

## **THE SIXTH AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FORUM**

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### **Plenary Session 1: “Effective and creative enforcement measures and tools for ending violence against women”**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a true honour and pleasure for me to be present at the 6<sup>th</sup> African Development Forum.

It is most timely to focus the Forum this time on the African women – women whose life I have had the honour to follow for the last decades, in good and less good. I have to say that I don't feel like a total outsider, who often is not able to understand the real life of an African woman, and measures actions to be taken against her own traditional and cultural background.

The title of my presentation is very prestigious, and I certainly cannot promise to find the solutions needed for the most effective measures. I will speak based on my own work and experiences worldwide, and concentrate on some of the problems and urgent measures needed to solve them, at least partly.

Some of the tools already exist, CEDAW, UN Security Council Resolutions (UN SCR) 1325 and 1820, and also a long line of important decisions and declarations adopted by the AU. The decision on parity by the Assembly of Heads of State and the Government of African Union is an example others could follow, especially the European Union!

Resolutions and conventions are effective only if implemented. Unfortunately that has not always been the case. The UN SCR 1325 about Women, Peace and Security was immediately followed up by the Independent Assessment “Women War Peace” commissioned by Unifem in 2002. The reporters were present President of Liberia, H.E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Elisabeth Rehn.

The message we got from interviews with women and girls in regions of conflict all around the world, was very clear: Women and girls are the victims of the wars of today, both during the conflicts and after. I have often expressed myself by the words: “In wars women's bodies are the battlefields of the fighting troops”.

Unfortunately the International Community with all its different actors, is partly to blame. In too many cases members of the international community have contributed to the misery of women, instead of helping and supporting them. I have a very clear vision: only those who have got intensive gender pre-training should be sent out. As well peacekeepers as international police, NGO:s and humanitarian workers, all of them have to pay the necessary respect to the women in a given country they are based in. Gender training is especially important for those who are in the leadership of an operation.

Trafficking in human beings increases during conflict and post-conflict situations. Organized criminals are not hindered by state borders, religion, or ethnic groups. Unfortunately they also support political leaders, who cannot always resist the temptation of corruption. When that is the case, it is very difficult to expect full support from the officials in the fight against human trafficking. I have had the opportunity to discuss with hundreds of women and girls forced to prostitution, either through trafficking or like in Africa through enforcement to be wartime “bushwives” – many of their true-life stories are heartbreaking.

The leadership in the International community is mostly male dominated, and the IC leaders do not pay enough attention to these enormous problems. As an example I can mention that in Europe, in Kosovo, women complained that after the IC came, their situation got worse. “Earlier they only had to resist their own men, now they have the whole international community against them!”

What is needed is a judicial system that gives women same rights as men. The system must support and protect the human rights of every individual, even against the state. The Rule of law is a woman’s best friend, when you can report to the police without fear, and when the court rooms are impartial and objective, following the law. It is clear that acting on violence against women needs resources. Law enforcement staff needs resources to react to violence situations and the staff needs to be trained. Everyone working on violence against women cases needs to understand the full picture of victim's needs. The resources need to foremost come from national sources, but also the International Community should pay more attention to the situation, and allocate more resources, to ending violence against women. Needless to say that impunity must be banned: everyone responsible has to take the consequences, even if he happens to be a general or a high UN-official. Impunity can only be achieved if the highest political leadership strongly stands behind it and talks about violence against women openly.

Violence against women is also closely linked to women's economic status. Even if there would be strong law enforcement, would a woman go and report violence to the police, if the one who is beating her is the breadwinner in the family - even if the woman works hard at home? If the whole family's economic survival is depending on the beating man, is the woman going to risk the livelihood of the whole family by sending the man to jail? Enforcement measures need to look at economic questions of victims. The whole issue of violence against women needs to be observed against the background of who owns the resources and the property, whose work is paid and how much, and what kind of opportunities and possibilities the society gives to men and what kind to women. This is also the big question when peace is in the making.

A special demand from my long lasting experience from conflicts around the world, is the need for implementation of SCR 1325 to all it’s parts. Some positive steps have been taken, small but important. Where we have not succeeded at all is the real empowerment of women, the right for women to play an active role in building the future for their families and their home country. Only a few women are in the leadership of peace building operations. European Union has no single woman Special Envoy, and United Nations has one SRSF, in UNMIL in Liberia.

When the future is drawn up during peace negotiations, where are the women who have to implement the decisions, often as sole breadwinners for the families? Who are the experts on bringing back education, social- and health services, and solutions to environmental problems on the grass root level? Women have had a say through efficient NGO:s, often unofficially, but they have seldom been invited to the negotiation tables. It is too often heard from peace mediators: “We have to take the serious and important questions first – then later we can handle women’s rights and issues”. But there is no “later”. If violence against women is accepted at the peace negotiation table and in crisis management situations, it can easily become accepted in the post-conflicts society for decades to come, and lead to more permanent culture of violence. Women’s voice must be there from the beginning, in the interest of lasting peace.

Africa is suffering from sad and serious conflicts this very day. Sudan and Darfur, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and its neighbouring countries...

The negotiations for peace must come, and this time it is the responsibility of all of us, governments, organisations, every single man and woman, to ensure the presence of women at those negotiations. There is no credible argument for not doing so.

SCR 1325 requests governments to create their own National Action Plans.

The Nordic countries and many others in Europe, have done so. African states are in the process, so is Jordan and some others. I would strongly recommend that every government will follow this request, binding up all relevant ministries to the plan and for action.

(I mentioned environmental expertise of women earlier. We all talk about climate change, and we surely have already seen negative signs of it. The climate change is a serious threat to the sustainable development of our societies. It will hit most seriously poor regions and poor people. And 70% of the poor are women. Securing food, water and energy will become harder and will take more time. This will have an impact on women and girls. They may have even less time for education, income generation or taking care of their families in developing countries in the future. Women have wide knowledge on coping with environmental problems, and if given a chance, they can be powerful agents for change. It is therefore of utmost importance that we ensure women’s participation in decision making, planning and implementing climate change related activities. In addition, it will be important that all relevant bilateral and multilateral programmes and financial organisations encourage women’s participation in this respect.

I am very pleased to inform you that one of the main themes for the high level Colloquium of Women Leaders next March in Monrovia, co-convened by Presidents of Liberia and Finland, will be Gender and Climate change.)

The hard work in all societies, in Africa, Europe and elsewhere, is done equally by men and women, side by side. Bearing in mind this fact, it is even more important that we also honour the work equally. Step by step women have taken their positions in political leadership, giving all the experience and expertise the society need for it’s future. Women in leadership are important role models for other women. We always have to remember that when we include the knowledge and skills of half of the population to the second part – the whole community is the beneficiary! - I thank you.