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**WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS:  
AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

#### **Introduction**

The growing and increasing participation and visibility of women from all over the world in various international fora in this decade - **Rio (1992)**, **Vienna (1993)**, **Cairo (1994)**, **Copenhagen (1995)** and **Beijing (1995)** - has been the most important factor in helping the world to see exactly which values and principles can contribute most to peace and the well being of all humanity. This has also confirmed that women's participation in all aspects of social life at the national and international levels is essential for the continued progress towards the achievement of justice, equality, development and peace. In Africa, in particular, women's contribution to development and their indispensable stabilizing roles in society have assumed even greater dimensions in the light of the unprecedented upheavals which characterize the continent today. The continued absence of peace in the world has forced women to look for ways of influencing the popular concept of security and on ways of creating a stable environment in which people of different backgrounds can live in harmony.

#### **Economic and Social Dimensions of Peace**

Peace will continue to elude nations if social and economic problems are left unresolved particularly problems relating to factors such as Food Security, Health Care, Education and Employment, in each of which women continue to fare very badly.

These constitute basic human needs which must be met for a peaceful and sustainable development to be achieved.

#### **Peace and Militarism**

The distortion of the economy as a result of military spending leaves no chance for achieving the goals of social justice whether for women, children, minorities or the impoverished. When developing countries use scarce resources for military purposes, essential social programmes are marginalised leading to a marked increase in homelessness, hunger and suffering. Usually women are disproportionately affected negatively by these factors making them the indirect victims as social services are sacrificed for military expenditure. Ruth Sivrad's study on "World Military and Social Expenditure," which illustrates the economic and social benefits that could come from a 5% reduction of military spending shows clearly how much women in particular could benefit from a cut in military spending.

## **Impact of Armed Conflict on Women**

The impact of armed conflict on women all over the world is the same: Women are raped, and sometimes deliberately to humiliate the enemy, they are deprived of their homes and livelihood, their responsibilities are increased, they are sometimes used as human shields by opposing warring factions, they have to watch their loved ones die, and they bury their sons and husbands. Focusing on African women, in conflict situations in **Angola, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia** and the **Sudan**, the sufferings of women have been the same: problems of rape, torture, sexual slavery, disappearances, deprivations, dangers of land mines and other problems women face as refugee and displaced persons, in camps, in returnee situations, as asylum seekers and as returnees. Conflicts have a negative effect on family and social systems, traditional and other social values and on women's self-esteem. Paradoxically, also, conflicts have had a positive effect on women who have developed great resilience and self reliance. Although they have been victims of war in many ways, women have not been helpless but active and resourceful, calling on reserves of strength and ingenuity to support their families and resist despair.

## **Women a Bridge to Peace**

The activities of women for peace began with women from the Western and former Eastern European countries, triggered by the two world wars. Until the 1960s the mainstream of peace activities remained largely eurocentric. With decolonization, national liberation and the creation of new states, often severely affected by armed conflicts, the participation of women from developing countries in the peace movement at the national, regional and international levels began to increase. Since the seventies the peace movement has had on its agenda items such as the **New International Economic Order**, the **Environment**, the **Struggle Against Apartheid and Against Violence** in all its forms. The United Nations Decade for Women, (1976 to 1985), provided an important opportunity for further development of women's peace activities.

In Africa, women have been mobilizing themselves to promote peaceful resolution of conflicts in many countries through their various **associations and organizations**. These activities which have been done mostly in isolation and on ad hoc bases have not always caught media coverage. These peace initiatives have been aimed at peace building and reconstruction and reconciliation efforts and have ranged from counselling for displaced and refugee women who have been subjected to rape and other sexual violence, skills training, implementation of health care and education programmes, peace education, human rights and legal literacy, as well as the holding of numerous seminars and workshops on development of strategies for community level reconciliation and peace. In areas of on going conflicts such as **Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia** and the **Sudan**, women's peace movements have endeavoured to bring about reconciliation between the warring factions. In this connection, women have staged peace marches, presented statements to organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and the Economic Community of West

African States (ECOWAS) and have printed posters and brochures with disarmament and peace slogans.

The Regional Conference on women Peace and Development organized by the Uganda Government, in particular, the Ministry of Women in Development, Youth and Culture, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the OAU, in Kampala, in November 1993, gave Africa women the opportunity to deliberate on why women have played such marginal roles in matters that have cost them, their families and entire societies, their very survival. Women argued that if peace is promoted by equality of the sexes, economic equality, and the universal enjoyment of basic rights and fundamental freedoms, and if the enjoyment of peace by all involves the exercise by women of their right to participate on an equal footing with men in all spheres of the political, economic and social life of their countries, particularly in the decision-making process, then the time had come for women to get involved in the solution of conflicts on the continent. One of the conclusions of the conference was that a sustainable peace needs the empowerment of women which in itself is a prerequisite for development. If women are to play an equal part in securing and maintaining peace, they must be empowered politically and economically, through knowledge and education, which will automatically make them operational partners with men. The conference ended with the adoption of the Kampala Action Plan which enumerates various courses of action to be undertaken by Governments and Non-governmental Organizations on behalf of women in order to address the various concerns relating to the achievement of peace on the continent.

Since the Kampala meeting there have been many African women's initiatives for peace and reconciliation and the high point for coalition building of African women for conflict resolution and peace was the Dakar African Regional Preparatory Conference in November, 1994 during which the NGO Forum, under the coordination of FEMNET organized the women's Peace Tent. This brought together women's peace movements from **Angola, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Congo, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa** and the **Sudan** as well as individual peace activists. It provided an opportunity to, among others, strategize for inclusion of the African women's Peace Agenda at the Beijing Conference. Africa women were also very active in the activities of the peace tents in Beijing.

### **Why women in the Peace Process**

There are strong reasons why women should be in the peace process: their useful role in the liberation struggles including their fight against apartheid for which many were imprisoned; their long experiences in their role as peace makers in the family as mothers, wives and sisters where they prefer problem solving through open communication, honest discussions of differences and dialogue among all concerned. They are used to resolving disputes through the best means of ensuring that at least some of the concerns of all conflicting parties are met - a win-win solution - a family model which seeks fairness and reconciliation rather than victory and retribution.

Further, as bearers of life, women can offer a special perspective and experience which will help to overcome prevailing life-destroying methods of dealing with human problems and conflicts. Since military conflicts and diplomacy, which have traditionally been exclusively orchestrated by men, have failed to be a reliable system to safeguard peace, the inclusion of women in all stages of the peace process therefore becomes imperative.

Enabling women to participate in the political decision-making level in respect of conflicts at all levels would meet the well articulated need to put to the test the extent to which it is true that women are less likely to wage war than men.

However, women need to be empowered for active participation in the decision-making structures in the peace process, and strategies have to be adopted at both the policy and institutional levels in order to accomplish this. At the policy level national constitutional guarantees have to be revisited since many of them are gender blind, gender neutral or outright discriminatory against women; legislative measures emanating from constitutional provisions also need revisiting as many of these measures are based on interpretations of constitutions which are in themselves biased. Reforms necessary are particularly in the areas of (i) equality before the law, (ii) marriage and divorce, (iii) inheritance, (iv) ownership of land, (v) citizenship, etc. These reforms must be carried in close conjunction with the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women which many African countries have signed and/or ratified. At the political level strategies of empowerment include Affirmative Action, Quota systems and for governments to define specific goals, timetables, targets and numbers that would accelerate the pace of gender equality. Institutional strategies include the setting up of national mechanisms/machineries for the advancement of women as well as support structures which could address the needs and concerns of women. These structure could address, inter alia, the Rights of women, Credit, Skills Training, Child Development and Education.

African women can contribute to the peace process through: (i) Peace Education as mothers, teachers, and members of the media; (ii) Education for Peace through their activities as members of the family and of civil society; (iii) at the political level women can participate in conflict prevention through their involvement in the democratic processes: voting other women into political office, becoming active and participating members of political parties, and trade unions, as well as through their activities in grassroots groups, professional associations and networks and non-governmental organizations. At the regional level, African women should strive to be involved in the activities of the Organization of African Unity's Central Organ whose activities entail Preventive Diplomacy, Election Monitoring, Observer and Peace Missions. They should also strive to be members of the OAU Commission on Refugees whose work is crucial to the peace process since peace can only be assured if the problem of refugees and displaced persons is to be successfully settled. Women's participation in the work of the Commission is essential not only because of the special perspective they can bring to the work but because the majority of refugees and displaced persons are women.

Women should also be involved in activities related to rehabilitation and reconstruction by participating in community-based rehabilitation programmes.

### **African Women's participation in the Peace Process at the International level**

Like women the world over, African women have a role to play in the search for peace at the international level. They must participate at the decision-making level and be part of delegations, national or otherwise, negotiating international agreements relating to peace and disarmament. They must insist on a minimum number of women participating in such delegations. They must also strive to be included, in equal numbers with their male counterparts, in peacekeeping operations, both at the level of recruitment in the United Nations and at the level of contributing contingent countries.

To give women the opportunity to participate actively in international debates concerning International Peace and Security, African Governments should appoint women to Ambassadorial posts at the United Nations or as Ministers with strategic portfolios.

### **Conclusion**

Conflicts in Africa continue to take a heavy toll on basic and other services as well as human lives, creating millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, majority of whom are women and their dependants. Because women bear an unproportionate burden of the scourges of war, they have a vested interest in peace. This is why many African women, as individual activists, members of peace organizations, associations or groups, are engaged in activities for peace at the national, regional and international levels.

Unfortunately, due to women's absence in the decision-making processes of their respective countries, these peace activities have had very little impact on policies and decisions relating to conflicts or peace. Women's ability to participate in decision-making can be enhanced by their empowerment through education, training, access to equal opportunities as well as including and involving them in the decision-making process at all levels. Outside their role as policy makers, women can be teachers of peace education and education for peace. In their positions of civil authority and administrative policy-making, both in the public and private sectors, they can influence decisions in areas such as finance, defence and foreign affairs, all of which relate, one way or the other, to peace. In their various roles in the media and as members of the civil society, they can sensitize the public to issues such as violence and discrimination in society and issues which promote peace such as respect for human rights, disarmament, political accountability and transparency and in monitoring public policy. They can and must also participate in the peace processes of the continental political organization, the OAU. African Governments must ensure women's participation in the OAU mechanisms for peace by appointing them to the relevant posts which will qualify them for such participation.

**Possible Role of the African Centre For Women**

In the light of the existing potential for women to actively contribute to the peace process in Africa, the UNECA/ACW should actively play an advocacy role for the introduction of Peace Education into the curricula of schools, universities and other institutions of learning, and to actively promote legal literacy and a culture of peace. It should continue to act as a catalyst for enhancing women's role and contribution to the peace process. It should strengthen women's institutions, organizations and associations, in particular, by facilitating the training of women for leadership positions through seminars and workshops and, where possible, fellowships, in order to empower them to participate in decision-making processes including those related to conflict and peace.

As a result of the present meeting, the OAU Women's Unit and the UNECA/ACW could act as a joint secretariat for the Committee of Women Leaders to be set up, until the Committee is strong enough to set up its own secretariat.

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## **WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS : An African Perspective**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. It has now been fully and widely recognized that national development and its many facets in today's world cannot be achieved without the full and active participation of women. This is not just because women make up half (in some cases more) of the population of many countries but because women, in addition to their primary role as family managers, invariably contribute very significantly to the overall stability and harmony of human society, an aspect which is often overlooked. It is in recognition of their indispensable role in development and the need to accelerate development and to ensure a better future for posterity that the international community has, over the years, developed various action-oriented measures and strategies for the advancement of women. These have included the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, International Human Rights Covenants, ILO labour standards, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, various Plans/Programmes of Action, and the recent Global and Regional Platforms for Action. All these call for greater involvement of women in the decision-making process.

2. In the 1990s, the United Nations has sponsored an unprecedented series of World Conferences, starting with the Children's Summit in New York in 1990, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, the International Conference on Population in Cairo in 1994, the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. What has emerged from each conference shows that a remarkable degree of international agreement has been reached on the norms and values needed to construct a just and sustainable world civilization<sup>1</sup> as well as on concrete actions that must be taken to ensure the advancement and full participation of women at all levels in decision-making.

3. The increasing and growing presence of the women from all over the world at these conferences, which culminated in Beijing, has been the most important factor in helping the world to see exactly which values and principles can contribute most to peace and the well-being of all humanity. Women's advocacy over the last few years has dramatically changed the way the world looks at international economics, sustainable development, and human rights. The changes women have promoted in these areas are critical elements in the foundation for peace and prosperity.

4. In Rio, women brought to the attention of world leaders the degree to which they, as small farmers and household decision-makers, hold the key to sustainable development.
5. In Vienna, women helped the world to see that human rights must be extended across all boundaries, whether of race, ethnicity, nationality or gender, if peace and justice are to be attained. Their status as the oppressed majority gave moral impetus to the conference.
6. In Cairo, women successfully argued that the education and empowerment of women are the best ways to decrease population growth and to promote fruitful development. Their role as mothers gave unassailable credibility to their views.
7. In Copenhagen, women were instrumental in analyzing and calling attention to the impact of world economic systems on the poor, most of whom are women, and in helping to project new ideas for alternative models of social development.
8. In Beijing, the Fourth World Conference on Women brought to the world's consciousness another essential element in the creation of global peace and prosperity: the achievement of full equality between women and men.<sup>2</sup>
9. Women's participation in all aspects of social life, both at the national and international levels, therefore, is essential for the continued progress toward the achievement of justice, equality, development and peace for the present and future generations.
10. In Africa, women's contribution to development and their indispensable stabilizing roles in society have assumed even greater dimensions in the light of the unprecedented upheavals that characterize the continent today. It is a regional tragedy in which a significant portion of the population has either perished in tribal and factional conflicts or have become displaced elements within the continent, with no lasting peace in sight.
11. Peace, as stated in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, is not just the absence of war, violence or hostilities at the national and international levels, but also entails the enjoyment of economic stability, social justice, equality and the whole range of human rights and fundamental freedoms within society. Such peace must be sustainable and safeguarded in addition to reducing or eliminating the use or threat of force in human affairs.<sup>3</sup> On the occasion of the International Year of Peace (1986), the Secretary General of the United Nations, in his messages to various celebrants, had this to say:

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies Para. 13, P. 17

"Peace is not merely the absence of war; it connotes justice and the removal of inequities; it has social and economic and cultural dimensions and it requires respect for human rights."<sup>4</sup>

and,

"Peace cannot co-exist with situations which engender misery and despair and therefore breed conflict. We cannot be compassionate towards members of our own community and callous towards the members of another. The individual who is in despair because of poverty, the child whose lot is hunger, the young who are robbed of their youth by disease, the refugee uprooted from his land, the helpless victim of violent conflict staring at the debris of his home - none of them is a non-person in an unknown land. Every one of them is a citizen of this earth".<sup>5</sup>

14. The fact that peace continues to elude the world in general and Africa in particular, makes it imperative for African women to reflect on some of the ways and areas in which they could influence the popular concept of "security", the general perception of conflict in society and the methods of creating a stable environment in which people of different backgrounds can live in harmony.

