

**Joint advocacy message from Regional Women's Organizations
to the regional Parliamentarians**

20 December 2021

The United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region and the Regional Action Plan (RAP) of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) complement the National Action Plans (NAPs) of Member States for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

Both instruments contain clear indicators against which ICGLR Member States can assess their responses to WPS issues. They focus on protecting women from sexual and gender-based violence, promoting women's economic rights and enhancing women's meaningful participation in decision-making and peace-building processes.

The ICGLR Regional Women's Forum (RWF), through the ICGLR Gender Directorate, and with the support of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region (OSES-G-L), UN WOMEN and the African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA), is working to strengthen the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000) through the RAP and its relevant pillars on participation, protection, prevention, redress, and recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, has highlighted structural inequalities from health and economics to security and social protection. In times of crisis, when resources dwindle and institutional capacities are strained, the situations women and girls face have disproportionate impacts, and their effects are magnified in fragile, conflict or emergency contexts. Even the modest gains made in recent decades are at risk of being lost to the spread of COVID-19. The response to the pandemic is not just about rectifying long-standing inequalities, it is also about building a resilient world for the benefit of all, where women are at the centre and helping to recover from it.

In light of the lessons learnt in the implementation of the RAP, and in view of the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls, as mentioned above, the ICGLR women's organizations believe that, as part of the activities to mark the 10th anniversary of the Kampala Declaration on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, there is a need for strong advocacy to establish an appropriate policy and institutional framework to curb violence against women and girls, ignite behavioural change and help establish gender equality.

To this end, the ICGLR women's organizations, through the Chair of the ICGLR Forum of Parliaments (ICGLR-FP), call on the parliaments of the ICGLR Member States, in their essential oversight, law-making and representative functions, to work closely with the ICGLR RWF and the Advisory Board on Women, Peace and Security to:

- Eliminate existing barriers to gender equality and stereotypes regarding women's capacities and place in the various legislations and society in general, and those related to the COVID-19 pandemic in particular.
- Repeal discriminatory laws and enact positive measures to achieve equal and equitable representation of women in mechanisms and programmes for prevention and care of COVID-19, in boards of directors, in parliaments, in public institutions, through the use of temporary special measures, including quotas.
- Institute urgent actions for parity (50/50) to accelerate women's participation in institutions, prevent violence against women and girls, and ensure their protection.
- Strengthen leadership and meaningful representation of women and marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, in all political and security decision-making processes of national and regional institutions.
- Monitor the implementation of policies relating to gender equality and women's rights in general, and specifically those relating to the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence. To this end, ensure that the needs and concerns of society as a whole are taken into account and that no one is left behind, especially women. As such, recognize the role of women in peacebuilding processes, including at the community level.
- Support a systemic approach to WPS implementation by strengthening national mechanisms for coordinating the implementation of NAPs. Remind governments of their commitment to facilitate customs duty relief for women in cross-border trade who are victims of harassment and gender-based violence.
- Promote gender-responsive budgeting in parliaments to ensure a more equitable distribution of public finances for women and men.