

**Commission on the Status of Women**

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**PANEL I**

**Women's equal participation in conflict prevention,  
management and conflict resolution and in  
post-conflict peace-building**

Written statement submitted by

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Over the past thirty years, both the interest and attention shown by the United Nations in problems relating to the discrimination against women have noticeably developed. With the increasing number of Security Council resolutions; the observance of International Women's Day, the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women; the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century culminating in the unanimous adoption of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security on 31 October 2000 have brought about great improvement in people's understanding of events governing the damaging process towards the advancement and full participation of women in all aspects of the legal, cultural, political, social and economic spheres. At the same time, it has enabled the international community to undertake through study, methods and policy that are likely to permit gender equality, development and peace. The special session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2000 took part in this effort and had contributed to the results and progress achieved. Nevertheless, in such a wide ranging field, we are still a long way from domination the myriad parameters requiring vigorous action, because the orientation that ensures the guardianship of the human rights of women and girls are connected on the one hand to the legal systems (constitution, judiciary, security) and on the other are related to the entrenched traditional customs of inheritance from generation to generation.

In virtually all societies and all spheres of society, women are subjected to inequality in law and in fact. This situation is worsened by the existence of negative norms and values that constitute the bedrock of discrimination in the family, in the community and at the work place.

However, while significant steps have been taken globally to address the issues of women's inequality as indicated by the signing of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women in 1981 globally including Liberia, much remains to be done to actualize the implementation of the provisions of the Convention.

The lesson to be learned from all of this is that we realized that despite our diverse backgrounds, values, status and opinions, the women in the sub-region of West Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone, La Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea) were united under one umbrella during the 15 years of civil crises in the sub-region in defending and advocating for the protection of their human rights and that of their families.

Hence, the women of the West African sub-region learned that peace is crucial to the very existence of women who usually bear the brunt of the worst forms of violence and abuses including sexual violence. Women are the custodians of peace, which must be

developed and nurtured as a means of not only peace-building, but of transforming the community of the sub-region from a culture of violence to a culture of peace.

It is our mission, in coordinated effort with the community, to protect all life and property using all resources available to understand and provide for the service needs of the community. By so doing we will improve the quality of life by building capacities to maintain order, resolve problems and enforce the law in a manner consistent with shared community values.

We hope this learning experience helps us to focus on the importance of political participation as a strategy to improve community livability and to strengthen women's empowerment.

Viewed in such a light, we must remember that the ability of women to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of women's action. Women should be in tune with the public - understanding the public, belonging to the public and gaining our strength from the public, which is vital to the success of collective endeavour.

In this regard, it is a question of attitude of mind and of perception which provides the moral authority for the promulgation of many of the rights, the security of the family and the home, the ownership of property, and the right to universal education, freedom of movement and access to information. It is a question of central challenge therefore the expansion of education and technological activity which are basic apparatus for economic change.

It is a question of re-distributive justice therefore giving full time and attention to duties, which are incumbent on every citizen in the interest of community welfare and existence.

It is a question of transparency and accountability prevailing over corruption and injustice and their related consequences of inequality, disorder, criminality, fear of crime and poverty.

Not surprisingly, poverty is a case in point. It is an inherent feature of hand-to-mouth existence. As poverty affords people the bare minimum of livelihoods, it is the key to generate conflict. Indeed, conflict has always been the detonation of poverty, a factor inherent in the situation of under-development.

Poverty more than any other factor provoking conflict is the leading cause of backwardness for about 95% of women and girls in the West African community with the high rate of illiteracy, the lack of access to credit and land, unequal access to health among others.

We cannot quote today, figures, data and facts, to show the degree and extent of socio-economic degradation. "We are offering one simple explanation for the West African sub-region.

