



INITIATIVES RELATING TO WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, it is universally recognized that women are the guarantors of the cultural values of peace, love, fraternity, tolerance and solidarity.

Peace, stability and development, however, can be achieved only if all segments of society, including women, are actively involved in their promotion.

In order for society to become fairer and more balanced, women need to be involved in the process of pacification and post-conflict reconstruction in its entirety. That also means that the principle of gender equality must be integrated not only into national policies and legislation, but also into habits, customs and traditions.

With this in mind, since the beginning of the implementation process of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Heads of State and Government have shown a clear willingness to integrate women into all sectors of life at the member State level, including into conflict resolution. The process of establishing and institutionalizing the ICGLR was therefore deliberately participatory and inclusive, as the Heads of State recognized that exclusion was a root cause of the conflicts experienced by the Great Lakes region.

MAIN LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

Dar-Es-Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region (2004)

Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region (2006)

Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence Against Women and Children (2006)

Goma Declaration on Eradicating Sexual Violence and Ending Impunity in the Great Lakes Region (2008)

Kampala Declaration on Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2011)

Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (2013)

Goma Declaration on Women, Peace and Security (2016)

ICGLR INITIATIVES

Advocating the promotion of women's rights and their participation in politics

Since its inception, ICGLR has insisted on the recognition of the role of women in the political governance of conflicts and their prevention and resolution, because it is convinced that decision-making, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace consolidation are effective only if women take an active part.

Prevention pillar

ICGLR supports the implementation of resolutions, considering them indispensable tools for effecting positive change for conflict-affected women in order to bring lasting peace to all in the region. It addresses the root causes of violence as a prerequisite for combating sexual violence against women in conflict and protecting their rights, by highlighting the importance of participation and accountability. Armed conflict, with its attendant proliferation of small arms and light weapons, prevents States from stabilizing their economies and consumes huge amounts of money that could instead have been spent on human security, including the empowerment of women. The proliferation of weapons is a serious threat to the security of women and girls, as these firearms promote violence, particularly sexual and gender-based violence.

ICGLR provided financial support for a workshop run by the Burundian women's platform for dialogue in Bujumbura on 1 March 2016 as part of the Women, Peace and Security agenda within the One Action for Peace project launched by ICGLR and the African Union.

Establishment of a pool of peace mediators

In its quest for solutions, ICGLR has created a pool of 28 high-level mediators comprising 9 men and 19 women from the Great Lakes region. The members of the pool attended a short training course on 27 and 28 June 2016 in Nairobi. The training will continue this year over a longer period. It will take the form of a retreat during which participants will exchange experiences with mediators from other regional economic communities.

Exchanges with Burundian women

One of the recommendations of the 2016 Goma Declaration of the Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region instructed the Platform and the ICGLR Regional Women's Forum to accompany women in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan in their search for peaceful solutions to the crises rocking their countries. As part of the implementation of that resolution, ICGLR and the African Union, with the financial support of United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Burundi, organized three days of exchanges, gathering Burundian women in Addis Ababa on 13, 14 and 15 June 2017 to prepare them to contribute to the inter-Burundian dialogue process. After the discussions, the participants drew up a road map and adopted a declaration.

Participation and advocacy pillar

The members of the Regional Women's Forum participate in all the meetings of the Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee (the foreign ministers of the member States), in Summits of Heads of State and Government and in meetings of the Steering Committee of the Regional Initiative Against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources. They have done so since the beginning of the process as part of efforts to monitor, at all levels, the implementation of the Pact on Security, Stability and Development for the Great Lakes Region. The Chair of the Forum makes statements that focus on the imperative of taking into account the needs of women and children in the region.

Meetings of the Steering Committee of the ICGLR Regional Women's Forum

In November 2016, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the African Union and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation provided technical and financial support for the Forum's strategic meeting in Khartoum. The outcomes of the meeting can be summarized as follows:

- A statement was drafted by the members of the Steering Committee and is due to be presented at the next meeting of the Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee and at the Summit of Heads of State and Government.
- Discussions took place about the next General Assembly of the Forum, due to be held in 2017.
- A logical framework for the annual operational plan of the Forum, outlining the priority activities for 2017, was developed and adopted.
- The current state of national forums was discussed.
- Members received information about the establishment of the autonomous secretariat of the Forum in Kigali and the operating budget for the first two years, which they then validated.
- The headquarters agreement prepared by Forum members was reviewed.

