict reconstruction collaborative efforts. She also stressed that if properly trained and equipped, women can be even more versatile in playing roles to bridge the gap between the local population and military operations. Finally, the Lieutenant also referred to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on her work, which has resulted in with the suspension of medical outreach, educational activities, training and other social events disproportionately affecting women. Nonetheless, she underlined that, thanks to her connection with the local communities, she managed to assist them in diverse ways to combat the pandemic.

Session II Looking ahead – what should we do differently?

Mme. Bineta Diop, Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, AUC recognized young women and girls as vital agents of change towards the realization of peace and security and the need for all actors to come together, assess achievements, examine continuing barriers, and define paths to accelerate actions to ensure the active engagement of young women and girls in all pillars of the WPS Agenda. She noted that various crises situations have shown that young women and girls are central to peace and reconstruction efforts and are resilient in the face of all the diversity. In this spirit, she underlined that all initiatives implemented by her office take a strong intergenerational dimension and are formulated with a strong recognition of young women and girls' role and contributions towards continental peace and security. She mentioned some of the major initiatives, including the SheLeadsPeace Campaign, FemWise, the AU Continental Results Framework (CRF) used to monitor the continent's WPS agenda and various solidarity missions conducted ensure voices of women and girls are integrated in the various peace processes and their needs taken into consideration.

In conclusion, she recommended the need to; strengthen co-leadership and recognize the leadership role of the youth; make explicit reference to young women and girls and articulate their needs in programs and initiatives; the importance of intersectional approach to data gathering and disaggregated data and the need to ensure consistent support to young women initiatives.

Dr. Véronique Tognifodé Minister of Social Affairs and Microfinance of Benin and current Chairperson of the African Union's Specialized Technical Committee highlighted that youth is a crucial theme for every government in the world, especially African governments, because young people are our future. She stressed the need for new perspectives and courageous decisions, deploring that conflict management remains male dominated. She underscored that women have a different style in terms of management and an acute awareness of the self-preservation instinct. Despite being criticized as overly sensitive, they can play a very courageous role in conflict prevention and management.

The minister noted the disproportionate impact of conflict on women who represent 80% of the world's refugees, and stressed that they must be further involved in conflict management. She noted that several resolutions on women have been adopted. For

instance, in 2020, the AU Specialised Committee on Gender Equality adopted a resolution stipulating that Member States must act to strengthen young women's participation in decision-making. Nonetheless, women are still absent from peace and security processes. To address this, Benin has made commitments for the role of women in peacebuilding, has adopted a national action plan for the implementation of the resolutions for the recruitment of young women into the national army, and has imposed a 15% quota for women's participation in the army, as well as a 15% quota in the field of education.

In concluding her intervention, the Minister called for massive investments for the education of young girls, and noted that such pragmatic measures should serve as an example for other countries to follow.

Ms. Marie Goretti NDUWAYO- UN Women Ethiopia, Liaison to AUC and UNECA Regional Advisor reiterated that despite the existence of strong, progressive and articulated global and continental policies, strategies and action plans on women, peace and security, African women including young women are still underrepresented in peace processes at local, national and continental and are disproportionately affected by conflicts.

Ms. Nduwayo emphasized the need for concerted efforts to address discriminatory norms and practices that overlook the role of women and young women particularly as leaders of today and tomorrow. Moreover, as the AU's theme of the year is around leveraging on culture and heritage to build the Africa we want, she stressed that it is crucial to build on the momentum to advance positive African egalitarian culture that reinforce gender equality and women's rights.

She stated that UN Women is committed to work closely with the AUC and Member states for the implementation of the WPS agenda through technical contribution to policies and strategies, coordination of joint programs, supporting the engagement of women and their organisations, generation of research and data, supporting learning exchanges, and documentation of good practices to inform policy and programming.

She concluded her remarks by calling participants to rally around the commitments of the Generation Equality Forum's Compact on WPS-Humanitarian Action to ensure that they are implemented, and women and girls are systematically and meaningfully engaged including women peacebuilders, refugees, IDPs, forcibly displaced and stateless women and girls – in the decisions that impact their lives.

Annex 1

Recommendations

- Gender mainstreaming is an essential requirement of sustainable peace; thus, the implementation of UNSC resolutions 1325 and 2250 as well as Africa continental women, youth, peace and security related commitments should be an inclusive effort that features the meaningful participation of women, especially young women.
- Advancing gender equality and sustainable peace requires dedicated financial investment that empowers young women to become transformative leaders and supports the implementation of women, youth, peace and security commitments.
- There should be a concerted effort to increase both qualitative and quantitative research as well as disaggregated data with well-defined and measurable indicators to monitor and report progress on the implementation of commitments that advance young's women's rights and contribution to peace and security.
- We need to place the participation, rights and interests of women at the center of planning and monitoring peace processes to bring fresh perspectives to the table, and to provide more holistic, equitable and sustainable solutions.
- More women alongside men make peace operations more effective and contribute to improving peacekeeping. Women peacekeepers are essential enablers to build trust and confidence with local communities, and diversity in leadership and teams bring in diverse perspectives, helping us to reflect the communities we serve and achieve our mandate.
- Women peacekeepers serve as powerful mentors and role models for women and girls in post-conflict settings, setting examples for them to advocate for their own rights and pursue non-traditional careers.
- Peace and security for all can only be achieved and sustained if there are equal opportunities, protection, access to resources and services and participation in decision-making for women and girls.

Theme: “The road to a lasting peace: Leveraging the power of young women and girls for peace and security”

Date: 12 August 2021 | Virtual Convening

Time: 11h00 – 13h00 GMT | 14h00 – 16h00 GMT+3 (EAT)

DRAFT AGENDA

Moderator: - Ms Victoria Maloka Ag. Director, AU WGYD

14:00- 14:15 Opening Remarks

- Karen Ondwasi, Chairperson, GIMAC Youth Network
- Ms. Fiona Lortan, Ag. Director of Conflict Management Directorate, Political Affairs, Peace and Security

SESSION I SETTING THE SCENE: Leveraging the power of young women and girls for peace and security

14:15 -14:50

Liz Lum , Adolescent Girl Advisor at Global Fund for Women and Generation Equality Champion

Keynote speaker - Speaks to the overall theme

1. Dr Edward Addai, UNICEF Country Representative to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

Children and Youth perspective – Youth Division /UNICEF through the Children in Armed Conflict Programme (CAC)

2. Ms. Christine Odera, Global Coordinator, Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network –

Presentation on the implementation of UNSCR2250 and UNSCR1325 in Africa

3. Lieutenant Gifty Kumbanyela, Peacekeeper serving with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)
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Role of young African women in peacebuilding and peace keeping missions and challenges

4. Ms. Ayak Chol Deng Alak , Head of Research, Strategic Defence and Security Review Board

Young women perspectives in promoting a culture of peace in South Sudan, opportunities and challenges

Intermission **Short video (What does peace mean to you)**

**14h50 – Session II Looking ahead – what should we do differently?
15h30**

Moderated Open Mic Session

1. Mme. Bineta Diop - AUC Chairperson’s Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security
2. Member State – Gender Minister of Benin
3. HRH ALH Dr Haliru Ndanusa Yahaya -Emir of Shonga

15h30 - Session II Way Forward

15h35 Moderator – Rewan Youssif , AUC Youth Division ,Team lead - Youth Health & Wellbeing
Key Messages, Recommendations and post dialogue advocacy plan

15h35-15:40 Closing Remarks

Ms. Marie Goretti NDUWAYO –
Regional Liaison Advisor - UN Women Ethiopia and Liaison to AUC and UNECA

