Joint Press Statement

UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop and the ECCAS Special Representative in the Central African Republic (CAR) emphasize that Women’s rights, participation and leadership are vital to Peace and Stability in the CAR

We have just completed a three-day joint mission to the Central African Republic, 24-26 May 2014, where we saw firsthand the impact of the current crisis on women and girls and the efforts underway to protect the population and advance peace and stability.

We came here to meet with the different actors and stakeholders, and to support women’s full participation and leadership in efforts for conflict resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian response, and reconciliation and recovery.

We had an opportunity to discuss the situation with the Transition Head of State, Catherine Samba-Panza. She has a difficult and challenging task and we offered her our full support.

We met with the Prime Minister and other senior government officials, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Stabilization Mission, and mission staff, along with the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and Head of MISCA. We also met with the High-Level Women’s Advisory Group, seventeen civil society organizations, sixteen women’s organizations, the Technical Follow-up Committee on the CAR crisis made up of the UN P5, CAR’s neighbors, the African Union and the European Union, religious leaders, displaced women in the country and the United Nations Country Team.

One of our priorities is to ensure that women’s and girls’ needs are fully integrated into the UN system response, and especially into the operations of the newly-established United Nations Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA).

We discussed the participation and leadership of women in local reconciliation, national dialogues, transitional justice, and elections. We discussed specific protection for women, services and justice for survivors, and the need for a clear commitment by all parties to refrain from sexual and gender-based violence.

With the new UN peacekeeping mission set to take over authority in military and police matters in September 2014, UN Women, the African Union and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) support the rule of law, women’s access to protection and justice, and peacekeeper training to prevent sexual violence.

We are pleased to announce that training developed by UN Women and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations will be provided to MINUSCA troop contributing countries.

This training has been tested in 17 nations and the aim is to ensure that all military units of UN peacekeeping missions receive specialized, scenario-based training on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence.
The ongoing crisis in the Central African Republic is of grave concern, and women, girls and children are particularly affected by the crisis.

The conflict has resulted in untold suffering and thousands of people have been injured or killed.

More than 554,000 people are estimated to be internally displaced. Of a total population of 4.6 million, some 2.5 million people are currently in need of immediate humanitarian assistance, the majority of whom are women and children.

Extremely high rates of violence against women continue to pose a serious threat to health, development and peace in the Central African Republic.

The international community has received numerous reports of rape, sexual slavery, and early and forced marriage perpetrated by armed actors.

This was confirmed by a UN fact-finding mission in December last year, led by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Access to health care, counseling, livelihoods and education remains limited. This situation is coupled with the breakdown of what was an already weak and malfunctioning judicial system.

Humanitarian access remains a major constraint owing to armed violence. We call on all parties to allow humanitarian access so that aid organizations can reach more people in need. Humanitarian activities must be protected and respected.

We call on all parties to protect civilians and not to harm them in any way. No person should be targeted or violated based on who they are, what they believe, or where they come from.

We call for greater action to prevent sexual violence, to provide support to survivors, and to bring perpetrators to justice.

At this time, stronger efforts are required to address the precarious situation faced by women and girls in the IDP camps and to bring their needs and interests to the centre of attention and international focus.

During our visit to camps for internally displaced persons, we spoke to women who had left their homes and belongings behind and are struggling to care for their children. They told us about their suffering, the violence they had endured.

What we heard and saw in the camp was devastating. Despite the incredible efforts and work of the United Nations, the African Union, countries of the region and International Partners, the reality is that the displaced people are in a desperate situation. While Partners are working to deliver food, water and services, durable solutions must be found, including the restoration of institutions and confidence in the rule of law, so that people can return to their homes when they feel safe to do so.

Of US$565 million in funding required for joint UN operations in CAR, only 32% has been funded as of 22 May 2014.
For millions of people, this assistance is a lifeline, and the response from the international community has so far been vastly insufficient. We urge the international community to respond and fully fund these efforts.

For peace and stability to take root in the Central African Republic, women, men and young people must play a full role in a national dialogue, peace negotiations, nation-building and strengthening social cohesion in the country.

We commend the women in this country for their various initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict. Women continue to make strong calls for peace, protection and participation. The women leaders of both Christian and Muslim faiths and from diverse socio-economic backgrounds that we met were clear in their desire to bridge differences to build a better future for all the people of the Central African Republic.

It is essential that the international community continue to support the Central African Republic in its peace and development efforts, with a special focus on women. As in too many places in the world, women and girls are still largely left behind.

We call for increased funding for the safety and protection of women and girls, for women’s participation in peacebuilding and humanitarian response, for women’s empowerment and education, and for women’s access to justice.

We encourage all International Partners to adhere to the UN’s policies on earmarking 15 percent or more of funding for women’s empowerment and gender equality.

Together we must support women as agents of peace and development. UN Women, AU and ECCAS will continue to work with the UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA, to support its commitment to respond to the specific needs of women and girls in the implementation of its mandate.

We remain committed to the realization of a peaceful, just and prosperous Central African Republic.

Bangui, 27 May 2014