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Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following themes: review and appraisal of the system-wide implementation of the Council's agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system

Statement submitted by Femmes Afrique solidarité, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* E/2004/100 and Corr.1 and 2.

Due to its extensive experience in African peace processes since 1996, Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) developed a multidimensional approach to enhance women's role in peace processes. This approach takes advantage of women's strengths, while at the same time recognising the institutional and cultural obstacles that keep them from fully exercising their rights. It led to the following achievements:

I. At the sub-regional level

Engendering the Peace Process in West Africa: The Mano River Women's Peace Network

A FAS initiative established in May 2000, the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was awarded in December 2003 by the United Nations General Assembly the UN Prize in the field of Human Rights taking into account the major role this Network played in mediating among the parties to the conflict in Liberia. The Network, which includes women from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, also has been carrying out important work to sensitise people at all levels – from grassroots organisations to politicians – on peace, especially on the Accra Peace Accords, which were signed by the women of MARWOPNET as witnesses.

In Abuja, Nigeria, FAS also facilitated the process that led to the creation of MARWOPNET in May 2000 with the support of UN agencies, the OAU, ECA and ECOWAS. FAS brought together women leaders and representatives of local NGOs, including networks of women ministers and parliamentarians, journalists, lawyers, academics, researchers, and individuals from the private sector who have demonstrated potential in the fields of peace, human rights and development to create MARWOPNET.

Despite their differences, the Mano River women agree on a common agenda on many issues related to peace and sustainable development for their countries and region. The impact of the Network was of paramount importance as it stopped the war between the three countries and brought their respective leaders back to the negotiating table. The UN Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan, has recognised, in his report to the Security Council in April 2001 (S/2001/434), the positive contributions of the Mano River Women's Peace Network to peace building, and has requested donors to contribute to this initiative.

MARWOPNET was developed through FAS capacity building and advocacy programme in the Mano River region. MARWOPNET members have benefited from various training and team-building workshops organised by FAS to enhance their effective influence in the region's peace processes and advance women's empowerment.

Engendering the Peace Process in the Great Lakes Region

FAS supported women's organisations to effectively demand change in the peace process in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. FAS engendered the Burundian peace negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania and the Inter-Congolese Dialogue by facilitating the involvement of

women who had previously participated in its civil education, advocacy and negotiation programmes. In Rwanda, FAS has a peace advocacy programme with local women's organisations.

Responding to an appeal from the women of Burundi, FAS enabled Burundian women participate in their nation's peace process by organising training workshops and advocacy missions that successfully led to the participation of 150 women in the Arusha Peace Negotiations in 1998.

With the establishment of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue - the political component of the peace process in the DRC pursuant to the 1999 Lusaka Accord - Congolese women recognised a significant opportunity to contribute to a more secure future for their country. FAS helped women to comprise 30% of the participants in this Dialogue that took place in Sun City, South Africa from February to April 2002 and resulted in the adoption of a strong Nairobi Declaration and Plan of Action.

Together with several other organisations, FAS has been working at various levels to advocate lasting peace in Rwanda. The Kigali Plan of Action recognises that amongst the civilian population women are most often the victims of war, which has a negative impact on all aspects of their lives. Consequently, women must become full and equal partners in the reconstruction of post-conflict society.

FAS conducted a programme of capacity building with women's organisations in the Great Lakes region to lay the foundations for a peace initiative involving women from Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda. FAS focussed its work at the national level in order to fully enhance women's capacities before developing and implementing joint advocacy activities. In time, FAS plans to build a women's network in the sub-region similar to the Mano River Women's Peace Network.

II. At the Regional Level

Together with the African Women Committee on Peace and Development (AWPCD), FAS, began a vigorous campaign for gender mainstreaming in Africa's new continental body, the African Union. In June 2002 - a month prior to the AU opening summit - FAS convened a Strategic Consultation on Mainstreaming Gender and Women's Effective Participation in the AU in Durban, South Africa. During the two-day Consultation, participants focused on how best to exploit opportunities for gender mainstreaming during the transition from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the AU. The Consultation culminated in the adoption of the Durban Declaration on Mainstreaming Gender and Women's Effective Participation in the AU.