## II. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF PEACE

15. Peace is one of the themes of the 1975 - 1985 United Nations Decade for Women, an indication of women's concern for the human suffering and waste of resources in warfare and the continued tendency to resolve conflicts by aggressive means. This concern, however, can be addressed only if women are counted among the decision makers. For women to advance there must be peace. Peace leads to development but there can be no development where there is inequality - inequality in the right to basic human needs, which constitute the social and economic dimensions of peace. This fact has been underscored in the Final Document of the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development, which states:

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<sup>4</sup> Messages and statements on the International Year of Peace, 1986, Javier Perez De Cuellar, United Nations, P. 101

<sup>5</sup> IBID P. 102

".....The world can hardly be regarded as secure so long as there is polarization of wealth and poverty at the national and international levels. Gross and systematic violation of human rights retard genuine socio-economic development and create tensions which contribute to instability. Mass poverty, illiteracy, disease, squalor and malnutrition afflicting a large proportion of the world's population often become the cause of social strain, tension and strife."<sup>6</sup>

16. It is well known that women bear the greatest burden of the world's poverty and are more vulnerable in situations where basic needs are unsatisfied, and which might be more adequately provided for were not a large portion of the world's resources spent on war. Women who are becoming politically aware and are active promoters of world peace acknowledge the linkage between their vulnerability and military spending. They, therefore, link their demand for peace with very concrete social demands for equality, development and the solution to global problems. Therefore, for a peaceful and sustainable development to be achieved involving the full and active participation of women, major basic human needs must be met; they include food security, health care, education and employment.

#### A Food Security

17. Hunger is a violation of a basic human right; it can lead not only to the death of an individual but to social disturbances (the food riots in Lebanon, Liberia, the Sudan and Tunisia, among others, in the 1980s readily come to mind). Due to the debt crisis and a drop in commodity prices, declining per capita food production, rising food imports, stagnant agriculture, higher food prices and inadequate distribution of food, famine and malnutrition are visible trends on the African continent especially where there have been civil wars and conflicts.<sup>7</sup> The main sufferers, inevitably, have been women with their children, both in rural and urban setting. Upon women also fall the burden of managing poverty. In Africa food security is therefore essential to peace especially as food security depends to a large extent on women, particularly rural women, who are responsible for about 80 per cent of agricultural production. Yet women hardly own any land, have difficulty in having access to loans, and are usually bypassed by agricultural advisors and projects. Further, only 9.3 per cent of women in the food production chain have access to agricultural training.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Final document, Para. 18, International Conference on the Relation between Disarmament and Development, New York, August 24 - September 11, 1987

<sup>7</sup> Women and War - Virginia Vickers, Zed Book P. 91

<sup>8</sup> State of the World's Women Report - 1985

18. Once a net exporter of food, African has, since the 1980s, become a net importer of food; and hunger as well as malnutrition continue to affect women and children. Since 1960, the population in Africa has increased at an annual rate of 3 per cent while food production has grown by only an average of 1.8 per cent; with food self-sufficiency rate dropping from 100 per cent in 1960 to 80 percent in the 1990s. Approximately 25 per cent of food requirements in Africa are imported, with annual food imports being equivalent to 30 per cent of Africa's agricultural export earnings. The scarce exported agricultural products are marketed at very low prices while the limited foreign earnings accruing from such commodities are diverted from more important uses to pay for food imports. Such a situation cannot bring about food self-sufficiency or food security. Because of African women's significant contribution to agricultural production, strengthening their potential for management of food and food aid resources, including the development of appropriate measures such as allocation of financial, technical and human resources as well as equitable price policies, can ensure that their priorities and their families' well-being are better served. This increased food security at household level would, in turn, contribute to the global aim of national food security.

#### B Health Care

19. In many African countries, the deterioration of public health systems and the decrease in public health spending have reduced health care availability. This situation directly affects the health of girls and women and also places disproportionate responsibilities on women whose roles, even within the family and the community, are often not acknowledged. Thus women, as major health care providers, by often lacking the access to medical facilities, tend to be more malnourished than men.

20. Africa has the world's highest fertility rate, the lowest life expectancy (49 years for males 52 for females), the highest infant mortality rate (103 deaths per 1000 live births), one of the highest maternal mortality rates and one of the highest dependency ratios (47 per cent under 15 years and 3 per cent over 65). The gap between fertility and mortality is widening -that is , more children are being born while less people are dying. This gap doubled between 1974 and 1994 and is expected to double by the year 2017. These demographic trends have had negative consequences on the health of women and quality of their lives. The non - availability of adequate health services and the inaccessibility to information, coupled with the presence of chronic diseases such as malaria, anaemia, as well as malnutrition, leave many women unable to cope with the physical demands of pregnancy. Consequently, maternal morbidity is widespread and the time-risk of maternal death of African women is 1 in 20 as compared to 1 in 10,000 in developed countries.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> African Platform for Action, Para 42, Pages 12/13

21. Recognition of women's right to health is of the utmost importance not only because it is a basic human right but also because in a world in which comparatively few have access to professional medical care, they are the major primary health care providers not only for their children, but also for the whole family, including the aged and the disabled. To reverse this trend in medical unavailability and inaccessibility, therefore, it will be necessary, among other things, to mobilize and allocate more financial resources to the health sector incorporating reproductive health, family and health sectors in order to reverse this decline in the overall health and well-being of women, men, adolescents and children.

### C. Education

22. Education is a basic human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus contributes ultimately to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if women are to become agents of change. As the first educators of the young, women cannot prepare young children to receive and apply the sophisticated knowledge necessary to function constructively in the 21st century if they themselves are ignorant and illiterate. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family, as well as empowering them to participate in decision-making in society.

23. In Africa, women lag far behind men in access to education and training opportunities. The adult female literacy rate of less than 50 per cent in Africa is the lowest in the world. In 1990 the adult literacy rate of males was 61 per cent while that of females was 39 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. This gap in educational opportunities has wide ramifications for the development process. Not only does it mean the exclusion of a significant portion of the population from being empowered for participation in a country's advancement, but also negatively impacts on the family and education of children the nation's health and population control. Generally, low participation of women in education has a retarding impact on the general pace of a country's development.

### D. Employment

24. Employment and self-employment and the income accruing therefrom are essential for the satisfaction of basic needs. High rates of unemployment or lack of opportunities to earn adequate income deprive individuals or families of the possibility to obtain food, shelter, education or health care. This, in turn, accentuates the gap in living standards between the various segments of society, raises frustration levels, and may lead to social unrest, civil war or other forms of violence. The right to be gainfully employed is therefore essential for the creation of a just society in both economic and social terms.

25. Income differentials between women and men, due to the former's disadvantaged position in respect of employment opportunities as well as access to resources for self-employment, prevent them as breadwinners from reaching adequate living standards for themselves and their families. This quasi-institutionalized discrimination which cuts across all segments of society, contributes to the perpetuation of value systems which tolerate injustice and a socio-economic environment conducive to violence.

26. The relationship between peace on the one hand, and economic and social justice on the other hand, is thus an issue which affects all humanity, not just women. Addressing these economic and social dimensions of peace adequately and equitably is therefore essential for the achievement of sustainable peace, and more so for the advancement of women. This constitutes a valid reason why African women are concerned and interested in being involved in the achievement of peace.

### **III. PEACE AND MILITARISM**

27. The distortion of the economy which is based on the assumption of eventual violent conflict with neighbouring countries and becomes a justification for an arms build-up, leaves no chance for achieving the goals of social justice whether for women, children, minorities or the impoverished. Armed conflict, preparation for war expenditures and the vast resources on armaments greatly and negatively affect society's ability to care for the vulnerable and to meet fundamental human needs. Militarism distorts human development, causing world-wide poverty, pollution, repression, torture and death. Various studies by women researchers have demonstrated how the quality of life is reduced and how basic human needs could not be met because of military spending. In Africa in particular, military spending is two or three times more than what is spent on education and health. The UNDP Human Development Report of 1987 showed that in Sub-Saharan Africa, armed forces personnel were 76:1 as compared to 3:1 in industrialized countries and to 15:1 in the world. In four African countries, two of them belonging to the group of Least Developed Countries, the report showed armed forces personnel as a percentage of teachers to be 416%, 591%, 300% and 203% while the armed forces personnel per physician was 533%, 130%, 75% and 106%, respectively.

28. When developing countries use scarce resources for military purposes, essential social programmes are marginalised, leading to a marked increase in homelessness, hunger and suffering. Usually women are disproportionately affected negatively; those who head families are four times as likely to be poor than male or couple-head families. Developing countries purchase military hardware on credit, using scarce foreign reserves and leaving mountains of debt for future generations. Escalating cycles of arms expenditure and worsening poverty and unemployment inhibit the possibilities for peace and the participation of women in development and are a major constraint on all development processes.



29. In an article in Development Forum, entitled "Weapons and World Welfare" J. K. Galbraith, writes:<sup>10</sup>

"In something close to half of the nations of the world, the military imposes its rule directly or indirectly on the people. Let us face the sad fact: in much of Africa and extensively elsewhere, people have exchanged the colonial rule for the military rule of this century.....This is one form of oppression, the effective suppression of democracy and its promise. The further and yet deeper oppression comes from the horrifying cost of the military establishments in third world countries. The poor countries collectively spend a large percentage of their gross national product on arms than do the rich; they import weapons in the range of \$30 billion a year; much of this is sophisticated hardware related in purpose not to any war time use but to serving the self-esteem of the military establishment."

In the same article the author states:

"The consequence, as noted, is enormous cost to the poorest of the world's people. In the US and the Soviet Union arms expenditure subtracts from a relatively high standard of living; in the poor countries it is at cost to life itself. The counterpart, the mirror image, of present military expenditure in poor lands is civilian deprivation, starvation and death."

30. Ruth Sivard, an Economist, formerly of the United States Arms and Disarmament Control Agency, in a study on "World Military and Social Expenditures",<sup>11</sup> illustrating the economic and social benefits that could come from a reduction of 5% of the US \$300 billion spent in 1976 to provide US \$15 billion for social purposes, came up with the following proposals:

- "\$4 billion: For 200 million malnourished children, supplementary protein feeding to insure full brain development.
- "\$3 billion: For poor countries on the edge of famine, increased agricultural investment to enlarge food production.
- "\$3 billion: Expansion of primary schools, with the addition of 100 million new places for children not now attending school.

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<sup>10</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith "Weapons and World Welfare - Development Forum, United Nations Publication, Vol. XV, No. 3 (April 1987)

<sup>11</sup> World Military and Social Expenditures, 1976, Page 19

"\$2 billion: Emergency aid and a permanent international relief force to assist disaster-stricken countries.

"\$1.5 billion: World-wide programme for prevention of dental decay by fluoridation.

"\$1 billion: Basic education for 25 million adults now illiterate.

"\$450 million: World-wide campaign to eradicate malaria.

"\$45 million: Iron supplement to protect 300 million children and women of childbearing ages against anaemia.

"\$5 million: Vitamin supplement to protect 100 million children 1 - 5 years against blindness caused by vitamin A deficiency."

31. If Africa's military expenditure were to be reduced by about 10 per cent, the total funds, if released for social services would lead to a great reduction in human misery and structural violence. The long-term implications are that continued diversion of scarce and vital resources into the military will continue to have an extremely destructive effect on the social infrastructure, productive capacity and the quality of life, leading to social unrest, strife and conflict.

#### **IV. WOMEN - VICTIMS OF WARS, CONFLICTS AND STRIFE**

##### **(i) Impact of Armed Conflict on Women in General**

32. The shift toward the involvement of non-combatants in modern conflicts is reflected both in the technical (scatter bombs, mustard gas, antipersonnel mines), and in the growing anti-human practices of war. Of these, the denial of food, the destruction of agricultural land and other environmental resources, forced migration and ethnic cleansing are among the dramatic examples. Rape which has been used over many centuries as a deliberate strategy in war, and has now been recognized as a major abuse of human rights, is occurring on an unprecedented scale.

33. Communities which have sustained a harmonious multi-ethnic existence have become particularly traumatised by its disruption and by the experience of neighbours, friends and relatives turning on each other. The closer the bonds which have been betrayed the harder they are to be rebuilt. As a Bosnian refugee woman exclaimed, "My friends were shooting at us. Do you know the feeling when you very soul hurts? A lot of them were my very good friends, people with whom I have shared both sadness and love. I lost them forever, in the most

unacceptable way. I went through the biggest human dilemma".<sup>12</sup>

34. For Africa, the aftermath of the cold war has meant the lessening of strategic interest concerns to world powers which has resulted in a decrease of resources to various countries. Burdened by external debts and Structural Adjustment Programmes that have forced cuts in social services, the impact of refugee populations is an added burden that even the most well-intentioned African host government finds difficult to bear.

35. Present day conflicts, worldwide, result in massive population movements within and outside national boundaries and have led to the phenomenon of refugee and displaced persons. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 1993, 75 per cent of the world's 15 million refugees were women and children, of these, one-third were African.

36. Most women's experience of armed conflict is not as combatants but as civilians caught in the cross - fire. What women most experience in armed conflict is the total destruction of the habitat; loss of the means of livelihood; many are forced to take up the responsibilities of absent men while continuing to carry all their own. Many women farmers, for example, have lost their crops to both conflicting sides in a struggle. Many are forced to flee from their homes for fear of their lives, and are obliged to move several times as their options for refuge become narrower, while others face the prospect of never being able to return to their homes, living perpetually in temporary shelters or camps. The most evident and numerous victims of war are refugees, and the majority of refugees are women and children.

37. Along with children, women and the aged are the most vulnerable in armed conflicts. Women usually bear the brunt of armed crises not just because they are vulnerable or are in the majority but because they are directly responsible for the well being of their families, a task placed on them by the tradition which makes them home-makers. They have to cope with the consequences of disruption of their normal way of life as they fend for their families single-handedly in new environments as displaced persons or refugees, characterized by poverty, disease and alienation. Armed conflicts have led to the destruction of family systems which hitherto provided a buffer of protection and a forum of succour for adults and children in times of stress, leaving women to assume greater responsibilities for the care and maintenance of children and the aged. This breakdown of traditional family structures is reflected in the increase in female-headed households (now over 30% in African) and abandoned and orphaned children.

