

**Declaration of the Women’s Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation
Framework for the DRC and the region
to the Summit of the African Union Commission in Kigali, Rwanda
12 July 2016, Goma, DRC**

The Women’s Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the region (“the Women’s Platform”, and the “PSC Framework”) established in January 2014 in order to ensure that women play critical roles in the implementation of the PSC Framework and fully participate in the broader peace and development agenda for the Great Lakes region of Africa, met in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on 11 – 12 July 2016. The meeting took stock of the progress made by the Women’s Platform in assisting women at grassroots levels through financial grants, capacity building and empowerment initiatives, and deliberated on strengthening women’s active engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in line with the implementation of the PSC Framework, and United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325).

The delegates took note of the progress and challenges faced in the implementation of the PSC Framework, and the plight of women and girls in the region. Noting the urgency for expedited actions and policy to achieve durable peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region with the active participation of women, the delegates present the following message and appeal to the Heads of State and Government attending the African Union Commission meeting in Kigali, Rwanda on 17 July 2016.

Recalling the Bujumbura Declaration of the Regional Conference on Women, Peace, Security and Development in the Great Lakes Region on 11 July 2013, the Inaugural Grantee Convening of the Women’s Platform in Goma, DRC on 13 – 15 May 2015, the UN Women Global Report on UNSCR 1325, and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all of which confirm the need to strengthen collaboration and build on the momentum generated by women’s networks and fora to ensure women are able to play meaningful and effective roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region;

Noting the findings and recommendations of the Field Monitoring Exercise of the Women’s Platform conducted in August - September 2015 which confirmed that when income-generating activities aimed at empowering women are implemented alongside peace and security activities, they positively boost the peace building processes at community, national and regional levels;

Welcoming the pioneering impact of the ministerial consultations held in Nairobi, Kenya, in April 2015, co-organized by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Office of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region (O/SESG-GL), UN Habitat, the Swiss Cooperation, the World Bank, and other partners, which recognized and supported the rights of refugee and displaced women to ownership, reclaiming of property, and inheritance;

Welcoming the initiative of O/SESG-GL and UN Women to convene in October 2015 representatives of women in the extractive sectors and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from the Great Lakes region, engaging them in further cross-border confidence building and other exchanges, including support with investments;

Recognizing the positive impact of the inaugural Private Sector Investment Conference (PSIC) for the Great Lakes region, held in Kinshasa, DRC on 24 - 25 February 2016, and which highlighted economic potentials and investment opportunities, and the urgent need to put in place measures that will ensure responsible investment with the full participation of youth and women;

Recalling that Heads of State and Government of countries of the Great Lakes region, and international partners, made significant commitments under the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region (2006) and the PSC Framework (2013) in order to bring about durable peace, security and development of the region;

Welcoming the significant roles played and commitments made by the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, the African Union Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, the African Union Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Executive Secretary of the ICGLR, the Ministers responsible for gender issues from Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda, and other partners of the Women's Platform, including Global Fund for Women and UN Women, to strengthen the Women's Platform and maximize synergy with the ICGLR Regional Women's Forum for advancing the role and interests of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding;

Appreciating the recent efforts led by the Guarantors of the PSC Framework, being the African Union (AU), ICGLR, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the UN, to achieve progress in the implementation of the Nairobi Declarations regarding the M23 movement, the repatriation of ex-combatants of the M23 movement from Rwanda and Uganda, the resumption of military cooperation between the Congolese army (FADRC) and the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), and the continuous efforts of the Government of the DRC to neutralize armed groups in eastern DRC;

Deeply concerned at the persistence of armed groups in eastern DRC, the spike in brutal attacks, particularly by the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), other unresolved agitations in the region, including on elections and governance in Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan and the DRC, and noting the impact of political crises and violence on women and children;

Further noting with concern the continuing high level commission of and impunity for sexual and gender-based violence in the region, despite increasing efforts over the last five years by Governments and national, regional and international partners to prevent and punish this particularly heinous crime;

1. **We note with concern** persistent insecurity and impunity for human rights violations in the Great Lakes region that is affecting citizens, especially women and children, in the countries of Burundi, the DRC, particularly in Beni, the CAR and South Sudan.

We therefore call upon the Heads of State and Government of the Great Lakes region to:

- Expedite the Burundi peace processes and ensure inclusivity in the dialogue, in particular inclusivity of the ICGLR's Regional Women's Forum, Civil Society Forum and Youth Forum;
 - Effectively support all AU and UN initiatives and processes in South Sudan which are in furtherance of the restoration of peace and security, the establishment of ceasefire agreements and the protection of civilians;
 - Support initiatives to address sexual and gender-based violence in the Great Lakes region and reinforce mechanisms to address impunity and provide reparation;
 - Call on the AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security to immediately carry out, in collaboration with the ICGLR's Regional Women's Forum, Civil Society Forum and ICGLR Youth Forum, solidarity missions in Burundi, the CAR, South Sudan and the DRC, particularly in Beni;
 - Constitute independent commissions of inquiry to investigate the ongoing massacres and human rights violations committed in Beni, the DRC, and in Burundi; and
 - Support the operationalization and strengthen the capacity of the national army in the CAR.
2. ***Considering that*** women remain under represented in political dialogue, negotiations and in peace building, ***we call upon***, the Heads of State and Government of the Great Lakes region, the international community and regional organizations to support initiatives born in the Great Lakes region which will ensure women acquire the necessary resources to participate effectively in all aspects of society. ***We therefore demand that:***
- States and Governments establish, strengthen, and resource national mechanisms for the implementation of the PSC Framework and UNSCR 1325;
 - Provide resources to the Women's Platform and the ICGLR Women's Forum to effectively support women in their peacebuilding efforts; and
 - ICGLR identifies and strengthens a network of female experts to participate in all decision making processes.
3. ***We appreciate*** the establishment of the ICGLR Regional Training Facility on sexual and gender-based violence hosted by the Government of Uganda and which was born by the Kampala Declaration as a means of enhancing peace and security for women. ***We therefore demand*** for the involvement of the ICGLR Regional Women's Forum and Civil Society Forum in identifying the trainees, in developing the curriculum and be provided the opportunity to participate in trainings.
4. ***We call on*** the States and Governments of the Great Lakes region and international and regional partners to provide financial and technical support towards economic empowerment of women, which will help address poverty and the cyclical nature of violence in the region.