SPECIAL ENVOY’S REMARKS AT PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE THEME OF ‘WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY’ TO MARK SOUTH AFRICA’S WOMEN MONTH,

ADDIS ABABA, 31 AUGUST 2016

Excellencies;

Distinguished guests; I am honored to be here today to celebrate South Africa’s Women Month. The month commemorates historic action by South African women in 1956, where 20,000 women showed their agency and gave voice to their frustration with unjust laws. Today we celebrate not just the women who filled the streets on that day, but also a strong women’s movement in South Africa which was an active and critical participant in the liberation of the country. Since 1994, South Africa has demonstrated a firm commitment to women’s empowerment, and it has provided the continent with numerous good practice-particularly in the area of women’s participation. South Africa’s parliament boasts some of the highest rates of women’s representation continentally and internationally and its Women’s Parliamentary Caucus is seen as a model of what women in legislatures can achieve if they build alliances and act across party lines. Women's participation in political life, and peace and security matter to positive societal outcomes- as South Africa demonstrates. South Africa has not limited its support on women’s empowerment domestically. South Africa has also been a leader in support of a range of efforts-
particularly with regards to enhancing women’s role in mediation across the continent. This needs to be acknowledged and applauded.

I have been asked to reflect at this panel under the theme of Women's Empowerment in the 21st Century, specifically on the issue of Women in Peace and Security. The key question posed at this panel is: Women are the emotional and physical victims of wars and conflicts. To what extent are they given the opportunity to mediate and contribute in conflict resolution? Over fifteen years ago, the international community adopted United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which was the first global recognition of the unique role, and active agency, of women in conflict, peace and security. Participation in conflict resolution is a cornerstone of the women, peace, and security agenda. Participation is not only a rights concern but also a pragmatic one. Conflict resolution efforts and political agreements which are inclusive are able to achieve sustainable peace. But the question posed strikes at the heart of challenge before us, fifteen years after international, regional, and national commitments on promoting women’s participation in conflict resolution - how far have we come in implementing this commitment?

When Mme Zuma appointed me as her Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security in 2014, I had a conviction that my role could not just stop at advocacy – it also needed a strong emphasis on policy implementation. Much has been said on the need to bridge the gap between policy and implementation on the continent – this is even more so in the area of women, peace, and security. Indeed, the women, peace, and security agenda has developed an elaborate architecture at global, continental, and regional levels. This architecture comprises of a strong normative framework built around a basket of policy and legal instruments starting from United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions, which have been embedded and developed further at continental and regional levels; implementation frameworks which include national and regional action plans on UNSCR 1325 as well as other WPS commitments; regional policy engagement platforms on WPS; and institutional programs, measures and flagship
initiatives. Sadly, progress for women on the ground has not matched this elaborate architecture. The large implementation gap has led to political and institutional consensus at the AU level on the need to put a moratorium on policy formulation and refocus attention and energies on policy implementation and monitoring.

It is in this vein that my office has embarked on developing a continental results framework to monitor and report on performance on women, peace, and security commitments at all levels. In the process of formulating and finalizing the framework, the OSE produced and launched under the aegis of the AUC Chairperson, in the margins of the Kigali AU Summit, a preliminary report on the ‘Implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in Africa’. This report builds on consultative meetings with AU Member States and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) that have developed Action Plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and canvasses the core global, continental, and regional commitments to the WPS agenda; tracks the development of UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs) and Regional Action Plans (RAPs); and outlines the main areas of achievements on implementation at national, regional, and continental levels. It represents the first attempt to capture the state of implementation of women, peace, and security commitments at all levels in Africa. Furthermore, it provides data from further research on various case studies of achievements on participation in the nineteen Member States that have adopted NAPs, including on parliamentary representation, leadership, and special measures; ministerial level representation; participation in peacekeeping police and military contingents; and of particular interest to this gathering- in peace agreements. It further fleshes out the challenges, as well as the current and emerging opportunities to accelerate implementation, concluding with specific recommendations at national, regional, and continental levels. It identifies key intervention areas to accelerate implementation, performance, and impact for women across the continent.