- 15 years of civil war in Liberia
- 10 years of civil war in Sierra Leone
- About 4 years of civil war in La Cote d'Ivoire

To think about a change of society is to raise the question for a new political orientation and the search for legitimacy through peace agreements and national elections which has become peculiar to countries emerging from war. To this effect, the “smart set” of society (national and international) has succeeded in eliciting, directing and negotiating the component parts of peace agreements to the exclusion of women.

History is indeed replete with evidence to the effect that the designation for participation in peace processes has interestingly been made on the basis of political affiliation and international contact to the exclusion of those in the conflict zones.

From time immemorial, power has been attributed to groups or on the basis of class. It has been attributed to men rather than women.

Consequently, the achievement of women's full participation in conflict resolution requires a new understanding of who we are and how we relate to one another, an understanding that will compel us to reshape our lives and that of our communities.

It is in the context of raising the level of women's capacity through the expansion of responsibility at all levels that the issue of women's equal participation needs to be addressed.

The strength of this panel holds the key into moving women into action in order to enjoy full equality at every stage of negotiation and intervention. As experience in recent negotiations of peace agreements has demonstrated, women's formal presence at such negotiations did not constitute their full and active participation especially in decision making. The most important role that women must play in pre- or post-conflict negotiation lies therefore in equipping women's institutions with the means through which they can achieve the real purpose of participation - which is to lay the foundations for a new political order that can cultivate an excellent ability in women's socio-political consciousness. The challenge to political outlook is to accept unambiguously the principle of equal participation.

But why is it necessary to think in such terms? Presumably, if politics could establish the full participation of women in the affairs of the country and if it could address gender perspectives in economic development policy to ensure that the needs and priorities of women as well as men are met, the need for such an experiment is strongly recommended. In such an eventuality it is important to note that such principles can only operate within a system that is essentially democratic in spirit and method.

In relaying these philosophies and visions to the expert group meeting on “Peace agreements as a means for promoting gender equality and ensuring participation of women – A framework of model provisions”, held in Ottawa from 10 – 13 November

2003, we were able to make effective remarks and submit opinions on which future prospects appear encouraging.

However, before focusing on the main recommendations arising out of Ottawa, it is important to recall that the experts, in discussing and analyzing the gender dimensions of peace agreements against the backdrop of lessons learned, obstacles, and good practices in the three stages of the peace process (pre-negotiations, the substantive peace agreement and its implementation), recognized that gender equality is an important social goal in itself and a crucial factor for achieving sustainable peace.

Consequently, the experts also recognized that if gender equality is omitted from the peace agreement, a window of opportunity in this newly found avenue for women's equal participation would be lost.

In this regard they expressed a sense of urgency for a common and global approach to support the positive development of full participation of women in social and economic issues.

In converging the various issues arising out of the different experiences in conflict the experts concentrated on 4 major areas and provided detailed and clear guidelines/checklist regarding obligations, duties and responsibilities of all the actors in the peace process in conformity with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) as follows:

**A. Obligations of negotiators, facilitators, funding entities and of process.**

**Under this area of concentration, measures adopted should compliment and support efforts to achieve the equal participation of women and men in peace processes considered essential for the attainment of sustainable peace and democracy. To this end, the mediators, parties to the conflict and the funding entities are to be au-courant with the provisions of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) through training and workshops to ensure that the provisions are scrupulously incorporated and adhered to.**

In commentary, let me state here that while there has been a constant commitment within the international community in reference to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) to develop an international norm to ensure that the promotion of gender equality and women's full participation is an integral part of peace processes; progress in reaching agreement on a common approach has been slow. Evidence to this effect is the fact that in recent times (3) three peace agreements have indeed been signed in the West African sub-region without the full participation of women. In this regard mediators to be criticized are those particularly within the ECOWAS for failing to use these golden opportunities to push the concept of women's participation. The ideal solution, without restricting the freedom of choice of the parties to the conflict, is to make it mandatory by both the mediators and the funding entities that participation for legitimacy must be based on equal number of men and women.

