

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Ms. Julienne Lusenge
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Mr President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am the Director of the Congolese Women's Fund, FFC and President of Sofepadi, I am also here on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.

Seven years ago in 2008, I came to New York and spoke before the UN Security Council. I described the conflicts in my country DRC. I painted in detail the rapes, murders and massacres. I asked you for concrete action for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and for strategies aimed at stopping sexual violence in I conflict be integrated into peace operations. Today, 15 years after 1325 was adopted, and 7 years after I first spoke to you, I am here again. How has this resolution full of hope changed the lives of women in conflict?

I thought for a long time whether I really wanted to come back here to re-describe the same atrocities, to tell you that almost nothing has changed in critical situations for women in DRC.

Yanar and I, we come from regions, cultures and situations that are very different, but we share common experiences: the exclusion of women from political, social and economic spheres. And that is precisely why nothing has changed. Women must be actively included in all peace and political processes.

If you want real security and world peace, dear Security Council members, you must commit seriously from this moment on, to finally include women in all parts of the peace process; whether at the village or government level. Against the backdrop of daily violence, Congolese women are having to open our own doors to take a seat at the table, as prescribed in resolution 1325

In 2013 in DRC, when talks began with M23, the armed group that decimated the local population and committed unimaginable violence and atrocities against women, women in North Kivu demanded to participate in the process of peace. Do you know what the response was? "There are only two parties in the conflict. Either you are part of the Government or part of the M23 group." Despite the insistence of women, they were denied access to the negotiations.

What message is this giving to our brothers and sisters? That only the armed men are invited to participate in peace processes or even in the political life? No peace can be built without women and the full respect for their rights.

I dream of the day that my country is not flooded with guns which fuel this violence.

The reality is that women are victims of war but also hold the key to peace. Right now, women in Rutsuru and Beni in North Kivu in the DRC are being killed, raped and kidnapped. They are forced to become sex slaves. I can give you the numbers of women; but one woman who has to endure this, is one woman too many. This is also happening to my sisters in neighboring countries and in other parts of the world.

That is why I ask you, why they ask you, to implement 1325 with concrete actions. You have heard the desperate cry of women many times and your actions were not enough to make a real difference. Do not let them go unheard today. We have been living in an endless cycle of violence. I hope today is the day we put this cycle to an end.

In the field, we are working so that victims become survivors, through holistic services. We help women become economically empowered, to know their rights, and then help them reintegrate into their communities as agents of change and with dignity. You must support our grassroots organizations and their community peacebuilding efforts. International organizations must coordinate their own work with what we are already doing and support locally led initiatives. Without a comprehensive approach and a dynamic change cycles of violence against women and girls will continue - unless we address the entire ecosystem.

Women are actively working to bring peace. We are constantly threatened by armed groups who come into our houses and try to physically and sexually attack us. Despite this, we continue to work. Without protection and with the scant

resources we have, we sensitize young people to dissociate themselves from the armed groups, to create a welcoming climate for dialogue that can build a lasting peace in villages, the country and even the region. But achieving these efforts must be supported not only with words and applause, but with concrete actions.

The UN must continue to identify practical approaches to bringing women into official peacebuilding. The Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework initiated by Mary Robinson is a mechanism with the specific purpose of including women in the peace process. Unfortunately, the Member States do not support this innovative mechanism. Only three Member States provided funding which brought women together from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and DRC.

The UN and international community must demand, must make requisite women's attendance and participation in all peace talks. Women need to be funded to get organized, build their voices and agenda and then negotiate in the formal processes, not just the sidelines.

Lasting peace cannot be build without justice. With my colleagues we are working to train police and judges so that they understand the laws, so that women can bring complaints and police properly investigate. Police officers and some magistrates are starting to call us when there are new cases, some of which we have won in court in fair trials. For us justice reform starts with proper training and resourcing of those working within the justice system, the improvement of working conditions and adequate prisons. Restitution for victims must also be available. All perpetrators of sexual violence crimes, including UN peacekeepers, must be brought to justice.

We urgently need mixed courts such as those in in Sierra Leone and Timor Leste to address serious crimes against humanity that are not being considered by the ICC. But beyond that, we also need widespread reform of our national judicial process.

Action must also be taken against the leaders who promote terror and violence during elections. Without fair and secure elections, there cannot be any democracy or lasting peace.

The international community must continue to support the peace efforts in Congo and work to eradicate criminal violence and improve the status of women. Mission leadership should meet regularly with women's organizations, community, and faith based leaders. They must listen to and investigate the allegations put forward by the local population instead of always dismissing them as rumors. The voices and needs of the local populations must shape the missions. The Security Council and the UN must continue to support local efforts aimed at stability. Peacekeeping missions should not provide long careers, but should be well planned with concrete results.

The destruction in the Congo has twenty years. That's enough. After 15 years of 'good intentions' it is high time to give women the authority and the tools with which we can build a better world for everyone.

Thank you.