

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR **PEACE & FREEDOM**



CSW62 Multi-Stakeholder Forum on “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”

25 January 2018

[Check Against Delivery]

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I am speaking on behalf of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

For over a century, WILPF has worked to advance feminist peace: a peace based on equality, gender justice and demilitarised security, a peace rooted in local women’s experiences.

Today, as we discuss “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”, it is critical to recognise the historical and ongoing marginalisation of rural and indigenous women, which is a part of militarised, patriarchal systems that support cycles of conflict and violence and exploit people and the planet.

Achieving gender equality and empowering rural women and girls requires addressing the lives of rural women across the conflict spectrum, including by supporting the leadership of local women in identifying problems and creating solutions that strengthen women’s human security and rights.

Although WILPF has 5,000 activists in 33 countries, today I would like to spotlight the situation that WILPF activists in Nigeria are currently facing.

In Nigeria, 81% of all farmers in Nigeria are women; and rural women in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states are currently facing the growing violence from the militant Fulani Herdsmen.

WILPF women peace leaders in Nigeria are bringing attention to brutal killings by militant Fulani Herders. These attacks resulted in 70 deaths in Guma and Logo just in January 2018, and have left many families in deep sorrow and anguish.

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The gender dimensions of this insurgency are alarming. The immediate impacts of the Fulani violence include psychological trauma, loss of economic livelihood, food insecurity, lack of access to quality healthcare, disruption in education, and other violations of human rights. In the long run, these experiences hinder women's empowerment and participation in decision-making and enable binary gendered narratives to emerge about "us" and "them", making further conflict and instability more likely. This is part of a broader spectrum of gendered violence and violence against women which exists both in "conflict" and "non-conflict" countries worldwide.

In the case of Nigeria, the government has taken significant steps to address this violence. In response to pressure from local women human rights defenders and peace activists, the National Gender Strategy and Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security were developed to strengthen women's empowerment in Nigeria; and a gender unit in the police was created. The Freedom of Information Act 2011 was also adopted to promote an open government within the context of countering terrorism. However, effective implementation still remains a challenge, especially in rural areas.

To prevent and address the crisis, it is important to listen to the experience of local rural women and support their analysis and work in building prevention and response mechanisms capable of ensuring their safety and security.

Governments should sensitise rural populations on the unacceptability of violence against women through awareness-raising and education campaigns, which challenge the logic of gender inequality and militarism.

Similarly, local authorities and communities should promote gender equal and non-violent communities through gender-inclusive services and programmes and raise public awareness of the poor conditions some women face particularly in rural areas.

In this vein, strengthening women-led civil society and leveraging feminist movements is important to ensure support and facilitate the action on changing existing social norms and preventing Violence Against Women for rural women and girls.

Building on good practice in civil society partnerships, such as through the current WILPF Nigeria Women Peace and Security Coalition on CEDAW and other NGO Coalitions in Nigeria, which looks into the problems women face and provide solution in partnership with rural women, is critical.

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In addition to strengthening partnerships with women-led civil society, governments and the international community must do more to provide an enabling environment for gender justice and peace.

In all societies, the proliferation of weapons continues to facilitate grave crimes and human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. Meanwhile, inadequate investment in social institutions and increasing corporate power undermine women's social, economic, and cultural rights and increase many forms of violence.

As such, ensuring human rights and protection of rural women requires that arms exporting countries prevent arms transfers that contribute to sexual and gender based violence; it also requires that international financial institutions enable strong social institutions in post-conflict reconstruction and support gender-sensitive reparations for survivors.

Finally, governments must treat rural women as full rights holders -- not just victims -- with holistic support for political participation; services; access to justice; and land rights and natural resources, and ensure policies and planning support political economies of peace and gender justice that address the lives of rural women and girls.

Ending violence against rural women and girls requires moving from a top-down approach to a bottom-up approach that supports local women's work for non-violence, human security and gender justice. It requires addressing situations across the conflict cycle: from conflict prevention through resolution and reconstruction. And it requires not just words but action.

We urge Member States and the international community to support the work of rural women human rights defenders and peace activists to disarm violence and build gender justice and peace through substantially increased political, technical, and financial support for grassroots women leaders and policies and programmes that overturn longstanding obstacles to gender equality and peace.

We need not just words, but action for human security and rights, for rural women and for all of us.