



REPUBLIC OF ANGOLA



### **Draft Final Communiqué**

**High-level regional forum of women of the Great Lakes Region under the Theme: ‘STRENGTHENING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN PEACE AND SECURITY PROCESSES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION’**

**Venue: Hotel Intercontinental**

1. The High-Level Regional Forum of Women of the Great Lakes Region under the Theme: *‘Strengthening Women’s Participation and Leadership in Peace and Security Processes in the Great Lakes Region’* took place in Luanda, Republic of Angola from 18 to 19 October 2024.
2. His Excellency João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola, AU champion for peace and reconciliation in Africa, Mediator of the Luanda Peace Process for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and current Chairperson of the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), officiated the opening ceremony alongside other Continental dignitaries.
3. The Forum was organized by the Government of Angola in partnership with the Office of the African Union Commission (AUC) Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), in collaboration with African Women Leaders Network (AWLN), FemWise-Africa, with support from partners, particularly the United Nations Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for the Great Lakes region (OSES-GLR), the Francophonie, the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), World Bank and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).
4. The Forum brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including as well as prominent women’s leaders from the Great Lakes Region (GLR), diplomatic community accredited to Angola, and representatives of civil society organisations, religious institutions and academics.

5. The Forum aimed to mobilize collective support and solidarity for improving the situation of women, children and vulnerable groups affected by conflict in the Great Lakes Region, particularly in the Eastern DRC and initiating a shift in approaches, towards inclusive strategies, where women take leadership in the regional efforts to conflict prevention, resolution and peace building.

6. In his opening remarks, H.E President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, noted with regret the devastating impact of the conflict and insecurity on women and girls, including mass displacement, increasing numbers of conflict related sexual violence perpetuated, loss of livelihoods, limited access to basic services such as healthcare, education, food and other basic needs. He underscored the critical role of women in peacebuilding and emphasized that women's involvement in peace processes is essential given their significance in community dynamics, their firsthand experiences of the impacts of conflict, and their unique capacity to foster dialogue and reconciliation. He praised various women's groups across Africa for their steadfast advocacy for peace and gender equality, as well as their relentless efforts to secure women's inclusion in decision-making spaces. Reflecting on the challenges posed by regional conflicts, he commended the resilience of women who negotiate peace, rebuild their communities, and heal the wounds of war. Yet despite these significant contributions, he noted that women remain underrepresented in formal peace processes concerning conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and called for heightened efforts to shift mind sets and dismantle barriers that hinder their participation to “ensure that women are present at the negotiation table, their voices are respected, and their ideas are put into practice”. He advocated for methods to alleviate the suffering of women and children as a result of violent conflicts in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Eastern DRC, South Sudan and Sudan, and other parts of the Great Lakes Region.

7. The Forum took place ahead of the Ministerial meeting on the Revitalization of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework for the DRC and the ICGLR Regional Inter-ministerial Committee (RIMC), both scheduled to take place in Luanda, Angola on 23 and 24 November 2024, respectively.

8. The Forum applied participatory, interactive and learning approaches, including panel sessions with facilitators, plenary debates and group work sessions.

9. The Forum was facilitated by senior Angolan Government representatives and other experts in the field of WPS, and organized around thematic issues: (i) the impact of peace, security and humanitarian situation of women in conflict affected zones, (ii) women's involvement in peace processes and efforts to promote participation as well as, (iii) practical ways to strengthen women's participation in peace processes, sharing experiences from the region.

10. The forum took note of the previous decisions and pronouncements of the African Union Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) on the Mediation and Reconciliation in Conflict Resolution in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), particularly Communiqués PSC/HoSG/COMM.1140 (2023), adopted at its 1140<sup>th</sup> meeting held at the level of Heads of State and Government on 17 February 2023, PSC/PR/COMM.1203 (2024), adopted at its 1203<sup>rd</sup> meeting, held on 4 March 2024 and PSC/MIN/COMM.2/1222 (2024), adopted at its 1222<sup>nd</sup>, held on 15 July 2024.

11. The Forum recalled the conclusions of the Ministerial high-level seminar of the AU PSC on the theme: *Commemorating 20 years of the PSC by taking Stock of Women's Participation and Leadership in Peace Processes in Africa*, held on 23 March 2024, which emphasised the need to include women experts/gender experts in mediation and conflict management and resolution processes.

