



MANO RIVER UNION UNION DU FLEUVE MANO

SPEECH OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE MANO RIVER UNION ON THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE WORKSHOP ON 'GENDER, PEACE AND SECURITY' HELD IN DAKAR, REPUBLIC OF SENEGAL

Honourable Ministers of Government
His Excellency Mr Said Djinnit, SRSG, UNOWA
Representatives of ECOWAS and the African Union
Members of the UN Family
Development Partners
Representatives of Civil Society and Non Govt Organisations
Women Activists
Members of the media
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

I wish on behalf of the Secretary General of the Mano River Union Hadja Dr Saran Daraba KABA, to express our thanks and appreciation to the United Nations Office for West Africa for having invited us to this very important workshop and to make a statement. In 2010, the Mano River Union Secretariat participated in the formulation of the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan on UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 in a similar workshop organised by UNOWA. Since that time, the MRU Secretariat has endeavoured to move that agenda forward. Let me use this opportunity to briefly highlight activities undertaken by the Secretariat so far.

The first was to revisit the MRU 15th Protocol on Peace and Security and to ensure that it is gender sensitive. Part of the engendering of that protocol was to include the Ministers of Gender of our Member States as members of the Joint Security Committee. Gender Experts also became members of the Technical Committee on Peace and Security. This is to ensure that gender issues as far as they border on peace and security are no longer ignored. This revised protocol has been endorsed by the Heads of State in June 2012.

Another step was ensuring that the provisions within the 15th Protocol are implemented. The Technical and the Joint Security Committees have been meeting regularly since 2011 to address pertinent issues and at the same time developed documents that will guide the Secretariat on priority issues to focus on. The Secretariat can now boast of a Cross Border Cooperation Framework and an Operational Plan on Peace and Security. Last month, a four day workshop supported by UNOWA was summoned for MRU Experts to cost the Operational Plan that has been endorsed by the Heads of State. It was a very time consuming exercise but at the end of the workshop, the Experts were able to identify and cost specific activities that should be addressed on a short, medium and long term basis. This now provides the basis for resource mobilization for the implementation of these activities. A Peace and Security Unit will be established in the Secretariat that will coordinate all peace and security issues and more especially implement the activities identified in the Operational Plan.

Realising the important role of the media and civil society within our Member States, MRU and UNOWA organized a three day workshop of CSOs and Media personnel in Abidjan in March 2012. The result of that meeting was the formulation of a '**Civil Society Agenda for Peace, Stability, Gender Equality and Human Rights within the Mano River Union**'. The Secretary General is very passionate in collaborating with Civil Society Organisations in moving this agenda forward. The Secretariat also organised with support from UNIPSIL a sub regional meeting of MRU Electoral Commissions. This meeting was well attended and the Secretariat is committed in implementing the recommendations that came out of that meeting. One recommendation was the setting up of a Mano River Union Elections Observer team to observe and monitor elections conducted in Member States. This team observed and monitored the elections held in Sierra Leone in November last year and issued a statement on the conduct of those elections.

As part of the provisions of the MRU 15th Protocol on Peace and Security, the Secretariat was able to establish 8 Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units in strategic border towns across the MRU basin. These units are functioning very well and addressing border security issues. I wish to thank the UN Missions in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire for their support in the setting up of these units and also participating in the monthly meetings. We intend establishing another ten units by end of June this year. One important issue commonly raised by

the female representatives of these units was the aspect of free movement of persons, goods and services in relation to the numerous check points, travel documents and the different opening and closing hours of borders. The Secretariat is currently addressing these issues and advocating for the reduction of check points (which some countries have addressed) and the issue of the opening and closing of borders as the hours are slightly different. The ministers have met and agreed on harmonised hours for the opening and closing of borders within the MRU which will be submitted to the Heads of State Summit to be held on the 30th April 2013 in Monrovia. Since most of the women traders who constantly cross our land borders don't have passports, they have advocated for a MRU ID card that could facilitate their movement and also ease the burden of having to pay for an Emergency Travel Certificate when this becomes mandatory. The Heads of State in their Summit held in June in Conakry last year have endorsed this idea and the Secretariat is pursuing this. Meanwhile the Ministers have proposed that National ID cards be accepted at the borders in order to make life easier for our women as an interim measure. This again will be presented to the Heads of State Summit in April.

As one of the ways to economically empower women, the Secretariat is focusing on Access to Energy and is therefore planning a High Level Conference on Women and Energy from the 7th to the 9th May 2013 to be held in Freetown. MRU is jointly organising this conference with the Government of Sierra Leone, UNIDO and ECOWAS. One of the outcomes will be an MRU Action Plan that will guide the Secretariat on activities to be undertaken in ensuring our women folk access clean and sustainable energy. We will be inviting rural women as well who are engaged in various economic activities because we want them to be a part and provide them the platform to share their stories.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to take concrete actions that will impact the lives of our women especially our rural women. They suffer a lot and most times silently. We need to hear their voices, we need to take on board their concerns and address those issues that militate against them. It is only when we make life comfortable for them can we safely say that we are achieving our goal.

In conclusion, I wish to thank UNOWA for all the efforts they have made in ensuring that our region remains stable and more especially for the moral, financial and technical support provided to the Secretariat. As a

Secretariat, we have submitted to the facilitator of this workshop what we have done and intend to do in the area of Gender, Peace and Security and it is my hope that we will work collaboratively during this workshop in producing a joint programme that will make meaningful impact on the lives of our women. As is often said, there can be no development in the absence of peace and so with support of the MRU Heads of State which they have demonstrated in so many ways, we are ready to work with other partners in ensuring that our sub region remains stable.

I wish all of us fruitful deliberations and I thank you for your kind attention.