38. Women, who usually have low nutritional and health status, have found themselves worse off in times of armed conflict. Educational opportunities for refugee women become even more rare as refugee camps and settlements are often located in remote/isolated areas where no educational facilities have been established. In countries of asylum, where mother tongue texts

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<sup>12</sup> Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect: Women speak about conflict P. 242, PANOS Publication, 1995

are preferred for pre-literate classes, their situation is made worse.

39. Furthermore, during armed conflicts women suffer more intensely from violence particularly rape and abuse at moments of arrest, detention and interrogation. In the war in the former Yugoslavia, according to figures taken from War Crimes Against Women in Liberation (vol. 3), women were said to have been raped as part of a systematic policy of sexual humiliation of the defeated. Lucy Hannan points out, in her report entitled "Rape: the undeclared War," in the magazine, "Humanitarian Monitor", of February, 1994, <sup>13</sup> that,

"Rape has always been used in war to humiliate the enemy and weaken morale. As the ultimate violation of a people, the physical and emotional damage to a woman is generally of less importance than its potential impact on the men. Yet, as ethnic conflicts proliferate around the world, rape seems to have assumed a vicious new edge. Sexual violation of a woman attacks the fibre of a community in a way no manufactured weapon can; women are seen as a repository of cultural, traditional, emotional and spiritual values, as well as symbols of property and patriarchal lineage. It is a devastating ammunition in an ethnic conflict, tearing open cultural fault lines that might well have remained hidden."

40. Even after their arrival in camps and settlements, refugee women continue to suffer physical violations, including sexual exploitation, rape and prostitution. Abuse and abduction of refugee women is a recurring phenomenon.

41. Good health is critical to women's ability to cope with their many responsibilities. Women's health issues on which conflict may have an impact include psychological and reproductive health as well as general health and other issues concerning women's access to food and community support. Women are doubly vulnerable to situations where there is a reduction in resources and support. Firstly, extensive rape as a constituent of conflict may give rise to the spread of sexually transmitted disease including AIDS, and to untold numbers of unwanted pregnancies. Secondly, in communities where men have preferential rights to command the resources of the community, i.e where women eat last, women may be the first to suffer from famine when there is reduction in resources.<sup>14</sup>

42. Those refugees who may be fortunate to make their way to new homes in strange lands may face problems of unemployment, cultural differences, language barriers and sometimes the hostility of the local population. Distressingly large numbers of refugees may have to suffer even more. If they are among those confined for years to refugee camps, then to all their burden is added the hopelessness of being without freedom and facing an uncertain future. Prolonged stays

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<sup>13</sup> Humanitarian Monitor, Page 42, February 1995, No. 2

<sup>14</sup> Development in Conflict: The Gender Dimension P. 21  
Oxfam Discussion Paper 3

in closed refugee camps with no possibility of interaction with the local community raises the level of violence from which refugee women are the first to suffer. Thus for some, there is no escape.

## **B. Impact of Armed Conflict on Women in Africa**

### **1. General**

43. According to a 1992 UNHCR report, the population of internally displaced persons in Africa is estimated to be 16 million: about 4.5 million in the Sudan, more than 1 million in Ethiopia, 835,000 in Angola, 2 million in Mozambique, 2 million in Somalia, 500,000 in Uganda, 4.2 million in South Africa, under 1 million in Sierra Leone, and 2 million in Rwanda. In Liberia, nearly 50 per cent of the population (a total of 2.5 million) is currently internally displaced while another 25 per cent (733,973) have fled the country. The UNHCR, in 1991, estimated that in six African countries (Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Somalia and Sudan) which were all ravaged by civil wars and faced severe war-related famine, women and children accounted for 92% of all war-related deaths.

44. Like refugee women, displaced women face sexual and physical attacks before, during and after their flight thus in a sense, they are more vulnerable than refugee women. Since they remain within their own borders, it is often the government that has caused their displacement that has the responsibility for their protection. In spite of International Conventions to protect refugees, displaced persons may not enjoy such protection. In a number of countries governments, and /or resistance forces have used food as a weapon and impeded efforts to send international assistance to civilians under their control. The cases of Angola, Mozambique and Liberia have been cited in this respect. Unfortunately the plight of displaced persons and their dependants has not been forcefully brought to public attention nor has enough been done by human rights institutions and NGOs and development agencies in exposing cases where governments refuse to provide clothing, medicine and other essentials to their displaced persons.

45. The refugee population in Africa according to the office of the UNHCR, is estimated at 7 million; 80 per cent of these are women and children. In eastern Sudan, there are an estimated 716,000 refugees representing nearly 24 per cent of the area's total population. Ninety per cent of Liberian refugees in Cote d'Ivoire, are women and children. The brutal killings in Rwanda forced over 1,000,000 people into Burundi and a similar number have fled into Zaire, 500,000 are in Kenya and 1,000,000 are in Tanzania where over 300,000 are in the Benaco refugee camp.

46. In the conflict situation now prevailing on the continent, women have suffered violence, displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation or disintegration; some have become victims of murder, terrorism, torture, sexual abuse, sexual slavery and rape and its consequences.

47. In Somalia, for example, the majority of the sexual assaults since the war were perpetrated by armed gangs of men who either singly or in groups raped women and girls. Women were raped in their homes often in the presence of their family members in conjunction with other acts of violence against other members of the family. Women and girls were abducted for enslavement or were sexually enslaved in their own homes by armed gangs. The attackers often kept the women and girls in captivity for months, forcing them to perform household duties and provide sexual services. Some women and girls disappeared altogether.<sup>15</sup> Somali refugee women in northern Kenya have been particularly vulnerable to abuses from all sides. They complain of looting, beatings, and killings by shiftas and Kenyan police alike. Often, refugees also become the helpless victims of police brutality after attacks by shiftas are carried out against Kenyan police. They are also raped in the camps by unknown bandits - ethnic Somali - both Kenyan and Somali.<sup>16</sup>

48. In the Liberian civil conflict,<sup>17</sup> women have been victims of violence committed by all warring factions. Some were sexually harassed or abused, beaten and stripped of their belongings while others were forced to consent to have affairs with combatants against their will as a means of support. The situation is especially true where, because of the large displaced population, women's ability to generate sufficient income by their involvement in income-generating activities was curtailed. In addition, a large number of men became frustrated and angered because of being defenceless, and, unable to protect their families and themselves, have inflicted violent acts of aggression on women and very young girls. The overall results have been teen-age prostitution, rape, molestation, battering etc. Because victimized women were busy trying to survive, the acts of violence perpetrated against them becomes secondary; for example, a Liberian market woman, a victim of rape identified herself to a project team in these words:

"I was raped by the fighters but, I am alive, I have to feed my children, the whole family is on me now. I can't find my husband these last three years. Yes I was raped but thank God I am still here. Finding food for my children right now is more important."

49. The story of rape of women war victims or of subjecting them to harrowing experiences is widespread. Some, as in Rwanda, are said to have been subjected to rape prior to being killed; in some cases where women were not killed they were raped by men known to be HIV positive. In some instances women watched their husbands getting killed while women from one tribe have been forced to kill their husbands or children just because the latter two came from the 'wrong' or different tribe. Many of the women, after losing their husbands, children and relatives in the

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<sup>15</sup> National Report, Somalia, April 1994

<sup>16</sup> Africa Watch, Women's Right Project - Seeking Refuge Finding Terror, Page 6, Vol. 5, No. 13, October 4, 1994

<sup>17</sup> Women and the Peace Process: The Liberian Situation, P.P. 6 - 7 by Ruth Caesar, UNECA/ACW Report 1994

prevailing bloodbath, have had to take care of some of the thousands of children orphaned in the killings. Worse still are the symbolic killings of nursing mothers and their infants. The dead baby is put back on the breast of the dead mother to represent the killing of both the giver of life and offspring in an attempt to obliterate the next generation of a particular Rwandan tribe. Exposure to such horrendous experiences has led to many of the victims becoming mad because they could not handle the psychological trauma they were undergoing.<sup>18</sup>

50. So prevalent is the incidence of rape and other forms of sexual harassment against women in times of conflict, that many women accept sexual alliances as means of protection, escape or simple survival. This strategy is a particularly important one in the case of young women as, for example, in Northern Uganda, where some mothers adopted the tactic of marrying their daughters to soldiers at puberty in order to limit the risk of rape. Reports from Mozambique describe the virtual enslavement of young boys and girls in Renamo camps where boys, who are themselves traumatised by violence, frequently inflict violent sexual acts upon the girls. Girls may be obliged to suffer these in order to avoid being killed or starved.<sup>19</sup>

51. Indiscriminate use of land mines by government and rebel forces alike is another worrying scourge in Africa. Once again the principal victims have been the inhabitants of the countryside with women and children, who have to go in search of water and firewood, in the majority. Africa is the most land mined in the world with 10 countries - Angola, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe - particularly infested with over 20 million uncleared mines.

52. All over the Horn of Africa where conflict has raged for decades, thousands of innocent people cope with loss of limbs blown off by land mines. Well after the civil wars ended in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, mine injuries remain a major health hazard. In Somaliland they have reached an epidemic level. According to some estimates, there are well over 23,000 amputees in Somalia, the majority of them from the breakaway northwestern republic. The Somali grazing grounds are littered with camel carcasses, while some mounds mark the graves of herders. In the towns, amputees hobbling on home-made crutches are tragically a common sight.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Survival - UNIFEM/UNICEF Publication 1994: Rwanda - The Complex heritage of being refugee and female by Wini Ogana

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit. Page 21.

<sup>20</sup> Humanitarian Monitor - Mines: The hidden weapon, by Kevin Cahill and Abdulrahman Farrah, February 1995 P.27

53. Land mines can also have a devastating economic impact. Power plants, transport centres, water supplies, schools, hospitals and other essential services are favoured targets destroying the infrastructure of society. They are a major obstacle to economic rehabilitation: in Eritrea young shepherds are frequently killed or wounded by landmines; in southern Sudan, mines have paralysed agricultural production and made whole towns unsafe, setting thousands adrift.<sup>21</sup>

54. In Angola, more than fifteen years of civil war has left over 20,000 war -related amputees, the majority of whom are women and children. In some parts of the country agricultural land can no longer be cultivated as it is infested with land mines. It has been reported that behind every human being in Angola there is a land mine. This situation which during the war was the cause of chronic malnutrition now poses a threat to the survival to many, in addition to environmental degradation.<sup>22</sup> In recent wars, women and children have been used as human shields to protect soldiers and to foil attempts for aid to reach the enemy.

55. The strategy, in present day conflicts, of sapping the enemy's moral, as opposed to merely destroying its military power, results in the use of food denial and environmental destruction as weapons of war. In Angola, both Government and rebel forces (UNITA) are reported to have deliberately starved displaced persons and to have planted mines to prevent farming or the possibility of subsistence. In Mozambique, according to well documented accounts, the rebel group RENAMO massacred, maimed, or mutilated over 100,000 persons and used food as a weapon to bring civilians under their control. In the Sudan and Ethiopia, food was repeatedly used as a weapon by government and rebel forces, causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons.<sup>23</sup> In Liberia, government troops attacked a UN compound housing internally displaced persons which led the Secretary-General to evacuate UN personnel from the country.<sup>24</sup>

## 2a. REFUGEE AND DISPLACED SITUATIONS

56. For most refugee women, the refugee experience requires continuing response to change, including the need to cope with traumatic new circumstances. Women now have to cope with new environments, new social and economic roles, new community structures, new familial relationships and new problems. These changes, particularly in family and community structures, hold many ramifications. Socio-cultural problems faced by refugee women are directly linked to the gender roles and expectations in the refugee setting and the breakdown of traditional

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Un usage perverse de la technologie - MINES - Page 12, Comité International de la Croix Rouge, 1992.

<sup>23</sup> Refugee Women: Women and World Development Series - Zed Books, 1992 P. 29

<sup>24</sup> Ibid



coping mechanisms.

57. Over 20 million people are currently living within the borders of their own countries, internally displaced from their surroundings and livelihoods. Women experience a series of new vulnerabilities in conditions of displacement. Without their resource base, they face, for the first time, an enforced idleness which undermines their sense of worth and purpose. Internally displaced persons are not covered by the UNHCR whose mandate is limited to international refugees. In 1990, however, the United Nations system acknowledged the special need to support internally displaced persons. The United Nations General Assembly then passed a resolution assigning responsibility for co-ordinating external assistance to these groups to the UN Resident Representative of the UNDP. Displaced women suffer immensely but, with courage and resilience, many of them have organized themselves and are engaged in some subsistence farming activities.<sup>25</sup>

58. Research indicates that Somali women have been forced to enter into liaisons with men who are not their husbands, because of general socio-economic insecurity caused by the civil war. Refugee women sought protection from men where traditional clan/family security mechanisms could no longer provide protection. These non-customary liaisons or unions may provide temporary protection for Somali women, but there is concern that following the period of exile and during repatriation, these women will find it difficult to reintegrate themselves into Somali society and be accepted within their community.

59. Research in Ethiopia<sup>26</sup> has revealed problems among both Sudanese and Somali populations due to the breakdown of traditional marriage arrangements. When Nuer and Dinka Sudanese men were unable to afford the necessary cattle (bride price), young men began to abduct their brides illegally, without payment. This "kidnapping" of women among Sudanese refugee populations in Ethiopia has been a source of conflict among families and a disruption of the refugee community. While marriage has traditionally created a social and economic bond among and between families, the practice of "kidnapping" created hostility and a division of families instead. There are also reported cases of high rates of abandoned wives among Somalis due to the fact that men no longer have a viable economic role to perform in the refugee setting. Thus, the man may leave in search of other economic opportunities, reportedly in Saudi Arabia or other more developed economies.

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<sup>25</sup> Women from Victims of War to Instruments of Peace: Beijing and Beyond: Journalists look at women's issues into the 21st Century, United Nations: P.46

<sup>26</sup> Refugees Displaced and Returnee Women: Paper prepared by the Regional Office and UNHCR for the Fifth Regional Conference on Women, 1994

60. In a Malawi refugee camp, Mozambican refugee men complained that there was a high rate of divorce and adultery and that traditional norms were disintegrating in the camps. Refugee women were often blamed for these failures. Marriage was reportedly under stress because it was taking place under non-traditional norms which would bind two families together. Inter-marriages were reportedly common but broke down due to a lack of respect for each other's traditions. Marriages in Mozambique have been traditionally held together with payment of dowry, but refugees are without the resources to maintain this tradition.