12. After deliberations and following the requests of the AU PSC to the AUC, to work in close collaboration with the Mediator of the Luanda Process and the Facilitator of the Nairobi Process, involving the Panel of the Wise and Femwise as subsidiary and complementary efforts, the Forum:

- (i) **Commends** the efforts by His Excellency João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola and Champion of the African Union for Peace and Reconciliation in Africa, for his pivotal role in the mediation between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic Congo through the Luanda Process;
- (ii) **Recommends** the appointment of 2 women and 1 man as co-facilitators from within the Great Lakes region and subsequently, the establishment of an ad hoc *Women Task Force*, at Expert level to substantively support the ongoing mediation efforts under the Luanda and Nairobi Processes and, requests that the *Women Task Force* be coordinated under the leadership of the Mediator of the Luanda process,
- (iii) **Further recommends** the Mediator to explore ways for the return of refugees of Bothe the DRC and Rwanda, particularly the FDLR to Rwanda with the support of the international community, as well as the return of Congolese refugees from Rwanda in accordance with the tripartite DRC-UNHCR-Rwanda Agreement, while **urging** the cessation of hostilities by the M23 in order to allow the massive return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their home communities,

13. **Commends** the efforts and commitments by H.E President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço for his pivotal role in the mediation of the conflict in the Eastern region of the DRC and for the inclusion of women. In a changing geopolitical landscape, the WPS Agenda is gaining traction, with the 'Pact of the Future' underscoring the centrality of women's role in peace and security and promoting participatory democracy. As part of a consensus agenda, it encourages the President, in his capacity as Mediator of the Luanda process, to designate a coalition of women leaders to support regional dialogue processes and coordinate, with the support of a

women taskforce women's contributions to peace and security initiatives in the GLR, with a clear plan of Action with specific goals and timeline for the coalition work.

14. **Applauds** the progress made to implement the UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions through WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) of the GLR Member States and ICGLR WPS Regional Action Plan (RAP), and encourages Member States to advance these agendas through policy support, including effective mechanisms and funding for their implementation, particularly relating to comprehensive economic recovery, rule of law and access to justice, and investment to women's right organizations.

15. **Recognizes** the significance of the role of women and youth in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding processes, post conflict reconstruction and protect their rights and that of, civilians in general including the rights of elders and disabled.

16. **Calls** for continued joint efforts by local, national, regional and international stakeholders to support Community Round Table (CRT) in Eastern DRC for inter- or intra-community dialogues for **Transitional Justice**, meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding to ensure the protection of civilians, in particular women, children and vulnerable groups.

17. **Strongly** condemns the violations of human rights, in particular sexual violence against women and girls in the DRC and the Region and urged the parties to respect International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights and uphold the ceasefire to facilitate safe passage for humanitarian actors to provide lifesaving aid;

18. **Requests** for tailored approaches for both victims of gender-based violence and women associated with armed groups in Eastern DRC by addressing the social, psychological and economic challenges they face through Transitional Justice mechanisms,

19. **Demands** strategic and meaningful engagement in all negotiations, mediation processes and existing peace monitoring mechanisms. Gender integration in all peace, security and development processes in the GLR, including in the Luanda Process, the promotion of a non-military approach to security and economic cooperation; implementation of impactful regional flagship initiatives focusing on women's and youth's social and economic empowerment to drive positive change in the region.

20. **Strengthen** and support women's peace networks through cross-border experience sharing and dialogue among communities, and for adequate financial and technical support, particularly to grassroots organizations in the implementation of

localized WPS initiatives and ensure that their voices contribute to shaping national and regional policymaking related to peace and conflict prevention.

21. **Calls** for a mechanism to strengthen and monitor women's participation in peace processes, especially in track one enforcement of ceasefire agreements, and support accountability through information sharing between the facilitation teams and women.

22. **Welcomes** efforts of the Republic of Burundi, current Chair of the PSC Framework for convening the Regional Women Forum of the Great Lakes on 22 and 23 August 2024 in Bujumbura, Burundi and its recommendation for the appointment of a Woman Goodwill Ambassador to champion the aspirations of women in the Great Lakes Region.

23. **Invites** governments in the region to collaborate closely with regional, national and local organizations to develop and implement inclusive policies related to peace and security that reflect the perspectives and needs of local communities affected by conflict.

24. **Finally**, as the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Beijing Platform for Action, and 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UNSCR 1325 nearly approach, it provides an opportunity to advance the commitment made through the Generation Equality, by mobilizing partnerships for gender equality and women's empowerment , particularly through the WPS and Humanitarian Action Compact. These frameworks offer a roadmap for breaking down barriers, addressing gender-based violence, promoting economic justice, and advancing bodily autonomy - all essential elements in the broader WPS agenda globally and in the GLR.

25. **Acknowledges and appreciates** the continued mobilization and strong solidarity messages delivered by women leaders in Africa for improving the situation of women in the GLR, and for initiating a shift in approaches to peace by engaging women as peace makers, and the creation of a regional women's coalition in support of ongoing regional peace processes.

26. Participants extended appreciation to His Excellency João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola and to the Government and People of Angola for hosting the high-level Forum on the situation of women and girls in the GLR and for the warm welcome, hospitality and courtesies extended to the delegations during their stay in Luanda, Angola.

**Luanda 19 October 2024**

