

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

**4 November 2020  
Chair's Summary**

1. On 4 November, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on the Great Lakes region. The meeting was held on a virtual platform and chaired by H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, Chair of the PBC. The objective of the meeting was to discuss ways to reinforce to the central role played by women in peacebuilding and development efforts in the region. UN staff from MONUSCO and UNDP attended the meeting as observers.
2. In his opening remarks, the Chair recalled the last PBC meeting on the Great Lakes region held on 11 June 2020, during which the PBC had agreed to convene a follow-up PBC meeting to help further advance the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the region, including by strengthening the participation of women in peacebuilding efforts, economic recovery and regional integration. He noted that the discussion would take into consideration and build on the outcome of a series of regional consultations that were convened by the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region in July and August 2020. The Chair further highlighted that the timing of the meeting coincided with efforts of the PBC to strengthen and better track the implementation of its gender strategy.
3. Mr. Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, updated the Commission on the three regional consultations in which he had convened a wide range of stakeholders to discuss the following themes related to the WPS agenda: i) women as agents of change for social and economic transformation; ii) prevention of all forms of violence against women and their protection; and iii) effective measures to guarantee women's meaningful political participation and their contribution in peacebuilding. He noted that the consultations had been held in the context of the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on WPS and emphasized that the current positive dynamic in the Great Lakes region offered new opportunities for regional cooperation and international support towards its implementation. The Special Envoy highlighted in this regard that the new UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes region and its action plan would contribute to strengthening synergies and cooperation efforts on the WPS agenda. In conclusion, he urged the Commission to support the translation of the recommendations made by participants in the consultations into concrete support to actions on the ground.

4. Ms. Julienne Lusenge, Directrice du Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises, and Ms. Muque Kigoma, Founder Fruito Company, briefed the Commission on the recommendations that had been put forward by the participants in the regional consultations. A report summarizing these recommendations had been shared with members of the PBC. Ms. Lusenge and Ms. Kigoma called for strengthening the capacities of women mediators and promoting women in leadership positions at all levels, including through quotas, as well as supporting the implementation of action plans on UNSCR 1325. They urged for strengthened financial and technical support for judicial reforms to guarantee women's rights, particularly by integrating issues of sexual and gender-based violence in national planning mechanisms and ensuring zero tolerance for impunity. They further underlined the importance of supporting civil society programs aimed at combating sexual and gender-based violence, including those related to legal services, capacity building, data collection and strategic communication. Ms. Lusenge and Ms. Kigoma informed the Commission that women entrepreneurs, who accounted for 70 percent of all cross-border trade, had been among those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic consequences. In this context, they called for improving the business climate and conditions for trade in the region. The full implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) would be a significant step in this regard. In addition, it was important to support women's trade organizations, increase women's access to financial capital and facilitate capacity building and learning platforms for women entrepreneurs. They further stressed the imperative of meaningful participation of women in all decision-making processes related to COVID-19 response. Recognizing that the recommendations could not be implemented without the necessary human and financial resources, Ms. Lusenge and Ms. Kigoma concluded by asking for the Commission's assistance in advocating for the mobilization of resources for women-led peacebuilding and development initiatives in the region.
5. Ms. Bineta Diop, African Union (AU) Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, welcomed the PBC engagement in the Great Lakes region, which was particularly relevant in the year of the AU initiative Silencing the Guns. She informed the Commission that AU reports on the implementation of the WPS agenda showed that women's needs in reconstruction settings were not adequately addressed and that resources for implementation were lacking. In this regard, the recommendations identified through the regional consultations were especially urgent. Ms. Diop stressed the importance of recognizing and strengthening women's leadership and highlighted in this context the value of networks such as FemWise and the African Women Leaders Network, of which the latter had several chapters in the Great Lakes region. She echoed the urgency in preventing sexual and gender-based violence in the region and noted with concern that resources often remained scarce for the good practice of One Stop Centers for survivors. In addition, she reiterated the centrality of promoting open border policies in order to support the entrepreneurship of women in the Great Lakes region, including through the implementation of the AfCFTA. Ms. Diop called on the Commission to rally behind the

recommendations formulated by the women peacebuilders, while especially stressing the need for gender-sensitive COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Furthermore, she highlighted the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) as a catalytic tool to strengthen the role of women in peacebuilding in the Great Lakes region.

6. Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following observations:

- They commended the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region for organizing the regional consultations and welcomed the identified recommendations. They recognized the critical role of women in lasting peace and development, including in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, and committed to supporting the efforts of the countries of the region to promote leading roles for women at all levels.
- They noted with concern the increased incidence of sexual and gender-based violence and the disproportionate vulnerabilities of women and girls during the pandemic. They encouraged partners to increase support for reforming the judicial systems and upholding women's rights, notably by integrating the issue of sexual and gender-based violence in national planning mechanisms and allocating resources for prevention efforts and the economic recovery of survivors.
- They emphasized the prominent role of women entrepreneurs as catalysts for the region's economic growth and an important contributing factor for consolidating peace and security in the region. They underscored the importance of improving the business climate and harmonizing tax regimes and trade policies to achieve the full potential of small and medium-size women-led businesses in the region, and recognized that the implementation of the AfCFTA had the potential to unlock opportunities for women entrepreneurs.
- They welcomed preparations for the Great Lakes Investment and Trade Conference, scheduled to take place in 2021 in Kigali, to strengthen economic cooperation and cross-border trade in the region and underscored the importance of women's participation in this event.
- Echoing concerns of women peacebuilders on the ground, they encouraged the countries of the region to integrate national action plans on UNSCR 1325 into their political and development plans. They called for reinforced support for the implementation of the regional action plan on UNSCR 1325, including providing adequate resources and strengthening the role of institutions and structures, such as

women parliamentary caucuses and increasing the role of women in political parties and national human rights commissions.

- They welcomed the support provided by the PBF in the region to create peace dividends for women and youth through increased cross-border trade and strengthened food security, and to reinforce the role of women mediators, and encouraged partners to consider providing additional resources to sustain and scale up these initiatives.
  - They welcomed the new UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the region, while underscoring the need for more coordinated cross-pillar and system-wide approaches for the effective implementation of the recommendations. They emphasized that the PBC would continue to provide a platform in this regard.
  - They committed to remain engaged with the countries of the Great Lakes region in taking forward the recommendations and encouraged partners to indicate those recommendations for which they are ready to work with governments and relevant stakeholders in the region, with a view to jointly define concrete actions and support.
7. In his closing remarks, the Chair reiterated the Commission's commitment to continue accompanying the Great Lakes on its path towards peacebuilding and sustaining peace, including by following up on the recommendations with a view of strengthening the role of women in peacebuilding and development in the region. He took note of the need for adequate resources for translating the recommendations into concrete actions and confirmed the commitment of the Commission to advocate for resource mobilization.