As such, my subsequent remarks will focus on giving some key highlights and findings from the report on the current state of women’s participation in conflict resolution efforts-and proceed to offer some recommendations and way forward for advancing this agenda.
Firstly, the picture that emerges from women’s participation in formal peace processes in Africa from 1992-2011. Of the sixteen peace processes conducted in Africa during that period, only two had women participate as signatories (with a low figure of 5%), the rest had none. During the same period, only three of the sixteen had women as lead mediators. Six of the peace processes had women witnesses (ranging between 7-20%), with five having women as part of the negotiating teams (between 2-25%). The picture is bleak. The numbers illustrate that with very few exceptions, the number of women participating in peace negotiations in a variety of official roles - as signatories, lead mediators, witnesses, or in negotiating teams - is significantly low or non-existent. While there has been advocacy to increase the numbers of women at the table, research indicates that influence and sequencing or timing of participation, and not just presence is critical in affecting the outcomes of the peace agreements and its provisions. How women mobilize outside the formal space, and the opportunities and avenues for transfer have also been noted as key as a strategy for influence. Mediators have a large role to play in this regard, and guidelines for women’s inclusion in peace processes have been developed at the UN level. Currently mediation processes are led by a variety of actors including the UN, AU, regional organisations and Member States increasing the complexity of pushing for inclusion in peace processes. Beyond the individual initiative of a mediator, a clear terms of reference for mediators around women’s participation and inclusion is then critical. Beyond the lead up to the signing of the agreement, women’s participation and inclusion in implementation and monitoring of the agreement post-agreement should also be of focus.

A number of peace processes have been concluded since 2012, including in Mali and South Sudan and illustrate a range of efforts by women to participate both in formal and informal spaces. The peace process in Mali was led by Algeria, a Member State, whereas the process in South Sudan was led by a regional organization, IGAD. Since the commencement of the Mali peace process in mid-2014, the women of Mali pushed for increased representation and participation in the ongoing process, primarily through the Platform for Women Leaders. The Platform undertook a number of activities, including training for women in conflict mediation; sensitization on the preliminary peace agreement; lobbying with political and traditional decision makers. Efforts resulted in an additional eight women
from civil society groups joining the original three women among the 50 government delegates in the negotiations. There have nevertheless been concerns that despite these efforts, by and large, the resulting agreement ignored the demands and priorities of Malian women. In spite of this, the Platform persisted in its engagement and convened women to consult and present their priorities for national institutions post-adoptions of the agreement.

With regards to the South Sudan processes, three out of the ten persons in the SPLM-IO negotiating team were women, and as a result of national and international lobbying, three women were included in the government delegation - which originally had no women. The IGAD-led mediation believed that inclusion of civil society was necessary to the process. After a number of attempts, it settled on the allocation of observer status to various ‘blocs’ – including one women’s representative. These blocs also served as witnesses to the signed agreement. The resulting agreement not only has gender-sensitive provisions, but also includes women’s participation in various intuitions for the implementation and monitoring of the agreement. South Sudanese women from across various constituencies have come together in a National Platform for Peace to collectively mobilize and strategize around the implementation and monitoring of the peace agreement.

Many explanations - some justified, others not, have been offered for the poor participation of women in formal peace processes. To address concerns about the lack of qualified women, many interventions have focused on capacitating women in negotiation, mediation, and a broad range of thematic and process related skills and knowledge. To complement a number of capacity building measures for women in leadership, mediation, negotiation, and election observation, rosters are being developed at national, regional, and continental level to ensure that Member States, RECs, and the AU have access to qualified women that they can deploy as part of their conflict prevention, management, and resolution efforts. These capacity building initiatives have not necessarily resulted in greater deployment or participation of women in formal conflict resolution efforts.

