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FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE JOINT SOLIDARITY MISSION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

UNITED NATIONS, AFRICAN UNION, ICGLR

Kinshasa, 18 August 2018

The Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, UN-Women, the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region partner up on a joint solidarity and advocacy mission for women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the Great Lakes Region, UN-Women, the African Union (AU) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), acting through the Advisory Board of the Women's Platform of the Peace Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) undertook a mission of solidarity and advocacy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from 16 to 19 August 2018.

The mission is the result of the strong commitment by the different regional and international institutions to unify their action to promote women's political participation in decision-making and peace processes.

The mission was led by Ms. Catherine Samba-Panza, former interim President of the Central African Republic, co-chairperson of FemWise-Africa, accompanied by Ambassador Liberata Mulamula, former Executive Secretary of ICGLR, both of whom are members of the Consultative Committee of the Women's Platform of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region.

During their stay in the DRC, the members of the mission met with various high-level representatives, including the Chairman of the National Assembly, the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for the Interior and Security, the Minister for Gender, Child and the Family and the Minister of State for Justice, who is currently the interim Minister for Foreign Affairs. They also held meetings with the Vice-Chairman of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), female politicians and representatives of civil society and different political parties, religious leaders, traditional chiefs and representatives of the United Nations Country Team. They were also received by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

The initiative to undertake a joint mission was welcomed by all and considered to be an excellent opportunity to advocate for the status of women in the DRC and their full participation in the electoral process as well as initiatives to strengthen their leadership capacities.

Furthermore, the joint mission delivered a message of peace and solidarity and made its interlocutors more aware of the need to involve women and young people in conflict prevention and resolution activities. The members of the mission were also pleased to observe the latest socio-political developments in DRC, notably the progress made in relation to provisions set out in the Constitution regarding the electoral process. However, sociological, cultural, legal and financial barriers requiring specific action by lawmakers were also identified. To that end, the next parliamentary mandate should consider reforms to ensure the implementation of legislation and positive discrimination measures for women and minorities.

Moreover, other causes for concern identified by the mission included doubts over the electronic voting system. The delegation encouraged CENI and political actors to engage in discussions in order to reach consensus on this matter. It also urged CENI to continue its efforts to promote outreach and civic education initiatives and noted the key role of the media in the advancement of the status of women, and called on the media to step up its efforts to ensure that women are given a greater voice.

The members of the mission observed the security and humanitarian challenges faced by the DRC and the Great Lakes region as well as the impact of conflicts on women, especially in rural areas. Women continue to face serious problems of survival as well as social and cultural pressures. The members of the solidarity mission therefore urged the moral actors to continue to engage in peace efforts and appealed to the political and legal authorities to implement measures to improve women's living conditions. Accordingly, the members underlined the need to strengthen the capacities of women and young people at the local level to enable them to have a greater awareness of their role as agents of transformation.

The mission's recommendations will be presented to the Heads of State and Government at the ninth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, to be held on 8 October 2018, and will be communicated separately to the African Union and the governing bodies of ICGLR.

In the meantime, a plan implementing the recommendations will be devised by a joint technical team comprising representatives of the Office of the Special Envoy, FemWise-Africa, ICGLR and UN-Women to promote women's political participation in the short- and long-term.

The mission expressed its sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government of DRC for the warm welcome it received, particularly from the Minister for Gender, Child and the Family, Ms. Chantal Safou Lopusa, member of the Consultative Committee of the Women's Platform for the Framework Agreement. The mission also thanked UN-Women and MONUSCO for their extensive support to the delegation and the fruitful discussions that the delegation held on its arrival with Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MONUSCO.

The mission expressed its deep appreciation for the enthusiasm and commitment of Congolese women and promised to persevere in its efforts to advocate for the participation of Congolese women and all women in the Great Lakes region both in the political sphere and in peace processes.

The mission was saddened to learn of the passing of Mr. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, and observed a minute's silence in his memory.