

**Ambassadorial-Level meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on Women,
Peacebuilding and Development in the Great Lakes Region**

Presentation By: Marie Muque Kigoma

Mr. President

Excellence Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. On behalf of women entrepreneurs in the Great Lakes region, we thank the Peacebuilding Commission and all distinguished participants for allowing us to participate in this important session.
2. I also wish to express my thanks to the Office of Special Envoy Huang Xia, who facilitated, in consultation with the ICGLR, the holding of these round tables at the regional level.
3. I am Marie Muque Kigoma; a female entrepreneur in Burundi, and I have been appointed to share the recommendations of the inclusive consultation held on 28 July 2020 on women's economic empowerment.
4. As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on all sectors of society, and this has led to an economic recession in a region where countries had recorded some of the strongest economic growth in the world. The impact of COVID-19 has included:
 - border closures
 - disruptions in the supply chain
 - the decline in investment and trade movements
 - a near-interruption of economic activity in key sectors of the region.
 - With measures taken to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have had a considerable socio-economic cost that has particularly affected women and poor households.
5. In this context, women entrepreneurs are particularly affected by the structural consequences of the pandemic due to their predominant role in the informal sector, which accounts for 70 per cent of cross-border trade in the region.
6. At the same time, the region's vibrant agricultural sector, also mostly dominated by women, has encouragingly demonstrated resilience and recorded innovative practices during the pandemic.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

7. It is important to initiate the post-COVID economic recovery in the region at the earliest opportunity, and to pay particular attention to the specific concerns of women entrepreneurs, as the most disadvantaged in our society.
8. To this end, we recommend to our Governments, to the international community and

to development partners two levels of intervention to support women entrepreneurs:

a) First level of intervention:

Support across sectors at the macro level to improve policies, and in particular to strengthen the process of regional economic integration. The aim is to encourage Member States to continue efforts, including:

- Improving the business climate,
- opening borders,
- the gradual removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers,
- harmonization of tax regimes and trade policies,
- strengthening regional and cross-border trade,
- successful implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) in accordance with the principles established by the African Union.

b) Second level of intervention:

- targeted support to strengthen and better organize women's trade associations,
- building the capacity of women involved in cross-border and informal trade,
- a strong commitment by partners to finance projects aimed at promoting the economic potential of women and young people in the region. This could possibly include a commitment to guarantee a percentage of funding support specifically to projects in support of women and girls.
- increase investment funds with flexible eligibility criteria for women and young people,
- reducing interest rates on loans to women,
- create more female-led venture capital firms,
- Setting up e-learning platforms to promote women's access to a wide range of business knowledge and boosting their leadership,

9. We hope that you will be respond positively to these recommendations, which will help to kick-start the region's economic recovery and strengthen the role of women entrepreneurs in the peacebuilding and development across the Great Lakes region.

Thank you for your kind attention.