The main challenge is to mobilize the financial resources needed to set up the Forum secretariat and implement the annual operational plan.

The Regional Women's Forum is a strategic tool created by the ICGLR Executive Secretariat for advocacy purposes to ensure that programmes and projects related to women make progress, as much at the level of the Executive Secretariat as in the ICGLR member States. Here we would like to advocate that a permanent seat on the Technical Support Committee for the monitoring of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement be officially accorded to a member of the Regional Women's Forum.

Pillar on combating sexual and gender-based violence

Recent research by ICGLR and various other organizations has shown that the conflicts tearing apart the region continue to destroy millions of lives, particularly those of women and children in rural areas, and especially when, fleeing conflict, they take refuge in neighbouring countries. The socioeconomic consequences of these crises have disproportionately affected women and girls and their impact has been felt profoundly by the wives and families of men who have disappeared or been killed, or who have fled or been recruited into armed groups. Compelled by circumstances to become the head of their household, women and girls have had to support their families, a role traditionally performed by men, and have been exposed to the highest levels of sexual exploitation.

Monitoring implementation of the Kampala Declaration on Sexual and Gender-based Violence and the Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence Against Women and Children

A consultant was recruited to evaluate the extent to which the Kampala Declaration has been implemented by member States (Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia). The World Bank financed the evaluation as part of its Great Lakes Emergency Sexual and Gender-based Violence and Women's Health Project. A report that compiles the results is available.

With the financial support of the World Bank, the Secretariat has been implementing the above-mentioned project since August 2015. It comprises three elements: **institutional support to the ICGRL, support for the Regional Training Centre in Kampala and symposiums for experience sharing at the regional level among Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.** These three countries are implementing the same project with different elements. A symposium is planned this year to enable them to share experiences and good practices.

Brainstorming meetings for positive engagement in the creation of an inventory of legislation and gaps in existing laws on sexual and gender-based violence in member countries

Missions have been carried out to ten ICGLR countries (Angola, Burundi, Central Africa Republic, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Sudan and Zambia) to hold brainstorming meetings on the application of existing laws and judicial practices relating to sexual and gender-based violence. The meetings aimed to analyse the situation in member States that hinder the application of laws and judicial practices for the suppression of such violence, to contribute to the fight against impunity and to better protect survivors of such violence; to create a platform for monitoring the application of laws on sexual and gender-based violence at the national level; to gather information on the obstacles faced by victims in gaining access to justice; to monitor the application of laws on sexual and gender-based violence at the State level; and to draft a document advocating reforms to such laws and judicial practices.

This exercise has enabled ICGRL to produce a guide to accelerating penal procedures regarding sexual and gender-based violence.

The Regional Training Facility on Prevention of Sexual and Gender-based Violence in the Great Lakes Region, in Kampala, conducts training sessions for police officers, army officers, magistrates, lawyers, social workers, and so on, in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence.

Initiatives under way

Finalization of the regional action plan related to United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)

Development of the ICGLR gender strategy/policy

The challenges

- Absence of political will to implement the commitments made.
- Absence of a regional mechanism for dialogue and consultation among women for the consolidation of peace at the level of the Great Lakes region.
- Low levels of participation by women in decision-making and in peace-negotiation and peacekeeping missions.
- Limited ability of women to participate in politics and peace processes.
- Existence of sociocultural constraints created by a patriarchal system.
- Structural and systemic marginalization of women in the democratization process.
- Discrimination.
- Lack of financial resources.
- Absence of national mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325.
- Absence of reporting on implementation.

Conclusion

Women must be firmly involved in conflict prevention and peace consolidation and take part in decision-making and the fight against intolerance and underdevelopment in the region, in order to help guarantee a better future for subsequent generations.