**B. Obligation of content of peace agreement with regard to security, legal political and physical security.**

**This area of concentration provides for the establishment of a Guarantor Body, human rights, legal regime for the transitional period, disarmament, demobilization, re-integration, rehabilitation and re-insertion (DDRRR), and constitutional review, which constitute critical components for peace and political legitimacy. The experts adopted a pragmatic strategy in approaching these issues for different geographical settings. In view of the context specific nature of conflict, they refrained from writing a peace agreement but rather provided guidelines for provisions with respect to women's rights, concerns and priorities and the inclusion of gender specific language as opposed to gender neutral language seen in recent peace agreements. The experts strongly expressed that DDRRR activities must have a holistic design to include measures to prevent re-armament possibilities with women's involvement from the initial planning stages of the process to ensure that the needs and concerns of female combatants as well as child soldiers are given special attention.**

In order for the standard of peace agreements to conform with the provisions of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), guidelines for provisions with respect to women rights, concerns and priorities in appropriate gender specific language must be included especially in areas where the lack of such language would seriously harm the active participation of women in the post-conflict transformation of the country.

Movement in this direction will lead to a new understanding of the nature of the community and of the rights and responsibilities of each of its members. It will entirely transform the role of women at every level of the community. It will put into context the spirit of harmony between men and women and the understanding between men and women will become more visible.

It will ensure the inviolability of legislation with regard to the Guarantor Body, human rights, legal regime for transitional justice and their derivatives that will protect both the environment and the development needs of the communities. It will be a slow process but the international community is able to create effective change in which our communities will have more effective communication, cooperation and consensus.

**C. OBLIGATION OF CONTENT OF PEACE AGREEMENT WITH REGARD TO SECURITY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SECURITY**

**This area of concentration is comprised of 7 elements-economic, social and cultural rights-general aspects of health, education and training, inheritance and ownership of land and property, adequate standard of living, economic security and nationality and citizenship. This guideline is**

**designed to bring into focus the current social and economic predicament of women and to define priority needs for countries in terms of external support. Fundamental social and cultural rights should not be eroded and the principle of equal treatment of men and women should be fully respected.**

Opportunity for linking peace agreements and with specific civil and political rights are more evident than program dealing with the restoration of economic, social and cultural rights. In this respect, civil and political rights did not contribute to equal benefits for men and women rather it contributed to economic dependency and the lack of empowerment. In this respect, as women's vulnerability to social and economic deprivation deepened further in conflict and in the post-conflict context, the experts recommended that peace agreements should emphasize the obligation of the State to promote the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, prevent processes of social exclusion and ensure that women can participate fully and equally in the post-conflict society. They stressed that issues related to inheritance and ownership of property, as well as to nationality and citizenship be brought to light and addressed. Mediators and donors have a particular responsibility as well as opportunity to support such a gender-sensitive approach in post-conflict socio-economic development. On the other hand, a refusal to comply could discourage or postpone the signing of a peace agreement but even such a stance should not be encouraged or supported.

#### **D. OBLIGATION IN PEACE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION**

**This area of concentration is composed of 5 elements-general obligations for implementation, dissemination of the peace agreement, women's full and equal participation in peace-keeping operations, mechanisms for women's access to participation and in peace agreement implementation processes.**

**This area examines the institutions for the management of the peace agreement and the issues of process arising in the implementation of the peace agreement. It establishes a link between the funding agencies and the monitors. It provides for the immediate dissemination of the provisions of the agreement for the purpose of local ownership and sustainable peace.**

The major part in the implementation of peace agreements is to ensure that provisions concerning gender equality and women's full participation are carried forward in a comprehensive and sustained manner. At the same time, all other provisions are to be implemented with full respect to gender specific language. This challenge confronts the moral thinking of men who have always considered themselves to be the stronger sex. Equality of the sexes has never pervaded their thinking nor has it entered into their vocabulary except for those who have been morally liberated from this mindset. How gradual should this considered change be? Clearly, the longer the initiative takes to become effective, the less attractive it is in term of its immediate benefits.

