

Statement to the Informal GA Civil Society Hearings

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Mr. President,

On behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women Peace and Security, allow me to thank you for convening these informal hearings and seeking the inclusion of civil society perspectives in the United Nations reform process. It is our sincere hope that the views expressed during these two days will be reflected in the final document of the September Summit.

The Working Group on Women, Peace and Security was formed five years ago to advocate for the full and equal participation of women and the inclusion of a gender perspective in conflict prevention, reaction, and post-conflict peacebuilding. We have been following the preparatory process for the summit with a great deal of interest and have made a number of concrete suggestions for the draft outcome document.

I will limit my comments today to three specific points.

First, the September outcome document should go beyond rhetorical condemnations of gender-based violence and call for the establishment of accountability and reporting mechanisms for such violence. Second, the outcome document should call for the inclusion of a gender perspective and equal participation of women's groups and civil society in the work of the proposed Peacebuilding Commission. And finally, gender equality and empowerment of women should be guiding principles for *all* member states' commitments to action agreed at the Summit.

Mr. President,

Today's wars are fought not only between armies but also increasingly in our homes, in our communities and on women's bodies. The UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo estimates that at least 25,000 cases of sexual violence are committed each year in North Kivu alone, just one region of the DRC. Given the disproportionate effect of violent conflicts on women and the increased use of gender-based violence as a weapon of war, conflicts cannot be resolved and sustainable peace will not be an option unless gender-based violence before, during and after armed conflicts is halted.

The UN and its member states must end impunity for violence against women. Ensuring that justice is done is essential if we are to convince men with guns that there is no impunity in committing crimes against women. Bringing perpetrators to justice is an essential part of reestablishing the rule of law.

We welcome reconciliation after peace comes, but too often amnesty means that men forgive other men for atrocities committed against women. It is with this argument in mind that **we urge you to strengthen paragraph 37 in the draft outcome document with a specific reference to the need to establish accountability and reporting mechanisms for gender-based violence.**

Although women suffer disproportionately in wars, we are not mere victims. We have a multitude of roles as combatants, peace builders, primary breadwinners, and peace educators. Women's groups have made enormous contributions to peacebuilding. But when it comes to official peace-making and peacebuilding,

women remain marginalized. The international community has been more comfortable having warlords at the peace table rather than female peacemakers.

We now know that bringing women to the negotiating table improves the quality of agreements reached and increases their chance of success. We know that post-conflict reconstruction works best when it involves women as planners, implementers and beneficiaries. We know these lessons well, but too frequently in the press of responding to the latest crisis, issues related to women's participation get lost in the shuffle. And yet it is precisely in the midst of a crisis that these lessons should take center stage.

Now let me turn to participation specifically in the **Peacebuilding Commission**. We agree with the view of many Civil Society Organizations that peacebuilding and conflict prevention are two sides of the same coin. And that given the exceptionally high rate of recidivism for countries that have experienced conflict, post-conflict peacebuilding has become a strategy for conflict prevention.

We further agree that the international peacebuilding strategies pursued since the end of the Cold War have been ad-hoc, piecemeal and fragmented, with responses by a multitude of actors.

Therefore, we support the establishment of an institutional home for peacebuilding. The proposed Peacebuilding Commission could provide much-needed policy coherence and coordination within the UN system. The Commission's mandate, composition and relation to the existing UN structures should be developed in consultation with member states and civil society, particularly national and grassroots women's groups.

Once established, the Peacebuilding Commission cannot continue to do business as usual if it is to be effective in building sustainable peace. We urge you to address a number of other challenges to effective peacebuilding:

1. Since 9/11, peacebuilding has been conflated with a discourse on "nation building" "regime change" and stabilization and reconstruction. Such formulations are driven principally by external concerns and the agendas of a few powerful countries. They undermine the basic agreement that peace, security and development cannot be imposed from outside. The people of the war-torn countries, particularly women, must own the reconstruction process. They must actively be involved in setting the agenda, allocating the resources and deciding the time-frame.
2. A strong body of research demonstrates that without timely, sustained and well-targeted financial resources, the international community's peacebuilding efforts do not make a significant difference on the ground. While high levels of aid are not a guarantee of success, the inadequacy of aid condemns peacebuilding to failure. Member states should create predictable sources of funding for peacebuilding—particularly women's peacebuilding.
3. Given the regional nature of most conflicts, successful peacebuilding would require a regional approach. It needs to move beyond the country level. The Mano River Women's example is a telling one in this context.
4. The viability of country-based peacebuilding depends on broader trends in a globalized world economy. Member states' failure to address the international trade in conflict goods greatly undermines post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. Similarly the steady global trade in small arms and light weapons compounds the difficulty of country-based Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programs. International support for peacebuilding needs to be strengthened through greater policy coherence on trade, aid, private investment, disarmament, and arms control at the global level.

Allow me to end by reminding you that we must empower women and ensure gender equality if we are ever to realize true freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in dignity.

The summit should recognize that human security has to be rooted and intertwined with human development and human rights. [End]