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Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring
Participation of Women

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Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Women's Participation – A Framework of Model Provisions

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The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the activities that Femmes Africa Solidarité has been involved in over the past few years to support women's initiatives in gaining access to, and effectively participating in, peace negotiations across the African continent and therefore highlighting our contribution to implementing and monitoring Resolution 1325, which DAW recognizes as a valuable tool for engendering women in conflict resolution and peace building. The intention of this paper is also to provide examples of the best practices African women have employed in their efforts to participate in peace negotiations in various conflict ridden countries and regions.

1) Analysis of the Setting

When wars begin, women start to **come together** in order to put aside their differences and work together to achieve peace for their people. Women across the world have generally been sidelined in the peace processes taking place within their own countries, even when these processes have incorporated a diverse representation of actors from the UN, African Union (AU), conflict resolution experts, political parties in conflict, and rebel groups. When women's voices are marginalized, their concerns and the issues which most affect them are often overlooked in any final agreements. This is despite the fact that, as the Secretary General Kofi Annan has stated, "women are better equipped than men to prevent or resolve conflicts." ("African Civil Society Organisations and Development: Re-Evaluating for the 21st Century" in: Economic & Social Affairs, September 2002) It was in order to address the conditions restricting women's involvement in peace processes across the continent that African women came together to build national NGOs such as the Liberian Women's Initiative, Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC), Collectif des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi (CAFOB) and Pro-femmes (Rwanda) as well as the continent-wide women's platform for peace, of which the African Women's Committee for Peace and Development (AWCPD), the Federation of African Women's Peace Networks (FERFAP) and Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) are a part. Through this platform, the women sought to develop more comprehensive, gender-sensitive policies and practices for conflict prevention and resolution.

Since war divides women, they like to take advantage of **neutral settings and environments** to get together to discuss and solve their problems together. As a result of the various obstacles women face in having their voices heard at the national level, often the first place they feel fully capable of expressing themselves is at the international level. Their neutral setting and open environment makes international meetings and conferences, such as the Beijing Conference, its preparatory process as well as its evaluation process, a perfect forum in which African women can come forward to discuss their suffering and share their experiences. For example, it was during the Pan-African Women's Conference on a Culture for Peace, which was co-organised by AWCPD and UNESCO in May 1999 (Zanzibar) that Eritrean and Ethiopian women felt inspired, for the first time since the war's inception, to talk with one another about the situation. Many of these women had studied together at the same schools, or lived as neighbours in the same communities but had never spoken of their problems as a group before this event. During the same conference, women from the Great Lakes decided to sit together in informal meetings for the first time as well. The AWCPD facilitated both meetings.

In addition, these international conference settings enable African women to see that they are not alone in their struggles. Once they see that others, both from within Africa and abroad, have shared similar experiences and have subsequently been successful in impacting their respective peace processes, they feel emboldened. Indeed, the international women's movement has aided the women of Africa tremendously in their efforts to make their voices heard in peace processes. This movement has led to the elaboration and wide-spread adoption of the Beijing Platform of Action, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), all instruments that have facilitated African women's efforts to mainstream gender within continental and national mechanisms. Thus, such neutral settings allow women to use the **legal instruments** that have been created for their purposes.

When analysing actors around the table of negotiation, the first thing that comes to mind is the case of Burundi. This case is a prime example of the importance of unity and collective action to women interested in impacting peace processes. In October 1998, Burundian women, with the support of FAS, sent a delegation to the third round of the inter-Burundi peace negotiations in Arusha to meet the facilitator, former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere. It was only at this third round that women were finally included in the negotiations. Up until this point, the political parties, rebel groups and other parties present at the negotiating table had not had any female representation in their groups. Only those who had been actively fighting and who had guns had been present at the negotiations. When the women first arrived in Arusha the male participants told them to go back home because they did not fully understand the issues and that women were prone to giving up too easily. This did not stop the women from following their goal, one which they had prepared for in advance by doing all the necessary homework to be taken seriously by the men. The women complained of being denied participation in such an important round table, which would have afforded them the opportunity to contribute to the peace process much earlier. They convinced Julius Nyerere to bring the conflicting parties together to bring an end to the hostilities and also spoke about the embargo, which was having a devastating effect on the population. Impressed by the women's show of courage and

determination, Neyerere promised to support their efforts. Through his intervention, the Burundian women met the leaders of the various delegations and made their opinions known. After all their efforts, however, the women were still only given **observer status**. In helping the women to get their voices heard, the facilitator argued that according to the UN they would thus have the right to take the floor. This was not as much as the women had hoped for but it was an opportunity for them to be involved.