The issue of gender equality and women's full and equal participation in all aspects of society must not only be limited to peace agreements. Towards this end, the experts were deeply troubled with the issue of women's rights and participation in Iraq. Consequently, it is for reflection by the Commission on the Status of Women that the question is posed- What measures are to be employed in guaranteeing women's equal participation in all spheres of society in those countries that have not experienced armed conflict and hence the absence of a peace agreement?

### **FINAL REMARKS**

The experts welcomed this nouvelle approach of using peace agreements as the vehicle for transforming the relation of the sexes from that of inequality to that of equality thus ensuring the well-being and harmony of the nation state. Commencing from the negotiations for ceasefire, conflict resolution and conflict prevention, men and women must participate equally.

In this connection, it will be incomplete if I fail to incorporate in my final remark some preliminary lessons learned from 15 years experience of living within a conflict -zone. Upon reflection, it is obvious that a politically -charged context re-introduces tensions and promotes tendencies to return to fighting, which necessitates an analysis of the root causes of the conflict. For it is well known that the causes that generate conflict are injustice or poverty. It is also useful to recall that in a crisis country, an attempt is usually made to give priority to "curative operations" to recover from crisis, through emergency intervention and humanitarian support, followed by reconstruction and development. To prevent conflict, however, we must eliminate its root cause(s). As mentioned in my introduction, poverty and its attending consequences of misery is one of the main causes of armed conflict. How can we eradicate poverty? How can we raise the consciousness of men? How can we bring women's equality into full reality?

First, it is essential we set into motion good governance to facilitate the establishment of re-distributive justice. Re-distributive justice will provide education, access to health and physical security for all. Furthermore, we must tackle the perennial problem of unemployment since large -scale industries are at a standstill and with the disappearance of the labour force, it is important to restore and revitalize the sector of production in order to reintegrate the returning workforce inclusive of the ex-combatants.

We can observe that female employment is concentrated only in subsistence farming where women are a majority. This work, however, has little "value" and generates no cash income because money is an abstraction in subsistence farming. The products are intended to provide only the basic needs of the family. It is evident that women in Liberia as elsewhere in the West African sub-region, especially those in rural areas are financially dependent on men.

To break the shackle of such dependency and inequality, women must organize themselves through institutions - legal, social or political - to monitor the flow of their



country's operation in the finance and economic spheres. Through organizations, such as the National Women Rights Commission, which will serve as a precursor to a national machinery for the advancement of women as recommended by the experts in Ottawa; women will gain the moral authority and the collective strength from the public which are necessary to change the negative attitudes that have affected the advancement of women.

Permit me in closing to state that with all of our collective goodwill in ensuring the promotion, advancement and equal participation of women in peace agreements, the fact is that it is an on-going reality that from the sub regional experience, 100% of peace agreements emanating from armed conflicts have been negotiated by men as heads of fighting forces; mediated pre-dominantly by men serving as mediators or facilitators and international funding agencies; participated in some instances by male-headed representatives of political parties and witnessed in exceptional cases either as participants/observers without voting rights by few highly placed women limited to formal presence without either the legal or moral authority to influence the decision or to project the concerns and priorities of women.

The issue of women's participation has never been part of the equation in negotiating peace agreement from the perspective of the mediators, the funding agencies or the parties to the conflict.

I ask the question, where did we go wrong? Is it for lack of sufficient dissemination of the various international norms or is it the failure to impose sanctions for non-compliance of the norms, which seek to ensure and protect women's equal and full participation in peace processes?

I therefore urge the Commission on the Status of Women to take active steps to provide concrete assistance in disseminating Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). Suffice it to state that should this trend continues, our vibrant stride for the achievement of women's equality and full participation in all aspects of life will indeed become another dream once had.

**I thank you.**