

SaferAfrica submission to the Shadow Report on Implementation of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa:

Article 2: Peace and Security

Gender Mainstreaming of the Defence Sector in the SADC Region

Across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, there is demonstrable evidence of an expanding consensus about the significance of women participation in the transformation of society. Key in this are the increasing commitments and efforts that target the promotion and empowerment of women viewed, correctly, as a matter of crucial importance to the character of societal development. The aspiration to expand the role of women is encompassed in the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (1997), and reflected in the national constitutions of the countries in the region. Within this larger project are efforts aimed at promoting gender mainstreaming in the defence sector. This is viewed as essential for a number of reasons, including the imperative for and right to gender equality in all aspects of life; the need to incorporate women into the defence sector at national level in order to ensure their participation in regional peace and security measures, including peace support operations; the continental shift from an emphasis on state security to a focus on human security; and the need to improve the gender sensitivity of peace support operations in light of the increased participation and victimisation of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. Within the defence sector, SADC countries are guided by the 2006 decision of the SADC Inter-State Defence and Security Committee (ISDSC) that sought to establish the status of women in the forces as a basis for formulating strategies to promote gender equity.

Comparatively though, women participation has been greater in the civilian sectors, with some countries almost attaining a parity between gender, compared to the security sector in general and the defence sector in particular. This reality poses critical challenges that require focused attention, particularly in view of the increasing role envisaged for the security and defence sectors in guaranteeing sustainable peace and development.

One structure that women in the defence forces of the SADC region have adopted to fast-track gender mainstreaming is the regional women in defence peace table, a forum that was launched to enhance the participation of women in the African Union and NEPAD peace and Security agenda. Supported and facilitated by SaferAfrica, the Women Peace Table offers women in uniform a valuable platform to share experiences and best practices on gender mainstreaming, reflect on strategies that can help them to attain gender equity, and ways of aligning practices within the defence sector with national policies, as well as regional and international standards and benchmarks.

Since its launch in 2003, the Women Peace Table, draws from UN Res. 1325 and the evolving AU frameworks for peace and security, in particular the AU peace and security agenda, as crystallised in the AU/NEPAD Consultations that SaferAfrica facilitated in 2003. It also draws inspiration from the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the AU Peace and Security, which elaborates the key peace and

security areas and issues that women should engage in. In addition, it provides a basis for the participation of women in the evolving processes that are shaping the African peace and security architecture, including the creation and operationalisation of the key instruments for conflict prevention, management and resolution, such as the African Standby Force and the Military staff Committee, the Continental Early Warning System, and the Panel of the Wise.

The SADC region has attained certain milestones towards the implementation of UN SC Resolution 1325. It is worth noting that participation of women in the defence forces has grown across board with some countries such as South Africa going beyond 20%. And while the number of women occupying decision-making positions in the security sector is very low, women form part of the highest decision making positions of generals in two SADC countries. Furthermore, over the years women have moved from the traditional support roles that they were associated with, to professional and technical masterings and trainings that make them pilots, engineers, commanders, etc. One very significant sign of progress is the creation of dedicated institutions to promote, support and/or monitor gender equity in the defence forces of several SADC Member States. Such structures are essential to ensure the translation of legal commitments into actual change.

Despite progress, a number of shared challenges face women in the defence forces of the SADC region. The most fundamental challenge, which extends beyond the defence sector, is the issue of gender stereotypes as well as traditional ideas of the military as a masculine domain. These stereotypes often manifest themselves as discrimination against women, in the areas of recruitment, training opportunities and promotion in the defence forces, which in turn contribute to the low numbers of women with high rank in the region. Another key challenge is the lack of a gender policy or strategy for implementation of UN SC Res 1325 in the defence forces. Even in countries where a national gender policy exists, there is rarely a specific implementation plan for the defence forces. Similarly, dedicated gender structures are often created without the necessary human and financial resources to accomplish their objectives.

In order to accelerate gender mainstreaming in the defence forces, dedicated structures with the requisite capacity should be charged with overseeing the development and implementation of gender policies with action plans. Until such time as women are represented equitably in the defence sector, quotas and other corrective are required to increase the percentage of women recruited, trained, retained and promoted in the defence forces. Accountability at the highest levels and regular reporting on progress are also critical, to ensure implementation legal commitments.

To accelerate gender mainstreaming in the defence forces of the SADC region, while transforming the security sector, in line with the human security framework that underpins the African peace and security agenda, a number of actions must be undertaken, at both national and regional level, to address social, institutional and other obstacles to gender equity in the defence forces. These actions could be adapted to other regions of Africa as well as to the continental level. The following are some of the key areas for action:

At national level:

- a. Cultivation of political will, and domestication of international standards, including Res. 1325;
- b. Mobilisation and allocation of resources for gender mainstreaming (human and financial);
- c. Building strategic partnerships between security sectors, with leadership, and with civil society, especially the women constituency;
- d. Elimination of the gender imbalance (through quotas, targeting of women and other affirmative action);
- e. Building individual and institutional capacity to ensure gender mainstreaming; and
- f. Analysis of gaps, through an audit of status, skills, needs and resources to determine targets and benchmarks.

At regional level:

- a. Monitoring progress made by Member States;
- b. Ensuring coherence across the region;
- c. Capacity building and other support;
- d. Improving awareness of gender issues;
- e. Providing a forum for information sharing and networking;
- f. Providing regional leadership.

These issues were identified by the 2006 Women Peace Table for action and a resolution adopted for a review of progress made towards gender mainstreaming in each country to be undertaken in the next regional Women Peace Table to be held at the end of 2007.

For a full report of the proceedings of all Women Peace Table conferences, contact the Peace and Security Programme of SaferAfrica at ps@safer africa.org

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