

Virtual advocacy meeting by Regional Women Forum (RWF) with the Great Lakes Region Parliamentarians held on 20th December 2021.

Right Hon Speaker Ken Lusaka, Senate House – Kenya and President of the Parliamentary Forum, ICGLR,

Hon Florence Kajuju Chairperson, Ombudsman Kenya and Secretary General - African Ombudsman and Mediators association,

Your Excellency, Amb. Huang Xia, UN Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region,

All participants and Women Peace and Security (WPS) champions,

Allow me to read the first paragraph of our concept note for this meeting as it guides my opening remarks.

“Since the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework in 2013, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for the Great Lakes region (OESG-GL) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), have been undertaking advocacy and solidarity initiatives to promote peace and stability, with a focus on the rights of vulnerable communities. These efforts have recently been amplified by the adoption of the United Nations (UN) Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region (S/2020/1168) on 22 October 2020. The UN Strategy places a strong emphasis on gender equality and is instrumental in promoting women’s rights, documenting the reality of women’s lives, and influencing the empowerment of women in the region. Equally, countries in the region, have subscribed to a number of international instruments and regional decisions, including the Kampala Declaration to fight gender-based violence”.

Then Covid – 19, with its adverse effect on WPS in the region, hit and the need for effective participation of women in the design of gender responsive policies and post COVID-19 recovery measures becomes even more urgent.

What we are saying and again I quote the concept note, “Despite the existence of legal instruments promoting and protecting women’s rights, their effective implementation remains limited and there are significant gaps and challenges relating to the effective inclusion of women in political and peacebuilding processes. Sexual and gender-based violence continues unabated. Parliament, being one of the most important institutions charged with law making, representational, financial oversight and policy, has the responsibility to ensure that commitments made by regional Member States, through their signing of various agreements and conventions, are translated into legislation and implemented with concrete actions”.

Against this background, the ICGLR Vice Chair of the Regional Women Forum and the Ombudsperson of Kenya, Hon. Florence Kajuju, who is the Chair of the Regions Ombudsman facilitated a consultative meeting with the Chair of the regional Parliamentary Forum (Senate Speaker of Kenya) on 11 November 2021 to discuss the best strategy to secure the engagement

and active participation of all Parliaments in the region in the fight against gender-based violence.

One of the outcomes of the meeting with the President of parliamentary forum included commitment by the regional Parliamentary Chair to facilitate and participate in an advocacy meeting between women in the region and the parliamentarians. The advocacy engagement will include representatives of regional ombudspersons, as recommended in the Advanced AU-Fem-Wise Training held in September 2021 in Kigali, Rwanda. This is happening today and I welcome you all and look forward to your active engagement on matters Women Peace and Security (WPS) in our region.

I will now draw you to the objectives of our meeting today but to put it in summary form we the RWF are here to seek commitment from parliamentarians in the fight against SGBV and enhanced hope in peace and security.

- **We** have Kampala Declaration that was endorsed in a special Summit championed by RWF by our Heads of States in Kampala in December 2011. It signifies our Heads of States commitment to fighting against SGBV but we lack the laws and policies to domesticate it effectively. We want you parliamentarians to work hand in hand with us RWF and CSO and indeed all champions of WPS in the region to make Kampala Declaration a reality. We in Kenya have approached our Speaker Ken Lusaka who has agreed and appointed one of the Senators – Senator Mutula Kilonzo Junior to work with us and bring any matters WPS that require registration or national policy to the attention of Parliament. We thank you Hon. Speaker and request that in your capacity as the President of the parliamentary Forum ensure the same is done where it is not in the rest of the Great Lakes Region.
- **The** Gender Ministers of the region in a Gender Ministers meeting held in Kampala in November 2018, committed to ensuring national budgeting towards women sensitive programs is adopted but they need parliament to assist in enforcing the same. It is parliament that passes budgets and we need parliamentarians to commit that they will ensure all the ministries budgets are gender sensitive by passing a law that allocates a certain percentage to women sensitive programs. This way National Action Plans (NAP) on UNSCRs 1325 and 2250 that all our countries have will be allocated adequate budget for implementation.
- **We** have commitment by our Heads of states during the Heads of States Summit held in Nairobi, Kenya in July 2014, to ensure youth employment (and I have in mind here the women youth who have suffered SGBV in pursuit of employment), but we lack the legislation to enforce sustainable employment practices and mentorship for self-employment of the Youth in our region.
- **We** have the UN fraternity led by UN Office of the Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region, and enhanced by the UN Regional Office currently led by our champion Jebbeh

Foster urging us to do more. The UN through these offices is already committed to enhancing WPS in the region. It our request Parliamentarians that you join us in a sustainable manner by ensuring relevant laws are passed to back our fight.

- **Our** meeting today with you parliamentarians is to make you understand that we can't achieve peace and security in the Region without you. Our hope is that you will embrace us in a working collaboration that will ensure sustainable peace and security for the women of the Great Lakes Region today and not tomorrow.

I welcome you all and look forward to a fruitful day with the Parliamentarians.

Merry Xmas and Happy New Year

Thankyou.

Commissioner Lydia Gachoya – Chairperson RWF (Kenya Chapter) and Vice President RWF.