61. Thus, the previous roles and functions of family members may no longer be able to operate in the refugee setting. For many refugee families, this caused cultural identity crisis, as well as an economic hardship. In flight, households and family members are separated. The roles of men and women, developed over time to suit the environment and the economy where they evolved, are so disrupted that the family may become dysfunctional.<sup>27</sup>

## **2b. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN REFUGEE CAMPS**

62. While popular participation is recognized as an important part of the development process, it has lagged behind as an acceptable part of refugee programming. There are also other constraints on refugee participation including reluctance of host Governments for fear of losing control, low priority accorded to refugee participation by NGOs, and barriers deriving from differences in culture and values among host country nationals and expatriate staff and the refugees themselves. Even within such weak systems, the absence of effective participation by refugee women stands out. Non-participation by refugee women in decision-making and programme implementation therefore means that they cannot be effectively protected, cannot obtain assistance on equal footing with men, have little opportunity to lead productive, secure and dignified lives and are not enabled to provide assistance needed to vulnerable groups.<sup>28</sup>

## **3. RESETTLEMENT SITUATIONS**

63. Although the UNHCR makes an effort to assist women defined as "at risk" (single females and widows with children as well as women victims of violence are in this group), problems are often encountered in the resettlement process. For example, in some cultures, (such as the Somali), resettlement of single women presents a problem. Somali people may reject the idea of a single woman being allowed to travel on her own and settle down anywhere without the protection and guidance of her family or clan. In many cultures, male community members are reluctant to allow women from their society to leave and become "independent" in the Western world. Islamic fundamentalists are particularly opposed to the resettlement of single muslim women in Western countries.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

64. It should also be noted that it is often difficult to find countries willing to accept single women for resettlement. There is often prejudice against single women refugees in Western donor countries where it is assumed that they will become welfare recipients and inevitably a burden to the state. Thus the problem of "women at risk" through resettlement becomes more compounded. It is also more difficult to find acceptable locations for the resettlement of women because of their usually low levels of education. Many countries select only refugees with higher levels of education for resettlement.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. RETURNEE SITUATIONS

65. As returnees after conflict situations, women may still face difficulties due to socio-economic conditions. For example, in some societies traditional land tenure may exclude returnee widows from access to land, thus making their economic options more limited. In areas where land shortages exist, women may be more adversely affected than returning men.

66. The gender-specific problems that face returnee populations can be illustrated from the Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan returning to their homes in the Humera area where an estimated 23 per cent of returnee women were heads of households with 6 per cent of them being single women without dependants. Because of the distance of the farming area allocated to them, women could not participate in agriculture. Further, division of labour among the returnee populations restricted women's access to land. As only men plough the land, women in female-or single-headed households were forced to rent their land, thus severely reducing their own profits and resources. With regard to shelter, returnee women also face problems. As men are traditionally responsible for shelter construction, women in female-headed households are forced to pay men to construct their homes, thus decreasing their limited resources.

67. In Mozambique, refugee women are said to have no hope for the future. As observed by a Red Cross worker, the only way for the women to preserve the future is to have many surviving children to carry on the family's and tribe's name. She continued:

" Many women are returning home with children of unknown fathers...If they marry, the husbands reject the children. ....All these women are coming back home and they don't find anything. The houses, streets, schools, hospitals and wells were destroyed during the war and they have to rebuild everything. The only thing they find are ruins and the land is full of mines."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Survival: African Women in Crisis Publication - Mozambique Women Refugees: One Day at a Time, by Patricia Made

68. Women ex-fighters, who composed a third of the Eritrean and Tigrean fronts, face special post-war challenges: they must make their peace with societies that are still profoundly traditional. Divorce rates among fighters are growing and child care is practically non-existent for women lucky enough to find work. Many families totally disapprove of their lifestyle.<sup>31</sup>

69. Re-entry in the normal capital-driven world presents a major challenge to female ex-combatants who lived a communal existence in which money played no part. Not only have long time fighters been divorced from economic reality but many, accustomed to the consensus style of operation that characterized the fronts, are now unwilling to make individual decisions about their future. The unaccustomed shock of financial insecurity can be overwhelming.<sup>32</sup>

70. Negiste, an Eritrean ex-combatant, commenting on a government scheme whereby each demobilized fighter will receive 10,000 Birr (US \$1,500 ) had this to say,

"In the field we didn't have to think of money at all or anything else for that matter - we ate, slept, sang and danced, fought and died. We had no use or value for money. I don't even know whether this 10,000 Birr is enough for anything or not. Even after liberation, I didn't have the chance to attend any course on acquiring skills of one type or another. Can I open up a shop with this sum ? Is it enough? I don't know. Can I use it? Even that I doubt. By the time I am asked to look after myself and family, I don't know where to begin..... Ever since the war ended, as if I didn't scare the hell out of the Ethiopian army in battle, - I have lost all my confidence and I feel I can't do anything anymore."<sup>33</sup>

71. An interviewee for the book "Arms to fight, Arms to protect"<sup>34</sup> had this to say about a Liberian ex-combatant:

"For instance, a female combatant was in the rehabilitation centre and her mother used to visit her. She completed her rehabilitation training but the mother did not want her back in the community. She had her own trauma , knowing that her daughter took up arms, maybe killed and got involved in a lot of evil. She did not want this stigma on her in the community."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Humanitarian Monitor - The Trouble with Peace: by Monica Sayers

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Survival - African Women in Crisis Publication: Eritrea: The dilemma of Women Combatants by Ebenet Essayas

<sup>34</sup> Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect, Women speak out about Conflict: Panos Publications 1995.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

72. Other women, due to their traumatic experiences have developed behavioural changes. For example, one Liberian interviewee in the book referred to above, had this to say:

" My personal behaviour has changed-like number one, my drinking habit - I drank only occasionally before the war. But now I drink any kind of alcohol, any form, without anybody to tell me what to do. It's a habit that developed during the war because we saw all sorts of things going on. You had to drink alcohol to be able to sleep, so that you won't suffer nightmares or see terrible things, even day visions. You would drink alcohol and smoke a lot of cigarettes because of the smell of the bodies in the streets. If I smoked cigarettes and drank a bottle of beer or stout or any alcoholic beverage, I didn't feel the hunger. Now I find it very hard to quit. "<sup>36</sup>

73 A somali woman who had been the victim of gang rape felt the same way. She said:

"After a few months I travelled to Nairobi, where I met relatives who saw me as a stigma. They ignored me, warning against disclosing I was their relative. Now I prostitute for a living, I chew "miraa"(khat), drink and try anything to forget my predicament. "<sup>37</sup>

74. In some returnee situations, therefore, the impact of conflict can deprive women of self-confidence, self-worth and, in some cases, can invoke community/family anger and rejection.

## 5. CONSOLIDATING THE GAINS

75. Empowerment and politicisation may arise when men are absent and the full weight of survival falls on women who are compelled and enabled to take on roles from which they may have been excluded in more peaceful times. Although the personal cost to women are high physical and emotional stress, the gains in confidence, self-esteem and powerfulness can be enormous. Communities may be jarred by crisis into the realization that women's contribution is vital and deserves to be more highly valued.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Survival - African Women in Crisis Publication - Somalia: Memories that refuse to fade P. 14

<sup>38</sup> Development in Conflict - The Gender Dimension : Report of a Workshop held in Thailand in February 1993, Oxfam discussion paper No.3

76. One of the most universal experiences of war for women is the taking on of new responsibilities - inevitably in the economic provision for their families but also new forms of management, decision-making, administrative tasks and dealing with officials and Governments. Women as heads of households have to shoulder, in addition to their roles as mothers and wives, the extra burden of providing for their families and, in many cases, developing economic self-reliance in the face of difficulties.<sup>39</sup> Women have discovered new skills, capabilities and confidence in war time.

77. In Chad <sup>40</sup>, the conflict enabled women to leave their private sphere and take part extensively in the public domain. Although the conflict has increased the number of women living in poverty, and has exhausted women physically, financially and psychologically, it has been the foundation of an awareness by women of their essential role in the survival of their families and communities. Women are no longer regarded as consumers only but also as producers. The war helped them to break with their traditional submission, to acquire more autonomy and personal self-confidence. The perception of marriage and children has changed too; children are no longer seen as the only guarantee of life for women or the survival of the household. Today, women's role as producers receives, and reinforces, consideration both from their husbands and from Chadian society as a whole.

78. In Liberia where women in pre-war times played no significant political or administrative roles, the brutality and bitterness of the conflict has changed their perceptions and expectations of Liberian society. A new determination to be actively involved in their country's political and business affairs are observed to be emerging. Changed attitudes to men range from women's straightforward desire to be independent, to a deep cynicism and loss of respect for men, especially among those who stayed in Monrovia where social structures all but collapsed. One woman interviewed for the book, "Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect: women speak out about conflict" said:

"We have learnt that it is not only Governments that bring development to countries. It is the citizens themselves. Two or three women can get together and make a big difference."

79. Liberian women are also conscious of having proved themselves, as another interviewee intoned:

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<sup>39</sup> Women and Conflict - Oxfam Focus on Gender 2, 1993 P. 12

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

"Women are becoming independent of men. We love the men, we need them - they are our husbands, brothers, fathers, uncles, -but we are not waiting for them like before to be the only providers. Men have come to appreciate this role and they talk about it with admiration. They also fear it, but they are willing to go the extra mile with the women. It is now common to hear a man say, 'We wish to have a woman president'. That's how far the women have gone. In Liberia, women have proved themselves."

80. Liberian women have spoken of how much they have learned, by their exposure to other ways of life. They spoke admiringly of the entrepreneurial spirit of Nigerian and Ghanaian women, vowing to emulate them instead of returning to their previously passive domestic existence. Their experience also prompted them to question their previous identification with America, rather than other West African countries.

81. In northern Uganda<sup>41</sup> where formal employment opportunities for men have been lost as a result of war and structural adjustment policies, women have risen to the challenge of earning income and single-handedly caring for their families. An international NGO's methods of promoting shared learning and economic activity assisted many of them in realizing the social, emotional as well as practical value of working collectively. The personal status of women has in certain respects changed for the better. Economic opportunities for women have opened up since the end of the war and there is generally an increase in the recognition of the importance of their role. Within the family, the division of labour has become more flexible. This has come about through necessity and has placed a heavy burden of work on Uganda women who, whether in marriage or as single heads of households, have had to take the responsibility of managing and providing for their families, including the education of their children. The positive outcome of the present development outlook of the country is the widespread acceptance of the role of women in community affairs. Women are influential in local government and there are large numbers of women's groups which play important roles in the community. Women are widely respected in community-based groups.

82. In the case of Somali women,<sup>42</sup> despite the problems they faced, the war has brought some positive changes. The dependence of many families on women's capacity to earn income and manage the affairs of the family has brought about a widespread acceptance of new roles for women. Many women have been able to develop more balanced relationships with their husbands and often declare they do not want to go back to how things were.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

83. From the foregoing and the jigsaw of individual experiences in conflict situations, one would agree with the authors of the book "Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect," that despite the powerful words of grief and disillusionment and harrowing tales of brutality and betrayal, the fact is that women in conflict situations have developed great resilience and self-reliance. That although they are victims of war in many ways, the women are not helpless, but active and resourceful, calling on reserves of strength and ingenuity to support their families and resist despair.

## V. WOMEN A BRIDGE TO PEACE

### A. Women's Peace Activities

84. Women have for the past 150 years been involved in activities related to peace. In Europe, in particular, women were much involved in setting up peace organizations. Alfred Nobel was much influenced in establishing the Peace Prize that bears his name by the book "Lay down your arms" written by Bertha Von Sumner of Austria. She was the first woman to receive it in 1905 and since then many other women, including Mother Teresa, have received it.

85. Women's participation in peace activities became more visible on the eve of the First World War. Many women both feared and opposed the forthcoming hostilities and as a result became involved in traditional pacifist movements while others founded separate women's organizations aimed at the preservation of peace.

86. The unprecedented damage to the civilian population during the Second World War led to another wave of strong anti-war feeling and opened a post-war era of peace-related activities. These activities were especially strong in Europe and Japan, the regions most damaged in the war and they focused on activities against war, especially against nuclear war.

87. Until the 1960s, the mainstream of peace activities remained largely eurocentric, but, with decolonization, national liberation and the creation of new states often severely affected by armed conflicts, the participation of women from developing countries in the peace movement at the national, regional and international levels began to increase. Since the seventies, the peace movement had on its agenda such as the new international economic order, the environment, the struggle against Apartheid and against violence in all its forms.

88. The new peace movement, as it became known, sought to protect the environment, ensure a just distribution of resources and create a democratic society. As women scholars conducted holistic analyses of the interrelationship among various world problems and focused on violence at all levels, women concluded that a new society was needed where all human beings could find an opportunity to fulfil themselves as human beings without exploiting others. Gradually, instead of being in organizations led by men, women began to play decisive roles in the new peace movement and their contribution became visible in terms of activities.



89. The universality of the new peace movement and women's contribution to it meant increasing diversity in terms of forms, issues and method of work. New grassroots organizations and even less formal movements began to appear in the world. In Western Europe the emphasis remained on disarmament and security, cooperation in a divided Europe and peace-related activities. Women in Eastern Europe, on the other hand, used detente to develop closer cooperation between women from East and West, to promote common initiatives such as workshops, peace marches, exhibitions and educational programmes. They gave priority to the problems of peace, disarmament, and the prevention of a nuclear catastrophe.

90. The United Nations Decade for Women (1976 - 1985) provided an important opportunity for the further development of women's peace activities. Each of the three World Conferences on Women, during the decade (1975 - 1985) dealt with the issue of peace in relation to the advancement of women. The Mexico World Action Plan (1976) called for the "full participation of women in all efforts to promote and maintain peace." The World Conference on Women in Copenhagen (1980) concluded that progress towards any of the three main objectives of the decade - Equality, Development and Peace - has a beneficial effect on the other two, and that, consequently, it is only under conditions of peace that it is possible to move forward to the full implementation of the other two objectives of the decade. In 1985 the third World Conference on women in Nairobi adopted, by consensus, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, which comprehensively called for the participation of women as equal partners with men in all areas of human activity.

91. During the decade, women from different cultures, ideologies and socio-economic backgrounds had unprecedented opportunities to meet to exchange experiences and discuss their perceptions of war, of peace, of justice and injustice, and to strengthen the dialogue between East and West and North and South. This was manifested in the Peace Tents in the NGO Forums both at the Third World conference on Women in Nairobi and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. At the Beijing NGO forum the slogan was "We don't want war" which embodied the call for peace by women. They appealed to the world to stop arms purchase, killings and eliminate wars so as to pave the way for lasting peace. The discussions in these tents focused on a wide range of topics including justice, women's rights, disarmament, and the elimination of violence and oppression. The Peace Torch arrived in Beijing from South Africa after it had been to all conflict areas in Eastern and Southern Africa. In the activities that were carried at the World conference, 45 meetings, workshops, discussions, etc, were devoted to the question of peace and security.

