

Twelfth Meeting of the Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security for the Great Lakes Region

12 May 2020, by Video Conference

Summary of Conclusions

1. The Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) for the Great Lakes Region held its twelfth meeting on 12 May 2020 by video conference. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and by Her Excellency Speciosa Wandira and Her Excellency Catherine Samba-Panza, Co-Chairs of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa).
2. The meeting was attended by Her Excellency Beatrice Lomeya Atilite, Minister of State and Minister for Gender, Family and the Child of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Ms. Liberata Mulamula, FemWise-Africa; Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; Ms. Hanna Serwaa Tetteh, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to the African Union; Ms. Chantal Yelu Mulop, Special Adviser to the Head of State of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in charge of Youth and Violence against Women; and Ms. Virginie Sheryl Nicole N'Dessabeka, General Director of the Research, Information and Documentation Centre for Women in the Ministry of Health, Population and the Promotion and Integration of Women of the Republic of the Congo.
3. Participants included representatives of United Nations system entities (UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo); representatives of the Executive Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and its forums and centres of excellence; and representatives of regional civil-society organizations, including Ms. Marguerite Mutumwinka, President of the Consultative Umbrella of Women's Associations in the Great Lakes Region, Ms. Julienne Lusenge, Director of the Congolese Women's Fund and of Profemmes Twese Hamwe, and gender experts.
4. The purpose of the meeting was to examine the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) health crisis on women, girls and other vulnerable groups in the Great Lakes region and to identify priority actions to be taken to preserve the gains made on issues related to WPS. Particular emphasis was placed on the participation and protection of women in peace and electoral processes, and on the role of States and civil-society organizations in the region in prevention, protection and economic recovery. The meeting was also an opportunity to review the implementation of the 2018-2023 Regional Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 for the Great Lakes region, and to examine the role of gender ministers in taking action at the national, regional and international levels in response to the ongoing health crisis.
5. In their statements, the Co-Chairs noted that progress had been made on issues related to WPS, but also expressed concern with regard to the emerging health crisis affecting communities in the Great Lakes region. They stressed that the concept of security also covers human security, which includes health, social and economic well-being, and the absence of gender-based violence.

6. The Advisory Board commended the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region for his involvement in the promotion of the WPS objectives in the Great Lakes region and took note of the steadfast efforts made in that regard by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In this connection they welcomed her consultations on the 29 April 2020 with the Security Council Informal Experts Group on WPS and her briefing note for the Security Council on the impacts of COVID-19 on implementation of the CRSV mandate.

7. During its deliberations, the twelfth meeting of the Advisory Board adopted a number of recommendations to be presented to the States of the region and the international community. This might also assist regional civil-society organizations to develop projects under the leadership of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and in partnership with the Office of the Special Envoy, the African Union and United Nations system entities. The recommendations followed the four (4) pillars underpinning the topic of WPS, taking into account the COVID-19 situation and its impact.

Participation

8. The Advisory Board noted the efforts made by member states to increase women's representation in institutions, the updating of legislation, and the enhancement of women's participation in political and decision-making processes at the national level, including access to senior positions.

9. In this regard, the Advisory Board requested States to safeguard the progress made in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 and to implement policies to enable women's organizations to be included in decision-making bodies for the crafting of policies and regulations for the post-COVID-19 social and economic recovery.

10. The Board encouraged the countries of the region preparing to hold elections in 2020, namely the Republic of Burundi, the Central African Republic and the United Republic of Tanzania, to ensure that women were represented in all stages of the electoral process.

Protection

11. Aware of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 63/308 (2009) on the responsibility to protect, and of the call by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, on 2 May 2020, to redouble efforts to protect the most vulnerable populations, in particular women and young people, the Advisory Board called on member states to allocate adequate financial resources to civil-society organizations working closely with grass-roots communities to allow them to provide the necessary support to communities in terms of access to quality health care and essential medicines during the pandemic and provide robust support in cases of domestic violence.

12. With regard to the upsurge in incidents of violence against women and the under-reporting of such incidents, the Advisory Board called on member states to take measures during the pandemic to ensure that monitoring, reporting and legal systems continued to function, and to follow up by providing robust support to women survivors of violence. Those provisions could include the setting up of additional, secure support sites to record the reports of survivors.

Prevention

13. Having noted the efforts made by member states, and the initiatives taken by CSOs to prevent the spread of the disease, the Advisory Board encouraged CSOs to pursue their efforts to raise awareness in communities to prevent the spread of the disease. The network of journalists that is already mandated to monitor and reporting on sexual and gender-based violence in the region could be an efficient channel for this awareness-raising exercise.

14. The Advisory Board also called on member states to take into account the gender dimension in their pandemic response plans and called on partners to consider providing additional resources, within the scope of existing funding mechanisms, to CSOs on the frontlines of pandemic prevention in the Great Lakes region.

15. The Advisory Board requested CSOs, through the technical coordination group, to develop a programme of regional activities to facilitate resource mobilization and to support the implementation of prevention activities.

Economic and Social Recovery

16. The Advisory Board, aware of the economic impact of the pandemic on the income-generating activities of women in the region, strongly recommended that compensatory measures be considered to address the economic recovery needs of women working in the informal sector.

17. The Advisory Board agreed to advocate with relevant national authorities to review the tax provisions applying to women involved in informal cross-border trade, in close collaboration with civil society. To achieve this goal, the Board requested the regional centres of excellence to coordinate the collection of data about the number of women active in cross-border trade and about their businesses as soon as possible.

18. Offer compensation to small and medium-sized enterprises run by women. To that end, the Board requests the private-sector forums of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, together with UN-Women and the Economic Commission for Africa, to collect data on the profile, situation and status of small and medium-sized enterprises in which women participate in the Great Lakes region.

19. The Advisory Board proposed that a special fund be set up to help women involved in agricultural food production, by providing them with financial support and encouraged member states to review their agricultural policy in the post-COVID-19 context.

20. The Advisory Board requested that the member states use a portion of the pandemic funds provided by international institutions to provide financial support to women to enable them to continue their agricultural production activities. Doing so would mitigate the malnutrition resulting from the cessation of agricultural activities as a result of the measures to contain and restrict the movement of populations. In addition, the Advisory Board urged Governments to complete projects to establish watering points in remote areas where women have no access to water.

21. The Advisory Board encouraged member states to take measures to facilitate distance learning for girls and young women in response to the impacts of the health crisis, and promote awareness among men and women of the fair distribution of family, household and community tasks.

22. The Advisory Board strongly encouraged the convening of a meeting of gender ministers of the Great Lakes region to take stock of the progress made by member states in order to enable a review of priority activities for the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325.

23. The Advisory Board encouraged the ICGLR to organize the general assemblies of the fora as soon as possible to enable the latter to participate as stakeholders in the implementation of the priorities identified by the Advisory Board.

24. Recognizing the importance of the effective participation of the Regional Women's Forum in the consultation process of the ICGLR, the Advisory Board requested the relevant entities of the ICGLR, including national coordination mechanisms, to contribute to the implementation of the activities set out in the programme entitled "United Nations in Support for Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region". The contribution could take the form of support in organizing the general meeting of the Fora, and in the development of a Regional Action Plan for the Fora, aimed at strengthening the operations of the Regional Women's Forum.

25. The Advisory Board stressed the importance of having a regional strategy to confront the pandemic in the Great Lakes region and welcomed a coordinated approach through an implementation process.

26. Finally, the Advisory Board expressed its gratitude to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and to the Co-Chairs of FemWise-Africa for having taken the initiative to organize the meeting in the current time of crisis.

Nairobi, 12 May 2020