

**UNOAU STATEMENT TO THE MEETING OF THE AU-PSC HIGH LEVEL SEMINAR AT
MINISTRIAL LEVEL ON THE THEME**

**“COMMEMORATING THE 20 YEARS OF PSC BY TAKING STOCK OF WOMEN’S
PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN PEACE PROCESSES IN AFRICA”**

**BY: Mr. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga
UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of the
United Nations Office to the African Union.**

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Your Excellency, Hon. Dr. Peya MUSHELEGA, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of Namibia and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of March 2024,

Excellencies, [Hon Ministers – in case there are others joining besides the MoFA Minister

Excellencies, members of the PSC [outgoing and incoming],

Your Excellency, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security,

Your Excellency, Mme. Bineta Diop, Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on Women, Peace, and Security,

Your Excellency, Hanna Tetteh, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa,

Distinguished invited guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you warm greetings from Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, a true friend of Africa and of the proud nation of Namibia.

From the outset, I wish to express my appreciation to the Government and people of the Republic of Namibia for the very warm welcome to this beautiful country.

Allow me to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the late President Geinghob for his immense contribution to deepening Namibia's democratic institutions, and indeed promoting the WPS agenda.

Congratulations on your initiative to organize this important meeting. I commend Namibia for the leadership it has continued to provide over the past 24 years since the adoption of UN Resolution 1325 in advancing the role of women in peace and security, with the overall objective of making the world a better, safer and more just place to live in.

We have all confidence that under the able co-facilitation of Namibia, this objective will prominently feature in the Pact of the Future being negotiated as an outcome document of the Summit of the Future in September.

Allow me also to extend my sincere appreciation to the African Union for inviting the United Nations to deliver a statement on this momentous occasion, to review progress made in enhancing women's participation and leadership in peace processes across Africa. This is a moment to both recognize and commend the concerted efforts of African women and their outstanding

contributions in promoting peace and security at all levels of society - local, national and regional in furtherance of a more peaceful continent and world.

Today, as we take stock of women's participation and leadership in peacebuilding processes, I wish to applaud the commitment made by African leaders, and the AUC, towards advancing the WPS Agenda in Africa, including through: establishing a Panel of the Wise which has 50 percent gender parity; institutionalizing women's-led AU Electoral Observation Missions; as well as investing in efforts to strengthen women's participation in peace and security processes through the establishment of mechanisms, such as the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise) and the African Women's Leadership Network (AWLN).

The United Nations welcomes the decision taken in 2010 by the PSC to have a standing session on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) every year, as an annual reflection on the state of implementation and domestication of this important agenda across the continent. This important decision helped ensure that a gender-sensitive approach to peace and security in Africa is fully integrated, in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Maputo Protocol.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all efforts to build sustainable peace is at the heart of more than two decades of global commitments towards advancing the women, peace and security agenda.

Women have played - and continue to play - vital roles, albeit often times behind the scenes, in mediating conflicts and reducing tensions in and between communities. Using their indigenous knowledge and individual affiliations, they are often able to get the ear of the warring groups, religious and tribal leaders, putting forth views that are instrumental in bridging differences.

Research has demonstrated that women's leadership in peacebuilding increases the sustainability of peace initiatives. Women play a considerable role in preventing or de-escalating conflict, brokering local ceasefires, and promoting cultures of peace and coexistence initiatives. According to a UN Women study, women's participation increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20 per cent and increases the probability by 35 per cent of a peace agreement lasting 15 years. So, we all have invested interest to have women in the center.

Yet, despite overwhelming evidence that women's full participation is central to negotiating peace agreements and to ensuring their success, we have unfortunately, faced regression on some key aspects of these goals.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

According to data collected by UN Women, in 2022, women participated as conflict party negotiators or delegates in four of five active United Nations–led or co-led peace processes. However, women’s representation stood only at 16 per cent, a further drop compared to 19 per cent in 2021 and 23 per cent in 2020.

Trend data since 1990 shows that seldom are representatives of women’s groups found as signatories of peace agreements. Of 18 peace agreements reached in 2022 globally, only one was signed or witnessed by a representative of a women’s group or organization.

In 2022, only 6 out of 18 peace agreements included provisions referencing women, girls, and gender concerns. In the 2022 negotiations between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, neither party included women in their negotiating team, although former South African Vice President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, served as mediator in the talks that led to the peace agreement in November 2022, in which my colleague Special Envoy, Hanna Tetteh, represented the UN.

This yet again demonstrates that investment in women and girls - and a consistent willingness to ensure their involvement in peacebuilding efforts - is generally way too low. For the sake of sustainable peacebuilding across the continent, more concerted efforts to scale-up women’s participation is urgently needed. Today’s meeting presents an important opportunity to reflect on how this trajectory can be improved.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Going forward, Africa (and the world) needs more women peace builders with meaningful participation, thus harnessing the vision and talent of women for a more peaceful and prosperous world. Adopting quotas for women’s participation in peace processes is one of the strategies that could help secure a space for women and bring concrete changes in the participation and leadership of women in peace and governance processes, a key pillar of the WPS Agenda. Secretary-General Guterres has been doing his part, including by appointing many senior African women in leadership positions who are making a significant impact on advancing peace, security and sustainable development in Africa.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we commemorate the 20th year since the establishment of the AU PSC;

i). Let this be a time of reflection on how we can honour our African heroines, their resilience, and their crucial efforts towards preventing conflict and promoting peace on the continent.

ii). Let's use this moment to contemplate the creative approaches we could implement to guarantee that women's active involvement in both official and unofficial peacebuilding efforts receives the necessary backing.

To do so, dedicated efforts will be required in developing gender-sensitive policies, backed by reliable gender-disaggregated data to implement targeted programmes, including in addressing challenges and structural gaps in education and healthcare facing women and girls. Equally critical is the need to allocate adequate funding to facilitate the implementation of national action plans.

It is only by deliberately advancing such policies and initiatives that imbalances and power differentials that result from and are fueled by persistent structural barriers and cultural norms can positive change be realized.

These are some of the concrete steps and the journey Secretary-General Guterres has urged Member States to embark on in his policy brief **A New Agenda for Peace**, if we were to remove any hinderance to the full implementation of the WPS agenda, particularly here in Africa.

iii). May this commemoration also serve as a reminder to us all that we need to ensure the effective implementation of measures that tackle the obstacles that African women encounter in asserting their rights to partake in peace initiatives across Africa.

iv) Let us raise our ambitions and develop implementable and binding targets to enhance women's participation and leadership in peace processes in Africa.

In conclusion, Chairperson I would like to emphasize that **now is the time to go beyond cursory mention of the challenges, but rather moving towards taking tangible actions**. Let us commit to taking the necessary policy decisions to ensure that our African heroines continue to impact positively on peace processes - and inspire the next generation of leaders and activists in the quest for 'The Africa We Want' - A prosperous, integrated, peaceful and secure Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of its people, especially its women and youth.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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