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PRESS RELEASE

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From the Communication Officer

Mitigating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts in Africa

Experts Formulate Recommendations for African Leaders

The African Union Peace and Security Department, in partnership with Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) and the International Peace Institute (IPI), is holding a two-day Expert Meeting on the African Union Panel of the Wise Expert Report on Mitigating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts. The meeting will be hosted by the FAS PanAfrican Centre for Gender, Peace, and Development (PAC) in Dakar, Senegal, October 24-25, 2011.

At its 7th Meeting in November 2009, the Panel of the Wise held a thematic study on “Women and Children in Armed Conflict”. The Panel has since commissioned a report on the impact of armed conflict on women and children. The report will be finalized at the Dakar Meeting, and will be presented at a forthcoming African Union (AU) Summit to Heads of State and Government for their consideration.

The Experts’ findings reveal that women are still minimally involved in conflict resolution in Africa. Commitments made at regional and international levels neither reflect the effective participation of women in peace negotiations nor take into account their concerns, despite the fact that too often women’s bodies are battlegrounds for the numerous conflicts taking place in many African countries. According to a study carried out by UN Women in 2009, out of over 300 peace accords regarding 45 conflicts, only 10 countries, out of which 5 were African, recognize the sexual violence of which women are victims.

Like adults, children are affected by the scarcities caused by wars, and they miss out on vital facilities to ensure the promotion and protection of their human rights, including education, health, and other social services. These wars result in their loss of parents at an early age, depriving them of love and care, and hardening them in the process. The displacement traumatizes them physically and psychologically. In addition, boy children are abducted and forcefully conscripted into fighting forces. Girl children are forcibly made sexual slaves of the fighting forces, compelled to do laborious work and carry loads beyond their age. At many levels, women’s and children’s access to justice and redress is impeded by systemic gender discrimination rooted in social systems both pre-and post-conflict.

The Expert Report outlines both the considerable developments in the African Union’s human rights architecture, as well as the challenges faced in the implementation of instruments aimed specifically at addressing issues related to women and children in armed conflicts. It identifies ways in which the Panel of the Wise can assist in devising measures to consolidate the efforts of the AU and ensure the implementation of existing obligations, in order to alleviate the plight of women and children in armed conflict situations.

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