This involvement was further encouraged at the historic All-Party Women's Peace Conference organized by UNIFEM in July 2000 and attended by two women representatives from each of the nineteen parties. More than fifty women met President Mandela and presented proposals to strengthen the draft peace accord's focus on women and gender issues. These included proposals to punish and eliminate war crimes against women, such as rape and sexual violence; guarantees for women's rights to property, land and inheritance; and measures to ensure that girls have the same rights as boys to all levels of education. Twenty-three of the women's recommendations were included in the final peace accord.

In the case of Somalia, the setting was that only clans were allowed to participate in the peace negotiations and these did not include women. Thus, the women of Somalia confronted similar obstacles to the Burundian women in their efforts to take part in the country's peace negotiations. Despite all of their efforts, the women of Somalia were told they could not participate in the final talks, in which a new government would be decided upon, because they didn't constitute one of the traditional bodies for negotiation, called "clans". The Somali leaders, who gathered in Arta, Djibouti, May 2000, for three months of discussions on rebuilding the Somali State, had agreed on the clan-based power sharing system as the modus operandi for the Transitional National Assembly (TNA). While they were not told directly that they were being excluded because of their gender, it was not difficult for the women to recognise that the 5 clans negotiating in Arta were comprised of men only. After considering the situation and preparing themselves with the help of SSWC, the women, representing cross-clans, came back to the mediation team and insisted that they be considered an additional clan. They were ready for action. Finding no legal or traditional reason why there shouldn't be an additional clan, it was finally agreed upon that they would be considered the 6th clan and thus be able to participate in the negotiations.

Because of their **innovation** and their analysis of the setting they were in, the women were able to participate at the negotiating table. The women's agenda for peace and gender inclusion was subsequently incorporated in the final conclusions of the meeting. In addition, the 6th clan succeeded in securing 25 seats for women in the newly formed parliament.

2) Consultative Process

In order to ensure women's involvement in peace negotiations is as broad and representative as possible, delegates must first be chosen who represent a cross-section of the constituencies. This process was carried out in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where a series of consultations were held to delegate female representatives to speak on behalf of the women in the country. The organizations involved in this process were successful not only in sending a delegation of women to

participate in the peace talks, but also in lobbying political parties, rebel groups and civil society to ensure that they too had an adequate number of women representatives within their delegations to the negotiations. The group of women's organizations also lobbied the UN to ensure that women were well represented in their delegation, as well to convince the international body of the importance of using gender sensitive lenses when looking at all issues related to conflict resolution and peace building.

The women delegates also **advocated** to push the various factions involved in the peace negotiations to get female representation within their own groups. The women met with government, with civil society and others to convince them of this need. Furthermore, the women questioned the different parties involved on their representation of the people in general.

In an effort to consolidate and strengthen their role as negotiators, it is important that the women's delegations meet with key mediators to discuss the relevant issues. A prime example of the effectiveness of this strategy is the meeting that was organized by a broad representation of Burundian civil society with President Mandela, the facilitator in the Burundi peace negotiations, in July 2000. The organizers used the opportunity to present their views and concerns to the President. At the end of the meeting, President Mandela invited the delegation to join the on-going peace process that was proceeding in his country, and urged them to seek a mandate from their respective constituencies to participate in the process when the talks moved to Burundi.

3) Common Platform

Women's groups, like their male counterparts, are not homogenous. They have different interests, belong to different political parties and represent different ethnic groups and clans. Informal negotiations are often needed to bring consensus among them. These groups often appeal to third parties to help them in this process so that they can overcome their differences and elaborate a common platform and present a united front. These third parties, or mediators, must be neutral, accepted by all the groups, understand of all of the involved issues, be capable of offering technical advice and of supporting the women to build their negotiation skills. They should also have the capability of securing access to the various actors involved at the decision-making level. FAS has been called upon on several occasions to fulfil this role.

The first step in promoting a common platform is to **build the capacity and leadership** of the different groups involved. The second step is to help them **identify their common issues**. Despite their differences, the majority of women emerging from conflict situations are able to use their gender lens to agree on the need to address human security issues such as: violence against women, healthcare, education, employment, the child soldier phenomenon and the need for economic development. In this process they will most often settle their differences. For example, the women of the DRC were able to identify and work out their common issues in the Nairobi Declaration and Plan Action, which were the result of several initiatives to bring the women of the various factions of the DRC (including government and rebel, east and west, city and countryside) together. This combined effort helped these women obtain a greater number of official seats at the Sun City

based Inter-Congolese Dialogue, as well as to secure accreditation for an additionally substantial number of women to participate as observers to the Dialogue.