The Durban Declaration was brought to the attention of the Committee of Ambassadors and other plenipotentiaries in June 2002 and the Council of Ministers of the OAU in July 2002. The Council committed itself to ensuring the mainstreaming of gender in all policies, programmes and activities of the AU and gave particular responsibility for fulfilling this commitment to the Chairperson of the AU Commission. At the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, which took place on 8 July 2002, President of Senegal put forward the recommendations of the Durban Declaration. The Assembly unanimously adopted a proposal for gender parity in the AU Commission. It is now stipulated in

Article 6 of the Statutes of the AU Commission that at least one commissioner from each region shall be a woman.

This historic move towards gender mainstreaming was applauded by the CSOs attending the Durban Consultation organised by FAS. While the organisations recognised the attention paid to women's issues and concerns, they stressed importance of ensuring the integration of women and their concerns into the AU, NEPAD and CSSDCA. The adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa was acknowledged as an important step in achieving this.

FAS organised a Conference on Mainstreaming Gender and Women's Effective Participation in the AU and NEPAD in Dakar, Senegal in April 2003. The Conference followed up on the Durban Consultation and enabled FAS to fulfil its mandate as a leading NGO in the establishment of the AU. The Dakar Conference mobilised CSOs to devise strategies for the institutionalisation of a strong mechanism of coordination to ensure civil society's active participation in decision-making processes for peace and development and to guarantee gender mainstreaming in the design and implementation of all the AU programmes and structures. To this end, the Conference adopted the Dakar Strategy. The recommendations of the Dakar Strategy were presented to President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal who used his good offices to mobilise other African Heads of State to actively promote the realisation of gender equality.

The commitment to gender mainstreaming made in July 2002 by the Council of Ministers of the OAU was implemented in July 2003 in Maputo at the second AU Summit. Equal numbers of women and men were elected to the AU Commission pursuant to the gender parity requirement in Article 6 of the Commission's Statutes. Since then, the gender parity approach has been extended to the recruitment processes of other AU bodies. Africa is the only continent in the world to have made such an obligation to gender mainstreaming within its continent-wide body.

FAS campaigned for the adoption of the Additional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Since the Protocol's adoption in July 2003, FAS focus has shifted towards advocating its ratification and implementation.

III. At the international level

At the international level, FAS lobbied for and embraced the adoption of Resolution 1325 by the United Nations Security Council in October 2000. In particular, FAS contributed its experiences of the effects of war on women in the Great Lakes and Mano River regions to the Security Council debate on Women, Peace and Security that led to the adoption of the resolution. Resolution 1325 acknowledges what FAS has always advocated – that war affects women differently to men, their protection is neglected and their contributions to peace building marginalised. FAS contributes to the implementation and monitoring of Resolution 1325 through the NGO-CSW Working Group on Peace, which is chaired by FAS in Geneva.

The Geneva Working Group on Peace is an initiative of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) and was co-convened with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Geneva under the aegis of CONGO and CSW. This group now comprises 47 NGOs. In contrast to the original Working Group on Peace, which focused primarily on disarmament issues, the Working Group of 11 December 2000 is more concerned with the promotion and protection of women and girls human rights. Its mission is to examine questions related to peace from a gender perspective, specifically issues of conflict prevention, resolution, peace building, reconciliation, peace education and human security.

Through its position as chair of the Working Group on Peace, FAS contributed to the monitoring of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security. FAS through its experiences on African peace processes contributed to the Working Group and enlarged its discussions to conflict zones in others regions, such as the Middle East where FAS Executive Director, recently conducted a solidarity mission.

FAS will link its two programmes: strengthening MARWOPNET and building the Great Lakes network to its monitoring of gender parity in the African Union and of UN Resolution 1325. Since the launch of its fund for women in post-conflict areas in Geneva in May 2000, FAS has been involved in post-conflict reconstruction. It is piloting this project in the Mano River region and intends to extend it to the Great Lakes region. To strengthen these programmes, FAS is building a Regional Peace and Development Centre in Dakar, Senegal. The Centre will improve its ability to develop, encourage and advance women as agents for change and a force for peace.
