

REMARKS BY H.E MME BINETA DIOP
SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION
COMMISSION ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY
COMMEMMORATION OF THE ST. BRIGID'S DAY
IRISH EMBASSY, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

1 February 2022

- **Your Excellency Ambassador Nicola Brennan**, Ireland's Ambassador to Ethiopia, South Sudan, Djibouti and Permanent representative to the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).
- **Dr. Rahel Batie**, Chair of the Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council.
- **Bronagh Hinds**, Senior Associate Democracies and Specialist on Women, Peace and Security.
- **Ladies and gentlemen,**
- **Good afternoon and happy new year to you all!**

I am honoured and pleased to join this distinguished panel and other participants in the St Brigid Commemoration Day, a woman leader and pioneer whose work of compassion, charity, and love for the underprivileged resonates well with peace building work that we are all engaged in. Indeed, thank you, Your Excellency Ambassador Brennan for inviting me to this year's commemoration under the theme "**The Role of Women in Peace Building**".

Before I proceed, let me bring you greetings and support from HE Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and a true champion of gender equality and women's equal participation in peace processes.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The commemoration we are holding today is a tangible proof that women leadership in peacebuilding has been there for time immemorial. Yet, we all know that the voices of women, their actions and their aspirations have not and do not receive the place they deserve.

The adoption of the Landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 marked a decisive moment in the advancement of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, recognizing women's agency in peace processes, alongside their protection against violence.

Allow me to remind ourselves that the women peace and security agenda is deeply rooted in Africa. The dark period of the multiple conflicts of the 1990's was marked by unprecedented violence against women and girls, being during the Genocide in Rwanda, the civil wars in the Mano River Region or in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to name a few. This led to the increased advocacy of the civil society that made the UN Security Council to adopt the resolution.

Additionally, a number of policy documents informing the UNSCR1325 were drafted from feminist events held in Africa, including the 1985 Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies in Nairobi, Kenya; the African Platform of Action of 1994 in Dakar, Senegal and the famous May 2000, Windhoek Declaration on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspectives in Peace Operations, which became a precursor to the adoption of UNSCR 1325.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the adoption of the Maputo Protocol in 2003 and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in 2004, Africa put in place continental instruments that supported Resolution 1325 and have made Africa, the leading continent with 54% of Member States that have adopted a National Action Plan for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Over the years, what has come out clearly is that despite the existence of progressive instruments, delivery on the promises of these instruments has been lagging behind. It is in this the African Union Peace and Security Council, adopted in May 2018, the Continental Results Framework (CRF), as a continental accountability tool to accelerate the delivery of the agenda in Africa. Through this framework, Member States report annually, on the implementation of the four pillars of the agenda in Africa. The CRF has included an additional pillar on emerging threats, being terrorism and violent extremism, pandemics, climate change and any other evolving ones.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the participation and promotion pillar, where you have asked me to focus my intervention, the CRF, shows us that the results are progressive although not sufficient.

Of all the various areas that the participation pillar focuses on, greatest progress has been made in the political space even though we have not yet achieved the 30% threshold.

- In the lower houses of parliament, women's representation has risen from 9% in 2000 to 25% in 2020¹ While this is impressive, women are still missing in senior civil service positions where critical decisions are made. For instance, in cabinet and local government they are still at 22% and 21% respectively.
- And unfortunately, women representation in top executive positions is lagging at 7%.

Worth noting, is that women representation in parliament has grown most in post conflict horn of Africa (from 8% in 2000 to 33% in 2020) this gives us hope that despite the ongoing crises, we can still overcome the gender gap with political will.

Your Excellency, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

It is in the peace and security arena where we have made the least progress, especially in the formal peace building processes. Women are still experiencing challenges to access the formal peace table including in almost all countries in conflict and/ or in political transition, being Mali, Central African Republic, South Sudan, among others.

However, despite the challenges, women have demonstrated great resilience in their determination to have their voices heard in the search for change and peace. We saw the women of Sudan take the lead in the 2019 demonstration in Sudan that led to the revolution. We still see them today on the frontline of the continuing crisis, despite a reported number of cases of violence against women, including rape.

In the South Sudan peace process of 2018, that led up to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, 33 percent of the delegates were women, and women made up 20 percent of the agreement's signatories.

In Central African Republic, following concerted advocacy to include women, it's only in the 2019 peace agreement, which is the **eighth in seven years**, that women were formally involved.

¹ [Women's Political Participation: African Barometer 2021 \(idea.int\)](https://www.idea.int/research-and-data/data/african-barometer)

In governance of peace and security processes, data tell us that we are making progress albeit slow. The military, justice and police institutions are undertaking gender reforms which are bearing good results:

- In Kenya for instance, for the first time in the history of Kenya military, a female officer was appointed to the influential role of the military spokesperson in 2021.
- In Sierra Leone, the female representation in the military has grown to 10.5%
- Other militaries including Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Ghana have also taken administrative measures to promote women's participation in the forces.

To promote women's participation in peace building processes at community level, many African governments have established local peace committees, which are useful structures in building community cohesion. Our data shows that the face of leadership in these committees is shifting from male to female. In Kenya, for instance, the number of women in peace committees increased from 29% in 2019 to 33% in 2021, with the number of those occupying the chairperson positions increasing two-fold from 6% in 2019 to 14.28% in 2021.

Excellency, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

The reality is that women's participation in peace building remains highly informal, it's also very much undocumented, yet very impactful and still critical. Good examples of the critical role of their informal participation can be drawn from the Liberian women who bridged the religious divide and ensured the Accra talks continued. The Somalia women who formed the 5th clan to bridge the clan divide is another example. We cannot forget the role of the Mano River Women.

In recent times, although the struggles are still ongoing, I have observed during the various solidarity missions, women's resilience, activism, courage and persistence in the women of Mali, Mozambique, Sudan, and South Sudan. In all these examples of courage, the lesson is that women must see each other as women who are negatively affected by conflict irrespective of their political, religious, or ethnic affiliation, women must form strong movements of solidarity and break away from identities that fuel the conflict and be willing to engage in open dialogues. The leitmotiv for women engagement must be PEACE.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our host country Ethiopia has been undergoing a crisis that has had disproportionate impact on women and girls. As we stand here today, I wish to assure my Ethiopian sisters of our solidarity and readiness to support women of Ethiopia in their contribution to finding lasting peace for the Country.

As I conclude, allow me to take this opportunity to thank the government of Ireland for their continued support to the work of my office and to being a true champion of the WPS Agenda.

With these few remarks, I thank you for your kind attention and urge us all to follow in the steps of St Brigid.

Thank you!