Because of their willingness to build a common platform for peace, the women in both the DRC and the Mano River were able to realize the bulk of their goals. The women of the Mano River, organised under the aegis of the Mano River Women's Network (MARWOPNET), have similarly succeeded on several fronts. For example, The Abuja Declaration and Plan of Action¹, which was the result of several meetings between the women of the Mano River basin, proved that the women were capable of succeeding where their men had failed- namely in putting aside their differences to build a common platform for peace. Recognizing that peace, development and security issues are interrelated, they split into working groups focusing on five critical areas of concern, in each of which one of the women's networks would be expected to play a leading role. The five areas are as follows:

- 1) Peace processes
- 2) Peace mechanisms
- 3) Security
- 4) Reconstruction
- 5) Economic empowerment

Representatives of UN agencies and other organisations were also chosen as facilitators or rapporteurs in the working groups in order to ensure their greater participation in the process. These representatives were involved as partners because of the experiences they had which they were able to share with the women in order to help them achieve their aims at the negotiation table.

In addition to the above strategies, the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council Resolution 1325 are serving as powerful tools to mobilize and unite women from diverse backgrounds and are enabling them to promote their common interests regarding human security issues such as health, education, employment and reconciliation. These tools can also be employed by women to promote dialogue between the various groups involved in peace negotiations, as well as to ensure women's concerns are taken into consideration when national constitutions are drafted once peace has been achieved.

4) Strategy for Negotiation

In the first part of this paper you have heard how the women were able to get themselves organised to achieve their common goals of peace and security. In order to surmount the various obstacles, women must take advantage of every possible opportunity that arises during the negotiation process. In addition to the partnerships women have made at the international and regional levels, they must also **obtain**

¹ The Abuja plan of Action was launched at the Abuja Meeting, in Nigeria in May 2000. The meeting was organised by FAS in conjunction with the African Women Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD) and the West African Women's Association (WAWA) and hosted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It brought together women from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea to share experiences, build consensus and launch a sub-regional peace-building programme. MARWOPNET was also officially created during this meeting. (see FAS publication on women's best practices in Africa: Engendering the peace process in West Africa, The Mano River Women's Peace Network)

grass roots and national support in the process leading to the negotiations. They can achieve this through: media outreach; the inclusion of as wide a spectrum as possible of women's groups in their work; caucus building; and, the lobbying of various involved actors.

As the Sun City women's delegation has demonstrated, during negotiations the women must **stay focused on their goals** which include: mainstreaming women's concerns into any final documents; the inclusion of women in transitional government; addressing the issue of violence against women; addressing the issue of impunity (e.g. through the creation of war crime tribunals); the disarmament and reintegration of child soldiers; and, support for traumatised civilians. In the case of the DRC, the women agreed to focus on additional goals such as, the integrity of the territory, a united Congo and the removal of external forces. With the support of FAS, and in collaboration with UNIFEM and UNDP, the women organised a caucus which enabled them to reflect on and analyse the issues being discussed in the various commissions comprising the Dialogue, as well as to develop strategies to enhance their participation. The caucus continued to share its experiences with other women's groups and network throughout its activities. It held meetings with representatives of all the various parties to the Dialogue, as well as with African National Congress (ANC) women leaders and the mediation team.

In Sun City the women's caucus was very keen to organise press conferences and press briefings and give radio interviews, all of which were subsequently disseminated in their country. In this way, the women delegates were able to continue to link with their grass root constituents to keep them informed on their movements and achievements. When the caucus appealed to the women of the DRC for their support in bringing all parties to the negotiating table, the women responded by demonstrating across the DRC. When these women were interviewed on TV they scolded the belligerents and begged them to sit down and negotiate. They told them that they did not want them back home until the negotiations were completed. Importantly, the caucus **worked together** with women from various political parties to make sure that together they could make an impact on the various commissions.

The Burundi peace process is another example of women implementing effective strategies during negotiations. With the help of Ruth Sando Perry, Former Head of State of Liberia, the women of Burundi were able to open doors that might have otherwise been closed. Ms. Perry, who led the delegation in its meetings with the facilitator, shared her experience and expertise in peace building with the Burundian women. While serving as Chairperson and Council of State of the Liberia National Transitional Government, Ms. Perry presided over the disarmament of the warring parties in Liberia, repatriated and resettled refugees and displaced persons, and conducted internationally acclaimed free and fair democratic elections. Ms. Perry's presence garnered the attention of those actors in the Burundi peace process who might have otherwise demonstrated reluctance in dealing with women on this level, and gave the women of Burundi hope that they too could successfully engage in the peace process. Ms. Perry's presence also illustrates the importance for women who are trying to participate in peace processes to have and remain in contact and dialogue with mediators in order not to be marginalised. Keeping in contact with mediation teams is imperative for groups to be included and then kept in the mainstream.