92. Women's peace activities have involved a direct struggle against publicly condoned violence. Examples are varied and include such instances as the silent demonstrations of Argentinean women at Plaza de Mayo against mass "disappearances" of people during the period of the military government; the participation of women in the Philippines, including nuns, in peaceful efforts to overthrow the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos by stopping tanks sent to attack rebelling troops; efforts to end hostilities in former Yugoslavia in 1991 including demonstrations by mothers and wives of soldiers in Croatia. It was market women in Mali who

championed the downfall of the dictator Moussa Traore. There is also the case of the mothers of political prisoners in Nairobi, Kenya who went on hunger strike for several weeks thus mobilizing international pressure that eventually led to the release of their sons and daughters from prison. Winnie Mandela of South Africa endured several terms of imprisonment for activities against Apartheid.

93. In other cases, women have sought to create their own channels to seek reconciliation between forces that are in conflict. For example, women from the two parts of Cyprus organized a number of joint meetings and seminars during the last decade aimed at the development of dialogue instead hostilities at the community level and promotion of understanding despite the division of the island. Similarly, joint meetings between Israeli and Palestinian women were, for many years, the only peacefully organized contact between the two peoples. Women of all races have joined together against Apartheid, both in South Africa and internationally.

94. In the face of international, regional and internal tensions and conflicts, debt, environmental degradation, the widening gap between the world's rich and poor, refugees, illiteracy and AIDS, the women's peace movement has increased its efforts to seek alternative solutions that would draw more attention to justice which must underpin any lasting peace. It has thus increased its concern for what is "right" in addressing the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in decision-making and in the enforcement of decisions crucial to lasting peace.

95. With the end of the Cold War more attention is being given to the eradication of violence in all its forms. Women's rights and women's role in governance are on the agenda as well. Due to extreme poverty in some parts of the world and national and ethnic conflicts in others, interest in the situation of refugees and the displaced, humanitarian assistance, conflict resolution and peace keeping are on the increase. There is increased realization that women should participate in the process of formulating and implementing the policies which affect them. Also, they realise that the new role of peace - making, demands the attention and the contribution of both women and men.

#### B. African Women's Peace Activities (Centre)

96. African women have not always been passive victims and observers of the devastating conflicts going on in the continent. They have been mobilizing themselves to promote peaceful resolutions of conflicts in many countries through their various associations and organizations. These activities, which have been done mostly in isolation and on ad hoc bases, have not always received wide media coverage.

97. These peace initiatives have been aimed at strengthening peace- building, reconstruction and reconciliation efforts and have ranged from counselling for displaced and refugee women who have been subjected to rape and other sexual violence, skills training, implementation of health care and education programmes, peace education, human rights and legal literacy, as well

as the holding of numerous seminars and workshops on development of strategies for community level reconciliation and peace.

98. In areas of ongoing conflicts such as Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and the Sudan, Women's peace movements have endeavoured to bring about reconciliation between warring factions. For example, in the Liberian conflict, even though women were not involved as members of delegations during negotiations and meetings held among warring factions ( a situation which should be deplored), all women groups came together and presented statements to the United Nations (UN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Women have also staged peace marches, printed posters and brochures with disarmament and peace slogans.<sup>43</sup>

99. In a statement regarding the role and involvement of women in the peace process, the Liberian women had this to say<sup>44</sup>, among other things:

"We, the women of Liberia are the mothers of the land. We feel the joys and sorrows of this land in a special way because we are women. Not only do we represent one half of the population, but we also feel a special sense of responsibility for our children, our husbands and our brothers who make the other half of the population. We take care of society. We soothe pains. We are the healers and the peace makers.

We call on all women of Liberia at home and abroad and all Liberian women to unite and join our efforts in aiding the peace process in Liberia clear its final hurdle. The struggle for survival as a nation and as a people is presently at a delicate and crucial stage."

100. In the Article of Faith contained the statement, the women continued:

"We hereby reiterate our demand that the women of Liberia be included in all discussions on matters concerning the State and the welfare of the people. Our lack of representation in the ongoing peace process is equivalent to the denial of one of our fundamental rights: the right of women to be seen, be heard and be counted. This absence also deprives the country access to the opinion of 50% of its human resources in solving the problems on which our lives as a people depend".

101. The Somali women also, although not officially part of the delegations to the UN peace conferences in Addis Ababa in 1993( another fact to be deplored), forced themselves to have a say in the process with a view to forcing the factions into making concessions for lasting peace. This was achieved through recitations by the women of moving nationalist songs and poetry

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<sup>43</sup> Women and the Peace Process: The Liberian Situation - A UNECA/ACW report by Ruth Caesar, Pp. 16 - 18, 1994

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

which introduced an element of emotion and seriousness. This practice was repeated in Hargesia where a potentially disastrous situation was averted. In Mogadiscio, when the city was divided by the so called "green line", in October 1991, a group of women marched and protested at the artificial division of an otherwise homogenous society, on March 8, International Women's Day. Although this first protest achieved little result, a subsequent march the following year brought women and men crossing the line.<sup>45</sup>

102. The Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace has held various workshops and meetings aimed at promoting dialogue between Northern and Southern Sudanese women.

103. African women have increasingly realised that it was not sufficient to mourn their victimization and displacement by armed conflict and that as nurturers and carriers of life their voice for peace carries uncontested moral authority and credibility. They have also realised that, in addition to humanitarian endeavour, they had to get together to discuss other ways and areas in which they could influence ways of solving conflicts on the continent.

104. The first opportunity for such deliberations presented itself when the Ugandan Government, in particular, the Ministry of Women in Development, Youth and Culture, in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), organized a Regional Conference Women, Peace and Development, in November 1993, in Kampala, Uganda.

105. The conference gave women the opportunity to deliberate on why women have played such marginal roles in matters that have cost them, their families, and entire societies their very survival. Women also wanted to know that if peace is promoted by equality of the sexes, economic equality, and the universal enjoyment of basic rights and fundamental freedoms, and if the enjoyment of peace by all involves the exercise by women of their right to participate on an equal footing with men in all spheres of the political, economic and social life of their countries particularly in the decision-making process, then the time had come for women to get together to find ways of being involved in the solution of conflicts on the continent.

106. Thus the deliberations of the conference, in addition to considering the situation of women in the process of political changes and the role they can play in conflict resolution and peace building, also focused on women and the social and political actions required to mainstream them in the decision-making positions at the national, regional and international levels.

107. The conference ended with the adoption of the Kampala Action Plan. One of the conclusions leading to the formulation of the Action Plan was that a sustainable peace needs the empowerment of women which in itself is a prerequisite of development. The justification of

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<sup>45</sup> The Role of Somali Women in the Peace Process in Somalia: Progress and Setbacks, ECA/ACW/WIPP/WID/GY by Suleiman Ahmed Gulaid, August 1994

targeting women is the effective utilization of human resources rather than the issue of equity. If women are to play an equal part in securing and maintaining peace, they must be empowered politically and economically, through knowledge and education; and automatically they will become operational partners with men.

108. The Action Plan<sup>46</sup> itself enumerates various courses of action to be undertaken by Governments and Non-governmental Organizations on behalf of women in order to address the various concerns relating to the achievement of peace on the continent. An important institutional mechanism called for by the Action Plan is a **Committee of Women Ministers and/or Plenipotentiaries including Ministers of Women's Affairs** to be set up whose function shall be:

- "(a) to network and articulate women's views on regional and global issues;
- (b) to address and formulate programmes and policies that will effectively deal with women's issues and concerns towards the betterment of the status of women, in particular, and society in general".

109. Since Kampala, there have been many African women's initiatives for peace and reconciliation. In September 1994, a strategy workshop was held in Kampala to plan for effective participation by women ministers, leaders of women's peace movements and individual women peace activists, at the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference on women which was held in Dakar, in November 1994. This effort, which was co-sponsored by UNICEF, ESARO and UNIFEM/AFWIC, was important in forging a strong coalition of African Women for Conflict Resolution and Peace. It further gave visibility to women's peace movements from major countries in conflict situations in the region, especially Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia and the Sudan. Part of a resolution adopted at that workshop stipulates as follows:

"Women are calling on African political leaders to seriously tackle the fundamental injustices in the sharing of power and national resource endowments, lack of respect for personal and group rights and the failure to cultivate a culture in which human values are paramount. These issue are underlying most of the conflicts in Africa today. African women are also calling on African governments to uphold the dignity of the institution of family and the democratic rights of various components of society - particularly women.

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<sup>46</sup> Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace - E/ECA/ATRCW/ARCCXV/94/7 adopted by the Regional Conference on Women, Peace and Development, Kampala, Uganda, Nov. 1993

110. From November 2 - 8, 1994 a mission composed of selected women's peace and human rights movements, in response to an appeal by Burundi women at the workshop, visited Rwanda and Burundi, to promote reconciliation, healing and peace at the community level. Before the Dakar Conference, an inaugural meeting of the Association of Mozambican Women for Peace was organized which focused on developing strategies for community level reconciliation.

111. A high point for coalition building of African women for conflict resolution and peace was the Dakar African Regional Preparatory Conference in November, 1994, during which the NGO Forum (Nov 13-16), under the co-ordination of the African Women development and Communications Network (FEMNET), organized the Women's Peace Tent. The Peace Tent brought together women's peace movements from Angola, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Congo, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa and Sudan as well as individual peace activists. It provided an opportunity to: demonstrate African women's determination to be integral players in resolving Africa's conflict situations; review the ongoing women's peace work in various conflict countries and strategise for inclusion of the African Women's Peace Agenda at the Beijing Conference.

112. An important outcome of the Peace Tent activities was the formation of a network of African Women's Peace Movements. There are plans for another meeting at which the networks could be formalized into a Federation.

113. The NGO Forum itself made many recommendations in respect of women and peace , among which are the following:

That:

- (a) There should be an emergence of corps of Autonomous African Women Ambassadors for Peace, identified and designated by The Network, through their work in the cause of peace and reconciliation;
- (b) A dynamic International Day of Peace will be organized on **27 September each year**;
- (c) A network of African Women's Movements for Peace will be created.
- (d) A provisional Co-ordinating Committee will be constituted, composed of L'Association des Volontaires de la Paix (Rwanda), L'Association des Femmes Burundaises pour la Paix, Fota Women's Group (Burundi), Movement National des Femme pour la Sauvegarde de la Paix et l'Unité Nationale (Mali), Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, Comité National des femmes pour la Paix (Congo), Liberian Women's Initiative, Women for Peace (South Africa), Association of Women for Peace in Mozambique, Ilda Women's Organization (Somalia), and Pan Africa Women's Liberation Organization.

114. On Sunday, 13 November, the NGO Forum in Dakar organized a PEACE NIGHT at which over one thousand women assembled to offer prayers for peace. There were speeches made by various individuals on the conflict situations in Africa. Speakers called for a continuous sensitization of the general public on the atrocities going on in many parts of Africa causing misery, pain and sadness to children, women and the aged.

115. At the Beijing Peace Tents organized during the NGO Forum, one workshop was organized by the Strategic Initiative on the Horn of Africa on the 4th of September 1995 during which women from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan expressed concern over the long civil wars, past and present in their countries; they expressed their desire for peace without which, they believed, survival and development in the sub - region would remain elusive.

116. Prior to Beijing, women in the Horn of Africa had gathered in Addis Ababa to strategize and develop a common agenda for stopping the wars and conflicts and the proliferation of arms, to support the democratic process and maintain peace and work for women's political, social and economic rights. They also launched a series of peace initiatives including regional workshops, a Peace March by Somali Women, planting a Peace Tree by Eritrean Women and a Peace Caravan by Sudanese Women. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Women Ad Hoc Committee for Peace concerned with advocating for peace and carrying out humanitarian activities related to war victims and homeless women had conducted a Survey on War victims and Homeless women, in Addis Ababa, in June 1994. In October 1995, it organized a workshop to consider the outcome of the survey and plan of the rehabilitation programmes.

117. A significant development in the African peace initiatives was the meeting of African First Ladies<sup>47</sup>, during the Fourth World Conference on Women. The purpose of the meeting was to consider the peace situation on the continent, in particular, the situation in Burundi. At the end of their discussions, the First Ladies issued a communique, part of which stipulates:

**"Anxious to put an end to the senseless fratricidal wars on our continent, and particularly to put an end to the current situation in Burundi, we have decided to:**

1. **Establish a Women For Peace Mission** which shall undertake a campaign to the various war-torn countries in order to urge them to stop fighting and engage in dialogue with a view to bringing about peace;

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The First Ladies were from Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Ghana, Nigeria. Other participants were the Minister of Human Rights, Social Promotion of Women, Burundi; Deputy Minister for Employment and Social Action and Welfare, Ghana. A Parliamentarian from Uganda, Minister of Health, Social and Women's Affairs, Gambia (representing the First Ladies of Uganda and Gambia respectively)

2. **Appeal** to the Secretary - General of the OAU, in close consultation with Member States, to ensure that henceforth women leaders will be included in the negotiating teams as part of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.
3. **Undertake** to request our respective Governments, in consultation with national women focal points, commissions or machineries, to identify competent women at national level who could be called upon to take part in the conflict Management Mechanism;
4. **Appeal** to our respective Governments to channel the badly-needed funds that they are currently spending on armaments to socio-economic development and empowerment of women and for the promotion of peace on the continent;
5. **Appeal** to the Secretary-General of the OAU to ensure equitable and balanced representation of women in the Organization, particularly at the policy and decision-making levels;
6. **Pledge** to take up with our respective Governments the urgent necessity of ensuring that women are also well represented in the higher levels of the public and private sectors as well as at the political level.

118. It is to be hoped that this very important and unique initiative will receive all the necessary support as it could open the way for further involvement of women from different walks of life in African societies in various aspects of the peace process.

119. From the foregoing it can be seen that the desire of African Women for peace in Africa and their determination to participate fully in the peace process has spread from the grassroots to the highest levels. African Women are no longer satisfied with only rendering humanitarian assistance to war victims, they have become active in debates concerning the question of peace, security and international cooperation and are deeply involved in efforts to ensure the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. These Strategies provide a map for future changes intended to open to women their rightful place in social, economic and political life, and to offer the world community in general, and Africa in particular the benefits of women's participation in the struggle to achieve a full just and peaceful society.

120. As it is essential for African women to participate in the struggle to achieve full and just peace in Africa, every effort must be made to increase their effectiveness in this endeavour. The processes for achieving this are elaborated in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, the Kampala Peace Plan and the Global and African Platforms for Action.



121. The next chapter of this study will outline some proposals and mechanisms for more effective participation of women in the peace process based on the recommendations from these documents.

