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**PBC VIRTUAL MEETING ON GREAT LAKES**

**4 November 2020**

**REMARKS BY THE AUC SPECIAL ENVOY ON WOMEN, PEACE AND  
SECURITY**

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**Your Excellency, Ambassador Robert Keith Rae,** Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations and Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission,

**Your Excellency Ambassador Huang Xia, UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region,**

**Your Excellency Ambassador Oscar Fernandez-Taranco,** UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honor for me to join you this morning, particularly for this session that focuses on the Great Lakes Region, a part of Africa region that indeed needs attention. Thank you Mr Chair for your kind invitation.

My appreciation also goes to HE Ambassador Huang Xia, with whom I had a virtual consultation some weeks ago and compared notes on the situation in the Great Lakes region.

Before I proceed with my contribution, allow me Mr Chair to convey well wishes from His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC).

**Mr Chair,**

The Great Lakes Region remains one of the most volatile regions in Africa and in this Year of Silencing the Guns, it is befitting that the Peacebuilding Commission pays particular attention to the Region, in partnership with the African Union Commission (AUC) and the International Conference for the Great Region (ICGLR).

As you know, this year marks also the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Plan for Action, seminal instruments that put the rights of women at the centre of the prevention of conflict and the building of sustainable peace.

Conflicts have had and continue to have an unbearable toll on the lives of women and girls in the Great Lakes Region, to the extent that at one time, the term capital of rape was coined.

I had the privilege to be invited by H E Mary Robinson when she was appointed the first Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region to work with her, exploring and setting up mechanisms to support women in the region. I continue to serve on the Advisory Board of the Women's Platform for Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region. I am happy that Ambassador XIA continues to focus his efforts on the platform.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

AUC efforts towards silencing the guns include a strong component to enhance delivery of commitments on the Women, Peace, Security Agenda in Africa. It is in this perspective that the AUC Chairperson, HE Moussa Faki Mahamat, has produced 2 reports on the implementation of the Agenda, using the Continental Results Framework (CRF). Data provided by Member States indicate that, in post conflict and reconstruction settings, women

needs are not addressed. Violence against women continue to be a scourge, majority in the refugee and internally displaced camps are women and girls.

A clear indication for the reports is that the relief and recovery pillar of the WPS Agenda does not receive proportional support. Indeed, often after the crises, the resources dwindle and communities are left in precarious situations.

Approaches to reconstruction and building sustainable peace must be based on a continuous engagement with women's led organization, while keeping at heart the gender lens of our engagements. We know that the Great Lakes has established umbrella civil society organizations such as COCAFEM, engaged in the prevention of conflicts and support to the implementation of the WPS Plans of action. Doing so will guarantee the inclusion of women, while building on their role women as peacebuilders and partners to deliver the commitments made towards sustainable peace, security and development.

I read with interest the outcomes of the consultations that the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great lakes convened and wish to make some thoughts on the key areas.

First, on Women as Agents of Change for Social and Economic Transformation.

I concur with the conclusions that call for the countries of the region to main open border policies. Witnessing the cross border women trade activities, the empowerment of women and the peace dividends they carry is a strong testimony of the resilience and entrepreneurship of the women of the Great Lakes Regions.

I do trust that the establishment of the AfCFTA will create space and opportunities for the women of the region to scale up their actions and joint endeavors.

Second, for women voices to be heard and duly considered in Africa transformation, Agenda, it is critical that women leadership is recognized, strengthened and fully integrated in all our actions. It is in this perspective,

that in partnership with the United Nations, the African Union Commission supported African women leaders to establish the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN). The network aims to galvanize women leadership to enhance their transformative participation in decision-making towards achieving inclusive and sustainable peace and development in Africa, in line with Africa Agenda 2063 and the Global Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. The first AWLN was established in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since then chapters have been established in other countries in the Great Lakes Region including the Central Africa Republic, Congo, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. I do believe that in supporting such initiatives that have adopted a synergetic approach to strengthen women's agency, the PBC would contribute to women becoming true agents of change in the Region.

The third aspect is the scourge of sexual and gender based violence. Let me first salute the fact the Great Lakes Region adopted the Goma Declaration on Eradicating Sexual Violence and Ending Impunity in 2008, followed by the Kampala Declaration on SGBV in 2011. These instruments provided the framework to address the continued use of the body of women as weapon of war and we witnessed some progress. But advances remain very limited and fragile.

We have seen good practices of establishing **One stop centres** in a number of countries, including in Rwanda with the Isange One Stop Centres and in South Sudan. Unfortunately, often the resources at the disposal for these centres are scarce and unstable. It is essential that our peacebuilding efforts strive to bring to an end this scourge in the Great Lakes Region. and beyond.

**Mr Chair,**

As I conclude, allow me to end with some broader recommendations to PBC:

**Firstly**, the Peacebuilding Commission should enhance support to women initiatives in the Great Lakes Region, in the Trade for Peace spirit. Investing in women is a preventive path, particularly as we mark the year for silencing the guns.

**Secondly**, reconstruction for women means addressing the impacts on the body, on the mind and on the communities. Reconstruction remains the central tenet of PCB work and the Great Lakes region needs support in this area.

**Thirdly** , COVID-19 is going nowhere. Our efforts should ensure that COVID-19 responses and recovery processes are gender responsive, strengthening women leadership in reconstruction processes, with strong emphasis on peace infrastructures, as we strive to build better.

Once more thank you for inviting me and for your kind attention.