

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Press Release No: 123/2021

Date: 20 Dec 2021

Venue: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

COVID-19 worrying trend on reversal of gains on gender equality and women's empowerment; Africa forum on Women Peace and Security.

African women and girls continue to show commendable leadership, mobilization and resilience despite the hard-hitting negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women across the continent have taken initiatives to mitigate the impact of the pandemic with actionable examples drawn from the mobilisation and coordination by Congolese youth and young women in feeding and distributing health packages to the vulnerable residents in Kinshasa during COVID-19 lockdowns; the actions of the young women and girls in South Africa leveraging technology to respond to the pandemic as well as the role of women mediators' network in South Africa in developing a peace infrastructure; and further the community-level responses by women organizations in Niger.

These actions were lauded at the 2nd Africa forum on Women Peace and Security convened by the Office of the Special Envoy on Women Peace and Security aimed at focusing on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the face of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. The forum brought together African Union Member States, Regional Economic Communities, Centres of Excellence and Women and Youth Organizations during the two-day event held on the 13th and 14th December 2021.

The forum observed that nearly 24 months after the first case of COVID-19 was detected, data across several African countries reveal that the pandemic is reversing gains on gender equality and women's empowerment accumulated over the last two decades. The impact has largely been noted include but not limited to issues of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including teenage pregnancies and forced marriages which has accelerated into a 'shadow pandemic'. Health concerns were raised especially the access to maternal and reproductive health services and the new inequalities created by vaccine access. The effect of the pandemic on livelihoods, particularly for those in the informal, low-paid, and precarious incomes were raised. Further, challenges posed on the education sector especially with the close downs of schools and the expanding digital/ ICT gap, between those who have access to digital tools and those without, leaving millions excluded. The forum also highlighted the increased militarization and policing of civilians and the exacerbation of vulnerabilities of women and girls in humanitarian settings and equally worrying, the limited participation of women in the policy and decision-making spaces, especially in structures within which decisions were made on COVID-19 responses.

To address the challenges and ensure building back strong, the forum made a 10-action points recommendations whose implementation brings together among others, the policy makers, the private sector, civil societies, women and youth groups, and the media. The forum recommended enhanced action that address the;

1. Gendered disaggregated Data: Governments, development partners and humanitarian organisations must acknowledge the gendered implications of

- COVID-19 and put in place gender-responsive COVID-19 prevention and response plans as well as design long-term resilience and recovery programming, based on the collection and analysis of sex, gender and diversity disaggregated data.
2. Monitoring and Evaluation: Enhance monitoring and evaluation since frameworks of reporting already exists, such as the Continental Framework for monitoring and reporting on Women, Peace and Security in Africa and Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index (MPSI).
 3. Resources: Appeal to Member States to continue mobilising resources for WPS agenda. Funding for women right' organizations and movements should be a priority, as well as funding for gender equality and women's rights.
 4. Participation of women: Expand the space for engagement of women, especially at the policy-making and decision-making structures on COVID-19 mitigation and response strategies. Women's effective participation in decision-making leads to more responsive and effective solutions to the pandemic.
 5. Health services provision: Governments should provide safe, effective, and sufficient sexual, reproductive, and maternal health (SRNH) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) services through different ministries and institutions, including the health sector, justice sector, internal security, and local governments, with complementary services provided by non-state actors.
 6. Gender norms and practices: Address negative gender norms and cultural practices that promote patriarchy and subjugation of women and girls. Additionally, educate boys to respect women and girls and bring to justice those responsible for SGBV.
 7. Partnerships: Promote strengthening of strategic partnerships and collaborations with key stakeholders.
 8. Militarization and over-policing: Adopt a holistic perspective on peace and security. Address insecurity but also pursue human rights for all.
 9. Implementation of commitments on WPS and Humanitarian Action: Accelerate implementation of existing commitments on WPS and Humanitarian Action for the next five years. The launch of the global compact on WPS-HA in the auspice of generation equality forum offers a great opportunity to step up efforts. There is now need to go beyond adoption of these policies and upscale efforts to transform commitments to tangible results for women and girls in Africa
 10. Women's inclusion in COVID-19 and future emergency plans and programmes: Adopt various post-covid strategies for gender equality and women empowerment (GEWE) and women's rights to peace to protect further erosion of gains and rights of women across the continent.

The forum was addressed by various speakers including: H.E Mme Bineta Diop, the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on WPS; Madam Letty Chiwara, UN Women Resident Representative to Ethiopia; Madam Madiepetsane Charlotte Lobe, Acting Chief Operations Officer (ACOO), Department of International Relations and Cooperation in the Republic of South Africa; Dr Sarjoh Bah, Director for Conflict Management, representing H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, AUC Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) ; and H.E. Mme Inès Nefer Ingani, Minister for Women Promotion and Integration in Development, Republic of Congo; H.E Kira Smith Sindbjerg, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Denmark in Ethiopia; Dr Joannie Bewa, Founder and Executive Director of Young Beninese Leaders Association (YBLA); and H.E. Ambassador Fatima Kyari

Mohamed, African Union Permanent Observer to the UN. The support of Denmark, Germany, Norway, USA and UN Agencies, including UN WOMEN, UNDP and UNITAR in the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa was recognized and highly appreciated.

For further information please contact:

Doreen Apollos | Information and Communication Directorate | African Union Commission | **Tel:** +251 115 517 700 | **E-mail:** ApollosD@africa-union.org | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security | African Union Commission | **Tel.** + 251-11-5517700 ext.2047; +251-11- 518 2047 | **E-mail:** wpsa@africa-union.org

Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | **E-mail:** DIC@africa-union.org
Web: au.int | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia | **Follow Us:** [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)