## VI. AFRICAN WOMEN IN THE PEACE PROCESS

### A. Why women should be involved in the Peace Process

122. Although, as mentioned earlier, it is women who often bear an unproportionate burden of suffering and misery during conflicts, they are seldom involved in the decision - making processes that lead to conflicts and are almost totally excluded from the peace process at the national and international levels. At the national level, Government bodies dealing with defence, security and international relations have virtually no women representatives. Traditionally, too, women have been excluded from any role in public affairs. They also have no voice in framing the system of ethics which defines human relationships in every society and religion, including Christianity and Islam. Until recently, christian women were completely excluded from the priesthood. The main religious ideologies support the continuance of male domination in all spheres of life and especially as arbiters of behaviour and guardians of public morals.

123. Thus, with few exceptions, women have had no place in political life. In world history, women have almost never been important politically with the exception of where, as queens, they have had to inherit the throne in the absence of male heirs. In Africa, these exceptions have also been mainly confined to the special advisory status of sisters, wives and mothers of kings. African history books are, therefore, silent on the role of women in the resolution of conflict and the maintenance of peace.<sup>48</sup>

124. This exclusion of women from peace - making initiatives is a wrong that must be righted both as a matter of social justice and of women's right to have a say in matters that affect their lives, their families and their communities of which, in most cases, they form over 50 per cent. Besides, women are better in defending their own interests and, therefore, for issues such as conflicts which affect their lives so negatively, their representation at the decision - making level is most essential to the peace process which involve **conflict prevention, resolution and management**, i.e prelude to, duration and aftermath of war .

125. African women have not always remained at the receiving end of the consequences of conflicts. To some extent, they have provided the back - up neede during war by carrying on the tasks of procuring and preparing food, providing care and support for the wounded, acting as courriers, working in intelligence and even preparing young men to go off to battle. Women

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Women in the Peace Process: Paper prepared by the  
OAU for the Fifth Regional Conference on Women,  
1994.

have always had justifiable reasons for being participants in armed conflict. In the wars of national liberation in Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe, women took up arms. There have also been female combatants in the Eritrean and Liberian wars, and in each of these cases, women participated in armed conflict for an ideal : **National Liberation and Self-determination, Political Justice and Social Progress, against Oppression, or a Legitimate Defence of home and country.** However, most of these efforts have gone unrecognized, under-estimated and under - valued.

126. The liberation wars of Southern Africa in the second half of the twentieth century produced many strong women both from among the guerilla fighters and among political activists. In spite of subsequent legal and political setbacks, Nomzamo Winifred Mandela of South Africa was often a beacon of hope to the struggle especially in the 1980s. A less controversial but equally militant activist was Nohtsikelelo Alberina Sisulu, who was also subjected by the apartheid regime to recurrent harassment, banning and detention.<sup>49</sup> Women's activities in conflict situations and for peace must therefore be recognized and utilized in the advancement of peace.

127. Even though women's role in maintaining peace and furthering the process of democratization is gaining recognition and momentum world-wide, they continue to be the specific targets of violence in situations of armed conflict. Their continued exclusion from political decision-making and conflict resolution, therefore, can only heighten their vulnerability. Experience has shown that the slow process of reaching agreements for peaceful settlements of armed conflicts prolongs the suffering for women, men and children but especially for women as they have to bear the burden of maintaining the survival of the family. (The numerous "peace accords" in the Liberian situation testify to this.)

128. To increase the survival chances of millions of Africans who through no fault of their own, are condemned to die by war, poverty, hunger, hatred, destruction and pollution of their natural habitat, Africa women have been looking for ways in which they can make a greater contribution to ameliorate the situation. This could come about by the building of a partnership between men and women based on equality which is crucial to fostering development, overcome discrimination and construct a more harmonious, equitable and prosperous society. Such a partnership, of course, implies mutual respect for the inalienable rights of all to the same privileges responsibilities and opportunities. For true equality to take root, profound revisions are required of both the roles of men and women.

129. The achievement of such a partnership in the face of prevailing conflicts and strife will demonstrate that women can change from being victims of war or helping to maintain the system, to becoming agents of change. But, as Dr Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, said on one occasion:

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid

**"No fundamental change in favour of women is possible without a massive change in male attitudes. This is more than a philosophical point: men control the legal, administrative and financial systems which effectively deny a vast number of women the right to own land, inherit property, establish credit, enter the professions or rise in business."**<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, change can come about only if men are willing and ready to cooperate with women.

130. As it is often women who have to put life back together during and after conflict, they have a greater appreciation of the real consequences of conflicts. Often being the worst victims of war and armed conflict, they could contribute constructively in defining alternatives and steps to be taken for peace and conflict resolution. They tend to perceive things differently from men. The idea of killing is alien to women perhaps because they are mainly associated with giving life and nurturing it. It is true that in certain instances women have resorted to violence but historically the aggressors have always been men. To women peace means safeguarding children, home, and life rather than military build-up and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or otherwise. Women as a group never institutionalized violence or generated systems of oppression.

131. Women may not necessarily or naturally be better negotiators than men merely by virtue of their sex; rather, never having been part of the negotiating process nationally or otherwise, they would necessarily bring fresh view to it. In the global context, for example, their perspective makes it possible for them to see the interrelationships between equality, development and peace and the need to analyze any strategies about each within the context of the other two; it also enables them to become catalysts for peace and political change. Female perspectives are, therefore, crucial to understanding the full dimensions of human society and for facilitating constructive change. As such they can be effective agents of change.

132. In addition, through their long experiences as peace makers in the family as mothers, wives and sisters, women generally prefer problem solving through open communication, free access to information, honest discussion of differences and dialogue among all concerned. They are used to resolving disputes through the best means of ensuring that at least some of the concerns of all conflicting parties are met, - a win-win solution - a family model which seeks fairness and reconciliation rather than victory and retribution.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted from The Advancement of Women: Notes for Speakers - United Nations Department of Public Information, 1995

<sup>51</sup> Peace Education - Paper prepared by ECA for the Regional Conference on Women and Peace, Kampala, Nov. 1993

133. Furthermore, as the bearers of life, women can offer a special perspective and experience which will help to overcome prevailing life-destroying methods of dealing with human problems and conflicts. Women's approaches to social relations and economic necessity, their concern with harmonious relationship, their skills in maintaining them and in resolving conflicts, reflect their capacities. These capacities which are desperately needed for the survival of human society can be developed. Women must be allowed to make their recognized abilities as peace makers within the family available at the broader level, in the national and international arenas.

134. Samir Sanbar, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information at the United Nations underscores this point in the introduction to the booklet "The Advancement of Women: Notes for Speakers", when he wrote:

"The world can no longer afford to hinder the creativity and the energy of fully half of humanity in solving our problems and building a more secure world. The goals of peace, security and development and human rights are closely inter-related and require everyone's participation."

135. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies which all Governments adopted by consensus, in paragraph 235 also insist that:

"Universal and durable peace cannot be attained without the full and equal participation of women in international relations, particularly in decision-making concerning peace, including the processes envisaged for the peaceful settlement of disputes under the Charter of the United Nations" paragraph 237 considers it: "Evident that women all over the world have manifested their love for peace and their wish to play a greater role in international cooperation, amity and peace among different nations. All obstacles at national and international levels in the way of women's participation in promoting international peace and cooperation should be removed as soon as possible."

136. In conclusion, military conflicts and diplomacy, which have traditionally been exclusively orchestrated by men, have failed to create a reliable system to safeguard peace. This makes the inclusion of women in all stages of the peace process at the decision-making level all the more imperative. And enabling women to participate in political decision-making in respect of conflicts, at every level, would meet a well articulated need and put to test the extent to which it is true that women are less likely to wage war than men.

**(B) Empowering women for participation in the peace process**

137. Whether it is by making their recognised skills at peace making available at all levels or whether it by utilizing them as agents of change, as has been demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, the effectiveness of women in the peace process can be realised only if they have **power**. So far, women's power has been seen in activities of their movements, their groups,

their organizations, their associations and even in those of individual women activists. They have demonstrated the power of influence, of lobbying and of applying pressure, all of which are outside the mainstream of politics. This form of power has so far been used to change negative laws and practices; it is necessary and should be encouraged.

138. However, for women to be active and effective participants in the peace process, they have to get into high positions in the traditional political structures; they have to be an integral part of the decision - making machinery that leads to the resolution of conflict, and be able to decide, on an equal footing with men, on the direction of society. Such a development requires active policies of equal opportunities, gender equality at every level and the removal of invisible barriers of attitudes and biases that hinder the advancement of women to positions of power and decision-making, including deficient education and training systems that reinforce gender disparity. Women need to enter the halls of power - in government, political parties, labour unions, and commercial organizations - in order to make their preferences and interests known.

139. A major challenge that must be addressed is that of the role of women as leaders, administrators and policy-makers, because it is only when women are part of those who design, plan, and formulate policies that they will be able to contribute to making development truly sustainable,<sup>52</sup> a situation which can come about only when there is peace.

140. The inclusion of women in the power structure in the public arena will come about only if and when they are empowered, both economically and politically. Empowerment of women is a strategy which has been called for in many international declarations and decisions relating to the advancement of women. The cause of development and peace cannot be compared to any other for which economic and political empowerment of women is more worthy. For Africa, its women are ready to play an energetic and tireless role for the achievement of peace; their empowerment rests with its respective governments.

141. Empowerment of women implies entrusting them with the intellectual, emotional, educational, as well as material means to exercise control over decisions and resources which are important to them, in this particular case, development and peace. But in order to empower women to excel, in order to equip them with skills to tackle the most intractable issues on a local, national, regional and global scale, they must not only be provided with the training and capacity building necessary to nurture a generation of effective leaders, they must also be exposed to the opportunities and challenges of which many of them remain unaware. This can be achieved and sustained through power-sharing between women and men in the political, economic, administrative and other spheres at all levels where decisions are taken that affect the lives of all members of society.

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<sup>52</sup> Beijing and Beyond: Journalists look at women's issues into the 21st Century

## Empowerment Strategies

142. In order to empower women to fully and actively participate in the peace process, African governments need to adopt strategies both at the policy and institutional levels.

### **1. Policy Level Strategies**

143. An important policy strategy for empowering women is revisiting national constitutional guarantees which, in many African countries, are gender - blind, gender - neutral or outright discriminatory against women. In the same vein, legislative measures emanating from constitutional provisions need revisiting and reform. Many of these measures are based on interpretations of constitutions which are themselves biased and discriminatory; the reforms necessary are particularly in the areas of (i) equality before the law, (ii) marriage and divorce, (iii) inheritance, (iv) ownership of land, (v) citizenship etc. These reforms must be carried out in close conjunction with the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which the majority of African States have ratified. The Convention covers measures to be taken by states to eliminate discrimination against women and obliges them to pursue various policies and undertake actions that would ensure women's equality with men in all areas of human endeavour. This is important for development and peace because national and global inequalities perpetuate themselves and increase tension of all types.

144. At the political decision-making level, **Affirmative Action** (the steps to eliminate existing, remedy past and prevent future discrimination) is a necessary strategy as it will open up opportunities for women. The purpose of affirmative action is to ensure that both women and men have an equal opportunity to compete for any decision-making or power - wielding position. (Equal opportunity will, of course, remain an ineffective tool in a society where women continue to be discriminated against in terms of education ) One means of effecting affirmative action is through the **quota system** and another is for **governments to define specific goals, timetables targets and numbers** that would help accelerate the pace of gender equality.

### **2. Institutional Strategies**

145. A major institutional empowerment strategy entails the establishment of national mechanisms/machineries for the advancement of women (most African countries have already done so) and/or strengthening them. The role of these mechanisms, during the last decade (1985 - 1995 ) has been to monitor the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. Their main functions have been the promotion of the integration of women's needs and concerns into government policies and programmes, the mobilization of grassroots support and informing women of their rights and entitlements at the national and international levels. Relevant support structures should also be established which could address the various needs and concerns of women. The following areas, among others, could be

addressed : (i) Child Development, (ii) Rights of Women, (iii) Credit, (iv) Skills Training, (v) Education. The effectiveness of such a mechanism and its support structures would depend on the commitment of governments and this will be reflected in appropriate resource levels, institutional status, competence in technical skills and ability to use information. Improvement of these factors is essential towards the elimination other obstacles to the advancement of women.

146. Women make up more than 50 per cent of the population in many African countries need to realize that they have as much right as the other less than 50 per cent of the population of their respective countries, to participate in policy - making decisions for peace in which their perspectives and approaches are essential. Their actual roles in the political fora where policies are made have so far been minimal. The struggle of women for their rights is intertwined with the struggle for peace; they therefore need to turn their spectacular energies and skills into changing the war system.

147. Empowering women by eliminating the obstacles that impair their wellbeing and enacting laws that remove all discrimination against them as well as supporting and strengthening mechanisms that monitor government policies and programmes to ensure that women are both participants and beneficiaries of these policies and programmes, will enable women to provide a more constructive approach to the use of power and to the resolution of conflict. The constant cycle of aggression and retaliation and the belief in the efficiency of violence cannot be broken unless all members of society are involved in the final solution. While women's participation may not be a panacea for lasting peace, their participation in the decision-making is vital to the peace efforts at the local, regional and global levels. Women through their various roles in the family and the community leave no doubt that they will bring new perspectives to the political mainstream.

### **C. How African women can contribute to the peace process**

148. The full and active participation of women in each of the three phases of the peace process -**conflict prevention, resolution and management** - is equally important and to each they will bring their special perspectives and their recognized skills as has been described earlier. These are examined below.

#### **1. Conflict Prevention**

149. This study has earlier touched upon some of the factors that lead to tensions and hence conflicts or wars. These include (i) the neglect, disruption or violation of the economic and social dimensions of peace, (ii) arms build - up and military spending, and (iii) excessive violation of human rights and violence against vulnerable members of society particularly women. Each of these issues, if properly addressed, can avert tensions which ultimately lead to conflicts. This is emphasized in paragraph 13 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies where it is stated,

"Peace is not only the absence of war, violence and hostilities at the national and international levels, but also the enjoyment of economic and social justice, equality and the entire range of human rights and fundamental freedoms within societies....."

#### A. Peace Education

150. A world without war, violence and the violation of human rights means a social environment which favours the full development of the human being, characterized at every level by tolerance, mutual respect and serious attempts to understand and respect differences, so that conflicts can be resolved without recourse to violence. These values, together with racial and sexual equality and good neighbourliness are what, according to the NFLS, should be developed, strengthened and promoted to form the content of **Peace Education** which should be established for all members of society particularly children and young people.

151. Nancy Shelley, an Australian peace activist, has further elaborated the definition of peace education by suggesting that it :

- is concerned with respect for persons, personal relationships, conflict resolution, social justice, sharing the world's resources, cooperation and community;
- deals with oppression, sexism, racism, injustice and recognizes that violence has to do with power;
- involves a radical approach to curriculum, the structure of schools, and the personal relationships within schools;
- is concerned for the planet, the environment and the connectedness of human to other life; will make a study of war and its consequences; will consider alternative ways of dealing with conflict, developing the machinery for resolving conflict internationally, nationally and personally;
- is not confined to schools but involves the community as it moves to affect the whole of society."

