



## ***PRESS RELEASE***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Addis Ababa, 25 January 2008

### **Not just victims: Darfuri women say, “We’re ready to lead towards peace.”**

**Addis Ababa – 25/01/2008.** Women from Darfur and across Africa met this week to craft a plan of action for peace in the conflict-torn Darfur region of Sudan. As talks are set to continue between combatant factions and the government of Sudan, the question of participation of civil society organisations in Darfur remains open, and the African Women’s Consultation on Darfur is a first step in an effort to ensure that Darfuri women’s voices are heard.

Since conflict broke out in Darfur in 2002, women have been systematically targeted for sexual violence, while domestic violence has also increased as traditional social structures have broken down during displacement and long confinements in refugee camps. Yet, the women leaders assembled in Addis this week agreed that Darfuri women cannot be considered only as symbols of victimization, but rather must have an active role in all aspects of the peace process.

“It is important that all those involved in the peace process understand that the women of Darfur, many of whom have been victims of violence, are also strong community leaders who are ready to help negotiate an equitable peace settlement and without whom the structures of Darfuri society cannot be rebuilt,” said Ms. Sidiga Washi, Babiker Badri, Scientific Association for Women Studies in Sudan.

The women also agreed that theirs is not a token participation. Those chosen to represent Darfuri women’s interests in the peace process must be given the resources, advice, and support to sustain dialogue with their constituencies as well as to navigate the peace process mechanisms.

The African Women’s Consultation on Darfur is one part of a larger initiative facilitated by the Geneva-based Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) to ensure women actively participate in resolving the conflict in Darfur, following a September 2007 fact-finding mission led by Nobel peace prize winner, Ms. Mary Robinson.

“We are here to support our sisters from Darfur and share our own experiences in successfully bringing peace to other African conflicts,” said Ms Marie Louise Baricako, Chairperson of FAS, adding, “We will continue to support them through their struggle to be equal participants in the peace negotiations”. She also urged the peace negotiators, the participants, and the international community to ensure that the women of Darfur have the resources they need to represent their interests at the table.”

Renown Musician and activist, Ms. Angélique Kidjo, who also participated in the fact-finding mission, warmly endorsed the conference, stating: "After my trip to the border of Chad and Darfur last September I realise that, in this conflict, there is one voice that never seems to be heard: the voice of the women. All the testimonies of the women I met there have touched me deeply. They told me their stories but they also

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pointed out that they don't want to be seen just as victims: they want to be active in the negotiations and in the resolution of the conflict. Women's involvement for peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone has shown the way. The same thing has to happen in Darfur and I hope the Conference will achieve this goal.”

The African Women's consultation on Darfur was organised on the margins of the 10<sup>th</sup> African Union Heads of States Summit, with the support of the African Center for Gender and Social Development of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Women, Gender and Development Directorate of the African Union Commission and the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom.

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