



African gender activists to undertake Zimbabwe peace mission

Women rights activists, led by Pan African Parliament's President Gertrude Mongella, have slated a solidarity visit to Zimbabwe, ahead the 27 June controversial presidential run-off poll.

In her message to the meeting, convened by the Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) Monday, Mongella said though she was unable to attend the meeting here, she was willing to join the peace mission to Zimbabwe to provide moral support to women in the country.

She also pledged the Pan African Parliament's support for the mission, which has been slated amid a growing political stand-off in the country, coming in the wake of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) pull-out from the presidential race.

The women activists, meeting under the banner of the "Gender is My Agenda" campaign, also called for an urgent stoppage of violence against women in Zimbabwe, saying all steps must be taken to protect women, girls and children affected by the violence.

The campaigners in the team to Zimbabwe include senior high court judges in Africa; prominent gender rights activists, lawyers and members of the African Court of Justice, tasked with the authority of scrutinising any form of rights violations in Africa.

The mission is expected to arrive in Zimbabwe ahead Friday presidential run-off.

Meanwhile, rights activists also expected in the team have accused the MDC of betraying the people of Zimbabwe by opting out of the race, seen as a lost opportunity.

"The run-off was not about personalities. It was about the people of Zimbabwe's right to exercise their constitutional right and I agree with the government this is not about politics but the supreme law," a women activist with an international body, confided in PANA.

The FAS meeting, held ahead the African Union (AU) summit to discuss the state of women and gender rights in Africa, also urged the AU leadership to ensure the presidential candidates ran a violence-free campaign.

According to the activists, who discussed the gender violence so far reported in Zimbabwe alongside other measures required to end the scourge, an end to violence against women in the Southern Africa country was important.

They also called for what they termed 'urgent and positive steps' to ensure the 27 June presidential run-off in the country is free while steps are taken to facilitate humanitarian access to people in need of basic livelihood items like food and shelter.

The declaration came at the end of a four-day meeting attended by Egyptian First Lady Suzanne Mubarak.

Egypt is scheduled to host African leaders for the semi-annual AU heads of state and governments assembly, whose main agenda is to discuss the state of water and sanitation in Africa, as it relates to the delivery of the United Nations poverty goals.

The Gender is My Agenda campaign was launched in 2004 to popularise AU's efforts to spread the gender equality principle among the continent's 53-member states, also called on the AU to ensure the safety of all Zimbabweans. They called for the lifting of a ban on several humanitarian organisations operating within the country to ensure women got access to the basic services.