152. Peace education is relevant to every citizen because peace or its absence affects every facet of life. The objective of peace education is to change non-peaceful relationships at the personal, communal, national and international levels into peaceful relationships- a state where discord or inflicted disorder in the form of violence is avoided. It means the involvement of every man and woman as informal education and socializing agents.



**(i) Targets of Peace Education**

153. **The family** is the first and most important target for peace education; it is in the family that children are first exposed to the positive or negative human relationships which are central concepts to sustainable peace. Relationships of equality and mutual respect between husband and wife is an essential foundation of family life and an important base in the learning process for children.

154. **Governments and Legislative Organs, community Leaders, Law Enforcement, Development, and Financial Institutions** must also be targets of peace education in view of the implications of their decisions and/or activities on peace. The issues of human development, armed conflict resolution, development, environmental protection, human rights, violence against women, refugees, illiteracy, health, AIDS, stereotyping, sensationalism, etc. are all related to policy decisions that are made by these leaders at the national level and which in turn, impact on the status quo with respect to peace.

**(ii) Women as Peace Educators**

155. As the first agents of socialization, women are natural teachers for peace education to their children. In playing their roles as parents, service providers, teachers, they are ideal for instilling into their children such values as: respect for others; the peaceful solution of conflicts and problems; sharing; partnerships; tolerance; a sense of justice; equity; and equality of the sexes, all of which are qualities for sustainable peace. Peace education should be extended to the primary school level where women constitute the bulk of the teachers. Here, they have the responsibility to influence attitudes towards peace at the very foundation of formal education which is likely to have a lasting effect in shaping the personality of the future adult.

**(iii) Peace Education in schools and universities**

156. In the educational system, peace education should start at the pre-school or nursery stage using pictures, images, songs and plays; all should emphasize the virtues of peace and peaceful co-existence.

157. At the primary and secondary school levels, educators, both women and men, must be vigilant about the message that text books, particularly history books, are conveying to youngsters in interpreting events. War must not be seen as inevitable. Various cultures and nations must not be stereotyped, nor images of perceived enemies or women be portrayed as less capable. Alternatives to violence and approaches to violence must become important elements of peace education in primary and secondary schools.

158. At the university level, basic courses on peaceful alternatives to conflict resolution should be offered and required of all students while research in this area should be encouraged. The understanding of the necessary conditions for peace in all sectors of life and the collective

responsibility of maintaining it should be injected into all disciplines so that the student leaves the university with notions of what role he or she has to play in fostering peace.

#### **(iv) The Media and Peace Education**

159. Women and men in the media communications, many of whom are too often biased towards images of war rather than peace, have to re-dedicate themselves to the role of educators for peace education, particularly in the context of the proliferation of armed conflicts around the world and in Africa in particular. Conscious of the influence they can exert in shaping public opinion and in decision-making on the entire spectrum of society, it is vital that they play their role in a manner that reflects a sense of responsibility. This responsibility should be reflected in their playing a positive role in the presentation of peace issues and to the designing of innovative ways of collecting, analyzing, packaging, and disseminating information so as to foster and promote peaceful co-existence and collective security.

#### **B. Education for Peace**

160. Among the effects of armed conflict are value distortion and the propensity for aggressive and violent behaviour in children. Chronic exposure to war and identification with aggressors leads children (as well as adults) to believe that violence is a viable means to cessation of conflict. Education for peace programmes can attempt to redress the imbalance in the exposure of children to violence and equip them with skills to resolve interpersonal conflicts peacefully. Education for peace is a very essential factor both in rehabilitating "boy soldiers" who have become a familiar feature in most conflict areas on the continent as well as in preparing children and adults to diffuse situations that might develop into tension and conflict. Women as teachers and as social and community workers as well as members of non-governmental organizations can play a vital role in Education For Peace activities.

161. Education For Peace, inevitably based upon cooperative relationship between men and women, is a lifelong process which must take place in every learning situation. It can and should be part of every structure and process through which people and societies conduct their public affairs.

162. Through teaching, lobbying, pressure groups and information dissemination, women can carry out their education for peace activities in the family, schools and universities, local communities, in community organizations, places of worship, the work place, unions, labour and professional organizations, in the halls of government and diplomacy, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations etc. Like their counterparts in the North, African women can contribute significantly to peace education through research, the findings of which could lead to advocacy for participatory democracy, preservation of a healthy environment, elimination of instruments of war and ensuring the prevalence of values, attitudes for peace, and the development of a new type of interpersonal and international relations based on partnership and tolerance.

### C. Conflict Prevention at the Political level

163. Military spending in many African countries is increasingly at the expense of health, education and other social programmes, thereby depriving a large sector of society of their basic needs. (These are often referred to as the economic and social dimensions of peace). Further, countries with military dictatorships tend to have high military expenditure per capita, a high ratio of armed forces personnel to the population and a disturbing pattern of internal official violence - oppression, torture, brutality, disappearances and political killings. These conditions constitute a rich recipe for tension, unrest, instability and internal conflicts.

164. The concern of African Women for these violations of human rights, human suffering and waste of resources on military spending will remain muted as long as they are not participating as decision-makers. Though women comprise more than 50 per cent of the voters in almost all African countries and have the right to vote and be voted into office, this has not been translated into equal representation. The number of women in elective or appointed offices remains unacceptably low. Few women, for example, reach top levels of participation in national legislature and even fewer reach major decision-making positions in government.

165. Even in countries undergoing democratic political changes, women's active role in the democratic process has induced significant political and legal changes, but the advent of democracy has not necessarily provided equal participation in politics and decision-making. Women often have limited access to the channels for achieving power at the top, especially in the executive bodies of political parties and Trade Unions. As Edith Cresson, former Prime Minister of France, observed in 1991, "Women are denied positions of responsibility not by the people but by the senior party politicians and political commentators who are all men in the traditional mould."<sup>53</sup>

166. The exclusion of Women from political decision-making deprives them of important rights and responsibilities as citizens and excludes their interests and perspectives from key decision-making on national budgets and setting of government priorities. Their skills are unused, and their viewpoints remain unheard, under-represented and ignored. Electing women to high office is a crucial responsibility and an important duty that women everywhere can accomplish. By casting their votes for other women, women can bring about not only political change, but changes in public policy, in the economy and in society at large. Women's participation in voting can be increased through education and information campaigns, training in political and leadership skills, funding and campaign assistance for women candidates for political office. By being elected into political positions and being appointed to decision-making positions, women will, among other things, be enabled to influence the allocation of resources and monitor the violations of human rights by governments etc.

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<sup>53</sup> Quoted from The Advancement of Women: Notes for Speakers - United Nations Department of Public Information, 1995

167. African women Parliamentarians are already active in peace efforts but they are few in number. It requires the support and votes of women to increase their number. As Geraldine Feraro, the 1984 United States vice presidential candidate said at a 1991 International women's Day meeting in New York, "What we need are not just a few women who make history but many women who make policy." Only women, with their voting power, can get more women into parliament and thus into political decision-making.

#### **D. Civil society level activities for conflict prevention**

168. It is not only as parliamentarians and politicians that women can exert influence on decisions relating to conflict prevention. Women in positions of civil authority and administrative and policy making jobs in both the public and private sectors can influence decisions in areas such as finance, defence and foreign affairs. In the mass media, women as reporters, editors, producers or directors can voice their opinions and concerns and thus sensitize the public regarding government repressive measures, excessive military spending and the neglect of the social sectors of development and the proliferation of arms in private hands.

169. Women can also contribute to conflict prevention through their activities as grassroots groups, professional associations, networks and other non-governmental organizations. In Africa, as elsewhere, a recent development of great importance and interest is the emergence of NGOs as advocates, arbiters and activists for issues ranging from human rights, disarmament, political and economic accountability, monitoring of public policies, rallying support and mobilizing women particularly at the community level in urban and rural areas. Being less hampered by bureaucratic and political constraints of official bodies, NGOs have access to information from local sources unavailable to governments. Beside their local impact and their influence at the national level, NGOs play an increasingly important role in international fora. Working with local communities, NGOs provide credit and marketing schemes, income-generating activities, health care, family planning and education, including training in many fields. In this way they can contribute to fulfilling basic need requirements of various segments of society. NGO Fora can be highly effective in drawing public attention to issues by pooling resources through their highly developed networks. The peace activities of African NGOs under the coordination of FEMNET have already been considered.

170. Professional associations can undertake peace research particularly studies on the root causes of conflict, the effects of conflict on women and children in various African countries, how women can be involved in the collection of data on early warning and the potential role of women in conflict resolution and peace building. Others in their advocacy activities should conduct awareness-raising seminars at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.

**E. Involvement of women in the peace process at the regional level**

171. Many of the activities discussed in respect of the involvement of women in the peace process have been at the national level where, in their roles as peace educators, media people and decision makers they can work to prevent conflicts within their own countries. Through networking, however, some of the activities, particularly research, seminars, workshops etc., could be carried out at the sub-regional and regional levels as well for the exchange of information and experiences.

172. At the regional level, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1993 adopted a Declaration setting up a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution to replace the earlier Ad Hoc arrangements that had been made to address inter-state conflicts.

173. "The Mechanism," the Declaration states, "is built around a Central Organ composed of states which are members of the Bureau of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the State of the Outgoing Chairman and, where known, that of the incoming Chairman, with the Secretary-General and the Secretariat as its operational arm."

"The Mechanism has its primary objective, the anticipation and prevention of conflicts. In circumstances where conflicts have occurred, it will be its responsibility to undertake peace-making and peace - building functions in order to facilitate the resolution of these conflicts. In this respect, civilian and military missions of observation and monitoring of limited scope and duration may be mounted and deployed. In setting these objectives, we are fully convinced that prompt and decisive action in these spheres will, in the first instance prevent the emergence of conflicts, and where they do inevitably occur, stop them from degenerating into intense or generalised conflicts. Emphasis on anticipatory and preventive measures, concerted action in peace-making and peace-building will obviate the need to resort to the complex and resource-demanding peace-keeping operations, which our countries will find difficult to finance.

"The Central Organ shall function at the level of Heads of State as well as that of Ministers and Ambassadors accredited to the OAU or duly authorized representatives. It may, where necessary, seek the participation of other Member States in its deliberations, particularly the neighbouring countries. It may also seek, from within the Continent, such military, legal, and other forms of expertise as it may require in the performance of its functions"<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Part of the Declaration of OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the establishment of a Mechanism for conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution within

174. It is clear, from the above, that, as much as possible, the peace process on the continent will avoid military operations, so that peace-keeping does not constitute a priority activity at the moment. Furthermore, the composition of the Central Organ leaves the door open for participation by other groups, including women. Thus women as Ambassadors or duly authorized representatives, as well as experts in the legal and other fields, can participate in the work of the Central Organ. It is therefore the responsibility of Member States of the OAU to appoint women to participate in these capacities and it also is up to women to fight for these rights particularly as, due to conflicts on the continent in many affected countries, women now form over 55 per cent of the population and over 35 per cent of households headed by women.

The OAU activities in the area of conflict prevention are stated below.

(i) **Preventive Diplomacy**

175. Preventive diplomacy is a tool for diffusing conflict without peace - keeping action. Whenever there is a conflict brewing, the Secretary - General of the OAU can, on request from the concerned parties, send an **Observer Team** to study the situation and make recommendations. A **Special Envoy** is then sent following the missions's recommendations; such an individual is careful not to apportion blame but would suggest ways of resolving the problem in a way that would create a climate conducive to negotiations.

176. Women can play very positive and effective roles both as members of observer teams and as special envoys. Because they are less confrontational in their method of dealing with potential conflicts, women make better negotiators between opposing parties. Their presence in negotiating teams could have a psychological effect that would be more likely to produce a breakthrough in the negotiations. Some time in 1993, the Secretary-General of the OAU had requested Member States to provide him with the names of Eminent African Women whom he could send as special envoys on some of these missions. It is hoped that Member States complied with this request and, that the Secretary - General would make good his promise and will also include women in observer missions.

(ii) **Election Monitoring**

177. Election monitoring by the OAU is also a tool for preventing simmering problems from blowing up into conflicts especially in situations where political parties are suspicious of each other. It involves bringing in observers, on request, but first ensuring that the political playing field is level, and parties are prepared to accept the outcome of the elections. Women have been members of OAU election observer missions in Algeria, Cote D'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi Namibia, and Tanzania, to mention a few; but, as always, their numbers were few. Women's presence in election monitoring teams will encourage other women to vote and thus

build greater confidence in the participatory democratic process.

## **2. Conflict Resolution or Peace - Making**

### **a) Military Observer Efforts**

178. Within the OAU, sending of military observer missions does not entail military peace-keeping operations except, as had happened in a few cases, where missions have been sent to conflict areas as was the case of the OAU Neutral Military Observer Group in Rwanda. Another major initiative in this respect also was the formation of the ECOWAS Military Observer Group ( ECOMOG) by Member States of ECOWAS for monitoring the restoration of peace and stability and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons in Liberia. Due of the absence of women in the upper echelons of the military of the participating countries ( Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone and at a later stage joined by Tanzania and Uganda), ECOMOG does not appear to have women in strategic positions. Women have also not been included in the many peace negotiations which have taken place in respect of the Liberian conflict during which several "peace accords" have been negotiated.

### **b) Traditional ways of Peace making**

179. The OAU Mechanism for Conflict Resolution does provide for the use of Eminent Personalities with cumulative experience and deep seated knowledge of African socio-economic and cultural conditions, for helping in the resolution of differences between warring factions in the African traditional way. Men do not have the monopoly of such knowledge or experience; women too can equally play an equally important role in this dimension of conflict resolution. Reference has earlier been made to the African First Ladies who established a Peace Mission to visit Burundi; their presence in peace missions can turn the scale positively in efforts at conflict resolution. In the light of their resolution mentioned earlier, and in view of their possible influence over their husbands, one could see a cabinet with more women Ministers emerging in the states of these first ladies ! It is hoped that their mission will receive the necessary support to ensure its effectiveness and success. Other Eminent Women Personalities can also undertake peace-making missions effectively.

180. Refugee and displaced women too can play a very important role in conflict resolution. Not only would they know the warring parties involved, but they have borne the brunt of the conflict and their experiences as refugees and displaced persons put them in a very unique position during peace negotiations. The statements and resolutions emanating from Liberian, Rwandese and Somali women can testify to their hopes and eagerness for peace. Heads of State and other peace - making bodies should therefore not overlook the importance of involving refugee and displaced women in peace negotiations.

