



Zimbabwe / African women to send a mission of solidarity to Zimbabwe after elections

HARARE, Zimbabwe, June 27, 2008/African Press Organization (APO)/ — African women attending Femmes Africa Solidarité's 12th Consultative Meeting on gender mainstreaming in the African Union held in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, from 20 to 23 June 2008, agreed to send a Women Solidarity Mission to Zimbabwe to support women of that country after the Presidential Run-Off election scheduled for June 27, 2008.

This 12th Pre Summit was organised by the "Gender is My Agenda" network, composed of 40 members and coordinated by FAS, with the support of the African Union Commission (AUC), AU Gender Directorate (AUGD), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement (SMWIPM), Egyptian Women Business Association (EBWA), Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), ActionAid International, Department For International Development (DFID), African Development Bank (ADB), African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

In the outcome document of the meeting called Solemn Statement and Recommendations, the women also undertook to take measures to protect Zimbabwean women and girls affected and displaced by violence after the March 29 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. There was also a call to facilitate their access to humanitarian resources such as food, shelter and medical services. In this regard, the women called on the Government of Zimbabwe to reconsider its ban against humanitarian organizations operating within the country and to ensure the safety and protection of all its citizens.

The women called on 'all leaders in Zimbabwe, and all other actors involved from the regional and the international community to commit themselves to a peaceful resolution of the crisis in that country.'

The 12th Pre Summit was officially opened by the First Lady of Egypt, H.E. Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, who strongly advocated for the empowerment of women, respect for their freedom and dignity. Mrs. Mubarak who is also the founder of the Suzanne Mubarak Women's International Peace Movement was cognisant of the effects of violence against women during conflicts and said there was need to establish a good social protection mechanism for them.

On the situation in Darfur, the women asked the African Union to intervene in the dispute between Sudan and Chad, and ensure that the peace accord signed between the two governments in Dakar, Senegal, in March 2008 was full implemented.

The women felt it was important for the African Union to demonstrate leadership in supporting the Comprehensive Peace Agreement as well as ensuring that women were included in the Darfur peace process as equal partners in line with the principle of parity in SDGEA and the UNSCR 1325.

On the theme of war in Africa, the Meeting welcomed the initiatives of resolving African conflicts, particularly the appointment of a distinguished African woman, Her Excellency Graca Machel within the Mediation Team to Kenya. To this end, the women encouraged the African Union to also nominate women to positions of mediators and / or special envoys to participate in peace negotiations in Darfur, Somalia, and Zimbabwe.

The women also enthusiastically welcomed the initiative of H.E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia, and her counterpart, H.E. Tarja Halonen, President of Finland, to jointly organise an International Colloquium on Women Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security in March 2009, in Monrovia, Liberia.

To this end, the women asked the African Union to mandate the President of the African Union Commission to initiate the process leading to a Second Summit of Heads of States on Gender in July 2009, in order to review and strengthen African commitments to gender equality as set forth in the SDGEA and other instruments.

Other topics such as land were also addressed at the 12th Pre Summit with the women demanding that mandate be given to the AUC, in cooperation with the women's movement, to convene a continental round table on women's access, control and ownership of land/natural resources and productive in Africa in 2008, to discuss and develop indicators and benchmarks for the AU Land Framework and Guidelines before their adoption by the AU Summit in 2009.

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FAS is an international organization of women enjoying consultative status with ECOSOC, which works to strengthen the capacity of African women so they can assume a leadership role in peace building and conflict resolution. FAS programs particularly apply in countries ravaged by wars and in the regions of the Mano River and Great Lakes. Similarly, FAS works closely with subregional and regional bodies such as ECOWAS and the African Union to ensure greater involvement of women in decision-making processes for peace and development