



UNITED NATIONS
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
Liaison Office to the African Union and Economic Commission for Africa

Remarks to the AU PSC Open Session on Vulnerability of Women and Children in Conflict Situations in Africa

Honorable Ambassador, Chair of the Peace and Security Council and Ambassador of Namibia; Honorable Ambassadors of the Peace and Security Council, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for the opportunity to address this Open Session on this commemoration of International Women's Day. Thank you to the PSC and the previous speakers for outlining the many key achievements that have been made since the passing of UNSCRs 1325 and 1812. We have come a long way and the AU Commission and member states have been in the vanguard of developing policy instruments and mechanisms to ensure greater representation of gender perspectives in peace support operations. But as you yourself have noted, we can do more. As several speakers have pointed out, we have gaps between the resolutions and implementation. I would like to make a few suggestions that could help us to strengthen this.

The planning and CONOPS development for Peace Support Operations already include humanitarian and human rights perspectives. OCHA and OHCHR are now regular participants in the establishment of PSOs from the planning stages. My **first** recommendation is for more systematic inclusion of gender expertise and gender-focused analysis and perspectives from the planning stages of each PSO. To this end, OCHA will ensure that its humanitarian and protection support will also extend to include sharing the IASC gender toolkit for emergencies which provides comprehensive guidance on identifying and addressing the very different needs of women, girls, boys and men during emergencies.

Excellencies, I would like to stress that the vulnerability of women, girls and boys does not begin when conflict erupts. It begins long before that. All of the crises that occupy us in Africa are either of a chronic nature or else they are overlaid on situations of state fragility and pre-existing vulnerabilities for women, girls and boys. This means that it is not enough for us to consider interventions **after** conflict erupts but for us to ensure that our analysis of vulnerabilities and risks are continuous in those fragile contexts. I have two additional suggestions therefore on how we can increase our efforts in this regard.

First, the Permanent Representatives Sub-Committee on Refugees and Displaced Persons undertakes several assessment missions every year, in fragile situations. Already humanitarian and human rights considerations form a part of the assessment supported by International Partners. I propose that gender expertise and gender analysis is also included in these assessment missions so as to ensure that the vulnerabilities of women, girls and boys form part of the analysis. The active participation of women in these processes will help in the identification of their needs and in the design of interventions to address them. It also allows for a recognition of what women are already doing for their own protection.

Second, the vulnerabilities of women and girls often have roots in livelihoods considerations, socio-economic inequities and difficulties in accessing basic services. Analysis and execution of programming during conflict and before should be multi-dimensional in order to ensure the effective protection of women and girls once conflict erupts. To this end, I suggest that the initiatives of the Gender Directorate extend to encompass other departments and sectors beyond military and security considerations to look at livelihoods, labor, migration and humanitarian vulnerability. OCHA stands ready, along with other humanitarian partners active in the Sub-Cluster on Emergency Preparedness and Response, to support an expanded intervention to holistically protect women, girls and boys before, during and after conflict.

Happy International Women's Day !

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