INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE COMMISSIONER FOR PEACE AND SECURITY OF THE AFRICAN UNION,

AMBASSADOR SMAIL CHERGUI,

TO THE HIGH LEVEL SEMINAR ON GENDER AND INCLUSIVE MEDIATION PROCESSES

Oslo, Norway, 24-26 MARCH 2015

«African Union perspectives on Women, Peace and Security»
Ladies and gentlemen,

A very warm thank you from the African Union and my very sincere appreciation for your kind invitation to discuss a topic of great importance to us at the African Union: Gender and Inclusive Mediation Processes.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) is the cornerstone resolution on women, peace and security, further reinforced by consequent resolutions on issues related to women participation to peace processes, protection of women from violence and respect of their rights, in particular UN General Assembly Resolution 65/283 (2011) and UN Security Council Resolution 2122 (2013) which recognizes «the continuing need to increase women’s participation and the consideration of gender-related issues in all discussions pertinent to the prevention and resolution of armed conflict, the maintenance of peace and security, and post-conflict peace building».

Together these resolutions create the Global framework for the agenda on Women, Peace and Security. In Africa, this framework is supplemented by the AU’s own instruments, including:

- Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union, at the Third Ordinary Session of the Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 6-8 July 2004, which calls for the need to “ensure the full and effective participation and representation of women in peace process including the prevention, resolution, management of conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa as stipulated in UN Resolution 1325 (2000) and to also appoint women as Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the African Union”.

- The AU Gender Policy seeks to “enhance the role of women in creating an enabling stable and peaceful environment for the pursuit of Africa’s development agenda. This involves enhancing and increasing the participation of women in the entire spectrum of peace building activities such as conflict prevention, conflict management, in particular peace support operations, conflict resolution, post-conflict reconstruction and development. The Policy further commits to promote the effective participation of women in peacekeeping, peace building and security, including post-conflict reconciliation and development.”
- Protocol to The African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa requires States Parties to “take all appropriate measures to ensure the increased participation of women in programmes of education for peace and a culture of peace, in the structures and processes for conflict prevention, management and resolution at local, national, regional, continental and international levels as well as in all aspects of planning, formulation and implementation of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.

- African Union Decade of Women, Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) has as one of its objectives on Peace and Security and Violence Against Women, to work with the African Union Peace and Security Department (PSD), the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the Panel of the Wise in the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions: 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889, with particular focus on Violence Against Women (VAW), peace building and reconstruction.

- In addition, the preventive diplomacy activities undertaken by the AU Panel of the Wise are complemented by yearly thematic reflections on conflict prevention and mediation activities. The purpose of these reflections is to enable the Panel to advise member states on how to best address threats to peace and security on the continent. As per its mandate, every year, the Panel identifies and highlights a specific theme relevant to conflict prevention or peace building in order to raise awareness and stimulate a policy debate around the issue. The report of the AU Panel of the Wise on “Eliminating violence against women and children in armed conflict through accelerated implementation of existing frameworks”, to be submitted to the Assembly of the Union in June 2015. Key recommendations include, among other things:
  o Expand the mandate of the AU Special Representative/Envoy on Women Peace and Security to focus on ending violence against women and children in conflict;
  o Advocate actively for an end to impunity for conflict-related sexual violence, mobilize member states’ political ownership, harmonization in AU and global responses to tackling the problem;
  o Increase by 50 percent the appointment of women in mediation at all levels, including within electoral bodies, constitutional courts, and as ombudsmen;
Strengthen accountability and enforcement mechanisms by prosecuting and sentencing perpetrators of violence against women and children, particularly in post-conflict times;

Systematically adopt a gendered approach to Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programmes and reparation mechanisms so as to address the specific needs of women;

Create better synergy between its gender machinery, mechanisms for human rights, conflict prevention, management and resolution and the AU Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;

Be actively involved in transforming women's leadership role in mediation, prevention and diplomacy through enhancing their role at every level of the peace process; etc.

The challenge facing us is how to ensure the concrete and effective implementation of this framework. The first requirement is for concrete strong political will at all levels to ensure implementation and durable solutions.

While acknowledging that conflicts affect more women and children, the discourse on women and conflict must stop at looking at women merely as victims in the conflict, but recognize their demonstrated capacities to be part and parcel of peace processes. One area in which the presence of women is critical is in the mediation process itself, since the outcome of the mediation will likely set the agenda for the immediate and long-term future, including addressing the power dynamics within which various social groups, including women, will operate.

However, sensitivity to women and gender issues, including the presence of women in the mediation, either as a mediator or as a party in the mediation, is not enough to address the issue of women’s role in the emerging society being fashioned in the mediation. Expertise in women and gender issues is also required, along with a conscious decision to place gender and the role of women on the agenda of the negotiation process.

Dear friends,

We are gathered here to discuss and reflect on professionalising the practice of mediation, while at the same time considering ways to improve gender and inclusive mediation processes. At the African Union,
we have, to date, paid substantial attention to this dimension of our work which has been translated into the following actions, namely:

1. by raising the profile of the issue at the level of the Heads of States’ deliberations, especially by dedicating the current year 2015 to women’s empowerment and development. It should be recalled that Pillar III for this year’s thematic focuses specifically on amplifying the role of women at the negotiation and in early warning mechanisms, as well as creating a critical mass of peacebuilders;

2. through the annual Open Session on the status of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts, engaging the Peace and Security Council on regular evaluations of our collective efforts in protecting vulnerable populations and improving their participation at the negotiation table;

3. by applying more scrupulously the principle of gender parity for AUC elected/appointed officials, especially in the field of peace and security. For instance, the AU Panel of the Wise, which are the preventive diplomacy arm of the Union, includes three women out of five members. In fact, its current Chairperson also happens to be a woman;

4. by increasing the number of women amongst the AU Special Representatives and Special Envoys. Since 2014, the number has gone from 1 to 8 in the field;

5. by appointing a Special Envoy, Mrs. Bineta Diop, to spearhead and monitor the efforts of the Union on the issues of women, peace and security with a strong emphasis placed on increasing our ability to protect vulnerable populations more effectively; and developing more robust approaches to ensure the effective participation of women in the various stages of peace processes;

6. by developing a comprehensive and longer term strategic approach to gender mainstreaming mediation processes, which will focus on the following three pillars: grooming the next generation of women peacemakers through intentional partnerships with academic institutions; professionalising further the practice of mediation at all levels; and creating a roster of women in the field of mediation;
In this context, the Peace and Security Department (PSD) launched a 5 year Gender, Peace and Security Program (GPSP) (2015-2020) designed to serve as a framework for the AUC and partners to work jointly at the political, advocacy, and programmatic levels. The Program is to support the development of effective strategies and mechanisms for women’s increased participation in peace and security and enhanced protection in conflict and post conflict situations.

The expected outcomes of the Program are as follows:

- Women’s roles in peace and security in Africa is strengthened;
- Women vulnerabilities in time of conflict and post conflict situation are addressed and their rights protected;
- The capacity of African institutions working in the area of peace and security, human rights and protection to mainstream gender is enhanced;
- The network of actors active in the field of gender, peace and security is strengthened;
- Documentation & research, communication and information dissemination.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The brief outline above demonstrates the importance of gender and inclusive mediation as part of the basket of tools at our disposal to reduce violent conflict in our continent. Opportunities to reflect on our practice, share experiences and chart a way forward are therefore vital.

Most importantly is that we have enough tools and resolutions. What we need now is implementation and delivery. I am sure that this seminar will help us reach that goal.

I thank you.