

UN 75TH ANNIVERSARY: A FOCUS ON WOMEN'S CRITICAL ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE BUILDING



Women have a role to play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. To this end the Office of the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region's new strategy recognises the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda as indispensable in promoting gender equality and women's contribution to peacebuilding efforts.

Based on this premise, the Office of the Special Envoy is pursuing cooperation with women's civil society organisations, raising their profiles, and providing them with a platform for their voices to be heard, particularly on critical issues pertaining to women and human rights.

The Office headed by UN Special Envoy Huang Xia, along with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), has been promoting the integration of the gender

dimension in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic through the establishment of a civil society organization coordination group.

In taking the WPS agenda forward as one of the strategic priority areas, along with the just-celebrated United Nations 75th anniversary, the Special Envoy intends to champion the work of the Advisory Board for Women, Peace and Security in the Great Lakes region as the office's key enabler for women as drivers of change in the Great Lakes region.

The increase in violence against women and girls, and the rise in unemployment and poverty due to the pandemic, are among the key issues the board is focusing attention on by promoting the critical role women play in cross-border trade and the need for all parties to see them as significant partners in regional value chains. To advance this cause, the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region organized a series of roundtable consultations aiming to identify rapid-impact peacebuilding projects that will strengthen the role of women and youth in community violence reduction.

Significant progress has been achieved in the Great Lakes region. For example, most countries in the region have developed their own National Action Plans on the WPS agenda. Tanzania was one of the latest to join this group of countries in mid-November, while Zambia is expected to finalise one in 2021.

Several countries in the region have also incorporated the 30 percent quota for women in their constitutions. An increasing number of women are occupying leadership positions in the legislative and executive branches, with some of the region's member States among the world's top 25 countries with the highest numbers of women in legislative bodies.

The regional average in national parliaments is 27.5 per cent, and 27 per cent in the executive branch of Government. Of note, Rwanda is the world leader for women's representation in parliament, with over 60 per cent women's representation, with Tanzania at 40 percent, Burundi at 36 percent, Uganda at 35 percent and Angola at 30 percent.

On the flip side of the coin, the presence of illegal armed groups in eastern DRC and their actions against the civilian population, particularly against women and girls, as well as the upsurge in sexual and gender-based violence, remain a major source of concern.

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In their effort to fight this scourge, the Guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region (UN, AU, ICGLR and SADC) organized a joint regional workshop on women and elections in Addis-Ababa in November 2020 to build a platform for the 20th Anniversary of Resolution 1325 (2000) . “It was noted that violence against women in politics remains a challenge to their participation, and that women are under-represented at all levels of the electoral cycle. Participants made a series of recommendations that called on the co-Guarantors of the Framework agreement to jointly pursue office initiatives that promote an all-inclusive electoral process that guarantees women's and minorities’ rights in countries preparing for elections,” Special Envoy Xia said.