Among the most effective of their interventions was that made on International Women's Day, 8 March 2002 which helped them to finally gain the respect of the men. The Congolese women began their celebration by attending the Dialogue's plenary session, in which the Mediator, along with all parties to the Dialogue, was present. Together the women, all wearing the same dress, representing government, armed groups, political parties and civil society, comprised close to 30% of the plenary that day. The group, which consisted of the women delegates to the Dialogue as well as experts with observer status, performed a short play, demonstrating the suffering they have endured as a result of the war. They then read their Declaration- a plea to include greater numbers of women in the country's decision-making mechanisms, and to take women's concerns into consideration in any final decisions agreed upon at the Dialogue's conclusion. Ruth Sando Perry also addressed the plenary. This event coincided with the beginning of the plenary session and had a tremendous impact on the political Declaration of each party to the dialogue. Many of the men were in tears by the end of their presentation. The tone of their Declarations had changed and they confessed that they did not realise that their women saw them such a negative light. The women were now able to make an alliance with the men since the latter had come to realise their guilt in causing the war and in excluding the women from having their say. The women seized this opportunity in order to bring their issues to the forefront.

The women's caucus played a mediating role throughout the Dialogue, holding discussions with the various parties to the negotiations, as well as with the negotiation team. At the same time, they reached out to the public via the international, national and local media by issuing regular media advisories and convening several press conferences and keeping their constituencies informed.²

5) Conclusion

Despite the various international declarations and conventions calling for their increased involvement, African women continue to be sidelined in their efforts to participate in peace processes across the continent. Even when they are organised and prepared, they often have trouble securing the necessary funds to attend negotiations. If they are able to find financial backing, they often have trouble getting the necessary accreditation to enable their full participation. And even when they do get accreditation, their potential contributions are often undermined by other participants who do not take them seriously. Despite the fact that women have proven their gift for negotiation, through their participation in the Mano River, Burundi and DRC peace processes, they must still contend with these obstacles.

After all of their efforts, how many women are participating in the transitional government in Burundi, and how many will participate in the DRC? Will they participate in the drafting of any new constitutions to ensure gender issues are mainstreamed? Will any war crime tribunal be set up to take into consideration the violence that has been committed against women in countries and regions of conflict? What protection will the international community provide to the women who have

² Although their strategies appear to have been effective, the women's actual impact on the negotiation process has yet to be officially assessed.

taken risks? These are some of the crucial issues that women's caucuses which are involved in peace negotiations should closely monitor.

Security Council Resolution 1325 must be seen as a tool that can be used to empower, mobilize and unify women across the globe. Its implementation is vital to the rights of all women living in, or emerging from, conflict situations. In order to effectively use this tool, African women must advocate for its implementation at the national level and the international community must support them, both politically and financially in this endeavour. The UNDP's recent commitment to support the women of the DRC and the Mano River in their efforts to participate in peace negotiations, as well as the DAW's commitment to creating gender mechanisms to deal with women's issues on a national level in war-torn countries, are both examples of positive responses from the international community. African women must build partnerships with other women and men from around the world who share their same interests, both in sustainable peace and gender equality. And, vice versa, it is the duty of individuals, organisations and institutions who fight for peace and equality in the world, to ensure that the brave women who stand up and challenge their male counterparts on the issues of war and conflict resolution, are able to have their voices heard in negotiations. Subsequently they should be able to return home safely to face their communities and share with them the promise of concrete change for the future.

By assessing the various peace agreements that have been, or are in the process of being, signed we hope that this expert meeting will be able to address the situation of women in peace processes so that they may have a real impact on future peace agreements, as well as on the necessary monitoring and implementation mechanisms that must accompany them. In Liberia, for example, while the women have signed the peace agreement and will now be monitoring the steps the government takes towards its implementation, their capacity to have a sustained impact on the final outcome of the peace processes is still uncertain. The question remains as to whether there is sufficient female representation within the government's own mechanisms, and whether gender issues are truly mainstreamed within the peace agreement itself. These issues need to be monitored in Liberia as well as in all other post-conflict countries.