

REMARKS BY HON. FLORENCE KAJUJU, MBS, CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION ON ADMINISTRATIVE JUSTICE, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE AFRICAN OMBUDSMAN AND MEDIATORS ASSOCIATION AND PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN REGION OF THE INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN INSTITUTE (IOI), AT THE VIRTUAL ADVOCACY MEETING HELD ON 20TH DECEMBER 2021

The Chairperson of the Regional Parliamentary Forum in the Great Lakes Region and Speaker of Senate of the Republic of Kenya, Hon. Senator Kenneth Lusaka

Distinguished Members of Parliament Present

Dignitaries Present

Distinguished Guests and Participants

All protocols observed

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to join you on this auspicious occasion as we undertake advocacy with the Great Lakes Regional Parliamentarian Forum. The role of Parliament in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence and the promotion of women's effective participation in political processes is so pertinent and dear to me given my background a former Parliamentary Women Representative in Kenya. For this reason, when the ICGLR Vice Chair of the Regional Women Forum, Commissioner Lydia Gachoya and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region reached out to me in my capacity as the

Ombudsman of Kenya, to secure a meeting with the Chair of Regional Parliamentary Forum, I quickly was on board and we were able to hold a meeting on 11th November 2021 where the Chair committed to facilitate, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, the meeting that we are having here today with the regional parliamentarians.

This meeting is a momentous one as it comes immediately after the world marked the 30th anniversary of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, from 25th November to 10th December 2021. The global theme set by the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE campaign was "Orange the World: End Violence against Women Now!". The importance of the 16 days activism cannot be gainsaid since according to the latest global estimates, nearly one in three women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.

Our meeting is yet again timely also since we are in the Covid-19 pandemic where a new strain, OMICRON has been discovered. Data and reports from those on the front line have shown that all types of violence against women and girls have increased since the outbreak of Covid-19, especially incidences of domestic violence. Many countries have also reported a significant rise in calls to domestic violence helplines. The latest report from UN Women, based on data from 13 countries since the pandemic, shows that 2 in 3 women reported that they or a woman they know experienced some form of violence. Only 1 in 10 women said that victims would go to the

police for help. This surge now known as the ‘Shadow Pandemic’ needs a global collective effort to stop it similar to the efforts taken to deal with Covid-19. Each and every one of us and particularly our legislators and ombudspersons present here today therefore has a role to play in standing up against such violence. Our conversation today is therefore a significant step in the right direction.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Generally, Ombudsman institutions were borne out of endemic institutional and systemic failures in the public sector. In particular, service delivery in public institutions was characterized by undue delays, abuse of authority, discourtesy, inefficiency, corruption, ineptitude, manifest injustice and misbehaviour, among others. Ombudsman institutions redress such maladministration in the public sector through effective complaints handling.

The UN SDG 16 recognizes that strong, effective and accountable institutions are vital for the realization of peace and security. Implementation of policies related to Women, Peace and Security (WPS) by extension needs to be monitored through the creation of strong and effective national institutions. The latter squarely falls within the mandate of ombudsman institutions which are responsible for ensuring that public institutions provide effective and efficient services. This makes ombudsman institutions a critical component in the implementation of WPS international, continental and national policies

including SDG 5, the UN 1325 resolution and the ICGLR Protocols.

The Commission on Administrative Justice of Kenya which I have the honour to chair, is a member of African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA), where I graciously serve as the Secretary General. AOMA is an umbrella body whose vision is to advance the development of the Ombudsman institution for the furtherance of good governance, the rule of law, and human rights in Africa. All AOMA members bear a constitutional mandate to safeguard public interest by protecting the sovereignty of the people and promoting respect for the Constitution and democratic values including gender equality in their respective countries. AOMA members employ a lot of advocacy in the redress of complaints as well as in championing the implementation of their recommendations. Due to their close collaboration with all public offices including Parliaments and Gender Commissions, African Ombudsman institutions are able to push for the promotion of women's effective participation in political processes as well as support the fight against sexual and gender-based violence.

Upon analysis of complaints received or conduct of systemic investigations, ombudsman institutions can identify gaps and come up with recommendations and reach out to their national parliaments to put in place the necessary legal, institutional and policy frameworks. They can also liaise with non-state actors to put pressure on the government to do that which they must for the meaningful participation of women in political processes

and to fight against sexual and gender based violence. Lastly, they can engage gender commissions and other human rights commissions/other oversight agencies to exercise their mandate particularly in oversight over the implementation of global, continental and regional recommendations/commitments made to increase women participation in political and electoral processes and to tackle SGBV.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Indeed, despite the existence of legal instruments promoting and protecting women's rights, their implementation has been wanting and there are significant gaps and challenges relating to the effective inclusion of women in political processes. Sexual and gender-based violence particularly during elections continues unabated.

I believe that our Parliamentarians can assist us in redressing these inadequacies since they are the elected representatives of the people. Parliaments are the main oversight institutions in our countries. With their law making power they influence policy. In exercise of financial oversight, they can hold the Executive accountable should they fail to implement the functions given to them by Parliament. Parliament is also responsible for budgetary allocation and using this can ensure that sufficient funding is allocated to the Ministry of Gender and Gender Commissions for the fight against SGBV. Parliament is also responsible for ensuring that commitments made by regional Member States, through their signing of various agreements and conventions, are

translated into legislation and implemented with concrete actions.

In doing this, regional ombudspersons being oversight institutions themselves as I have already highlighted, can assist Parliaments in holding national institutions accountable to their commitments. Indeed, AOMA during the FemWise Africa training held in Kigali on 6th to 10th September 2021 committed to support FemWise Africa and the African Union in the promotion of women, peace and security agenda within the region as well as within their local contexts. As the Secretary General of AOMA, I reiterate this commitment and will work with ICGLR in promotion of women rights and in the fight against SGBV in the ICGLR member states.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As I conclude and as Malala Yousafzai, a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Pakistani activist for female education said “I raise my voice not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.” So let us jointly speak out for the victims of SGBV and take concerted efforts together to eradicate gender-based violence since attempts to fight alone without the assistance of the other, will be an effort in futility. This is part of our commitment to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and peace, security and development cannot be realized GBV still thrives in our societies. True to this, the former First Lady of the United States said that “No country can every truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contribution of half its citizens.”

On that note, I laud the Chair of the Regional Parliamentary Forum for facilitating this meeting and applaud the commitment demonstrated by our participation today. I am certain that the resolutions of this meeting will go a long way in the fight against SGBV. Let us keep our discussions alive and continue working together.

Thank you very much and God bless you all and God Bless our countries in the Great Lakes Region!