

20th Anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)
31th October 2020

In my capacity as the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, I am glad to join Africa in celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the landmark Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) which stresses the critical role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as well as the importance of ensuring their full and equal participation in peace and security efforts.

Among the many milestones achieved by the countries of the region over the last 20 years is the increase in women's representation in national parliaments and cabinet positions. The Great Lakes region can be proud that a number of its countries are global champions in this regard, with a large number of parliamentary seats occupied by women, and some countries having already moved beyond the mandatory 30% quota. At the same time, the regional average for women holding parliamentary seats is currently 22%, with a slightly lower average for cabinet positions, highlighting that our collective efforts must be further strengthened to reach and move beyond the 30% that countries of the region have committed to achieve within the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plans.

Implementation of these National Action Plans, alongside the WPS Regional Action Plan, and other normative frameworks, will support grassroots women civil society organizations (CSOs) and ensure that their voices are heard and are part of decision-making. The 'Advisory Board for WPS in the Great Lakes Region' is a key advocacy body that has been instrumental in engaging with Member States to advance the WPS agenda. Its engagement at the highest level of Government, as well as with grassroots CSOs, has contributed greatly to our collective efforts. I am pleased that it is seen by all regional stakeholders as a force for good in the promotion of Resolution 1325's four pillars – participation, prevention, protection, and resolution and recovery. Recent engagements by my Office with the United Nations Peace Building Commission also ensure that the Great Lakes region is an integral part of the PBC Gender Strategy aimed at strengthening engagement with women peacebuilders at all levels. The new UN regional strategy for the Great Lakes region also stresses that the meaningful participation of women and youth remains crucial for the region's stability, and that the UN will promote and, where possible, initiate interventions to bolster the economic empowerment of women and youth who play a critical, yet often understated, role in national economies and trans-border trade.

I am particularly pleased that women's empowerment is seen as a priority by the PBC and Member States, and by development partners in their support to regional initiatives. Many international partners are achieving this by linking financial support to development projects using a gender lens. This approach is particularly timely in view of the challenges we face to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a particularly devastating impact on women and girls across the Great Lakes region due to the existing gender inequality and inequity.

There is no better time than now for all stakeholders to join hands to ensure women's inclusivity in governance and peacebuilding processes is a reality going forward. I welcome progress achieved over the last two decades, with resolution 1325 recognised as a landmark resolution for the United Nations, and urge all stakeholders to reinforce their collective efforts to reach the ultimate goal of full equality in all aspects of our lives.

Special Envoy Huang Xia