

**Statement of the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African
Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security**

United Nations Security Council

Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security

25 April 2014, New York

**Madam President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and
Gentlemen,**

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Union Commission Chairperson's Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, Ms. Bineta Diop, to the Security Council at the Open Debate on women, peace and security.

Ms. Diop would like to thank the Nigerian Presidency for the invitation extended to her, and sends her regrets from South Sudan. Ms. Diop is in South Sudan as a member of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan. She and her colleagues have embarked on their first visit to investigate human rights violations and other abuses in South Sudan, and to make recommendations to ensure accountability, reconciliation and healing.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report and leadership, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, for her commitment to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and to the protection of women,

men and children around the world from this scourge. I also thank the Executive Director of UN women for her full support to the women, peace and security agenda in Africa.

As you are aware, the Chairperson of the AUC has made the protection of women's right across the continent a priority, and is committed to promote and work to achieve gender equality, and is making sure that the AUC has a 50/50 work force in line with the African Union Gender Policy 2009.

In January of this year I assumed my mandate as the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security of the AUC Chairperson, Dr. Dlamini-Zuma, and with this appointment I recommitted to continue working closely with the women of the African Continent. I made the resolve to amplify their voices and concerns at the African Union, and in other decision-making bodies, and to ensure that women assume their rightful role in ensuring peace and security on the continent.

In Africa, the number of victims of sexual violence during armed conflict is staggering, and tackling the issue of conflict-related sexual violence is one of the critical areas of concern in my new mandate, requiring urgent and effective action at the community, national, regional and international levels. Additional areas of my mandate deal with the implementation of UNSC 1325 and women's participation in peace processes.

I am therefore pleased to report that in January this year, the Commission of the African Union signed a Framework for Cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on

Sexual Violence in Conflict, on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations. This agreement complements ongoing efforts by the African Union Peace and Security Department, which is working to put in place a code of conduct and a zero tolerance policy that clearly outlines the AU's strong position against sexual violence, exploitation and abuse by AU troops.

This code of conduct and zero tolerance policy will be shared with all troop-contributing countries and integrated into all related training. We are already seeing progress in this area with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which already has a policy on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Furthermore, the agreement strengthens the collaboration and common commitment of the African Union and the United Nations to combat impunity, and hold promote accountability, implement capacity building and training programmes, foster better coordination, national ownership and leadership, facilitate the provision of multi-sectoral services for survivors, and to alleviate the stigma and trauma of survivors.

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Article 11 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Maputo Protocol, calls on States Parties to "protect asylum seeking women, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, against all forms of violence, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation, and to ensure that such acts are considered war crimes, genocide and/or crimes against humanity and

that their perpetrators are brought to justice before a competent criminal jurisdiction.”

The implementation of the Protocol and all existing AU mechanisms that address the issue of conflict-related sexual violence have to be accelerated. We have a long way to go, and a lot of work to do on so many levels if we want to see progress, and ensure the protection of vulnerable Africans.

We have to start by doing away with the tradition of inequality between women and men, one of the overarching reasons why violence against women is widespread and easily committed. We have to educate our young boys and men and engage them in the fight against the culture of sexual violence.

To execute my mandate, I commit to look beyond seeing women only as victims, and men as only as victimizers. Instead, I will recognize them as active agents in the fight to prevent conflict-related sexual violence. Conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms need to fully involve women and men and has to be approached as a community effort, with monitoring and financial support made available to make implementation successful.

We have to take aggressive prevention methods, and challenge societal norms that portray girls as less than boys and make them develop low self-esteem and self worth, further contributing to the cycle. We also need to prosecute perpetrators and hold them accountable for their actions in conflict-related sexual violence.

In recognition of the critical need to investigate atrocities of sexual violence in conflict, one of the objectives of the Commission of Inquiry on

South Sudan is to document atrocities of sexual violence with a view of ensuring accountability for those responsible. We must ensure that the cries of the people of South Sudan do not go unheard. We cannot say that we do not know, and once we know, we have no excuses, we have to act. The responsibility lies with all of us.

Moreover, we need to raise the profile of women's networks and civil society organizations, which in many instances are the first responders to address the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence, and the first to stand in solidarity with survivors. Sustained progress and action on these issues requires the strengthening of local initiatives and mechanisms to combat conflict-related sexual violence in conflict, including those targeted at protecting the independence of the judiciary, promoting gender-sensitive school curricula, training civilian police, sensitizing youth, and combating stigma and ethnic discrimination.

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The African Union has a Gender Parity Principle, which has been in force since 2002. The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, adopted in 2004, applies to all AU member states and we hope to see its full implementation reflected in the approach to Security Council Resolution 1325.

If we are in agreement that women's rights are human rights and that women are essential to the establishment of peaceful societies, in our approach to tackling conflict-related sexual violence, we need to enable the full participation of women during peace processes, and the African Union

and the United Nations should continue to build a critical mass of women mediators and appoint more women as lead mediators. As the Special Envoy, I will work closely with UN women, regional bodies, national and international partners and Africans from all walks of life, to ensure that women contribute meaningfully in peace negotiations. Conflict-related sexual violence is a global scourge and the approach to combat it should be local as well as global. We count on the joint effort of the UN and AU; I count on your support in implementing the women, peace and security agenda across the continent.

As we approach 2015, the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda commits to the eradication of all forms of violence against women and children. The African Union Agenda 2063, which is committed to build a prosperous and peaceful Africa, puts particular emphasis on the engagement of women and the youth in the continent's development.

In conclusion, I humbly appeal to all of you to continue your support of our efforts in the fight against sexual violence and leave you with the words of former President Nelson Mandela "As long as we take the view that these are problems for women alone to solve, we cannot expect to reverse the high incidence of rape and child abuse. Domestic violence will not be eradicated. We will not defeat this scourge that affects each and every one of us, until we succeed in mobilizing the whole of our society to fight it."

Thank you for your attention.