181. The Kampala Action Plan calls for the setting up of a Committee of Women Ministers and Plenipotentiaries who, among other things, should be involved in peace - making activities. Other women's peace committees have been called for within the African NGO community. The proliferation of such Peace Commiittes must not be considered as a matter of "too many cooks," rather, they must be encouraged as they all will be addressing the peace process from varying but complementary perspectives.

c) Election Monitoring

177. As a part also of conflict resolution, election monitoring can take place where there has been a conflict situation. Observer teams can be sent by the Secretary-General of the OAU Secretary- General on request. The activity will assist Member States in the peaceful management of change and the building of democratic cultures and institutions capable of diffusing tension arising among rival political groups. Again, as in the case of Conflict Prevention, the concerned parties must be committed to the election process and willing to accept the results. The observer team also must ensure that the political playing field is level, taking into account the power of incumbency. This exercise was carried out successfully in Namibia, Mozambique and South Africa. Women participated in these election monitoring exercises but, as usual, their numbers were few. It is hoped that the number of women in observer teams will increase either through the decision of the OAU Secretary- General or through various governments which are requested to submit names for such missions.

3. **Conflict Management or Peace-Building**

a) Rehabilitaion and reconstruction

183. This aspect of the peace process in Africa is, at the moment, a very delicate but important. The war may be over but the memoery lingers on. Whether it is in Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone or Somalia, due to the brutalities that had taken place, albeit in varying degrees, there will be calls and agitation for justice, and for hunting down the culprits from within and without national boundaries. There will be need for apologies from various factions to injured parties. Peace - building which will involve forgetting the past will not be easy. In some instances, returning refugees and displaced persons returning to their villages may face harassment from those who remained at home and faced the difficulties. There will also be issues of land ownership, and reclaiming of property by those whose family members may have been killed. In addition, in some cases, the government that initiated action that led to the flight of refugees may still be in power.

184. These are all delicate and sensitive issues which have to be handled carefully and would need the efforts of both women and men, working together in varying capacities, to dispel fear, restore hope and confidence, instill good neighbourliness, tolerance, understanding and mutual respect so as to bring harmony and peace. Women can effectively participate in the peace - building process under the circumstances, in their roles as negotiators, counsellors, judicial and



legal experts and law enforcement personnel. Governments need to utilize the services of women in these efforts.

185. One aspect of peace management or peace - building is rehabilitation which includes reconstruction. It is a problem that, with its varied and inter-related aspects, cannot be solved by government efforts alone. Firstly, there are the psychological problems of abused and traumatized women and children. Secondly, there are the problems of the victims of conflict - the disabled, widows, wives with handicapped husbands, orphans and street children and also the reunification of families.

186. A major result of conflict is the destruction of the economy, destruction or disruption of resources and basic services, of traditions and cultures, the destruction of infrastructure as well as environmental degradation. Rehabilitation and reconstruction would have to cover the whole spectrum of development with all its ramifications.

182. Women's participation in peace-building or conflict management is not only essential and crucial but imperative. Women must work side by side with men on an equal footing, to bring back people and countries ravaged by conflicts to the status quo ante and, in some cases, to even better situations.

188. Community-based rehabilitation programmes will have to be formulated and implemented by the joint efforts of various ministries, development agencies and NGOs with the full and active participation of women from all walks of life including their professional organizations and associations.

189. One group of women that are essential to peace-building are refugee women. In their experiences as refugees, these women have accumulated not only confidence, self-reliance, resilience and determination but some have acquired skills that will be essential to the development process for reconstruction. Besides, being direct victims of conflict, they have a vested interest in seeing peace re - established in their homelands where many of them would like to return.

b) The OAU Commission of Twenty on Refugees

190. This Commission, set up in 1964, is entrusted with the responsibility of examining, in depth, the refugee problem on the continent and making recommendations to the OAU Council of Ministers and, thereafter, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The Commission undertakes missions to Member States with a view to appraising itself of the prevailing situation of refugees, returnees and displaced persons and advising governments as to how to tackle the problem of displaced persons. The Commission has also spearheaded the idea of requesting Member States with refugees to declare general amnesty and to enact amnesty laws in order to enable refugees to be voluntarily repatriated. The Commission also urges Member States with few or no refugees to provide education, employment, resettlement opportunities and financial

assistance to overburdened states with large refugee populations.

191. In both peace building and conflict resolution, peace can only be assured if the problem of refugees and displaced can be successfully settled. The work of the Commission is therefore very crucial to the peace process and the participation of women therein is very essential. This is not only because of the special perspective women can bring to the work of the Commission, but because the majority of refugees and displaced persons are women.

192. As the Commission is comprised of Ambassadors, most of who reside in Addis Ababa, the headquarters of the OAU, Member States of the Organization have the obligation and responsibility to appoint women to Ambassadorial posts so as to enable them to give their services to this aspect of the peace process.

#### c) Peace Institutions

193. An important aspect of the peace process is the need for establishment of more peace institutions, preferably at the sub-regional level, for addressing the peace process. Existing examples are the International Training Institute for Peace and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) which was established in Southern Africa three years ago. ACCORD grew out of a need expressed by a cross section of South Africans - community workers, politicians, religious leaders, academics, legal and social work practitioners - for training and educating people in new and innovative ways of resolving conflict and for creating fora and institutions for the expression of these skills. The training, intervention and research programmes of ACCORD extend from community to international preventive diplomacy and peace keeping. Women in the sub-region have been involved in the work of the institution both as participants and beneficiaries.

194. Efforts must be made to replicate this type of institution in other sub-regions of the continent. The exchange of information and experiences among these institutions and with the OAU Mechanism will help to further the cause of peace and development on the continent. The full and active involvement of women in the activities of such institutions cannot be overemphasized.

#### d) Peace Financing

195. There is no doubt that women's peace activities have included financial considerations and these have been addressed partly through fund-raising. The OAU Mechanism for peace prevention, resolution and management includes the establishment of a Peace Fund for the purpose of providing resources exclusively to support OAU operations activities relating to conflict management and resolution. The Special Fund is made up partly of voluntary contributions from Member States and other sources within and outside Africa.

196. In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during the last three years, wives of African Ambassadors have organized fund raising activities and donated the proceeds to the Peace Fund which, to date, stands at over US \$22, 290. Another group of women in Addis Ababa, the African Women's Voluntary Group, has donated US \$ 800 to the Peace Fund. Even though they have not been included in all aspects of the OAU's peace process, African women, by these gestures, have demonstrated their support for the peace efforts at the regional level.

### **VIIAFRICAN WOMEN IN THE PEACE PROCESS AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL**

197. Although the purpose of this paper is to address the role of African women in the peace process in Africa, it must be stressed that, like women the world over, African women have a vital and essential role to play in the search for peace at the international level.

198. Women must participate at the decision - making level and be part of delegations, national or otherwise, negotiating international agreements relating to peace and disarmament. They must insist on the establishment of a minimum number of women participating in such delegations. They must also strive to be included, in equal numbers with their male counterparts, in peace keeping operations, both at the level of recruitment in the United Nations as well as at the level of contributing contingents countries.

199. In this connection, the United Nations should set the example by equally using the services of women and men in its peace keeping operations, and should encourage those countries providing troops for peace keeping to include women in their contingencies.

200. Finally, the United Nations Security Council, which is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security is made up normally of 15 Ambassadors\Permanent Representatives to the United Nations. During their debates, representatives of other Member states of the United Nations, including Ministers, can sometimes participate. African Governments, by appointing women to Ambassadorial posts at the United Nations or as ministers with strategic portfolios, will be giving women the opportunity to participate, at the international level, in decision-making discussions on issues concerning international peace and security.

## VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## A.

## Conclusions

201. Peace, which is inextricably linked with development, is possible only where, basic human needs are adequately and equitably addressed, human rights are respected, and principles of equality between women and men in all spheres of human activity are strictly observed. Furthermore, many African countries, like most other developing countries, devote huge expenditures to military buildup to the detriment of social services which affect majority of the population. Curtailment of these expenditures could release much needed resources for the improvement of the living conditions of the populace and for development.

202. Wars in Africa continue to take a heavy toll not only on the environment, economic infrastructure and basic services, but on human lives, millions of which have perished with millions more suffering as refugees or internally displaced persons, majority of whom are women and their dependants. Because women bear an unproportionate burden of the scourges of war, they have a vested interest in the achievement of peace. This is why women in many African countries, as individual activists, members of organizations, associations or groups are engaged in activities for peace at their national, regional and international levels. Over the last decade there has been a proliferation of activities by women, all geared towards the achievement of peace on the continent.

203. Unfortunately, however, African women's peace activities have had no significant impact on policies and decisions relating to conflicts or peace because of their absence from the decision-making processes and bodies in their respective countries. Although through their experience as mothers, carers, providers and teachers women are well equipped to play an effective role in the peace process, they could do this only if they participate in the decision-making; this could be done by empowering women through education, training, giving them equal opportunities and including and involving them in the decision-making process. While governments and political leaders have a responsibility to empower women and thus enhance their participation in the decision-making processes, women too, through the power of their numbers and of their votes, can elect other women to parliament and other decision-making institutions.

204. In addition to their roles as political decision-makers, women can be **teachers of peace education** and of **education for peace**. Women in positions of civil authority and administrative policy-making in both the public and private sectors can influence decisions in areas such as **finance, defence and foreign affairs**, all of which relate to conflict and peace in one way or the other. In the media too, women as reporters, editors, producers or directors can sensitize the public to issues such as violence and discrimination in society. Women can contribute to conflict prevention through the activities, including research, of their professional associations, grassroots groups, networks and other non-governmental organizations in respect of issues such as human

rights, disarmament, political accountability and transparency, monitoring of public policies etc. Women can also participate in the peace-making process in observer teams or as legal and other experts, as well as special envoys within the OAU Mechanism for peace prevention resolution and management. In peace building, women from all walks of life, including refugee women, can participate in rehabilitation and reconstruction activities through their various roles as teachers, social service operators, academics, and community leaders. Their success in these endeavours will depend largely on African governments which need to make use of their services and expertise.

## **B. Recommendations**

205. Below are some recommendations covering most of the areas considered in this paper; they are by no means exhaustive.

- (i) Underlying causes of tension, including violation of basic human rights and ethnic grievances must be analysed and dealt with at their earliest manifestation, to avoid them blowing into conflicts.
- (ii) The proliferation of weapons, including small arms, should be monitored and processes for small arms collection must be emplaced.
- (iii) Political institutions should be designed in a way that ensures that minorities are proportionately represented in bureaucracies and parliaments and that their interests in the political, cultural and economic spheres are addressed.
- (iv) It is important to recognize and address the need to generate the political will among governments, civil society and the private sector, for the active support of programmes aimed at the peaceful settlement of disputes.
- (v) Governments in relatively peaceful situations should set an example by making cuts in their military spending and making economic conversion. Women must be active in identifying the areas where economic conversion plans can be successfully implemented to benefit women.
- (vi) Participatory democracy is a necessary mechanism for equal treatment and participation by all members of society; there is therefore a need for ensuring the practice of popular participation in all institutions.
- (vii) To boost women's political decision-making power, governments, political parties, trade unions, the private sector, women's groups should:
  - introduce special measures to increase the proportion of women involved in the political decision-making;

- secure women's right to vote , stand for election and hold public and political office;
  - encourage women to fully exercise the vote independently, according to their own individual choice;
  - generate support networks so that more women can campaign for public office at the grassroots, state, national, regional and international levels;
  - promote qualified women to positions of power at every level within political, legislative and judicial bodies with the goal of achieving parity;
  - encourage women in power to serve as mentors and otherwise support qualified women candidates in their career development;
  - integrate women's concerns at all levels of planning and action on conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy.
  - increase the number of women in leadership positions in public and private enterprises to at least 30 per cent by the year 2000, with a view to achieving future parity with men;
- (viii) The significant role of women in conflict resolution and peace-making should be recognized and strongly supported.
- (ix) Because of women's ability of rallying together to solve common problems, it is important to build upon their collective action by helping them and their organizations in translating their acquired knowledge into action using their resource base and social networking.
- (x) There is a need to build a positive image of women as political and public decision makers. Women researchers, publishers and women in the media should make a concerted effort to highlight contributions made by African women historically and in the contemporary era, as leaders in various capacities.
- (xi) The gap between law on the statute books and laws that actually affect women's lives is often a glaring one and attempts to bridge it are often hampered by the idea that the legal system is beyond the reach of "ordinary" people. Relevant women's organizations and groups or associations should demystify the law by informing women of their legal rights and by translating legal jargon and procedures into plain language so as to make the law work for women.

- (xii) Because many existing women's groups are weak and ineffective in advancing the status of women, it is necessary for women to look inwardly and to critically assess and rectify their major sources of weakness, especially in respect of cohesion and common vision of women's movements, as well as failure to link urban struggles with rural struggles at the grassroots.
- (xiii) Women must research and evaluate measures taken to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in their respective countries, in particular, their effectiveness in overcoming the constraints against women's participation in social life and in policy-making.
- (xv) Women's organizations and other NGOs should, as a matter of strategy, adopt deliberate measures aimed at institutionalising civic education, gender and legal - awareness programmes as well as eliminating negative attitudes and socio-cultural practices.
- (xv) Promote the incorporation of women in peace education programmes in schools, conferences and publicity programmes to underscore their potentially significant role in mediation and negotiation.
- (xvi) Promote legal literacy and peace education programmes in schools and in the media underscoring women's plight as victims and their potential as peace makers.
- (xvii) Revise educational curricula to shift the emphasis on war and violence to more peaceful aspects of civilization.
- (xviii) At the primary and secondary school levels, curriculum should be revised to give new emphasis to the teaching and promotion of the cultural values and ethics that are likely to foster peace in the outlook of the students, particularly in matters related to conflict resolution.
- (xix) Universities should introduce foundation-level courses that would be compulsory to all students which emphasize values and thics that promote and foster peace.
- (xx) Women and men in the media as well as communications specialists should recommit themselves to their role in peace education by seeking creative and innovative ways of analyzing, packaging, and disseminating information as a confidence-building tool to foster and promote peaceful co-existence and collective security.

- (xxi) Women should mobilize the necessary action at all levels to ensure that they achieve a critical mass at the national level in key ministries and offices that make or influence policy with regards to matters related to collective security and peace. They should equally ensure that they are amply represented in organizations that serve the same purpose at that level.
- (xxii) Women and National Governments should ensure that women not only participate in the decision-making process at the highest levels on military issues, but should also join the police force at all levels so as to be in a position to influence the functioning of the sector.
- (xxiii) Due attention should be given to the training of soldiers and diplomats in conflict management, peace-keeping and peace -making.
- (xxiv) The United Nations should ensure the inclusion of women in all peace-making and peace-keeping missions at all levels and should request that military contingents despatched by Member States in this regard also contain women.



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