The picture of women’s participation in conflict resolution efforts would not be complete however if we did not look beyond formal, governmental spaces. The Women’s Situation
Room is a women’s groups initiated and led process that mobilizes women and youth to address the particularly gendered nature of electoral violence for women as both candidates and voters. WSRs—with slight variations and contextual adaptations—have been established in a number of countries during elections, including in Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mali, Guinea Bissau, and Nigeria. This process, which has been noted as best practice, involves a wide range of activities that result in women’s direct and full participation in ensuring peace and stability in advance of, during, and following elections. It may involve a range of peacebuilding activities, including consultations, trainings, monitoring and advocacy; bringing together women, youth, media, electoral stakeholders, professionals, religious and traditional leaders and institutions to ensure a transparent and peaceful electoral process. These actions lead to the Women’s Situation Room where women are involved in peace advocacy, intervention, coordination, political analysis, observation and documentation.

At grassroots level where women and women’s groups seek to resolve local(ized) conflict, to national and regional networks and peace platforms, civil society and women’s groups in Africa have demonstrated that they can convene, mobilize, and organize to ensure their active participation in a wide range of conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding activities. This recognition of the importance of strategic and collective agency has resulted in the formation of more permanent and formal platforms for promoting women’s participation in the process of preventing and managing conflicts, at various levels. For example, in 2000, the Mano River Women’s Peace Network was launched to complement nationally-driven activities to consolidate peace in the sub-region. COCAFEM, also established in 2000, is a regional coalition of women’s groups and associations in the Great Lakes that was borne out of the acknowledgement of the regional cause and consequences of conflict in the region, and the desire of women in the sub-region to play a visible role in conflict management and advocate with national and sub-regional policy makers to address the impact of insecurity on women. These regional networks and platforms are then uniquely positioned to engage with regional institutions who are leading conflict resolution and management processes in the region, as well as engage in cross-border solidarity and action. At a national level, platforms such as Planete Femme in Central
African Republic, the South Sudan National Platform for Peace, and the Platform for Women Leaders in Mali, are examples of how women have organized to build consensus on key issues, priorities, and asks and push for their greater participation during the process of peace negotiations, as well as strategize and engage in monitoring and implementation post-agreement.

While the picture in informal, civil society spaces is more reflective of women’s agency and potential in the area of conflict resolution, the reality in formal spaces continues to be disappointing. In this regard, the report proposes a number of key intervention areas to enhance women's participation in conflict resolution, including:

- Recognize and support women’s observer and advisory role in peace processes, while pushing for greater direct participation. Ensure observer and advisory groups complement and do not substitute efforts towards direct participation. Focus on numbers and also influence, provide support for organizing outside and inside formal spaces, and effective transfer strategies.

- The AU Peace and Security Council is uniquely positioned to not only push the agenda but also provide a strong oversight role. Ensure mediation and good offices processes led by the AU have well-defined Terms of Reference which include ensuring women’s participation and inclusion of gender-sensitive concerns and have access to gender expertise. Build capacity of mediators and teams on the importance and how to of inclusive processes. Advocate and collaborate with RECs and Member States on the same. Monitor inclusion of processes.

- Increase the deployment of women and election observers and Mission Heads for Election Observation Missions; Call for greater appointments of women as Special Representatives/Special Envoys.

- Move from a focus on capacity building to more concerted deployment of capacitated women in a variety of conflict resolution efforts. Ensure and enhance demand and utilisation of rosters.

- Fast-track the operationalization of the African Forum of Women Mediators,
undertake advocacy within the Commission, with RECs, and with Member States, to ensure trained women are increasingly deployed in a range of conflict prevention and resolution capacities

- Provide support for Women's Situation Rooms as part of conflict prevention and resolution initiatives, their replication and sustainability, as well as incorporation of lessons learnt on existing models

- Ensure the full functioning and resourcing of regional WPS fora and platforms to enable them to play a greater role in advocacy, oversight, and implementation of the agenda regionally, as well as generate collective thinking about dealing with country level challenges. Such alternative structures and processes can be more responsive than merely pushing for participation in existing structures and processes

I hope that these few highlights and recommendations provide us with a basis to collectively advance this agenda. I salute South Africa’s leadership in the sub-region, continentally, and internationally in advancing women’s equality and empowerment and trust that this leadership will continue.

I thank you.